

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Luke 12:49-59

(Discussion questions are at the end.)

This can be a tough passage to make sense of. Let's keep in mind that Luke 12:1-Luke 13:9 is all one episode. Even though we've been taking it in bite size chunks, we need to have in mind the whole if we hope to make sense of it. Also, much of this whole section of Luke (though not all) is unique to Luke. With that in mind, we might want to ask the question of why Luke included it while the other Gospel writers did not? You'll recall that Luke was writing to a man named Theophilus, likely a Roman official of some kind, who likely had some questions regarding the Christian faith that Luke was trying to answer throughout his Gospel and Acts. By the time the Gospel of Luke was written and Theophilus was reading it, the life of Jesus as well as some early church history was just that...history—so what Luke recorded could be looked upon in retrospect as well as the current environment Theophilus found himself in. A likely/possible question Theophilus may have been asking is why is there some much opposition and animosity toward Christians? Early persecution was likely brewing. Theophilus, as well as many early Christians, were probably wondering, "What gives? This is not what I expected." Here in this passage Luke records Jesus thoughts on the subject...division (and with it, animosity, hostility, violence) should be expected.

*"I have come to bring fire on the earth..."* (12:49a NIV). When we read "fire" here we should think of a refiner's fire. Metal was put into fire to burn away the impurities. Jesus is a purifying force, and the purifying process naturally divides/separates the pure from the impure. But before Jesus does that, the watershed moment of history must occur first...the crucifixion and resurrection (i.e. the "baptism" Jesus needs to undergo). This event will establish Jesus as the rightful King (keep in mind, again, that Theophilus can look in retrospect to that event). So beyond the image/picture of fire that naturally divides/separates, logically, any difference in opinion/perspective on "who's in charge here?" has a dividing/separating effect too. So in verses 49-53 Jesus was simply stating the fact that He will naturally cause division between those who accept His Lordship and those who do not...and the reality is that may even separate families/households. (For more on the separating/dividing aspect of Jesus, see Matthew 25)

As a side note, when we think of Jesus as someone who brings peace, that is not a contradiction to what is being stated here. Rather, it's a clarification: amongst those who recognize Jesus' Lordship there will be peace (assuming those people humbly submit to Him on a consistent basis). But between those who recognize His Lordship and those that do not, there will naturally be division of some kind (with varying levels of acceptance/tolerance vs hostility). But for our part, we should not be the ones bringing hostility to the table.

From 12:22-40 we see that Jesus was directing His words more toward the disciples, even though there was a large crowd around Him listening to Him. After Peter's question in verse 41, it appears that Jesus was speaking both to His disciples and to the crowd at large. In verse 54-59, Jesus turns His attention back to the gathered masses (the word "hypocrites" in verse 56 is a clue that Jesus is targeting the crowd).

*“How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?” (12:56b NIV). What in the world was Jesus talking about? N.T. Wright puts it well, “So why can’t they look at what’s going on all around them, from the Roman occupation to the oppressive regime of Herod, from the wealthy and arrogant high priests in Jerusalem to the false agendas of the Pharisees—and, in the middle of it all, a young prophet announcing God’s kingdom and healing the sick? Why can’t they put two and two together, and realize that this is the moment all Israel’s history has been waiting for? What can’t they see that the crisis is coming?”*

That “coming crisis” that Jesus had in view was the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. Israel was on a collision course with the Roman empire. (This will be rounded out in next week’s passage that concludes this entire section.) Jesus was warning them to not go head-to-head, toe-to-toe with their adversary. There is a price to be paid for doing so, and it would be costly. This section of Luke has the flavor of Old Testament prophets. Even verses 52-53 are reminiscent of Micah 7:6. Like the prophets of old, Jesus here is preaching repentance and warning of coming judgment if repentance didn’t happen. And like Israel of old, Israel of Jesus’ time didn’t heed the prophetic warning.

So all though out this entire section of Luke (from 12:1 to the present passage...and on through 13:9) we have been highlighting the core problem being “self-focus” (or self-centeredness, or selfishness...or however you prefer to say it—even if by “self” we mean the collective/communal “self” and not just the individual/personal “self”). To summarize, is our attention on the King and His agenda, or on ourselves and our agenda? According to the King’s agenda, Israel had a very unique role to play in His agenda. Likewise, the Church has a very unique role to play. As history tells us, for the most part Israel failed in carrying out her calling. What will history say regarding the Church?

- Q. Have you experienced division between yourself and others based on your faith in Jesus? Explain.**
- Q. If you’ve experienced relational tension with others who don’t share your faith in Jesus, how do you determine whether it’s the natural dividing/separating aspect of Jesus versus the way you may be expressing/communicating your faith?**
- Q. Notice the quandary we find ourselves in as followers of Jesus: we are called to testify to the Lordship of Jesus Christ; we are called to proclaim, demonstrate, and embody the Gospel; we are called to live out the present reality of the Kingdom of God in our midst. At the same time, as we do so, according to Jesus, people will want to disengage from us, to not associate with us, and maybe even desire to harm us. Some will join us, some will reject us...this is just par for the course. How do you/we deal with the relational upheaval this experience naturally creates?**
- Q. There is another layer to all this that the text does not address but may be worthy of discussion/conversation: Jesus speaks of division between those who accept Him and**

those that reject Him. But how do we handle the situation of those who claim to accept Him but who live inconsistently with what He requires?

- Q.** The church has always been called to have a prophetic role/voice in society. (I could go on for days about making sure we are a voice toward those in places/positions of power and influence, and NOT striving to be in the place/position of power...but that's a subject for another time☺) But the primary target of the "prophetic voice" is toward God's people more than toward those who aren't God's people. The correction and warnings are targeted to believers more often than not. What do you think Jesus would say to His church today? What words of warning and correction do you think He has for us?