



## Group Discussion Guide

*For group meetings from October 18 afternoon through October 25 morning*

### **Matthew 7:1-11**

This final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount begins with powerful truths about judging other people (in this case the connotation of “judge” is “condemn”). In short, Jesus said his followers are not to condemn others. He elaborated by stating that those who do will receive the same type of judgment from God that they render to others people. He used an illustration of a person with a “log” in his eye attempting to remove a “speck” from the eye of someone else. Jesus identified the man with the “log” in his eye as a hypocrite, because he was trying to rebuke the sin of another before dealing with his own sin first.

The teaching in verse 6 is widely accepted as a stand alone statement, not necessarily connected with verses 1-5. However, it does help us understand what Jesus meant regarding “judge not.” His reference to “dogs” and “pigs” in verse 6 seems to clearly indicate that believers can discern the state of the heart of another person, without being the one who condemns them. That type of judgment is left only to God. Followers of Jesus can, however, see the actions of a person and catch a glimpse of that person’s heart (vs. 15-20). In verse 6, Jesus taught his followers not to give “what is holy” to “dogs” and not to throw “your pearls” to “pigs.”

*The “pigs” are not only unclean animals but wild and vicious, capable of savage action against a person. “Dogs” must not be thought of as household pets: in the Scriptures they are normally wild, associated with what is unclean, despised.*

*D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 185.*

The meaning of “what is holy” and “your pearls” can be derived from the context of Matthew, in which the author focuses a great deal on the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus did not teach that some people should not receive the gospel message. Instead, this teaching is meant to show his followers that they should not expect people who have rejected the gospel (“dogs” and “pigs”) to suddenly receive it. When someone chooses to reject Christ, we should continue to pray for them but also must consider moving on to share the gospel with others who might be receptive to him.

Jesus then shared the importance of seeking God for “good things,” as well as the faithfulness of God in giving them. Jesus said his followers should ask, seek and knock, and reminded them that even human fathers give good gifts to their children when asked. The example requests are bread and fish, which are connected to the model prayer taught by Jesus in Matthew 6:9-13.

There, Jesus said to ask God for “daily bread.” In addition, he taught that his followers should not worry about daily food (Matthew 6:25-33). The lesson here is, our Heavenly Father is far better than any earthly father, and therefore we should seek Him and expect Him to provide good things in our lives. We should remember that in the model prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus taught his disciples to pray for daily bread, forgiveness and the ability to forgive others, and deliverance from evil. God desires for us to ask, seek and knock not because He needs to hear us several times before He answers, but because He desires us to seek Him diligently.

### **Matthew 7:12-20**

Verse 12 is known as the “Golden Rule,” and many Bibles contain that description of this section of the sermon. His teaching focused on one’s relationship with God and with others, which is consistent with the Old Testament Law. In this one simple sentence, Jesus explained that we must treat other people as we would want them to treat us. This teaching was so foundational that Jesus said, “... for this is the Law and the Prophets.” It has been said that this truth did not originate with Jesus, but that he was the first to state it in a positive way; rather than issue a prohibition, Jesus issued a positive command to “do.” He taught that life was more than avoiding evil; it was doing good!

In the next two verses, Jesus described the two paths one could travel. He said the widest gate and easiest path to travel led to destruction, while the narrow gate and more difficult path led to life. Many people would use the wide gate and easy path, while few would use the narrow gate and difficult path. In John 14:6 he said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life ... No one comes to the Father except through me.” The Gospel of the kingdom is the narrow gate and difficult path. All other thoughts about life in this world and beyond make up the wide gate and easy path.

Jesus made sure his followers knew about false prophets. He told them to be cautious regarding these teachers, because they would seem innocent but were in fact extremely dangerous. Jesus taught that false prophets could be identified by how they live. He used agricultural analogies to point out that fruit can only be produced by fruit-bearing trees and plants. Healthy trees and plants will not bear diseased fruit, while diseased trees and plants will not bear diseased fruit. Jesus said the trees that do not bear healthy fruit will be cut down and burned, meaning that false prophets (identified by their sinful way of life) will be judged.

### **Matthew 7:21-29**

Connected with his teaching in verses 15-20, Jesus in verses 21-23 shared the truth that not everyone who appears to know God will enter into the kingdom of heaven. We already know that God the Father does not deceive His children (vs. 7-11), so this is not meant to show that God will somehow allow a person to think they are His child by their faith in Christ and then at the day of judgment reveal they actually are not. Instead, Jesus was stating that there will be those who have relied on their works that they claim were done in service to God as their way into heaven. Because Jesus is the only way to the Father, this reliance on works is one of the many false teachings that make up the wide gate and easy path described in verses 13-14. Jesus clearly taught that only those who do the will of the Father will enter into heaven. These people

are those who have placed their faith in Christ and then walk with him in obedience as a result of that faith (Ephesians 2:8-10).

At the end of his sermon, Jesus issued a final challenge. He instructed all who heard him to do what he had said. Those who followed his teaching would be “like a wise man who built his house on the rock,” while those who did not would be “like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” When a storm came, the house built on the sand fell, while the house built on the rock did not. Those who come to Christ in faith and follow him in faith will continue to stand when the pressures of life push on them. Those who reject Christ will fall under pressure. The storm represents the trials of life, but also the judgment that is yet to come.

The reaction to Jesus’ sermon was astonishment. Those who heard him teach had not heard anyone – not even the scribes and other religious leaders – teach with such authority.

*Jesus is not an ordinary prophet who says, “Thus says the Lord!” Rather, he speaks in the first person and claims that his teaching fulfills the OT; that he determines who enters the messianic kingdom; that as the Divine Judge he pronounces banishment; that the true heirs of the kingdom would be persecuted for their allegiance to him; and that he alone fully knows the will of his Father.*

*D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 195.*

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it is sometimes challenging for us not to judge (condemn) other people? How can we make sure we address the “log” in our own eye before we even think about removing the “speck” from the eye of someone else?
2. In light of Matthew 7:6, how can we avoid condemning others while also discerning when it is time to back away from sharing God’s truth with them?
3. What does Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:7-11 teach you about our Heavenly Father? What does it teach you about prayer?
4. The “golden rule” seems very simple. What type of situations make it difficult for you to practice this teaching? What does it mean to you that Jesus stated this rule “is the Law and the Prophets”?
5. Why is it so important for us to be able to recognize false prophets?
6. What do you take away from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:21-23? How does this affect your understanding of faith and works?
7. Matthew 7:24-27 has temporal and eternal applications. Regarding the temporal application, what are you doing to ensure your life is built on the solid rock of Jesus?