



SESSION 5

TRANSFORMED IN MY ACTIONS

▶ **The Point**

The way we treat others should reflect the way we're treated by God.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 7:1-12

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Life is full of difficult people. You encounter them on the job, in the classroom, and maybe even in your Bible study group. Even total strangers can make life difficult.

As I'm writing, I'm on an airplane, and the guy sitting in front of me has his seat dropped back in my lap. So I'm thinking, *How can I write a Bible study about dealing with difficult people when the guy in front of me is making it difficult?*

In the same way, how can we keep from being difficult to others? The surface solution is to be nice to everyone all the time. But is that realistic? Is it enough?

Jesus called us to an even higher standard. As with everything Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, He went beyond a polite definition of proper behavior. He called us to love others and treat them even as He has treated us.

▶ **The Setting**

As Jesus continued to teach His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, He guided them to deal with the problem of being critical or judgmental of others. He taught them to live according to a standard set by God Himself. God had treated them with love expressed in mercy and grace. He expected them to treat others the same way. In doing so, they would reflect the way they had been treated by God.

What does the Bible say?

Evil (v. 11)—Refers to the theological truth that all people have been corrupted by the presence of sin, which makes us enemies of God until we receive the forgiveness offered by Jesus Christ.

The Law and the Prophets (v. 12)—This expression brought to mind the entire scope of Jewish Scripture, which we refer to today as the Old Testament.

Matthew 7:1-12

1 “Do not judge, so that you won’t be judged. **2** For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

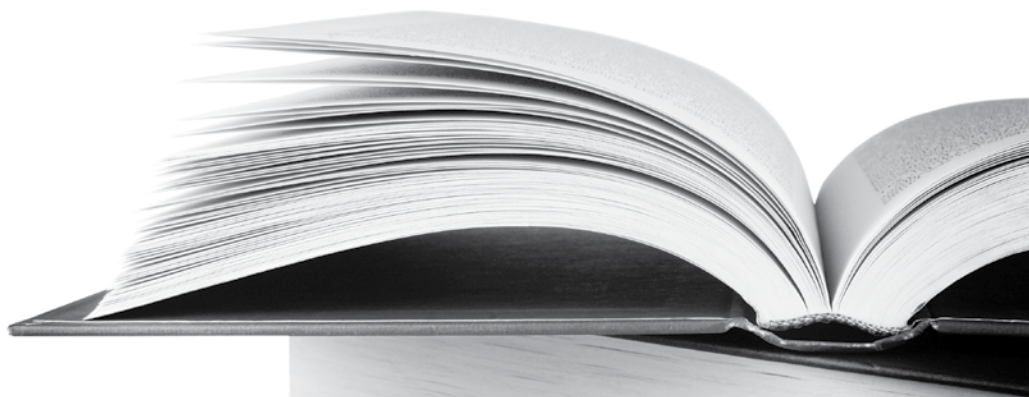
3 Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the log in your own eye? **4** Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a log in your eye? **5** Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

6 Don’t give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

7 “Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

9 What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? **11** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

12 Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them—this is the Law and the Prophets.



GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 45 of the PSG: **“What’s one of the nicest things anyone has ever done for you?”**

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): As a supplement to Question #1, above, challenge group members to find something they’ve carried into your meeting space that is connected with another person’s kindness. Examples could include clothing or accessories

received as a gift, jewelry, handwritten notes, photographs or messages saved in a phone, and so on.

Note: As time allows, encourage volunteers to tell the stories behind the items they share.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 46 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of ministering to difficult people by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 46 of the PSG: **“The way we treat others should reflect the way we’re treated by God.”**

LEADER PACK: Use Pack Item 4, “Whatever You Want,” to help group members make a visual connection with the Scripture passage in this session.

PRAY: Transition into the study by acknowledging that you and each of your group members have been well treated by God. Praise Him for the love and continued kindness He has shown to all people.

TIP: Get expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid. Visit ministrygrid.com/web/biblestudiesforlife.

Matthew 7:1-6

[Verse 1] As Jesus continued with the Sermon on the Mount, He turned His attention to another problem that prevents spiritual growth in His disciples—being judgmental. In no uncertain terms, Jesus directed His disciples to stop judging others. He did not imply they could never engage in evaluating others. However, He left no room for cold, cruel criticism.

[Verse 2] Jesus added two sobering details to His command. First, His followers could expect to receive the same kind of **judgment** they doled out. If they showed mercy, they would be treated mercifully—and vice versa. Second, they could expect the same degree of judgment they poured out. If they showed very little mercy, they could expect mercy to be in short supply when they were judged. If they were extremely merciful, they could expect extreme mercy.

[Verse 3] None of us should see ourselves as qualified judges. But we effortlessly slide into the seat of a judge when we overlook our own sin while condemning the sins of others. Jesus described looking past our sin as a **log** in our eye. We cannot clearly see the faults of others while we're blinded by our own. Yet, we constantly ignore our own flaws and arrogantly pass judgment on the flaws of others.

[Verse 4] Moving on, Jesus raised a tough question: how can we give spiritual advice to someone whom we judge to be falling short of God's standards if we're blind to our own spiritual shortcomings? Directing others to change while overlooking our own sins paints a picture of outrageous behavior. Growing Christians don't let themselves live with such glaring contradictions.

[Verse 5] Not only is such behavior a contradiction, it's also counterfeit. Jesus called people who exhibit such counterfeit spiritual behavior hypocrites, picturing a person playing a role on a stage. Hypocrisy in believers brings shame to the kingdom of God and damages spiritual growth. When we find ourselves being hypocritical in judgment, we do well to be honest with ourselves. By reckoning with our own sins first, we pull out the timbers that blind us and make us judgmental toward others. Only when we take that critical step can we actually treat others correctly.

[Verse 6] Jesus brought up **dogs** and **pigs**. These dogs were mongrels that would eat anything; the pigs would eat even spoiled slop. These animals represented how some people respond to the precious treasure believers share in Christ. Some people attack a believer because the good news of Christ doesn't satisfy their self-indulgent appetites. Likewise, they may **trample** it under foot. Believers need to be aware that people won't appreciate the walk with God we treasure. We need to be wise judges of the people as we share our faith in Him.

Matthew 7:7-11

[Verse 7] Being wise in our judgments requires the Lord's help. We can't take on such a daunting task by ourselves. Fortunately, when we seek His wisdom in prayer, He will answer. Jesus didn't say we always get the answer we want. However, we can trust God to help when we open our hearts to Him.

Jesus also alerted us to the need for persistence when we pray. Sometimes praying involves **asking** for something. At other times, it's more like **searching** for something or trying to open a closed **door**. We don't always get what we ask for immediately. Neither can we always find what we're searching for in an instant. Furthermore, praying doesn't always unlock the closed door at a moment's notice. We cannot cease praying about what we need even when we find ourselves waiting a long time for an answer. Persistence in prayer is the order of the day for a growing believer. When we pray relentlessly, we will receive the wisdom we need to exercise spiritual discernment with others.

[Verse 8] When the answer doesn't come, the search doesn't end, or the door doesn't open, Jesus reassured that praying is not in vain. Our prayer will be answered, but perhaps not within the time frame we expect. His assurance helps us keep on praying when an answer has not come. If we persist in prayer, we will see for ourselves that He keeps His word and provides the help we need. It might come immediately, or it might come later. But we can rest confident God will answer.

[Verses 9-10] Jesus encouraged us by pointing to the ways of wise and caring parents. When a child asks for **bread**, a caring father will place it in his or her hand if he can. He would never think about responding by handing his child a **stone**. Likewise, when a child asks for **fish**, a caring parent won't respond by giving him or her a **snake**. We expect parents to give their children what will help them instead of what might hurt them. We can expect the same from our heavenly Father.

[Verse 11] Observe the distinction Jesus made. He reminded listeners that we're given to **evil**. But even though caring parents are given to evil, they still try to do what's best for their children. Thankfully, our heavenly Father isn't at all given to evil because it's not in His nature. Therefore, we can always count on Him to do what's in our best interest when we ask Him for help. He won't make any mistakes when He answers our prayers. He always does what is right and best.

Growing Christians ask God persistently to give us His wisdom so we can practice His discernment. We will never be disappointed when we keep on asking Him, seeking Him, and trusting Him to help us as we encounter individuals who cross our paths each day.

Matthew 7:12

[Verse 12] We often refer to this verse as the Golden Rule. Parents use it to teach children how to treat others. However, they often make a mistake: they leave the impression that following this rule will render something in return. Children come to believe they should do good to another so that person will do good to them. The verse doesn't make such a claim. Our reason for living out this rule isn't to get something in return. It's because we're kingdom citizens who want to treat others in a way that reflects how God has treated us.

Jesus intended for His disciples to be intentional in their relationships with others. In Jesus' day, Jewish people learned a passive version of this life rule. They were instructed not to do anything to others that they wouldn't want done to them. Of course, they could follow that rule by doing absolutely nothing for anyone at any time. But Jesus prompted His disciples to take initiative in showing God's love to others—to be intentional about treating others the same way God had treated them.

Jesus underscored the biblical basis for this life rule—it summed up **the Law and the Prophets**. He had in mind all of what we know as the Old Testament. Everything His followers had learned from God's Word could be put into practice by following this rule.

What Jesus taught His disciples then still holds authority for kingdom citizens now. Living out God's Word means putting this verse to work in our relationships. This foundational rule for living becomes easier as we reflect on how Jesus has shown His love for us. As we nourish a heart of love for Him, it also produces a heart burdened for people to know Him personally. That burden prompts us to treat them in the same way God has treated us. We strive to be honest with ourselves instead of being judgmental toward others. And we constantly seek His wisdom through persistent prayer so we will know how to put this basic rule to work and honor Him in our relationships.

Previous Biblical Illustrator articles "The Law and the Prophets" (Winter 2013-2014), "Motes & Beams" (Winter 1996), "Hypocrite" (Winter 1983), and "Pearls in the Ancient World" (Fall 1978) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 52 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for allowing Jesus’ words to influence their attitudes and actions this week:



Notes

Dotted lines for notes

- ▶ **Seek forgiveness.** Think of moments from your recent past when you’ve acted judgmentally or condemned others in your heart. Confess your sin to God and ask for His forgiveness. If necessary, seek forgiveness from those you have wronged in this way.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit Philippians 2:3-4 to memory this week. Let this passage guide you in building and maintaining healthy relationships with others.
- ▶ **Take a stand.** Keep your eyes open this week for circumstances in which people are being mistreated. Take action to stand up for these people in obedience to Jesus’ command that we treat others as we want to be treated.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 52 of the PSG:

There are many difficult people in this world, including you and me. The principle behind the Golden Rule is not that we treat others well so that they will treat us well—the truth is that we’ve all been treated well by Christ in spite of our difficulty. Therefore, our relationships should reflect the love of Christ.

PRAY: Conclude by affirming your desire to obey Jesus’ command to treat others how you want to be treated. Also affirm your commitment to treat others with the love of Christ even when they don’t treat you the same way.