



JUDGMENT ZONE

7

Questions
to Ask
Yourself

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Introduction

One key relationship skill is the ability to judge correctly.

When you think about it, relationships are the most important thing in life—whether we're talking about your relationship with God or with others. However, relationships don't just build themselves. It takes work and skill to develop great relationships.

In this eBook, we're going to talk about one key relationship skill in particular: **the skill of being able to judge correctly.**

This skill is so important because when we judge people incorrectly, they feel it immediately, and it causes them to pull away. To build marriages and families that keep growing, **we need to unwire our tendency to judge.**

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

Mark 2:16 (NKJV)

The problem is, judgment is so common in our world that we don't always realize we're doing it. As Christians, we know that certain behaviours and lifestyles contradict God's principles, so we aren't sure how to behave around people who choose to ignore God's ways. If we accept these people into our world, are we condoning the behaviour? Then again, if we reject them, we aren't behaving in a Christ-like fashion, because He was often criticized by the Pharisees for fraternizing with sinners.

Through this eBook, I hope to clear up some of this confusion and explain why **we need to be more accepting of others**, just as Jesus was. We'll talk about when it is appropriate to judge and when it isn't. I want you to start thinking about the "tax collectors and sinners" in your world. **What can you learn from Jesus' example?**

Is There a Right Way to Judge?

There's a big difference between judging a track record and judging the heart!

As Christians, we are taught not to judge, but at the same time we learn that God has given us principles for how to live. So how do we stand up for what's right and teach our kids God's ways without judging people who live a different lifestyle?

The answer to this question lies with understanding how to judge the right way.

How could you think for a moment that you have the right to judge another person's servant? Each servant answers to his own Master, and he will either stand or fall in His presence. The good news is that he will stand because the Master is able to make it so.

Romans 14:4 (VOICE)

You may be thinking, "I thought that all judgment was wrong!" The truth is, we can and should judge in certain circumstances—as long as all we are judging is track record. You see, **there's a big difference between judging track record and judging the heart.**

When we judge the heart, we make assumptions about why people do what they do, instead of simply looking at their actions. We think, "That person is bad," or "They meant to cause me harm." We assume people's motives and intentions, or we define their worth and value as a person based on their actions.

On the other hand, when we judge actions, we might say, "I don't agree with what you've done," or "I can't trust you until you build a better track record," but we don't devalue or look down upon the person because of their choices.

Jesus taught us to love and accept people as they are, unconditionally.

We can ALWAYS love and accept people, even when we can't yet trust them or we don't agree with their choices.

When Is It Okay to Judge?

Trust must always be earned.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first."

John 8:7 (NKJV)

We have started a conversation about the difference between judging actions and judging the heart. As we talk about **when it is appropriate to judge**, I'd like to give you an example to demonstrate this further.

Let's say you're starting up a business and an acquaintance wants to partner with you. The trouble is, he's bankrupted four businesses in the last ten years. He owes several people money, and a few trusted friends have confided that he took advantage of them in business deals. When you ask him about it, he takes no responsibility and places the blame on everyone else.

Now, if you're not supposed to judge, does that mean you should take him at his word? Should you ignore his track record and trust that he's going to treat you differently than he's treated others?

No, **trust should always be earned**, and we need to be discerning when looking at someone's behaviour. At the same time, we can't assume to know why people do what they do. It would be wrong to call the man a shady businessman or a snake, because now we're attacking his character. We also can't assume that he meant to take advantage of others or that he doesn't care about others, because we don't know his motives and intentions. **All we know is his track record**, and wisdom says not to partner with him unless he has changed and earned himself a new track record.

Can you think of an example in your own life where you judged someone's heart? With this example in mind, would you now approach the situation differently?

When Does Judgment Start?

The second you ask “why,” you are judging the heart, and it’s going to bring you suffering.

We’ve been talking about judgment and how we need to judge track records, but not a person’s heart, motives or intentions. So...how do you know when you’re crossing that line?

The second you ask “why,” you are judging the heart, and it’s going to bring you suffering.

Let’s say that I’ve just finished preaching at church. As I’m walking out, I shake hands with all the people I pass who are sitting at the end of each row—except I miss the man sitting in the sixth row.

That man has a choice. He can either judge my motives or my actions. If he just judges my actions, he might say, “Leon walked right past me. Oh well, I won’t assume that he meant to.” If he judges my motives, he will ask the question, “Why?”, and then he will start to judge. “Leon must think he’s better than me.” By assuming, he’s just making things up because he can’t possibly know why.

Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track. Don’t assume that you know it all.

Proverbs 3:6 (MSG)

If the man carries on with this judgment, our relationship has no chance. Meanwhile, there could have been a perfectly good reason why I missed him. Maybe I made eye contact with a young wife who just lost her husband, and I was focused on her in that moment. He will never know the truth if he just assumes my intentions and judges me instead of asking questions.

Put this teaching to practice. When you’re tempted to assume why people do what they do, either **choose to assume the positive or ask them a question.**

Why Should I Ask Questions?

We cannot judge others' motives and intentions.

Every time we judge others, we're making assumptions about why people do what they do. **But can we ever really know why people do what they do?**

Even after knowing someone for years, we still can't accurately assume their motives and intentions. I was reminded of this while teaching a pre-marriage course with my wife Sally after we had been married for about 22 years. During the exercises, each couple would pause to ask each other a series of questions. Being married for so long, I thought we would know what each other would say, but I was surprised that our assumptions were often wrong.

We need to always remember to ask each other questions instead of assuming.

For You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men.

1 Kings 8:39 (NKJV)

In fact, 1 Kings 8:39 clearly says that only God knows our hearts. This is why we can't assume people's intentions. We have no expertise in that area. In fact, we often don't even know why we do what we do. Have you ever done something and when someone asked you why, you couldn't answer? In times like these, it's God's Word we can rely on to help us to discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV).

If you want to take your relationships to the next level, step one is to stop judging others' motives and intentions. If someone hurts you, talk about how it made you feel, but don't attack their character. Never assume; **always ask** them why they did what they did, and you'll bring understanding and openness to your relationships.

Why Is Judgment so Harmful?

We have to be careful not to speak mistruths about our loved ones' identities.

When we judge, we attack the other person's identity and drive a wedge between us. The good news is, we can show love and acceptance for others at the same time as we confront their behaviour. That's real love, and **as a believer, you have what it takes to love this way—Jesus' way!**

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

John 13:34 (NKJV)

Our words have power. Let's say you have a little daughter who just lied to you, and you reacted by saying, "You little liar." While calling someone a liar if they've lied seems logical, we need to take a moment and realize what we're saying. We're not saying, "You lied and that is unacceptable." We're saying, "You ARE a liar. That's who you are, and YOU are unacceptable." Big difference!

We have to be careful not to speak mistruths about our loved ones' identities. The truth is, she's a child of God, not a liar or sinner or bad girl. She's a beautiful new creation of God who did a bad thing. As her parent, you know that lying is a bad habit that will hurt her. You can explain to her that because you love her so much, you're giving her a consequence so that she will remember that lying is not something she should do.

If you've used judgmental language with your loved ones before, it's not too late to talk to them about it. **Great healing can come from a conversation that starts with, "I was wrong."** And remember—we are all on a journey that involves growing and changing our actions to be more like Jesus!

Can I Love When It's Undeserved?

Holy Spirit empowers us to love even when that love is undeserved.

Judgment can be very damaging to our relationships. The trouble is, many of us have been raised to be judgmental. Many legalistic religious groups seem to encourage judgment, but **we need to follow Jesus' example.**

Jesus didn't judge sinners, He ate with them. He befriended them. He accepted them and reprimanded those who self-righteously judged them. The truth is, **none of us have the right to judge another.** We are all imperfect—and we are right with God not because we're so good but because of what Jesus has done.

We're empowered by His Spirit in us to love others the way He loves people—with His unconditional, agape love. On our own strength, we can't love and accept people this way. It can be tempting to want to judge others and hold on to unforgiveness and resentment, but the Spirit of God within us can enable us to walk in His agape love. **We are empowered to love even when that love is undeserved.**

Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.

Mark 2:15 (NKJV)

If there's one thing I want you to take away from this eBook on judgment, it's simply that I hope you are encouraged to **stop assuming why people do what they do.** When someone does something to hurt you, find a way to ask them about it. It can be hard to admit when you're hurt, but you'll save yourself a lot of pain and suffering if you can get to the bottom of the issue from the start.

How Do I Respond to Being Judged?

If you live your life trying to avoid the judgment of others, you're putting what they think of you above what God thinks.

"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Matthew 7:5 (NKJV)

We've been talking about judgment and how it's okay to judge someone's behaviour, but not their heart. We've talked about making the decision to never assume why someone did what they did without asking them about it.

But what about when someone you love constantly judges you?

Being judged by someone is incredibly painful. It hurts to have someone assume to know why you've made the choices you have, especially when they assume the worst.

In Matthew 7:5, Jesus encourages us to stop trying to fix others—so we don't need to tolerate it when others keep sending the message, "You're broken and I need to fix you." While I'm not saying that it's a bad idea to listen to others' advice, **you can't live your life according to someone else's opinion.**

Children of parents who judge repeatedly can become controlled by that judgment. In an effort to earn the love and acceptance they crave, they can live their lives in constant fear of being judged and criticized. The trouble is, when we allow someone to control us with judgment, basically we are making that person our god.

Whether it's your spouse, a parent, a boss or a friend, if you live your life trying to avoid their judgment, you're putting what they think of you above what your Father God thinks.

God loves and accepts you unconditionally. He says you are the apple of His eye, His precious treasure and His beloved child. **When you make a mistake, He's not going to judge or condemn you, so why accept that kind of treatment from anyone else?**

Conclusion

You can express that you love and accept a person, even when you disagree with their behaviour.

When it comes to our relationships, much damage can be done just through what we say.

Some of the most damaging words we can speak to each other are judgmental words. When we pretend to know someone's motives and assume they meant harm, we attack their self-worth. And when we attack someone's self-worth, the result is anger and hurt, and that relationship begins to enter what I call the "zone of suffering."

Judgment in a relationship always leads to suffering.

When you cross that line and begin to judge, the relationship stops growing. You need to deal with the hurt by forgiving the other person, talking about it and coming to some sort of understanding. Until you take steps to heal, you sentence the relationship to merely existing instead of flourishing and building into something increasingly wonderful every year.

Do not judge and criticize and condemn others, so that you may not be judged and criticized and condemned yourselves.

Matthew 7:1 (AMPC)

Matthew 7:1 hints at why judgment destroys relationships. The more you judge someone, the more judgment you receive in return. It's simply a matter of sowing and reaping, but this law can also be to your benefit. **The more you show someone unconditional love, the greater the chance you will receive that love in return—and the more likely you will begin to undo the damage that judgment has done.** Only then can the relationship change and grow.

Has judgment damaged any of your relationships? Think about how you can begin to turn things around by showing that person unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness. I'm not saying that you need to agree with everything they've done, but remember: you can stand up for your boundaries and disagree with someone's behaviour while expressing that you love and accept them as a person.