

Radical empathy

discussion guide

based on **Matthew 7.1-12** (Linked to sermon of 8/3/26)
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This was part of a series on the Sermon on the Mount

Intro: Think of a time someone has judged you unfairly. What did it feel like?

Read Matthew 7.1-6

What 'plank' might you be carrying in your own eye that affects how you see and judge others?

The word translated 'judge' means to evaluate and then act on that evaluation. Scholars suggest a better translation might be 'don't condemn.' There's a crucial difference. Condemnation involves self-righteousness and contempt, seeing others as somehow less than us.

How do you sometimes see people as less than you?

In Hebrew thought, having a 'good eye' meant being generous, whilst having a 'bad eye' meant being stingy (see Matthew 6.22-23 as well). This applies not just to material generosity, but to how generously we view others.

Did you look at people today with generous eyes, giving them the benefit of the doubt? Or did you view them through the lens of criticism and judgment?

Verse 6 is enigmatic! Jesus is teaching us that there are times when sharing our deepest spiritual insights (pearls) may not be received well, and could even provoke hostility. This requires discernment about timing, relationship, and receptivity. Sometimes our zealous attempts to share truth can actually damage both the message and the relationship.

Can you think of times when this has happened? In hindsight, what might have been better ways to approach the situation?

"Jesus isn't calling us to be naive or ignore harmful behaviour. Instead, He's challenging our default response. Rather than rushing to judgment using our limited understanding, we need God's wisdom to discern well."

Try to summarise these verses so far with a set of guidelines for when it is right to approach someone about the speck of sawdust in their eye.

Which of these guidelines do you find hardest? Why?

Read Matthew 7.7-12

The wisdom we need to love others well, to discern when to speak and when to listen, to see clearly past our own planks - this wisdom comes through persistent prayer. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. The promise isn't that we'll get everything we want, but that our seeking will be met with God's response. Sometimes that response is yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait, and sometimes it's an invitation to see things differently.

What relational wisdom do you need to keep asking God for, and how might persistent prayer change your heart in the process?

This isn't a promise that we'll get everything we want, but an assurance that what we receive from God will always be good for us, even when it doesn't feel like it. The 'good gifts' our Father gives include the wisdom to navigate complex relational matters, the grace to forgive those who hurt us, and the strength to love difficult people. Sometimes the good gift is patience rather than immediate resolution. Sometimes it's the ability to set healthy boundaries rather than getting someone to change. Sometimes it's peace in the midst of conflict rather than the end of conflict itself.

How has your heavenly Father given you 'good gifts' that you didn't initially recognise as such?

The 'golden rule' isn't passive ('don't do to others what you wouldn't want done to you') but active - we are to proactively treat others as we long to be treated ourselves.

Think of some of the interactions you're likely to have over the coming days with tricky individuals, when it would be easy to judge / condemn / correct them. What difference should the golden rule make in those moments?

Personal reflection:

Head – what have you learned in this session that you need to ponder on more?

Heart – what has spoken to your heart in this session that you need to pray through more?

Hands – what actions do you need to take to put this into practice?

Is there anything from this reflection you want to share with your group (or one or two others in the group) so they can pray for you specifically, and encourage you in the days ahead?

Prayer suggestions:

- Rather than praying for the people you find difficult, pray for yourselves to be able to view and treat them differently.