

Merciful Judgment: A Field Guide

How to Judge without Being Judgmental (Part 3)

Introduction

The Text

³⁷ “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” ³⁹ He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye. (Luke 6:37–42)

A Brief Review

- A. Though this message is the third part of what you might call a mini-series on the subject of merciful judgment, and though these three messages are meant to interlock and build on one another, for the sake of time we’re just going to dive right in.
- B. I will remind us again though that, in our text, Jesus is trying to move us away from being [v. 37](#) kind of people—people who judge others harshly; and He’s trying to help us become [v. 42](#) kind of people—people who judge others mercifully; people who, in love, are able to help remove a speck from a brother’s eye so that he can see more clearly.
- C. In an attempt to help us in this, I’ve put together A Field Guide to Merciful Judgment.
 - 1. This Field Guide is organized around 4 questions: (1) Who Should We Mercifully Judge?; (2) What Should We Mercifully Judge?; (3) Why Should We Mercifully Judge?; and now (4) How Should We Mercifully Judge?
- D. To answer this fourth question, I’ve come up with 10 adverbs for us—10 words that qualify this merciful judgment and point us in the direction of how it is actually worked out in our lives. Last week we looked at the first three—(1) Slowly; (2) Prayerfully; (3) Humbly. This week we will take on the last seven.

(4b) How Should We Mercifully Judge?

(4) Sympathetically

- A. These qualifying adverbs are meant, in a sense, to build off of one another. Imagine we see a brother or sister who seems to be caught in grave sin or doctrinal error. What are we to do?

1. Well, we go about things Slowly, suspending judgment until we've gathered more of the facts.
 2. Even when we become sure that this is something worthy of addressing, we don't first rush to speak to the person about it, we rush into our closet and speak with the Lord. We've been Prayerful.
 3. And though, after prayer, we still feel God is wanting us to be His instrument for helping our beloved friend see clearly again, we are not so foolish as to think we cannot relate, as if we too couldn't fall to the same errors. Indeed, we make sure that our hearts are Humbled before we ever open our mouths.
- B. But adding to this, again, we ask the question: How Should We Mercifully Judge? And we find that we should also do it Sympathetically.
- C. If humility lowers me to the place a servant beneath this person, sympathy moves me towards them. I feel what you feel. I suffer what you suffer.
1. Sympathy is a word derived from two Greek words: sun (with) + pasko (to suffer) = to suffer with.
- D. Now, let me say a few things about this sympathy:

(1) It Takes Work

- A. Sadly, sympathy doesn't seem to come natural to many of us. We are so consumed with our own worlds, with our own suffering and trials, that we feel we don't have time for anyone else's. So sympathy is going to take some work.
- B. I suppose sympathy can be likened to taking a trip. You are visiting another person's world—walking where they walk, feeling what they feel, learning about them, living with them. You're traveling. And that takes work.
1. A couple of weeks ago, my family and I took a trip to Phoenix, to visit my mom and dad. Let me tell you something: it sounds like a nice idea, going to see the grandparents or whatever, but, with three kids, just traveling to the grocery store is hard, it takes a lot of work.
 - a. But we get there and we share life with my parents, and hear what they've been going through, and I get to see the joy it brings my mom to hold Levi who's growing up so fast and she feels so far away.
 - i. And that's what sympathy is all about. Doing the work to get there with a person.

(2) It Changes Everything

- A. Traveling into a person's world and walking with them, will change your perspective on them and any issue you feel called to address. You see they are given over to such a thing for reasons you had no knowledge of at the start.

B. I remember watching that hit show *Lost* a long while back and I actually learned something about sympathy from the way the writers told the story. They started you in the present day with the characters, but as the show went on they would take you back into stories from each characters' past.

1. And, here's what I found: going back and learning about where each person came from, hearing the rest of their story, changed everything. I would start off thinking that guy's just a jerk, that girl's just melodramatic, that dude's pure evil or whatever. I'd form all these judgments about the characters.

a. And then they'd take us back. And we'd see how the evil guy actually had this horrible father that abused and manipulated him. And suddenly I'm finding myself not angry at him, but sad, and suffering with him. Truly traveling into their world, their story, changed my whole approach to them.

C. The things a person is doing may still be wrong and need to be addressed, but now your heart feels for them, and they will know you hear them and love them when you speak.

(3) It's Learned Behavior

A. But all of this is learned behavior. What I mean by that is: we've learned it from our Savior. He is the quintessential Sympathetic One. And here's the amazing thing: what we are talking about doing here for one another is just the sort of thing He's already done for us.

B. You want to talk about taking a trip, traveling into another person's world? Well, Jesus literally does this for you and for me. He leaves the glory He's had with the Father before the world ever was, He takes on the limitations and weaknesses of human flesh, all so He can walk with us, get into our story, and sympathize with us...so He can truly help.

1. “¹⁵ [W]e do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:15–16).

a. And He does more than just suffer with us, right? He suffers for us. In love, He takes our judgment on Himself at the cross, and He extends mercy for our weaknesses, grace in our time of need. He is merciful in His judgment of us, and He does it sympathetically.

C. Brothers and sisters, people of the cross, by the Spirit of Christ in us, let us do the same with one another!

(5) Faithfully

A. Through much of my messages on this subject of judgment, the assumption has been that we are quick to speak. That's because that's really the assumption back in [Luke 6](#)—there's a beam in my eye but I'm ready to point out the speck in yours.

1. But still, there is another side to this, right? While there are some of us who are much too quick to judge others, there are others of us who are actually too slow. We see things, we see things clearly, but we are just too scared to address them.
- B. Yes love covers a multitude of sins, but there comes a point where love speaks. The speck in the eye is causing things to get all infected, you're going to lose your vision. I've got to say something.
1. That's why, I would say that Merciful Judgment is done Faithfully.
- C. The book of Proverbs gives us the principle I'm after here: "⁵Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (27:5–6).
- D. The apostle Paul fleshes this out for us. It seems he had written a previous letter to the Corinthians addressing some serious sin in the church. And in 2 Cor 7:8-10 he gives us a window into his heart in the whole process: "⁸[E]ven if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret."
1. You can sense Paul's turmoil in this. This is what the transition between covering sin to confronting sin looks like. It's hard. It's not fun.
 - a. "I do not regret it...well, I did regret it, but I don't regret it, because it led to salvation for you!" But there's a reluctance. I don't like doing this. I hate to see you grieving. But if it leads to true repentance and heart change it is all worth it in the end! "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."
- E. So, if you want to be faithful to your friends, you will at times, in mercy, confront them.

(6) Constructively

- A. Now, finally, with adverb number six, here is the moment we've all been waiting for: we actually get to open our mouths and speak.
1. Everything to this point has been about slowing down, getting your facts straight, checking your heart before God, growing in love for this person—all so that, when you actually approach them on a serious matter in their lives, you are ready to use your words, not destructively, but constructively...not to tear them down, but to build them up.
 - a. As Paul exhorts the Ephesian church: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29).
- B. We like to believe that old playground saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." But I think more true to life would be: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can crush my soul."

1. I would wager that more of us have been broken in deeper places and in more lasting ways by words than we've ever been broken by sticks and stones.
 - a. I can still recall harsh words spoken to me from when I was just a little boy. Do you have any of those?
- C. According to [James](#), the tongue is not neutral or impotent. On the contrary, it is "set on fire by hell" ([3:6](#)) and with our words we set fire to one another!
 1. And Paul is saying: "Christian, it ought not to be so any longer with you." "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up. . ."
- D. And what characterizes words that build up? Well, they are words that "give grace to those who hear." In other words, they are words soaked in the gospel. They are not lit on fire by hell. They are, rather, dripping with the living water of God's grace.
 1. Even as we address serious sin or doctrinal error in another, we do so in a way that affirms their identity in Christ and assures them of God's love and commitment to them.

(7) Gently

- A. At this point we remember that, at least in the image Jesus gives us back in [Luke 6](#), we are dealing with another person's eye. When we approach a brother or sister to help them remove a speck we are dealing with something as sensitive, something as vulnerable as their eye.
- B. I remember when I was a kid, after a long day in a chlorinated pool or something, my eyes would be all dry and red, and my mom would have to help me put those Visine drops in.
 1. This was one of the most ridiculous scenes you'd ever see. Because no matter what, when the tip of that little bottle comes towards my eye, my eyelids are closing, it was just reflex. So drops would be hitting my cheek, my forehead, the floor, anything but my eye. She would have to use one hand to wrench the eyelids open and then the other to get the drops in, and even still it wasn't a sure thing.
- C. As ridiculous as all this is, it tells us something very important about the eye and the nature of speck-removing work: we've got to be so gentle. People don't naturally like having their sin brought up or addressed. They want to shut their eyes to that sort of thing, even if you are truly trying to help.
 1. Paul puts it this way in [2 Tim 2:24-25a](#): " ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ^{25a} correcting his opponents with gentleness."
- D. When we are addressing sin or error in another, are we aggressive, even hurtful? Or are we gentle?

(8) Patiently

- A. The early church father Tertullian once said: “It is God’s nature to be patient. One of the signs the Holy Spirit has descended is that patience and waiting is always by its side.”
1. So naturally, then, we must ask: when dealing the sins and errors of others, are we patient?
- B. I’m reminded of the text I preached two messages on back in August of last year: 1 Thess 5:14: “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”
1. Paul lists three different kinds of people: “idle”, “fainthearted”, “weak”; and he calls for three very different approaches: “admonish”, “encourage”, “help”; but he calls for one thing that must be present in our dealings with them all: patience!
- C. In a culture consumed with pragmatism and efficiency, in a culture that demands immediate results—from our technology, from our exercise, from our diets, from our investments, from our relationships, or whatever—do we have the patience anymore to walk with a brother or sister along the difficult and demanding path of sanctification?
1. We are not transformed into the image of Christ overnight but “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). And we need patience if we are going to help each other along in this.
- D. So then, do we bring things up with a person and expect them to be fixed from thereon out? Or are we prepared to be patient with them, as God certainly is with us?

(9) Incrementally

- A. If we were to end the sermon at this point, it might seem that Christians are to be somewhat limp-wristed in their judgments. They are very gentle, soft-spoken, and self-deprecating. They bring up things but they don’t really put their foot down on anything.
1. But to end here would not leave us with the full picture. For the Scriptures make very clear that Merciful Judgment is to be, like God’s, Incremental.
- B. By this I mean, that we start slow, hoping the best, gentle and patient, but if this person continues to be unrepentant regarding a closed-handed doctrinal issue or a black & white moral issue, things are to progress bit by bit and our judgment gets incrementally, increasingly more severe.
- C. Are we willing to go Matt 18 in love for another person? “¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (vv. 15–17). We cannot let you go on thinking you are a Christian anymore.

- D. “You say we do this in love Nick?” Yes, love. I know we struggle with this concept, but we can't miss the context of Jesus' words here.
1. Just before in vv. 10-14 He gives the parable of the lost sheep, where it's all about God's pursuit of the one sheep that has gone astray.
 2. And just after in vv. 21-22, He gives the parable about forgiveness, wherein He calls His disciples to forgive those who sin against them “seventy times seven” times.
 - a. So we must not think that such a process is abandoning a person. No! It is truly one of the ways we pursue them and attempt to turn them from going astray.
 - b. And we must not think that such a thing is done with a hard heart towards the person. No! We know that God is ready and willing to forgive a million times over if only they would turn from their sin and repent.
- E. It is love that gets in a brother or sister's face and says: “You are not walking rightly with God. And we can't let you go on thinking that you are. But O how we hope and pray you will turn and live!”

(10) Expectantly

- A. Even if things were to incrementally escalate to such an extreme point as this, never once do we lose hope for the person. We do it all with great expectation.
1. For we know that no one, however hard in unbelief, however stubborn in sin, is ever beyond the reach of God's grace. No one!
- B. That's the entire point of Paul's life: “¹⁵The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Tim 1:15–16).
1. Have you ever wondered: Why did God let Paul go on hating Jesus and killing Christians for all that time? Why didn't Jesus just call Him as a disciple and apostle back when He called all the others?
 - a. Answer: “that in me, as the foremost [sinner, persecutor of the church (v. 13)], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”
 - i. He wants us to look and say: “If God could save a man as far gone as Paul, He can save a man like me, or you, or anyone!”
- C. So as we address serious sins or doctrinal errors in each other's lives, we do so with such great expectation and hope. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace in Christ!
- D. So now may He make us a church that knows how to judge without being judgmental. May He make us a church that knows the way of merciful judgment.