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First Things First: Get the Log Out

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Matthew 7:1—5

Based on thoughts by Andy Stanley

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

If you're like me, you have to constantly make choices about how to spend your time, and if you're like me, you're often frustrated by the results. You may push yourself to the limit, and still feel like "so what?" Or maybe it's too much conflict. Or there's just too little of you to go around. Or you're not in control. Or you feel empty. And trying harder just doesn't work. So we're looking at Putting First Things First, the firsts in the Scripture, with the confidence that when God says "First," it's important enough to design our lives around it. We began with the first commandment, "*no other gods*," and we will fight against the serious lack of praise in the world. We talked about praying *first*, and not just as a last resort. And today, we're looking at one of the first things we should do as we interact with people.

The problem with being a church person is you become judgmental. [How many grew up in Church?] If you're not a longtime church person, you can say "Phew!" But heads up: all of us form opinions. You can't do or be anything without all sorts of judgment coming down on you. Even worse, you can't do anything without being dominated with your opinions judging others. Some of it is harmless, but a lot of it is very harmful. We think our judgment is true, and when you see something wrong, you take a stand and address it. But in the back of our minds, the tape plays over and over "*You shouldn't judge.*"

Then there's the position of *being* judged. And you can usually tell when it's happened. There's the quick scan: zzz...judged. Too old, too young, too out of date, too out of shape. Too in shape. Or it's about how you parent, or if you go out with friends and order a beer, (Enh, he's a drinker), or if you *don't* order a beer, (it's like: Ooh, too *good* for us? Are you a "CHRISTian?"). Or maybe you're dating someone with a different color skin. zzz. Judged. And it goes downhill from there. It feels really bad. We do it ALL THE TIME, don't we?

The problem with *being* judged is you never get to present your case. And **the weirdest thing in all of this: Judging someone never works!** When someone judges you, you never say "Thank you! You've made me feel so small, so foolish, I think I'll change... I want to be like *you*." Judging me doesn't change me. It doesn't make me a better person. It doesn't make me want to be like you. It makes me want to run in the opposite direction. It pushes me deeper into the thing I'm being judged for.

The truth is we've been in both chairs. The judged and the judger. Most the time we just talk to our friends about them. ("Can you believe she's wearing that...?") And we all just sit there collectively judging! Oh, and

pass the word, it's a prayer request. I'm not going to talk to them about it, because that would be judgmental. What a weird phenomenon!

If we're going to put first things first, we have to address all this confusion. We've heard it said "*Don't judge,*" yet there are some people who *need* to be confronted. Personally, I'm glad for some people who have confronted me. And some of you need to be confronted. You're doing stupid stuff. It's hurting you and your family. And you're heading down this path, but if I confront you, then you'd say "Who are you to judge me?" So there's *that* weirdness. And there's the weirdness inside us when we think "I don't want to judge, but what I see is very wrong and I should say something!"

Into all this confusion, Jesus speaks. And it's incredible. If you have your Bible, turn to Matthew chapter 7:1-5. Listen to Matthew 7:1 "*Do not judge...*". There it is! We haven't made this up. This is huge in marriage, in parenting, in relationships, in all of culture and society. It's an incomplete sentence, but that's it. Okay, but why do I not judge? "*Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*" Judged by who? God? The people we're judging? Jesus says "not gonna tell you." But be careful. If you're a person who sets yourself up as a judge over other people, it's going to come back in your direction. He goes on...

"*2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*", using the amount or the weight of judgment *you* use. Those of us in this chair say "But-but-but-WAIT! We're right! She's doing this! He's going down that path! I got 4 "*Thou shalt nots...*" and Jesus just says "Okay, but heads up." Don't judge unless you realize you'll be judged in the same way.

Here's what Jesus is saying: His point is NOT don't ever form an opinion about anybody. His point is NOT there are no people in the world with issues that need to be addressed. This is Jesus' subtle way of applying the golden rule to others. I want you to judge others the way you want to be judged by others. The way you want your heavenly Father to judge you. Here's how I want to be judged: with lots of grace and love and understanding and care, and if you let me talk long enough, Jesus is going to come along and say "Well, poor Matt! No wonder you're such an idiot! It's amazing you're as good as you are. Welcome into the kingdom!" Isn't that you want to be judged? I want a lot of slack. I want people to say "He's really messed up in that area, but there's probably stuff we don't know."

Okay, as his audience is taking all that in, Jesus says "*3 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*" Before you judge them, Jesus asks you "Why do you even care? Why do *you* have to form an opinion about the issues in *that* person's life? Why do YOU? What is it in YOU (not them)? What's wrong with YOU that you feel the necessity, the need to point out the speck in their eye? Perhaps **there's more to this issue than their problem?** What is it in you? In other words, "Matt, why are you so excited to point out their problem and not your own?" I know the answer to that. "What problem? I don't have any problem!" I mean look at *them*! They have problems! *I'm* so insightful, I have more clarity about them than they have about them!

And Jesus says no, you don't. You're blind, blinded by the log, the plank. **When I see something in you that bothers me, I need to look in the mirror and quit looking at you.** When I see something that causes me to form an opinion judging you, writing you off, or writing you up, that should trigger in me a response that says "Humph. **I wonder what God wants me to deal with in my own life?**

Listen to how he finishes. Jesus says "*4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?*" Now if you say "Wait a minute. They have major sin, *they* have major problems. In those moments when you are sure those issues are all theirs, I want you to just **pause. Is what you see a reflection** in you? (eyes are the mirrors to the soul—whose soul?)

Hear me: this is not saying "Turn a blind eye and ignore all the problems." Go back to what Jesus said. Our response to the junk we see in other people, our first response is not to go after the speck in their eye, but to ask what is it about them that is reflected in my life? If that could become our first response to the sin we see in other people, we would be better off, and as Jesus says in a minute, they would be better off.

Then He says something really strong. Listen to verse 5: Jesus says “5 *You hypocrite,*” Isn’t it true that much of our culture has written the church off as hypocrites? Why? Because **they see us unwilling to deal with the plank in our own eye.** When you sit in this seat, you know you’re not perfect, you know you have issues and sins and fears. You know you’re on a path of self-destruction, but I can’t listen to you. Because **I realize you lack the same self-awareness you accuse me of.** So *I’m* gonna judge *you*, because you’re not self-aware, and it turns into blah, blah, blah, because all I can see is your plank. Why should I listen to you, Dad? Why should I listen to you, Mom? Why should I listen to you, Honey? Or Brother, Grandpa. I’m not saying I don’t have speck of dust in my eye but my gosh, have you looked in the mirror lately?” And you drive me deeper into my problem. And at the end of the day, nothing good happens.

Jesus says there’s a solution to that! “*first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*” I’m still learning this. As a parent, as a husband, as a boss, something about you irritates me, something needs to be done! Jesus says, “First, call ‘em, no. Write em, no. Confront ‘em, no. Gossip about ‘em, no.” What’s first? Look in the mirror. God wants to help them. He’s just got to get somebody who’s prepared to help them.

What Jesus is teaching us, is **our first line of response**, Dads, wives, kids, when you see something in someone else that needs to be addressed, first, first, first ask “God. What is it I see in them, that You see in me? What is it in their eye that’s just an extension of my eye?” What is it that’s driving me crazy in them that’s actually a part of me? Did you ever think the speck in their eye fell off of the plank in yours? ☺ Jesus says “I’m just as concerned as you are. I just want you to be prepared to have a conversation that won’t drive them further away.” Then and only then, will you and I see clearly enough to actually do you and them some good.

When I’m tempted to pass judgment on you, I need to stop. And look to see if there’s a trace of the same thing in me. **Pay attention to the specific emotion their sin (their speck) elicits in you.** Does their sin make you angry? Anger is your issue not theirs. Does their sin make you jealous? “Well, she shouldn’t wear that.” Well, that’s cause you *can’t* wear that. ☺ Until you strip away your jealousy, you’re not a candidate to help her. Until you strip away your anger, you’re not a candidate. That’s your issue, your log, your plank, something you have to deal with. Until we do, we’re just going to drive them away. So we ask “God, why do I feel what I feel? Why is it so big?”

It could be your marriage. It could be your kids. And you’re mad! And you’re right! But your insight into their speck is blinded by your log that you have yet to deal with. Pay attention to that big old hunk of emotion.

There’s another part of this lesson. **If you’re the one being judged**, and you keep throwing out “Don’t judge me. You’re judgmental.” Maybe there’s a new category: Just maybe, one of the people who’s tried to talk to you is not coming because they want to be judgmental. **If you’re the one being judged, please consider God Himself may have prepared somebody to talk to you.** Perhaps they’re coming because they’ve been exactly where you are, and they know exactly where you’re headed. And they love you too much to leave you alone. Whether you’re in love with Jesus or you’re just checking this whole thing out, the worst thing you can do is put up the “don’t judge me” smokescreen and just blow off everyone who’s ever confronted you, who’s ever brought truth to bear on something in your life, because after all, doesn’t the Bible say, “We’re not supposed to judge.”

If you’re a person who’s on the run, would you at least be open to the fact that God may send someone into your life, who, as gently as they know how to do it, wants to point out the sawdust in your eyes. Would you be open to that?

If you’re the person who’s generally right, who knows the Scriptures, you’ve been a Christ follower a long time, would you ask God to help you, instead of looking across the aisle at the speck of dust in someone’s eye, to ask “God, if it’s bothering me, perhaps there’s something in me, that bothers you.

Imagine a group of Christians this large for whom that becomes a first line of response. We would be perfectly positioned in someone's life to help them avoid the sin that's taking them down a path that ultimately leads to destruction in this life, and perhaps the life to come. So many need help! "*Do not judge*", but that's not the whole sentence, "*lest you be judged in the same way.*" And if you *do* approach someone in their life, first take a long hard look in the mirror, pay attention to the emotion. You'll be able to see clearly to remove the speck of sawdust from their eyes in love.

Study Guide

Monday: Reread Matthew 7:1-5. Review your sermon notes. What has triggered you to judgment most? A person? A group of people? A situation? Reflect on being judged the way you judge others. And spend time repenting, or turning away from that. Pray for God to show you the plank, or the log in your own eye.

Tuesday: Read Luke 6:20-38. This is called "The Great Sermon" by Jesus. Do you tend to be in the "judging chair" or the one "being judged"? Note Jesus' promise in v.38. What would it mean for you to give, knowing that it would be given back to you more fully than you gave?

Wednesday: Read Luke 6:39-49. Some of these teachings are the same as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5—7. In what area of your life recently has it been like "the blind leading the blind?" Make a list of those areas you are most reluctant to admit are your blind spots.

Could removing the "log jam" in one of these blind spots leave you equipping to others? Pray for that to become a ministry for you.

Thursday: Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. In this letter, Paul is writing the Christ-followers in Corinth who were involved in sexually immoral acts. Paul is not talking about judging people who have no clue as to what God says about their sin. (5:10, 12). In what areas are you overly judgmental? Too permissive? Inconsistent? Helpful? Ask a friend or trusted family member to help you in those areas.

Friday: Read Matthew 18:15-17. Jesus is teaching how to talk to a Christ follower who sins against you. Much of what bothers us is due to our own lack of patience, but when it's serious, note the 4 steps to take. If you ever face this, take your time in this and go step by step.