

St Paul's Dorking Small Groups - Sunday 18th March 2018

'The Good and Beautiful Life' Chapter 11. Learning to live without judging others: Matt 7:1-5



How did you get on with praying instead of worrying? How about a Prayer Journal?

JBS defines judging: **'Judging is making a negative evaluation of others without standing in solidarity with them.'**

Phrases like "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) or "correcting someone found in sin" (Matt 18:15) become justifications for judging others and leave us open to accusations of being 'holier than thou' hypocrites.

Key thought: The moral high ground is a very lonely place: because we are sitting up high on a pile of rubbish!

But ...this is subtle, it creeps up on us, and it is often unconscious and deep-seated in our make-up, our up-bringing, and our outlook on life. Test yourself with a few "labels" - *Trump followers, fat people, thin people, homeless people, gays, those who have walked away from the faith, ISIS, ETON Toffs, Bankers, Estate Agents, long term unemployed, drug users*

THE FALSE NARRATIVE

There are two primary reasons why we judge others; (1) To fix others - to set them straight, to "help" them shape up: condemnation will not change people! (2) To make us feel better about ourselves: putting others down builds us up!

So why does judging others in this manner not work?

- 1) **It does not flow from a heart of love** - Mother Teresa said "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." It's all coming from the wrong place - the wrong source.
- 2) **Judging someone forces someone to recognise errors** - People feel attacked and defensive. Change usually comes about through an individual's own recognition of their need to change, not through someone else telling them!
- 3) **Judgement is usually destructive** - We tear down the house, but we fail to re-build it. Change requires the adoption of new narratives, support, patience and little steps - not a barrage of words, however wise or well intentioned!
- 4) **Judgement is usually wrong.** The old saying goes '**Do not judge another until you have walked a mile in their shoes**'. We don't know peoples' stories. Philo of Alexandria said "**Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle.**"

A NEW NARRATIVE

Jesus offers us a completely different narrative about how to help others change. **Read Matt. 7: 1-3 again.** Jesus begins with "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged", usually understood that if we judge we will be judged by God. But God is not mentioned here. Better understood: if you put others down they will judge you in return. The log is thought to mean our own sinfulness and Jesus is saying 'Who are you to judge? You are more sinful than your neighbour!' JBS argues this is not logical. Would Jesus really tell us to get rid of our sin so we can get on with judging big time!? So the log is not our sinfulness but our desire or need to judge. Judging others never works: **all it creates is friction not momentum**. Jesus is saying we need to remove that deep compulsion to judge others. We have received mercy, we have been moved from condemnation to love, so why do we want to place others into judgment? Remember **Matt 18:21-35**.

A NEW AND BETTER WAY – 3 STEPS TO POSITIVE CHANGE

- 1) **Be-Aware:** Be more aware of our own triggers: Get tuned in to those people or situations where we are likely to be judgemental. From where do our prejudices emerge in our feelings about people? How do we label people? We have an inner and hidden predisposition to judge certain people or situations that just sits there in our make-up.
- 2) **Beware:** Perception is NOT reality! There is a phrase used in coaching, '*The map is not the territory*'. The map we have in our minds of people and situations is drawn with all our own baggage and prejudices. There is a distortion of the truth because we paint the picture how we want to paint the picture. **Don't believe everything you think!**
- 3) **Be-Proactive...Not destructive:** We may well be faced with people where the best choices and the wisest courses are not being pursued. The way forward is to walk in their shoes, to be a catalyst and a collaborator rather than judge and jury. In **Matt 7:7** we are called to ask, seek and knock. JBS suggests instead of jumping in immediately, we hang back and ask for wisdom, seek to be **collaborators in positive change**, and knock upon our Heavenly Father's door in prayer before we do anything. We need to have our minds transformed from destructive to constructive (**Rom. 12:1**)

SOUL TRAINING: This week's Soul training is to focus on GOSSIP: a pervasive form of judgement that speaks negatively of someone in their absence usually with the motive of putting them down and making us look better. So this week, let us simply refuse to engage in gossip or participate in conversations about other people that often include half-truths.

Secondly: Use this week to name and shame our own triggers and to weed out our unconscious bias. Use it to free us from the need to take half a story and make a **negative evaluation of others without standing in solidarity with them**.

Questions for discussion:

- 1) Review together the list of "labels" above. Can you add some more? Which are those you are most familiar with?
- 2) Can you share a story where you have been judged or have handed out judgement and it has backfired?
- 3) Review together the 4 reasons why judging others does not work. Do they ring true in your experience?
- 4) Discuss the way JBS interprets the "speck and the log": seeing the log not as our sinfulness but as our need to judge
- 5) Discuss the 3 steps to positive change: Be-Aware, Beware, Be-proactive. How might you pursue them?
- 6) Ask/Seek/Knock: How might we be better collaborators in positive change?
- 7) Tell a story of how you have stood (or could now stand) in solidarity with someone positively, instead of judging.