

MESSAGE - SOTM - Part 22 - There's Wisdom in Hesitation - 6.29.25

That verse in James where he says “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”—that continues to have a slow but profound impact on my life.

I still remember the first time I read it. I was about 18, and for whatever reason, it just stuck with me. Probably because I was used to doing the *exact opposite*—slow to listen, quick to speak, and (sometimes) quick to be angry!

Although my parents are probably thinking, “I don’t remember you being quick to speak...” And they’re right—I was shy. But I was definitely “quick to speak” in that sometimes I didn’t think through how my words might get me in trouble. You’ve heard of foot-in-mouth moments? I’ve had plenty, and sometimes still do—it’s a process!

I’m sure I’ve told this story before but it’s worth repeating. I remember one day I was at my dad and Sharon’s house. At this point I was in college. And for whatever reason, I had an attitude with my dad that day.

I couldn’t tell you what we argued about because I don’t remember. But what I do remember is the moment I said to him, “Oh yeah, well you know what? The Bible says, ‘Fathers, do not exasperate your children!’”¹

Have you ever said something and instantly thought, “I shouldn’t have said that”? That was me in that moment!

But, you know, I like to think I’ve learned from my mistakes! And yet, that one verse—*be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*—I’ve learned that’s always going to be a conscious struggle for each season of life.

I think we all can relate. Because following Jesus doesn’t mean we’ll be perfect. There will always be difficult seasons and awkward moments! But we *learn* from them. And we press on—pursuing and reflecting the righteousness of God in the way we live and relate to others.

¹ Colossians 3:21 (NIV 1984)

We've been talking a lot about that kind of righteousness in this series. It's been foundational to everything Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He calls us to a *greater righteousness*—not a self-righteousness, but a greater righteousness than that of the world. It's a way of living that reflects God's heart and points people to Him. And one of the ways we reflect His heart is through the posture of being slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to anger.

And so now, in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus echoes this posture by addressing the way we interact with other people. He said in the first couple verses...

[SLIDE 1] Matthew 7:1-2 - Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

At first glance, this seems pretty straight forward: Don't judge others. It's a fairly well known teaching from Jesus—people seem to know this one even if they haven't read the Bible.

But the way Jesus means it probably isn't how we tend to hear it.

So let's be clear up front: Jesus is not saying you should never discern right from wrong. He is saying, "Don't condemn other people—especially when you're ignoring your own sin."

We'll see this morning that there's a big difference between discernment and condemnation...

[SLIDE 2] Discernment helps people grow in grace. Condemnation tears people down.

That's what Jesus is warning us about here: This isn't about judgment in general. This is the kind of hypocritical judgment that elevates us while shaming others.

But how do we know that's what He meant? After all, Jesus literally said, "*Do not judge.*"

Well, Jesus was a rabbi. And ancient Jewish rabbi's weren't usually straightforward with their teaching methods. They wanted their students to think deeply, allowing biblical wisdom to take hold in their hearts. And so they taught in layers, using imagery and parables as a way that invited their students into the depth of God's wisdom.

I had some professors like that in seminary. I remember my Greek professor in particular. He didn't just hand out answers. He wanted us to wrestle with the material ourselves.

For instance, one time I asked him who he thought the "Teacher of Righteousness" was in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He just smiled and said, *"That's a great question! Keep reading and let me know what you think."*

That's how ancient rabbis taught. Their goal wasn't just to *inform*—Their goal was to *form* their students—shaping how they think and live in light of God's truth.

So yes, Jesus gives a clear command: "Do not judge." But it's not as clear-cut as it seems, because we're meant to interpret His words through the parable and the proverb-like wisdom that comes after it.

To set us up for that, let's take a closer look at the word "judge."

Google says that a judge is *"A public official appointed to decide cases in a court of law."* In other words, someone with the authority to pass judgment and hold people accountable.

But here's the thing—we might not be an officially appointed judge, but we do judge. Because in the most basic sense...

[SLIDE 3] To judge means to discern or evaluate. It's forming an opinion—positive or negative—and then acting on it.

So, if you think about it, we make judgments almost every day. We evaluate people by the things they say, what they do, how they drive, how they parent, how they vote—you name it, we judge it.

So... is that wrong?

Well, it *can* be! It just depends on the “*how*” and the “*why*” behind our judgment. That’s what Jesus shows us in the next few verses...

[SLIDE 4] Matthew 7:3-5 - Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Just to be clear—this part isn’t separate from what came before it. **This is the explanation Jesus uses to show us what He meant when He said, “Do not judge.”**

So let’s think about this...

[SLIDE 5] What *kind* of judgment is Jesus warning us about?

It’s the kind where we elevate ourselves over someone else—it’s where we act like we’re in the right and they’re in the wrong.

This goes beyond discernment. This is when we assign a certain value to the other person. It’s seeing their flaws and deciding they’re less than—less spiritual, less moral, less deserving. That’s not discernment, that’s...

[SLIDE 6] Condemnation

This is the flavor of judging that Jesus was talking about with His command to not judge. It’s an arrogant, and even dangerous, kind of judging because this kind of judgment belongs to God, not us.

The Apostle Paul even talked about this in 2 Corinthians 5:12-13 where he said that believers are not to judge people who are outside the community of faith—again, that’s God’s job, not ours.

But let's be real—sometimes we might find ourselves exercising the kind of power and authority that should be left to God—and we might even like it! But **when we step in and try to do God's job, we're actually showing our own hypocrisy.**

It's a hypocritical posture because it's not judging from a place of purity or humility. Instead, we've got a plank in our eye—and yet we're hyper-focused on the speck in someone else's eye.

But what if we really do have the best intentions? Maybe we genuinely want to help someone with their speck?

That could be the case! But there's a warning and a nuance here that needs to be highlighted. Jesus said in verse 5...

[SLIDE 7] Matthew 7:5 - You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

The warning is to examine ourselves first. Are we acting in the same way? Are we really in a position to help—or are we ignoring our own sin?

But let's say we've dealt with our own sin. Now what? It seems like the next step is to go ahead and help the other person remove their speck, right? Well, it's actually more nuanced than that.

Jesus doesn't *command* us to remove the speck. He simply says that once we've removed the plank, we'll be able to see clearly.

This is where we have to step into the Greek weeds for a second...

The Greek word here for “remove” is *ekbalein*—scholars describe the form of this word as an “infinitive of potential.” That's a fancy way of saying: **This is something you *might* do, but it's not *required*.**

And that's important—because...

[SLIDE 8] Clarity doesn't always lead to correction. Sometimes it leads to compassion, sometimes restraint, and other times clarity leads us to prayer.

So what Jesus is saying is this: "When we've taken an honest look at ourselves, we'll be in a better place to respond to others with wisdom, *if* that's what the situation requires."

It's the James 1:19 theme again: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

Notice there's wisdom in hesitation.

Jesus is forming people who see clearly—not so they can condemn—but so they can respond by reflecting God's heart—His heart of compassion, mercy, humility, and grace.

But sometimes seeing clearly means realizing that our job isn't always to **fix** someone, but it is always to **love** them.

And that's the nuance—that's the essence of what Jesus is saying...

[SLIDE 9] We should be very hesitant to speak our minds when we see a speck in someone else's eye.

Now, the reality is, we've all failed at this "slow to speak" kind of posture—right?

I think of the times I'm driving to Philly to see Alex and someone blows past me on the highway, probably going 90 mph. What do I do? I shake my head. I might even beep my horn—as *if they could hear me!*

But let's be super transparent here—In that moment they're racing by me, I know I've caught myself making assumptions—assumptions about their character, their priorities, maybe even their intelligence! I know I've said things like, "*What an idiot! Why would anyone drive like that?!*"

...You know, it's funny, didn't Jesus already say something about calling people idiots? Yep—Matthew 5:22.

So, my evaluation of them was that they're idiots. But that's an opinion I formed based only on how fast they were driving. I don't know who they are or what their situation is. And the real irony is, I might be speeding too! But I'll justify myself, saying: *"At least I don't drive like that guy!"*

That's what Jesus is talking about—it's the kind of judgment that **lacks self-awareness and grace**. It's the kind of judgment that condemns without knowing their situation and completely ignoring my own.

Again, it's not that discernment is wrong—the Bible often teaches that we should use discernment. What's wrong is when **pride distorts discernment into condemnation**. And Jesus is saying, *"Don't do that."*

And this brings us back to what Jesus said earlier...

[SLIDE 10] Matthew 7:1-2 - Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and *with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*.

That sounds like a consequence, doesn't it?

If we judge others with a condemning spirit—especially while ignoring our own sin—then we can expect the same kind of judgment to come back at us.

But who's judging us? Well, notice that it's not just God that *measures* us. It's people too!

And so in that way, Jesus is saying, **the posture we project toward others is often what we can expect to receive in return**. Maybe not immediately, but eventually, people will see through our facade.

This is part of what Jesus is getting at in verse 6...

[SLIDE 11] Matthew 7:6 - Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Doesn't that sound a little out of place? Like, what in the world are you talking about Jesus? Is this just a little proverbial saying of Jesus that Matthew decided to throw in as bonus content?

Well, as always, context matters when we're studying ancient wisdom, even when it comes from Jesus!

So, in rabbinical teaching, "pearls" often symbolized *wisdom*. "Dogs" and "pigs" were commonly used as shorthand for *those outside the Israelite community*.

And as bad as that sounds, this actually isn't about name-calling—that would be pretty hypocritical considering everything else Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. He's not telling us to love others in one breath and then turning around and calling them pigs.

Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience that would have been very familiar with this imagery. To us it might sound offensive—but that's not how they would've heard it. He's using language that was commonly taught by other rabbis.

I learned this week that rabbis would elevate the holiness of God's Word so much that they considered it to be too sacred to share with those outside the Jewish community! And they justified this with the last two verses in Psalm 147, saying that **God's commands were exclusively for Israel, and that other nations wouldn't understand or respect them.**

But Jesus challenged this posture! He's not saying that we should keep God's Word to ourselves. However, He is warning us to...

[SLIDE 12] Be careful not to throw God's wisdom at people who aren't ready to hear it—especially when we haven't taken the plank out of our own eye!

Imagine that someone lost a loved one. It was sudden and unexpected. They're understandably upset. They're not in the right place to hear something like, "*You know what, the Bible tells us to rejoice about everything, so just try to find the positive in this situation.*"

That's a true statement, but it lacks *empathy*. When people are hurting, they don't need us to spout truth at them. They just need us to be there and provide a

listening ear and a comforting presence—That’s how *God uses us* to comfort others!

So look at verse 6 again—“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your *pearls* [God’s wisdom through his Word] to *pigs* [those not ready for it]. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

Here’s the risk: When we preach truth without empathy and grace... or especially when we condemn people while pretending to be pure... Don’t be surprised if they see through our hypocrisy and push back, attacking with the same heartless and judgmental posture we showed them!

This is why the Apostle Paul encourages believers to respond to others with a posture of godly wisdom and love...

[SLIDE 13] Colossians 4:5-6 - Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

It’s about showing a *greater righteousness* as we model Jesus to those who don’t know Him.

But if we’re using God’s Word to condemn those outside the community of faith, then we’re actually going against God’s Word...

Paul said in...

[SLIDE 14] 1 Corinthians 5:12-13a - What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.

In other words—stop holding the world to standards they haven’t signed up for. That’s not our job. God handles that.²

And again, this all flows out of the deeper principle from Matthew 7:2...

² **Side Comment:** Some christians have been especially guilty of this with regard to recent politics. It doesn’t matter which political party we align with, we would do well to stop expecting the government to hold christian values. It’s not our job to force them into Jesus-values. It’s also not our job to condemn. That’s God’s job. **We shouldn’t be expecting the government to do the work of the Church while we sit back and complain.** That’s hypocritical.

[SLIDE 15] Matthew 7:2 - For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

In other words: The *measure* we use to judge others will be reflected back at us.

And think of what we're doing when we "measure." We're assigning a value. We measure by the ounce, the pound, the length, width and height—which is fine when we're dealing with objects! But when we *measure* people, we're reducing their value based on our own assumptions.

People are far more complex than we tend to realize.

Most of the time, people are carrying things we'd never know just by looking at them. Their stories are deeper than what we see on the surface.

So it's crucial that we don't make assumptions — that we don't condemn — and that we don't beat people over the head with the Bible.

[SLIDE 16] If we want to represent Jesus well, then we need to love others enough to not judge.

And if we want to offer wisdom that leads to transformation, then we need to make sure it's coming from a place of empathy and grace—not superiority.

That's what this entire passage in Matthew 7 has been about. It's showing a greater righteousness with a posture of humility. It's having a heart that's slow to condemn and quick to love.

So yes, this passage is a *warning*. But it's also an *invitation*.

Jesus is warning us against using judgment as a weapon. But He's also inviting us to take an honest look at ourselves so that if He calls us to help someone with a speck in their eye, we'll do it in a way that wisely reflects His heart of compassion, love, empathy and grace.

It's the same heart that God revealed to Moses long ago...

[SLIDE 17] Exodus 34:6-7a - The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

That's the heart behind the Sermon on the Mount. And it's the heart that spoke to James when he summed it up by saying...

[SLIDE 18] James 1:19 - Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

That's the posture of humility that Jesus calls us toward. But as I said earlier, it's not easy.

Years ago when I was a youth pastor, I remember reading James 1:19 to the students and one of them said, "Yeah, I can't do that."

And honestly, I'm not sure I gave the best response at the time. But if I could go back, I think I'd say something like:

"You know what, I really appreciate your honesty. And you're exactly right—you can't do that. Actually, we can't do that—at least, not on our own.

But that's the point. This kind of posture doesn't come from just trying harder. It's not about faking it or forcing it—it's about being formed by Jesus over time."

I think we would all agree that the posture of being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry... it doesn't come naturally for most of us!

However, it's a posture that grows in us through the slow, Spirit-led process of discipleship.

It's what happens when we resist the impulse to condemn and instead choose to pause, to listen, and to take stock of our own heart—so that we can begin to see clearly what God is doing in someone else's life, and how He might want to use us to encourage them.

That kind of wise hesitation makes room for love, empathy, and transformation—not just in them, but in us too.

But for all of us, this transformation begins by letting go of contempt and allowing the Holy Spirit to be our guide.

The Bible Project summed this up so well. They said:

[SLIDE 19] “Once contempt is gone, empathy, love, and concern can thrive in our hearts.” (Bible Project, SOTM, E30)

That’s the heart-posture Jesus is calling us toward. It’s a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. And it’s a heart that seeks first the Kingdom of God.

Let’s Pray