

[Culture](#)



Jedi Master Yoda listens in a scene from the movie "Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones." (CNS/Lucasfilm)



by Mark Piper

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@markpiper](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

May 4, 2024

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Like the Death Star at the end of "Star Wars: A New Hope," let me cut to my explosive take on this day made for puns, memes and intergalactic battles: May the force (and May the Fourth) be with you. And may you know that Master Yoda was wrong.

Yes, it's Jedi heresy, but let me repeat: Yoda, wrong he was.

"Do or do not," he said in "The Empire Strikes Back." Concluding, "There is no 'try.'"

Balderdash. Argle-bargle. Absurd. This dictum must be wrong. Musn't it?

May the Fourth be with you this Star Wars Day

May 4 is celebrated as "Star Wars Day" among the franchise's fans. ("May the Fourth" references the line "May the Force be with you.") [Read NCR's best reviews of "Star Wars" here.](#)

Life — whether here or in a galaxy far, far away — has gray areas and liminal spaces with plenty of in-betweens, becomings and efforts en route to having done something. Isn't "trying" a prerequisite to doing? Granted, I'm not an adherent to the [Jediism religion](#); my disposition is that of a practicing Catholic. As the moniker implies, my religion requires continual pursuit or following. It is not as simple as do or do not.

Or is it?

I've had this bone to pick with this well-loved green guru for years. However, it was a recent dialogue with my 9- and 6-year-old kids that brought this Jedi mind trick — err, philosophical difference — back to the fore.

For the past three years, I have had a call-and-response with my kids as either I or they head out the door in the morning:

Me: What are you going to do today?

The kids: Listen. Learn lots. Do "good great."

One morning, while in a playful mood with my good but sometimes mischievous children, I continued ruefully, "Will you though?" And one responded in earnest, "I'll try!"

Their response reminded me of the dialogue between padawan Luke Skywalker and Jedi Master Yoda in "The Empire Strikes Back." When Yoda required Luke to try a new, more challenging, bit of training, Luke responded, "I'll give it a try." That's when Yoda shot back, "No. Try not. Do or do not. There is no 'try.' "

I couldn't imagine barking back to my kid — who said they would try, as earnestly as Luke — "No! You *will* listen. You *will* learn. You *will* do 'good great.' There is no trying. Just doing!"

And I thought to myself, Yoda was wrong.



"Do or do not," Yoda says in "The Empire Strikes Back," concluding, "there is no 'try.' "
" (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Disney Plus)

Faster than a lightsaber can cut off an arm — or a disciple's sword can cut off an ear — my objection to Yoda made me worry if my objection was also contrary to the commands of Jesus, or to my own practice of Catholicism which I am trying to pass on to my children. After all, Jesus doesn't say, "Try to love your neighbors," but rather, "Love your neighbors" ([Matthew 22](#)). To the rich young man ([Matthew 19](#)), he doesn't say, "Try and sell what you have and try to follow me." No, he says, "Go, sell what you have and follow me." Likewise, with the works of mercy ([Matthew 25](#)), the language is of actionable commands to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, etc. Not to attempt and do this, but simply, like Yoda, to do or not to do. Complete commitment.

Maybe it's me, and not Yoda, who has got his prerogatives wrong? Maybe I've been practicing my own faith wrong and teaching my kids dubious life lessons! The "do good great," of the "Listen. Learn lots. Do good great," mantra I have for my kids originated from a grad school professor paraphrasing a quote of St. Vincent de Paul: "It's not enough to do good. It must be done well."

Perhaps my frustration with Yoda, then, isn't that he's wrong, but rather that I believe what's more important is how something is done — not merely whether or not it is done.

I believe it often takes many tries to do something well. Yes, doing the works of mercy is important; and yes, either you're doing them or you're not doing them. But how you do them matters just as much — the spirit, intention, attitude and reasons all matter. Ask a 9- or 6-year-old to apologize to their sibling and maybe they will, but it may or may not have true contrition.

Advertisement

"You expect us to be perfect!" My 9-year-old declared recently after I chided my kids for not listening well after school.

"No, I don't want or expect perfection," I responded carefully. "People do some really distorted things to achieve perfection — or worse, to appear perfect. What I expect is progress. I want you to try harder to listen the first time I ask you to do something."

This brings me to the last point. Yes, Yoda and Jesus speak in clear commands of commitments and not merely attempts; and yet, in the Gospel we also find the Beatitudes ([Matthew 5](#)). To be merciful and meek, pure of heart and poor in spirit takes work; there will be successes and failed attempts, there will be occasions for forgiveness when we fail or fall short. But thankfully, as long as we keep at it — keep forgiving, keep trying — we've got a chance to actually live out Gospel holiness. Maybe not with perfection, but at least with integrity.

Just as Luke Skywalker would grow in wisdom, age and grace, I hope my children do so as well, even if they don't have Yoda to guide them. As long as they keep trying, they will be great listeners, they will learn lots and, I have no doubt, they will "do good great" — love God, neighbor and self with all they've got. Perhaps Yoda isn't wrong. Perhaps I took him a little too literally, because trying often is the same thing as doing.

May the force be with you; and also with your spirit.

Related: ['My Life With the Jedi' mines the spirituality of 'Star Wars' and St. Ignatius](#)