



The Journey of Thomas

Non-Judgmental

By John J. Smid

Matthew 7:1-5

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 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? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when at the time there is a plank in your own eye? 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.

"Arthur, I have been really struggling with something I did recently that I just can't seem to shake. I don't know what happened but when I talked with Sarah yesterday it seemed that I made things even worse for her. She failed her test at school and I studied with her and knew she could have passed. I tried to help her but in the end, she went away in tears.

"Well, Jim, you just need to understand, these things happen and your daughter is responsible for her own failure. She should have studied more. You probably shouldn't have studied for her like it seems you did. You know what the Bible says about those things, "Each man should bear his own load." Your daughter is responsible for her own grades. She is old enough now for that."

(Gosh, maybe I am really a bad dad and have made more mistakes than I thought I did.)

What just happened? Jim started out the conversation seeking Arthur's camaraderie and friendship in something that was troubling him. His friend quickly became a teacher and with arrogance just shut him down. I am certain Arthur didn't intend on hurting his friend Jim. But in the end, Jim may have just needed a friend to listen; instead he got a teaching session and a Bible scripture to boot!

No questions or active listening here. It is almost as though this friend had a script memorized ahead of time, ready for bear. Arthur's answers were plastic, empty and prescribed instead of empathetic or caring towards his friend.

When I Listen....

When I look into someone's life with sincerity—listening to their heart with mine—it is very difficult to be judgmental about their choices or circumstances. However, when I put myself in the role of detached instruction I likely devalue their life experience or perspectives on challenging issues.

All too often I can get into my "better than you" stance and look down on others as though somehow I have the definitive answers to life's problems and questions. I must remember that I may see outward circumstances and may have my own opinions on things, but I cannot see their heart with full clarity.

Of course, this passage from Matthew does not negate our ability to make “sound” judgments and to make appropriate decisions about things that we encounter. Instead, this kind of judgment means to assume the office of “Judge” in someone’s life.

There is only one judge, and that is Jesus Christ! When we face His judgment we will be assessed fairly and with perfection so who are we to think that we can do that? It’s when we express this attitude that the world turns to us and says, “Don’t judge me”. When they see us with a “holier than thou” attitude their comments are often accurate about us. They are telling us the truth – we can be arrogant about what others do or think and it isn’t right for us to have that attitude.

I can quote the second part of this scripture like this, “Oh, here, little one, let me fix your problems since I don’t have any of my own, I can sure help you out here.” Meanwhile I am using this situation to distract myself from the gashing wound that may be present in my own life.

So, how do we learn to be more non-judgmental? By working diligently to evaluate our own lives truthfully. Then we are more likely to have compassion towards others and stop pointing our accusing fingers. We build towards this process as we become honest with ourselves. When we see we are capable of the same shortcomings, we can then see ourselves as fallible as everyone else. When we realize we are attempting to “cast the first stone”, we lose our power as accusers.

As we grow less judgmental our relationships will very likely improve. Our decision to assume the office of “Judge” does nothing more than to build walls and barriers with others. Personal honesty gives us the ability to better see our walls so we can begin to tear them down.

Teachy-Preachy Communication

Another concept of learning how to relate to others in a healthier way is to put down the proverbial pointing finger in our communication. This “teachy-preachy” way of communication is very prideful and off-putting and it may prevent relationships to flourish. It is with this “closed ears” posture that people feel invalidated and dominated. The “I know better than you” attitude that comes through parent/child style of communication between adults can invalidate a person’s heart and therefore produce walls between us.

Can you remember a time when someone pulled out the visible or invisible finger pointing, telling you what to do, or using the “I know what you need” kind of communication? How did you feel? Maybe feeling small or insignificant comes to mind? Or, did it just bring about feelings of invalidation, or intimidation for you? Certainly this is not going to be fruitful.

I am thankful that there are people who have walked the road ahead of me and have learned some life lessons that will help me. However, when I am trying to sort through my feelings or pour my heart out, I don’t handle someone telling me what to do or how to do it very well. There will be a time later when I am ready to hear wisdom from someone’s life experience and my ears are situated to hear it.

Covering Up My Own Insecurities?

I believe that teachy-preachy communication has closed more relationships off than many other communication errors we can make. I recognize that there have been times when I have gotten into teachy-preachy responses because I began to feel uncomfortable with overwhelming reactions and I just didn’t know what to do. So, instead of learning how to find a sense of peace with someone

else's sorting out process, I tried to fix them and their problems by all the things I know will help. In the end, I don't think I helped them at all.

Bible Bullets

As Christians, we can be so quick to bring another bible passage to the conversation. So often when we find ourselves with a challenging situation with a friend or family member, we can default to some seemingly wise repeating of a bible scripture. I have heard these referred to as "bible bullets" and it sure can communicate an underlying message – "here, let me shoot you with this"! Maybe that will kill off the terrible choices you are making or about to make.

If the person isn't a Christian, then I am reminded that the unsaved man doesn't understand the things of the Spirit. (I Cor. 2:14) If the person is a Christian, the heat of a challenging conversation is really not the best time to bring out a Scripture. I have learned the best thing we can do in that situation is listen and wait for the right time for our own spiritual input to be relevant. A good time for this might be when they ask.

There is certainly a place for God's holy, inspired Word to be shared. There are teaching moments and situations that provide the best venue to bring Scripture into a situation. But this must be discerned with wisdom and typically only after a person feels valued and heard by us as members of the Body of Christ. Then we might see a better receptivity for some of our best scriptural insights to be shared.

This doesn't let us off the hook! The practice of personal honesty is work. There are times when we look at another person's life; the splinter we see in their eyes can call us to be reminded of the logs in our own eyes. This humbling experience is just that – an opportunity to regain some honesty in my own life.

What will we do when we see someone troubled? What about someone who has just made a terrible mistake? And what was our response to the store clerk that didn't help us like we would have liked. Or the church friend who has just slammed the reputation of someone we love.

Our response is one of humble evaluation of our own lives so that first of all we understand that if we haven't done it, we may be tempted to do it or we may end up doing the very same thing we are critical of someone else doing.

I try each day to live with this in mind; the fact that I am breathing today, is God's grace on my life. In my imperfection and humanness, I deserve death as compared to God's standards of complete perfection. Due to my human nature, God provided Jesus Christ to die in my stead so that I may have life – life abundantly. Isn't this the same for everyone?

Prayer for today: Oh, Lord, forgive me of my shortcomings, my poor judgment, my selfishness and pride. Please help me today to realize that truly, there but for the Grace of God, go I. I don't want that to be a trite comment, but a heart change. Help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. I want to share your grace with those who need it and maybe today the ones I have assumed to be the Judge over are the ones who need your grace the most. Help me to be a minister of Your grace in their lives.

Practical Application: Use "I", "Me", "My" statements when communicating with others about your life or experiences. Many times when we speak to one another we use the word "you" when actually speaking about ourselves. (For example: "you know when you drive to work every day...") Practice using the word "I" in place of "you" when you are speaking about yourself. "When I drive to work every day I experience....".

Look for insights as to how unnatural it may feel to use words that directly refer to your experiences rather than softening or deflecting the attention away from yourself.

Write three feeling statements regarding the concept of personal honesty:

"I feel _____

About using "I, Me, My" statements

Because _____"

"I feel _____

About being more vulnerable with people about my own shortcomings

Because _____"

"I feel _____

About the last time I saw someone in trouble and gave them a scripture instead of listening to them

Because _____"

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