

Series: Sermon on the Mount
Building Healthy Relationships
Matthew 7:1-12

Introduction

"Taught by time, my heart has learned to glow for other's good and melt at other's woe." Homer

"If you want a love message to be heard, it has got to be sent out. To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it." Mother Teresa

For the past few weeks, we've been looking in Matthew's Gospel at what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. One of the major themes of this teaching emphasizes the difference between being religious and having a relationship with God. Jesus arranges the Sermon on the Mount around the topic of building key relationships. He teaches about citizenship in God's kingdom, the believer's relationship to the world, our relationship to the Law, to God, and to money, and now he talks about our relationship with one another.

If you want to succeed in relationships, you have to be able to get along with other people! Wisdom and skill in this area are critical! I think it's safe to say most of us want to experience the blessing of having a healthy close relationship. Most of us would also like to know how to avoid damaging and destructive relationships. Jesus gives us the wisdom and insight we need to succeed in this area.

In Chapter 7, He gives us several keys to building healthy relationships with words you've probably heard many times. The whole teaching of Chapter 7 hinges on verse 12, which we have come to know as "the golden rule."
"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12 NKJV)

The Roman Emperor Severus was so charmed with the Golden Rule that he had it inscribed on the walls of his palace. I think God would rather that we inscribe it on our hearts and act upon it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the first 11 verses, Jesus gives us principles that are essential to building healthy relationships. The first two apply, especially to your closest relationships.

I. Do not judge (7:1,2)

In verses 1 and 2, Jesus says, *"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:1-2 NKJV)*

These few words are among some of the most misunderstood and misapplied sayings of Jesus. Jesus is not saying we don't need governments, courts, or law enforcement. Jesus would not advocate defunding the police. According to scripture, God ordained that governments are to regulate society and administer appropriate punishment for offenses against society. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14). Jesus did not question Pilate's authority to execute capital punishment. He even acknowledges that this authority comes from God. (John 19:10-11)

Jesus also is not saying we shouldn't evaluate the behavior and actions of people. Jesus expects us to use our God-given intelligence. You can't accept every statement you hear at face value. Some people are so gullible they fall for anything. While we don't want to be critical or judgmental, it's still important to do some critical thinking!

Jesus never opposed taking a stand on moral issues. Pointing out the negative consequences of a person's actions is not the same thing as judging. Sometimes you must take a stand and make unpopular decisions.

If verse 6 instructs us not to 'give what is holy to the dogs,' then we need to know the difference between who are dogs and who are not! If verse 15 says to "beware of false prophets," we need to know the difference between who is a false prophet and who isn't.

Jesus also makes it clear that it is important to correct those who are operating erroneously. In Chapter 18, Jesus says, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

(Matthew 18:15 NKJV)

In Galatians 6:1, we are instructed to restore the fallen, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

(Galatians 6:1 NKJV)

In Galatians 2:11, Paul says that "when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;" (Galatians 2:11 NKJV)

Good friends sharpen each other with their words. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

(Proverbs 27:17 NKJV)

So what, then, did Jesus mean by the words, "Judge not"? Well, if you bear in mind that Jesus has been dealing with attitudes and motives in the Sermon on the Mount, you realize He is talking about having a critical or condemning spirit.

It is not our job to condemn people even though we are called upon to correct them. Citizens of Christ's kingdom are not to put others down or elevate themselves at the expense of others. It is this kind of smug disdain for others that Jesus called hypocrisy.

But the contempt of the scribes and Pharisees was more than just the smugness of superiority. It was a snobbery based upon their own set of rules meant to dominate and control the people. They had neatly packaged a system of rules and regulations that prescribed an external kind of righteousness. And their judges had become corrupt and despised and condemned the common people. They elevated themselves as the righteous ones and used the law to browbeat the people into submission. Their judges, who were supposed to be the guardians of the law, twisted and perverted the law. (John 7:49). They replaced God's standard of righteousness with their own standards. They expected people to conform to their rules. And if they didn't, they applied the external pressure of their judgment.

It's important to recognize that Jesus is not forbidding judgment of someone's behavior or beliefs. He is warning us not to develop a critical or bitter spirit. We are not to focus our attention on how others have offended us but on how we can improve the situation. We cannot let the offenses of others give us the right to reject them or retaliate against them. This is especially important in close relationships like marriage and personal friendships.

But why the warning? Because a critical spirit will usually be reciprocated or, as Jesus says, "that ye be not judged." Verse 2 says, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matthew 7:2 NKJV)

This is what you call negative reciprocity! It's something that erodes and eventually destroys a relationship. Jesus challenges us to invest positive and loving action in people even when they're in the wrong!

If you want to build healthy relationships, you've got to learn how to say difficult and corrective things in positive and loving words. It may seem awkward, but you must also learn to express your gratitude for the favors and kindness you receive from others.

What would you say characterizes your closest relationships? Are you more motivated by an attitude of reciprocity or by an unconditional expression of gratitude? How do you feel about the people closest to you? Do they often hear encouraging words and displays of appreciation, or do they hear constant criticisms and excuses from you?

Contrary to popular opinion, it often only takes one person to begin to turn things around from the negative to the positive. I know it's hard to get negative people to receive positive affirmation, but you've got to keep trying.

But what about when offenses and conflict arise? Well, the fact is, that's inevitable in close relationships and is where this next principle comes in.

II. Log and speck (7:3-5)

In verses 3-5, Jesus says, "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First, remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:3-5 NKJV)

These words conjure up an interesting image, but they also make a profound and convicting point. When we experience conflict, our natural response causes us to focus on the other person's offenses and faults. It's easier to respond, "If you think I've got faults, let me point out a few of yours!" Is it easier to turn the tables on the other person rather than take any personal responsibility?

The counsel Jesus suggests is to focus on changes you need to make to be a better person. Jesus says, "Notice the log that's in your own eye." In other words, focus on your part in the conflict. It's a "log" not because your part is more serious or you have greater guilt, but because you are responsible for what you can correct. That should be the primary thing that occupies your field of vision when you encounter a conflict.

It doesn't matter who started it; what matters is how you resolve the problem. The quickest way for that to happen is to stay positive and express humility in love and service to others.

But why is this so difficult to do? Well, believing our thinking and position is the right one bolsters our confidence and reinforces us. Have you ever noticed some people have to be right about everything and, consequently, have a hard time developing close relationships with other people? Jesus says we can't afford to adopt that as our model.

When we feel threatened or challenged, we often instinctively move to a self-righteous, self-justifying position. That only damages and destroys our dialogue with others and even our relationships. That's why receiving and living under God's grace is so essential. When you know that God has your best interests at heart, no matter how wrong you have been, you find the courage to see and admit your sins and shortcomings to yourself, to God, and even to others.

Now you know why the grace of God is so foundational to developing healthy close relationships. When we are honest and forthright with ourselves, we can clearly see to take the speck out for someone else.

Rebuke and correction are still an essential part of the character development process. However, it must be offered humbly and for the person's benefit, not out of defensiveness or to deflect criticism or in retaliation. Relationships grounded in God's grace will consistently profit and grow in depth. Sadly, there are some people in this world who only use relationships for their own profit.

Jesus' principle in verse six tells us how to deal with them.

III. Pearls before swine (7:6)

He says, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." (Matthew 7:6 NKJV)

Putting a pearl necklace on a pig doesn't do much good! Your pets have no appreciation for the value or your intent of the gifts you shower upon them. I hate to say it, but you're doing it more for your benefit than for theirs. A pig will probably destroy the necklace and then attack you because you threw something at them.

The point is obvious. Some people are so self-absorbed that they are not interested in sharing a healthy relationship with you at all. They will consistently and deliberately use your attempts at friendship only to gain an advantage for themselves. Of course, we need to be careful not to draw this conclusion about someone too quickly. And we need to recognize that people can and sometimes do change.

You cannot make a person change. And unless they are willing to change, we can wind up only reinforcing their selfishness. So, where do we get the strength and power to deal with those who totally disregard us?

Jesus addresses this in the final section of this passage.

IV. Ask, seek and knock (7:7-11)

In verses 7-11, Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11 NKJV)

We often apply this passage to the importance of persistence in prayer. But notice that the context has to do with building healthy relationships. Jesus'

point is that if we want an effective and meaningful relationship with others, we first need to develop a healthy relationship with Him.

God is the only one who can supply you with enough grace to meet your deepest needs and cause you to see your eternal value. Even when your dreams and goals have been shattered, and the visions of your heart have been dealt a death blow, the Risen Savior can still create within your heart a resurrection of new life and new energy and renewed purpose.

Only God can supply you with the discernment and wisdom you need to be your true self and love others wisely.

Conclusion

The keyword in maintaining healthy relationships is balance. The more often you read the Bible, the more balanced your life will become. Only God can provide the grace we need to maintain this balance making us able to develop lasting and meaningful relationships. As we talk to God each day, we grow in faith and wisdom and build a strong and powerful relationship with God. And true to His word, God never fails to hear or respond to our prayers, although He may choose to give us a better answer than we thought to ask for.

When you develop a healthy relationship with Christ, it dissolves any hint of a critical spirit within you. Instead, we obtain the wisdom and discernment we need to deal with the situations and problems we face.

The world talks a lot about love, but it knows very little about it. Authentic love is not blind to the truth. It sees things as they really are and still manages to be loving. Genuine love is not judgmental; it is truthful!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." ([Philippians 1:9-10 NKJV](#))

Do you need some healthy relationships in your life? Do you have any room in your heart for making some improvements, or do you see others as the problem? Are you looking to Christ for ways to improve your own attitudes and behaviors? Do you pray, "God change me, or God change them!"

People are the most valuable resource on the planet, and how you treat others really does matter to God.