

Why Do You Have To Be So . . . ?

1. Warm up: Jeff began Sunday's sermon by telling about a time he said something stupid, *i.e.*, asking God to bless the briefs of the Lambda lawyers during a prayer at a big Lambda fund-raising dinner. Tell us about a time you said something stupid and/or embarrassing (large or small).
2. As we continue our sermon series on how to build beautiful relationships the Jesus way, this week we are focused on the Biblical injunction about not being judgmental. Tell us about a time in your life when you felt hurtfully judged? Describe the experience and how it made you feel.
3. Tell us about a time when you harshly judged someone else and now regret it. How did your judgment affect that person?
4. The Bible repeatedly tells us not to judge others. For example, Jesus said, "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." Matthew 7:1. Similarly, Romans 14:10 says, "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . Each of us will be accountable to God. Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another." Nevertheless, we also often have a responsibility to offer honest feedback to others. Jesus himself modeled that for us. So where do we draw the line between honest feedback, which is good, versus judging someone, which is bad? What did Jesus mean when he said, "Judge not." For guidance, let's reread Luke 18:9-14, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. How would describe the attitude of the Pharisee toward himself?
 - b. How would you describe the attitude of the Pharisee toward others?
 - c. Do you consider yourself righteous? Why or why not?
 - d. How would you describe the attitude of the tax collector toward himself?
 - e. How would you describe the attitude of the tax collector toward others?
 - f. In verse 14, Jesus says the tax collector went away "justified," but the Pharisee didn't. Why was the tax collector justified? Why wasn't the Pharisee?
5. Read the excerpt from Jeff's sermon printed on p. 3. Then return to the questions below.
 - a. Do you agree that judgmentalism "is less about an action – *i.e.*, critiquing the people around us – and more about the attitude with which we critique them." Why or why not?
 - b. Think about a time when you felt it was important to offer critical feedback to someone. Choose someone else in your group to pretend to be that person. First,

roleplay what it would look like if you gave that person your feedback in a harsh judgmental way. Then rewind and roleplay what it would look like if you gave that person your feedback in a compassionate empathetic way.

- c. In your own life, when have you experienced something that can be described as “compassionate evaluation and/or feedback?” Describe the experience and how it made you feel.
 - d. Why is judgmentalism such an impediment to building beautiful relationships?
6. Hopefully we now better understand what Jesus meant when he challenged us not to be judgmental. But just because we know what we’re supposed to do doesn’t mean we have the capacity to do it. So on Sunday, we took some time to ponder three Biblical truths which, when internalized, can transform us from harsh judges to compassionate evaluators.
- a. **Step #1 – Get in touch with your own shortcomings.** Remember, Jesus told his Luke 18 parable as a warning to “those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.” Luke 18:9. And Jesus ended the parable by saying, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” Why is getting in touch with our own sinfulness so critical to our ability not to be judgmental toward others?
 - b. Do you feel you live with a profound awareness of your own sinfulness? What’s the difference between a healthy and unhealthy awareness of our sinfulness?
 - c. **Step #2 – Recognize that we’re all products of forces more powerful than us. Therefore, there’s a reason why the person we’re tempted to judge is the way they are.** When the Apostle Paul challenges the Corinthian Christians to stop being so judgmental toward each other, he says, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” I Corinthians 4:7. What do you think that verse means. Put it in your own words.
 - d. In a sermon two weeks ago, Jeff criticized Elon Musk for callously de-funding USAID and allowing 750,000 of the poorest poor to die. Last Sunday, Jeff confessed that even as he criticized Musk, he was oblivious that, in his own small way, he too was doing what he accused Musk of doing by not sending \$24 per month to help starving children. Jeff said he needed to fix that. He also went on to tell us about the childhood traumas that Musk experienced. Did that information impact how you feel about Musk and the attitude with which you evaluate him? Why or why not?
 - e. Tell us about a weakness of yours and where you think that weakness came from. In other words, as best you can discern, what made you that way? Did you ever consciously choose to be that way or did it just “happen to you”?

- f. **Step #3 – Show grace to those you’re tempted to judge.** Because grace is the most powerful force for healing in the cosmos. And when people feel grace coming from us, they’re better able to hear our feedback and find themselves wanting to change. Jeff said, “If grace is what saves us, that means showing grace is the greatest good we can ever do. And if grace is the greatest good, that also means that the opposite of grace – harsh judgment – is the greatest sin we can ever commit.” Do you buy that? Is judgmentalism the greatest sin we can commit? Why or why not?
- g. Thomas Merton said, “Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is a savage just because he is *your* enemy. Perhaps he is your enemy because he thinks *you* are a savage. Or perhaps he is afraid of you because he feels you are afraid of him. And perhaps if he believed you were capable of loving him he would no longer be your enemy.” Your thoughts?

Luke 18:9-14

9 Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” ¹³But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.’

Sermon Excerpt

“The Pharisee in our Gospel story gives us a vivid picture of what Jesus says it means to be judgmental. The story teaches us that being judgmental is less about an action – *i.e.*, critiquing the people around us – and more about the attitude with which we critique them. In our Gospel story, it’s as if the Pharisee was putting himself on a pedestal, and looking down on people. That’s the posture and perspective that Jesus condemns as judgmentalism. Instead, whether evaluating ourselves or others, our posture should be like the tax collector, on our knees, head down, and hands extended to heaven. Therefore, judgmentalism can be defined as judging people with an attitude of moral superiority that leads to harsh criticism, rather than compassionate evaluation. So the point is not that we should never honestly evaluate someone and offer honest feedback. The point is that when we evaluate, we should do so with humility and compassion born of a keen awareness of our own profound shortcomings. What we’re talking about is the difference between harsh judgmentalism versus compassionate evaluation.”