

UNIT 1: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Lesson 5

April 12, 2026

The Christian's Relationships:

Followers of Christ are called to live like Christ.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson explores three essential aspects of Christlike growth. It begins by addressing the vice of faultfinding, emphasizing the difference between constructive evaluation and harmful judgmentalism. Next, it examines Jesus' teaching on seeking God for our needs and trusting in His faithfulness. The lesson concludes with a focus on the Golden Rule, highlighting its role as a summation of Jesus' ethical teachings and its connection to a broader passage in Matthew that encapsulates the Law and the Prophets. Students are encouraged to reflect on how Christlikeness in relationships can influence others and serve as a testament to the character of Christ.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Some scholars believe this part of the Sermon on the Mount is not as carefully organized as the other sections of Jesus' sermon. It could be that Matthew, who had heard and collected Jesus' teaching, combined them in this setting. Another likely possibility is that this section reflects a teaching style used by rabbis, where ideas are connected more loosely instead of being tightly structured. Even though it may feel less organized, there is a key central idea running through it – how Jesus' followers should act in the world. We are told to trust God completely, which will help us show kindness, love, and grace to those around us.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

- 1. DO NOT BE A FAULTFINDER: Matthew 7:1-6.**
 - A. On Judging Others, (1-5)
 - B. The Rise of the Judges (6)
- 2. PERSIST IN PRAYER: Matthew 7:7-11.**
 - A. Keep Asking, Seeking, and Knocking, (7-8)
 - B. Trust the Father's Goodness, (9-11)
- 3. LOVE OTHERS AS YOURSELF: Matthew 7:12; 22:34-40.**
 - A. The Golden Rule, (7:12)
 - B. The Greatest Commandments, (22:34-40)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. DO NOT BE A FAULTFINDER: Matthew 7:1-6.

A. On Judging Others, Matthew 7:1-5.

Verse 1 may be one of the most quoted and misused verses in the Bible. Some use this verse as a defense against any criticism or correction. Others, employ it to avoid taking any responsibility for correcting or counseling an erring Christian. The Greek word translated as judge has a wide range of meanings – from simple evaluation of other’s actions to the more extreme acts of condemnation and vengeance. Often in the New Testament, the word is used to describe how a situation is assessed and decisions are reached (Acts 4:19; Luke 7:43; 1 Corinthians 10:15; 11:13). In each of these occasions, “judging” is portrayed as a neutral or even a positive act. Indeed, Jesus commended “righteous judgment” that is not based solely on appearance (John 7:24). However, the New Testament rejects harsh judgment or judgment that assumes to know more than it does (Romans 2:1-3; 14:10, 13; James 4:11).

Jesus used the image of a man blinded by a plank in his eye attempting to perform the delicate operation of removing a speck from another person’s eye (Matthew 7:3-4). In this case, the one trying to correct his brother’s vision will likely cause more harm than good. Jesus used the term “hypocrite” (v. 5) to describe these people. These individuals are merely pretending to see things clearly and offer assistance, despite being in a worse condition themselves. They should take care of their own issues and address their faults before trying to judge others. Through this and similar illustrations, Jesus warned His disciples against being hypocritical or judgmental. He was not saying they could not or should not assess and address the inappropriate behavior of fellow Christians, but they were to avoid a persistently judgmental attitude. Such people are guilty of condemning them for their faults while overlooking their own shortcomings – not the least of which is their faultfinding tendencies!

B. Be Discerning Teachers, Matthew 7:6.

This verse has been interpreted in various ways, but can be understood as follows: “Do Not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they [the swine] trample them [the pearls] under their feet, and [the dogs] turn and tear you in pieces.” In that time, there were feral, hungry, and aggressive dogs known to attack people who tried to feed them. This illustrated the behavior of some people who would respond violently to Christians reaching out with the Gospel. Pigs were unclean animals to Jewish people, and Jesus was essentially teaching His followers not to give sacred and precious things, such as the Gospel, to those who would neither appreciate nor receive them as such.

Jesus was encouraging teachers, preachers, and witnesses to be discerning regarding whom they share His teachings with (see Proverbs 23:9). Although Christ’s disciples are never to be ashamed of the Gospel and should always be ready to share it (1 Peter 3:15), we also need to maximize our opportunities and efforts. Trying to force the teaching of Christ upon people who do not want to hear or receive it can invite personal attack and allow them to profane God’s Word. When Jesus sent His disciples into various cities, He said that if a household or town did not receive the message, they were to shake the dust off their feet and go to the next one (Matthew 10:13-15).

Jesus’ teachings on judgment challenge us to reflect on our personal lives before focusing on others. While many Christians start with good intentions, they can sometimes forget the grace they’ve received and adopt a self-righteous attitude, acting as enforcers of God’s rules rather

than encouragers. Jesus discourages this mindset, urging us to prioritize self-reflection and repentance. He calls us to address our own shortcomings first, reminding us of the importance of humility and grace.

2. PERSIST IN PRAYER: Matthew 7:7-11.

A. Keep Asking, Seeking, and Knocking, Matthew 7:7-8.

In verses 7 and 8, Jesus began to teach on prayer. This may seem like an abrupt shift from verse 6, but it aligns with the Kingdom life Jesus was describing. Faultfinders approach the world in a self-righteous manner, looking for errors and people to blame. However, Jesus's disciples are open to the work of God in the world and act accordingly. They do not look for reasons to retreat; they look for opportunities to see God at work. The context that follows is closely related to Jesus' teaching on seeking the kingdom of God.

Prayer is first and foremost an action (asking), but it is not limited to discerning direction from God. We are also instructed to seek and knock. Asking may be the first (and continuing) action to perform, in that we should ask God for what we need to participate in the advancement of His kingdom. Then we are to seek, meaning we should be looking, open, and observant as we scan our environment, aware that the Father will give us what we need. As we discern the activity of the Spirit, we should move forward and knock. Although this knocking is figurative, we move forward in prayer to where we see God moving. We knock to enter and benefit from the answer for which we have prayed. This activity is not aggressive, manipulative, or anxious but is consistent, patient, and gentle. Throughout this instruction on prayer, Jesus used the present imperative (command) for asking, seeking, and knocking (v. 7). The following translation emphasizes the dynamic meaning of His words: We should ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking. We should be consistent and persistent in our prayer life. Prayer is about continued confidence that God will answer.

Jesus did not restrict answered prayers to a few spiritual elites. The Jewish people often celebrated God's willingness to answer prayers, but the rabbis tended to reserve the privilege of answered prayers for the most holy and heroic. According to them, God primarily answered the prayers of people like Elijah, which seemed to exclude the people who felt they could never measure up to such lofty standards. Jesus, however, was saying that everyone who faithfully and sincerely asks, seeks, and knocks will have their prayers answered. In other passages, Jesus also notes that we must believe (Mark 9:23), and our prayers that align with His teaching will be answered (John 15:7).

B. Trust the Father's Goodness, Matthew 7:9-11.

To understand His point about God's willingness to answer prayer, Jesus asked His followers to consider their parental care when their children asked for bread or fish, typical food of the day (vv. 9-10). These images were carefully selected. Stones along the Galilean shore resemble the shape and color of small loaves of bread. Serpents (or perhaps eels) were unclean for the Jewish people and therefore not eaten. No loving parent would mock the sincere request of their child for what they need with "gifts" that are unusable. How much more, then, can we trust the Father

to be faithful in His answer? By calling His followers “evil” in this illustration, Jesus was comparing the divide between humanity and the nature of God (v. 11). Even good parents fall short of the mark when compared to God.

By describing God as a loving and caring Father, Jesus was echoing descriptions of God found in the Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 49:15. He reminded His audience what they ought to know: God will care for them, so they need not fear. He will give “good things” to those who ask (Matthew 7:11). This is found in the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, as well as the command to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. These are all good things that the Father will not withhold. Answers to prayer may not come in the way we might expect, but they will always be good gifts from a good Father.

Jesus encourages us to approach the Father with confidence, trusting in His generosity and readiness to provide beyond what we can imagine. When praying, we should ask, seek, and knock – actions that reveal persistence and faith. Asking initiates prayer, seeking involves being attentive to God’s guidance, and knocking symbolizes taking steps where we sense His activity. Jesus emphasizes persistence, urging us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking with unwavering trust. Importantly, God’s answers are not reserved only for the most holy but are available to all followers of Jesus who earnestly seek Him.

3. LOVE OTHERS AS YOURSELF: Matthew 7:12; 22:34-40.

A. The Golden Rule, Matthew 7:12.

The Golden Rule is one of Jesus’ most well-known and revered statements. It is valued as a summation of ethical dealings with others. Other religious and philosophical traditions, as well as prior Jewish writers, had similar forms of this rule. However, these other forms tended to be phrased in the negative. For example, “Do not do to others what you find to be hateful.” Jesus’ statement is positive” “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (v. 12 NKJV). This puts the responsibility on His disciples not only to refrain from harming others, but to seek their well-being actively.

This positive framing is in line with Jesus’ early statements in the sermon about His purpose in relation to the Old Testament: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets, I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (5:17 NKJV). Throughout His sermon, Jesus showed that the way to the kind of righteousness that belongs in the Kingdom was not merely avoiding transgressions but actively working for the good of others. This fulfilled the Law, which called upon the people of God to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18).

B. The Greatest Commandments, Matthew 22:34-40.

Later in Jesus’ ministry, He would take opportunities to succinctly repeat all that He taught in the Sermon on the Mount. For example, when tested by a lawyer on which was the greatest commandments, Jesus responded by summarizing the whole Law and Prophets: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (vv. 37, 39). At the heart of the Jewish Law is the Ten Commandments. The first four of those commands deal directly with the people’s relationship to God: worship God only; do not make idols; revere God’s name; keep the Sabbath. The

remaining six commands deal with people's relationships with others: honor your parents, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness; and do not covet. The rest of the Law expounds on these commands, providing guidelines for living according to the Law.

Likewise, when the prophets spoke in the name of God, they were offering real-time commentary on the application of the Law and calling God's people to faithfulness to the covenant. Jesus was saying the Law is fulfilled when someone loves God totally and loves others as much as they love themselves. Remember that Jesus was not limiting "love" to warm feelings of affection. Instead, this was to be love in action: purposefully acting for the well-being of another. Being governed and guided by this kind of love results in the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets.

This teaching about loving others as we love ourselves invites reflection on how we express love daily. It encourages us to go beyond our own needs and actively care for others. It also challenges us to examine whether our actions embody love or merely fulfill basic obligations. Imagine approaching tomorrow with the sincere intention of making love a top priority. Such a mindset could profoundly transform your interactions, deeper relationships, and bring greater joy not only to those around you but also to yourself. Embracing this perspective could create a ripple effect of kindness and connection in your life.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

We do not grow in God's kingdom at the expense of others. Jesus calls us to be gracious with our judgments and attend to our own faults first. Jesus calls us to see others as an opportunity to love.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Give the class time to reflect on their love for others. Encourage them to prayerfully seek opportunities to share Christ with others, and to trust God to open the doors for this to happen.

WORKSHEET

Reflections of the Sermon on the Mount

Throughout the New Testament writings outside the four Gospels, there are numerous passages of Scripture that reflect the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The following are some examples of this in relation to the lesson for today, based on Matthew 7:1-12.

Regarding faultfinding (Matthew 7:1-6): “Who are you to judge another’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand ...But why do you judge your brother [fellow Christian]? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Roman 14:4, 10).

Regarding persistence in prayer (Matthew 7:7-11): “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for the saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

“For this reason, we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1:9).

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (Colossians 4:2-3).

Regarding loving others as one’s own self (Matthew 7:12): “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10).

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

“See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

Wise Living

Judging:

Matthew 7:1-5:

1. Why does Jesus have to warn us not to “judge” others (v. 1)?
2. In what sense do we determine the severity of our own judgment (v. 2)?
3. Put Jesus’ teaching in verse 5 in your own words.

Praying:

Matthew 7:7-8:

1. How is prayer like asking?
2. How is prayer like seeking?
3. How is prayer like knocking?

“God looks not at the elegance of your prayers, to see how neat they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of you prayers, to see how many there are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers.” – Thomas