

## **The One Requirement for Living Life Well**

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Life As It Was Meant To Be Lived

Matthew 7:1-12

Over the past several months I've been teaching a series from the Sermon on the Mount. When I began the series I called it "Life As It Was Meant To Be Lived." Jesus is laying out a program for living well in a world that does not live well. How do you keep your bearings, your value system intact, and not lose your humanity in a world that is so image conscious, hard edged, and uncompassionate? How do you live well?

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount. We begin with a statement of our own need before God. Matthew 5.3

### **SLIDE**

Mt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We start the good life with the confession that we don't live the good life. We are unable to live the good life. There are all of these forces inside of us tugging, pulling and controlling us that move us away from our ideal. So Jesus begins with what has become known as the "beatitudes." The attitudes of a person who has come under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

Then Jesus speaks to us about kingdom behaviors – what we've called the "do-attitudes": the beatitudes, the description of Christian character, and then the do-attitudes, a description of Christian behavior. We read that those of us who have been grabbed hold of by God, who claim that God is at work in our lives, those of us who have come under the reign and rule of Jesus Christ have learned to behave in ways consistent with living life well. So we've learned how to deal with our anger and our lust. We keep our marriage vows and our word. We are not merely an echo of all of the negative people around us and all of the negative circumstances. We've learned how not to respond in kind, but to take the high road in our relationships.

Christian attitudes, Christian behaviors, and then Jesus digs more deeply and in Matthew 6 and he speaks to us about our Christian motivations – why we do what we do. He is telling us that in order to live life well, it is not enough for us to do the right things, we also need to have the right motives. We can do things simply to maintain the right image, but the activity is not coming from our hearts, so we live divided lives. He warns us against hypocrisy, particularly religious hypocrisy. In drilling into our hearts, he warns us against worry and the problem of the divided soul and the divided mind.

But you know, at this point in the Sermon on the Mount, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the depth and extent of the instruction we've received from Christ. There are so many things to keep in mind so that we might live life well. The list has become so long that it is possible to lose the forest for all the trees, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the age, after all, of ADD. We're all suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder. Not just those who have been diagnosed with this condition, but all of us have incredibly distracted minds. We are constantly multi-tasking. We are ordering our Venti Decaf Non-Fat Vanilla Lattes with two Equals while we are speaking on a cell phone, and reading the newspaper headline from the New York Times. Or you are driving down the road listening to our IPODs while you put on your eye makeup in the rearview mirror.

We say: Jesus, in an age of so many distractions where our minds are so busy, can you boil down this entire sermon to one pithy saying, one simple sound byte that I could reduce to an index card and put on my bathroom mirror to read in the morning? I want to live life well, but you've given us so many instructions and I am so distracted. Can you boil it all down to something that I can put on a bumper sticker?

Our requests for simplicity does not offend Jesus. He doesn't say to us: How dare you try to reduce this brilliant sermon or the scope of my teaching to one or two things. How dare you, you superficial Americans. No, instead, he says: "I will help you out. I will boil my teaching in the Sermon on the Mount down to just one thing, just one thing."

I don't know how many of you saw the movie *City Slickers*; it came out maybe 15 years ago. In the movie, Billy Crystal plays the part of an advertising executive. He is this middle-class yuppie, who I think is turning 40, but he decides that he is going to go on a big adventure with his friends. He is going to go out west and participate in a cattle drive. Because he is a yuppie executive, he goes with his coffee grinder so that he can have fresh ground coffee every morning. In the movie you see him waking up and grinding his coffee beans. The noise from the grinder immediately sets off this major cattle stampede.

Well, Billy Crystal meets this tough, old, grizzled cowboy named Curley, who is played by Jack Palance. Billy Crystal is absolutely enamored with Curley. Curley is everything that Billy Crystal is not. He is self-assured. He is confident. He has a core. He has a center. He is not distracted by a million things. He knows what he's about.

After Billy Crystal sets off this stampede, Curley turns to him and says: "Now you and I need to round up the cattle and you are coming with me." Billy Crystal is certain that Curley is going to take him out on the trail and kill him somewhere, but he goes with him anyway because he is too afraid to say "no" to this tough cowboy. So, here is the scene:

Billy Crystal and Curley are out at night sitting around the campfire. Billy turns to Curley and says: "You seem to have it together. You seem to understand life. Tell me what is the meaning of life."

Curley holds up his pointer finger and says: "My understanding of life is this." Billy Crystal says, "What? What do you mean this? What do you mean? Your finger? The meaning of life is your finger?" Curley says, "No. The meaning of life is just one thing...one thing." Billy Crystal says, "What one thing? What thing?" Curley says: "That's for you to figure out."

Jesus says the same thing to us in Luke 10.38-42,

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Lk 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Lk 10:39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Lk 10:40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Lk 10:41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things,

Lk 10:42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one.<sup>6</sup> Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Is there anything more apparent than that we 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans are more like Martha than like Mary? Martha was distracted by many things. She has 50 things going on in her mind. We 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans have dozens of items on our Blackberrys and pocket PCs. Our focus is all over the place. Jesus, can you make it simpler for us? Can you pull of your teaching in the Sermon on the Mount together in just one statement, one thing that will help us to live well?

Jesus says, "Yes. Here it is." Matthew 7.12

#### SLIDE

Mt 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Since the 8<sup>th</sup> century this has been called The Golden Rule. One statement that you can put on your bathroom mirror, one thing that you can put on your bumper sticker, one sound byte that will help you to live well if you put it into practice is The Golden Rule. I've called today's talk, "The One Requirement For Living Life Well." Let's pray. Matthew 7.1-12,

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Mt 7:1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Mt 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.

Mt 7:3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:4 How can you say, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person’s eye.

Mt 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 then turn and tear you to pieces.

Mt 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Mt 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

Mt 7:9 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Mt 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

Mt 7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Mt 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

The Sermon on the Mount all comes together in Matthew 7.12. He sums it all up in one sentence.

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Mt 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Now there are two things that stand out about Jesus in Mt. 7.1-12. The first is his sense of humor. After the 1960’s, Elton Trueblood wrote a classic little book called *The Humor of Christ*. He pointed out that modern audiences miss the humor in much of what Jesus was saying, so our emotional reaction when we hear Jesus’ words are to nod our heads and to think about his statements as being another wise or religious statement. Elton Trueblood said the germ of the idea that finally led to the writing of his book, *The Humor of Christ*, was planted when his eldest son was just 4-years old. He was reading to him from the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew’s gospel very seriously when all of a sudden this little boy

began to laugh. He laughed because he saw how preposterous it would be for a man to be so deeply concerned about a speck in another person's eye that he was unconscious of the fact that his own eye had a log in it. Because this little boy understood perfectly that the human eye is not large enough to have a log in it, the very idea struck him as being completely ludicrous. Trueblood said his laughter was a rebuke to his parents for their failure to respond to humor in an unexpected place.

So Trueblood began reading Jesus' words and he discovered humor everywhere: ironies, satire, and paradoxes. Jesus had no problems spoofing powerful people, taking the little pin prick of humor and deflating proud people's egos.

You know one of the newest movements in corporate consulting and organizational behavior is humor consultants. Consultants have discovered that people in organizations work better when they are having fun. Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream has a basic approach to hiring. They boil it down to one question: Are you weird enough to work here? Jerry says, "If it isn't fun, why do it?"

Southwest Airlines, which is one of the only airlines that made money while all the other airlines were going bankrupt and seeking government bailouts, the president of Southwest Airlines, decided that he was going to create a corporate culture which was fun. So you get on one of Southwest planes and the flight attendants is telling jokes.

Jesus understood creating a corporate culture that embraced humor. He understood that 2000 years ago. It is amazing the most churches that claim to follow Christ are grim places. Some of the most joyless, sour, unhappy places on earth are churches, who claim to follow a person who was the most joyful, free, entertaining, shocking, breaking all the conventions, wonderfully fun personalities who ever lived.

But there is another thing that stands out about Jesus in this text, not just his sense of humor, but his sheer brilliance. To be able to summarize all of his teaching, all of the Bible, all of God's revelation regarding our relationships with each other, all of our ethical responsibilities concerning one another, to be able to pull all of that together in one statement is nothing short of absolute genius. Why is his statement in Matthew 7.12, that we call the Golden Rule, so brilliant?

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Some people say: Isn't Jesus saying merely what other religious teachers and philosophers said before him?

Darrell Johnson, in his series of lectures on the Sermon on the Mount, points out that all of the other philosophers that came before Jesus stated this rule in a form that was negative and passive.

- Refrain from what you don't want other people to do to you.

So, for example, Confucius was asked: Is there one statement that can serve as a rule for my own life? He answered:

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Confucius: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

Socrates said:

SLIDE

Socrates: "What stirs your anger when done to you by others that do not do to others."

There is a story told in the Jewish Talmud about a Gentile who came to Rabbi Shammai and said to Rabbi Shammai: I am prepared to become a convert, if you can summarize the whole law while standing on one leg. Rabbi Shammai drove him away. This same Gentile went to Rabbi Hillel. Rabbi Hillel stood on one leg and said:

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"What is hateful to yourself do to no others. That is the whole law. The rest is commentary. Go and learn."

But Jesus doesn't give us merely a negative and passive statement. He gives us a positive and active statement. Jesus' exhortation is so much more difficult. It is not just don't do something that you don't want done to you. Don't cause other people harm, but actively do good. Jesus' statement delivers us from so much agonizing regarding what is the right thing to do in different situations. We find ourselves in a million different situations and we wonder: OK, how am I supposed to relate here? One thing, Jesus says. Just one thing. In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.

We want to know how to relate to our children. We read a dozen different books that give us a dozen different perspectives on child raising. We consult all the experts. We go to all the seminars. This stuff is good, but to live well with kids, it is not a requirement that you read a dozen books, or consult a dozen experts, or go to a counselor. How do you treat a child? Jesus says ask yourself this question: How would you want to be treated if you were a child. How do you relate to your teenager? How would you want to be related to if you were a teenager?

How should we Christians think about the big debate regarding immigration right now, a debate that is so complicated. There are economic issues that we need to take account of. There are political issues. There are security issues. There are fairness issues. All of these concerns are legitimate. But in the midst of all of this complexity, Jesus says: What I want my followers to do is to ask themselves this simple question, how would you want to be treated if you were an immigrant?

How should I relate to AIDS victims? Well, how would I want to be related to, if I had AIDS?

How should I relate to what is going on in the Darfur in the Sudan? Women are being raped; children and men are being killed. Well, how would I want to be related to by the world community if my home was burned out and I was being chased from place to place, and my family was being murdered. How would I want to be related to?

Do to others, Jesus said, as you would have them do to you. Friends, you can know God's will most of the time in most situations by consulting your own heart. This is brilliant. This principle works with illiterate people who can't read. The principle works with folks who have no access to libraries. The principle works with folks who don't have the money to consult experts, who aren't surrounded by brilliant people with brilliant opinions. Consult your own heart, Jesus says. Consult your own self-interests and act towards people along those lines. How would you want to be treated?

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation said this:

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It was certainly clever of Christ to state it this way. The only example he sets up is ourselves. And Jesus makes this rule as intimate as possible by applying it to our lives, our hearts, our bodies, and all of its members. No one has to travel far to get it or devote much trouble to get it. The book is laid into your own bosom. You are your own Bible, your own teacher, your own preacher. Just guide yourself by this and you will be wiser than all of the books of the lawyers.

Isn't this brilliant? The Golden Rule works for people who have Ph.D.s and the Golden Rule works for people who are elementary school dropouts. The Golden Rule works for people who are living in mansions in New Albany and it works for people who are homeless and living down by the Scioto River. The Golden Rule works for old men and old women; it works for young men and young women; it works for children and teenagers; it works for people who have misplaced their glasses and can't read. We don't have to pick up a phone and call the experts. Consult your own heart; consult your own interests, and then act towards the other along those lines.

Now, many people have struggled to find a common thread, Matthew 7.1-11.

## SLIDE

*Today's New International Version*. 894-895. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2001, 2005.

Mt 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Mt 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.

Mt 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:4 How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

Mt 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 then turn and tear you to pieces.

Mt 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Mt 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

Mt 7:9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Mt 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

Mt 7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

The statements seem to be completely unrelated. Jesus talks about judgment. He talks about pearls before swine. He talks about prayer. Is this just a collection of Jesus' sayings that were brought together by Matthew?

I don't think so. I think Jesus is speaking to us about three ways that we wish other people would treat us.

First of all, we want to not be judged by others, vv. 1-2

## SLIDE

Mt 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Mt 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.

There are very few verses in the Bible that are more misunderstood and misquoted than Matthew 7.1,



## SLIDE

Mt 7:1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

We live in a morally very flabby age right now. A time when the most important thing in life is to be tolerant of everything and everyone, to never make any moral statement about anything at all, to have no lines, no absolutes, no standards, no stake in the ground that we are not going to be moved from. The most important thing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to accept every kind of behavior. If a Christian makes a moral statement or a value judgment, they are immediately confronted by someone who says: How can you call yourself a Christian? Didn't Jesus say, “do not judge, or you will be judged.” Who are you to say adultery is wrong or abortion is a sin or war is unjust? Never use the word “immoral” unless you want to sound positively medieval.

But Jesus is plainly not meaning that he wants his followers to exercise no moral discernment or make no value judgments. Otherwise, he would not have said just a few lines later in v. 6,

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Mt 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 then turn and tear you to pieces.

How could we put into practice v. 15-16 unless we exercise some kind of discernment?

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Mt 7:15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Mt 7:16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

How could a church ever exercise church discipline as the Bible plainly tells the church to do unless it exercised some kind of discernment, some kind of judgment. We could never put into practice the disciplinary procedure of Matthew 18 or 1 Cor. 5 if Jesus basically said all immorality, all evil, all false doctrine, just sweep it under the rug.

Do not judge. He is not asking us to suspend our critical faculties or our moral discernment. What does do not judge mean?

## SLIDE

## 1. Do not be a critic

Jesus' statement is condemning the spirit of criticism. We live in an age of hyper-critics and 24-hour news analysis. There is nothing that a politician or any person in the public spotlight can say or do that is not analyzed until something wrong is discovered. The spirit of the hyper-critic is the spirit of looking for something that is wrong, looking for the weakness, looking for the worst part of someone's statement. Politicians can't say anything anymore that has any content, so they are reduced to empty platitudes that have been focus-grouped to death.

This weekend was the NFL draft. If you are a sports fan, you have been saturated with 24-hour a day coverage for the last several weeks of every flaw and supposed weaknesses of some of America's best athletes. The spirit of the hyper-critic. That's what Jesus is condemning.

You don't want that done to you, do you? You don't want every one of your statements gone over with a fine tooth comb. Well, don't do that to others.

Maybe you've heard the joke about the bachelor who is complaining to his friend. He said: My mother finds something wrong with every woman that I bring home and introduce to her. This one is too fat; this one's too thin. This one's too tall; this one's too short. This one talks too much; this one doesn't talk enough, she has no opinions. I don't like the way she laughs. I don't like her hair. She is not domestic enough. He said: I am at my wit's end. I don't know what to do.

His friend said, "Why don't you find someone exactly like your mother and bring that woman home?"

So the bachelor scours the city and finds the woman who is exactly like a younger version of his mother. She could be a clone. Same personality, same interests, same sense of humor, same talents.

The friend talks to the bachelor and says: How did it go? The bachelor says: Not very well at all. The friend says: Your mother didn't like this woman either? The bachelor said: Oh, my mother loved her! My father hated her.

## SLIDE

## 2. Do not judge on secondary issues.

The hyper-critic. Jesus is condemning judging each other on disputable issues. It is amazing how petty and superficial the judgments are that we make towards one another.

In our teen years we judge each other based on choices of music that someone else likes, or the clothes they wear, or the cars they drive, or the way they do their hair.

If you are in your 20's and 30's and you are a Christian woman, you will be judged by some based on how long you nurse your child. God forbid, according to some, that you didn't nurse your child. Some people will judge you for whether you spank your children or not. The big issue when we were raising kids was whether you used your hand to spank your child, or a wooden spoon. Child raising is a major area where people in the church judge one another. Do you allow your child to celebrate Halloween or not? Do you allow your child to read Harry Potter or not? Do you allow your child to watch the Simpsons or not? Whose play group is your child invited to?

When you are in your 40's you will be judged by the size and location of your house, the kind of car you drive, and your weight. You will be judged by the mistakes your children have made. My goodness, even death doesn't free us from other people's judgments. You will be judged by the kind of coffin you put your parents in. Was it made out of mahogany? Did it have a beautiful satin pillow?

Do not be a hyper-critic. Do not judge one another on secondary issues.

#### SLIDE

3. Do not close the book on another person.

But most of all, what Jesus is getting at here is do not close the book on another person's character or life. Do not pass the final sentence on anyone else.

- He's a loser.
- She's hopeless.
- There's no getting through to her at all.

Do not pass final sentence on another person. That is what Jesus is saying. Because none of us knows all the facts. We do not know what is going on inside of another person. And we do not know what God will do. How unfortunate it is when family members write off other family members and simply say: I will never ever speak to this person again. Final judgments.

Now, I understand that some people are exceptionally dangerous. Some of our family members may be in prison. Some of our family members may be drug addicts. But final judgments? Closing the book on someone? This person cannot change? That is something that only God can determine.

You know, we often close the book on other people regarding their interest in Jesus Christ. We often say: This person is not interested at all. People do that particularly with Jewish people or with Muslims. Well, this Jewish neighbor, or

this Muslim at my job, my parents or my extended family is certainly not interested at all in Jesus. They seem to be writing off Jesus Christ because of their intense reactions. But is the person really rejecting Jesus Christ, the person? Or is it that when we talk about Jesus Christ, memories of anti-Semitism, the church's treatment of Muslims during the Crusades, they react? What is going on with this individual? Are they writing off Jesus the person?

One commentator said that he was doing a lecture at UCLA. About half the class was Jewish. He was speaking to the class about Jesus of Nazareth, and about his philosophy of liberation and freedom. He was talking to the class about Jesus of Nazareth and the way he related to the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised. He said after the class a few Jewish girls came up to him and said, "We want to talk with you about your lecture."

So he said, "Let's go outside." So they sat down by a tree on the UCLA campus and they started to talk. One of the Jewish girls said, "I love what you had to say. You know, as I was listening to you, I had one question. Is this Jesus of Nazareth the same person that is called Jesus Christ?"

You know, when you close the book on someone, when you say this person is not at all interested in Christianity, is it the person of Jesus that they aren't interested in?

Jesus warns us that the ruler we use to judge will be the same one used on us. Thank God that God does not use the same ruler on us that we generally apply to ourselves. Thank God that God is so much kinder and more merciful than we are towards ourselves. And it is this ruler that God wants us to apply to others. How do we wish that others would treat us? We want to not be judged.

We also want to be brought back on track when we've gone off track. Vv. 3-6

## SLIDE

Mt 7:3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in someone else's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Mt 7:4 How can you say, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Mt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

Mt 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 then turn and tear you to pieces.

You know, this little phrase in v. 5 is often neglected.

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Mt 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye.

Jesus is not saying that there is no misbehavior, or problems with a child, or a teenager we are raising. He is not saying that we are never to bring correction to our mates, our husbands, wives, friends in a small group. What he is saying is that first of all, if you are really concerned about holiness or truth, or whatever it is that you feel is lacking in your brother or sister's life, make sure you perform surgery on yourself first in that area. You are really upset with this other woman's gossip. Take 30 seconds and ask yourself: Do I gossip? God, reveal to me all the times I have gossiped in the last week, the last month, the last year. I am really concerned about bringing correction regarding gossip. God says: Great! Let's start on you.

See, Jesus understands that we project our flaws and faults on others. And he understands that the things we are often most upset about in others are the very things we are most guilty of ourselves.

CS Lewis, who is my favorite Christian writer in one of my favorite Christian books, *Mere Christianity*, says this regarding the sin of pride. Lewis writes:

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*I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others. In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, "how much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?" The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise.*

If you are really interested in getting someone who has gone off track back on track, Jesus says to start with yourself. Make sure your annoyance, your irritation, your problem is not merely a reflection of what is in your own eye. And after you've taken a bit of time to be honest and authentic before God, after you've said to God: God, search me, know me, is there anything in me that needs to be changed? Then you will be ready to do eye surgery on another person. I love the fact that Jesus uses the analogy of eye surgery to describe the very delicate operation of correcting another human being.

We do get off track. The reason why we need the church, that we need a community of people, is because we need others to bring us back on track. But we understand that bringing someone back on track is not hand surgery. It is eye surgery. The hand is a tough part of the body. Last week I reached into the toaster to get a piece of my rye bread that my wife had unfortunately surrounded with her English muffins. As I reached in, I put my hand against one of the hot

elements. I literally just cauterized my hand. I pulled it out and put it under some cold water. After 10 seconds I was fine.

But get the tiniest speck in your eye? I've shared this story before with some of you. Years ago when I was in college, for two years I made money by tarring flat roofs. One time while I was putting tar on the flashing of a roof, a little piece of metal flicked up and went under my eyelid and began to scratch the surface of my eye. I was madly blinking my eye trying to dislodge this thing. It was driving me crazy as I felt it scratching the surface of my eye.

I was about 2 ½ stories up and I had to walk down this ladder virtually blind and walk a couple of blocks to the student infirmary. I was in agony with this tiny little speck in my eye. My nose was running. I ran into the student infirmary and I ran to the front desk. I said, "There is something in my eye. There is something in my eye." This wonderful doctor walked out and she brought me into one of the waiting rooms. She laid me down on the table, put a huge magnifying glass over my eye, and said: "Just stay still for a moment." She put this tiny little Q-Tip in my eye and "bing" she pulled it out!

How merciful. How kind. This thing was killing me. There are things in our brothers and sisters lives that are killing them, but to remove that thing is a delicate operation. It requires great love and great gentleness.

And in practicing the Golden Rule, we want to be prayed for. Vv. 7-11

## SLIDE

Mt 7:7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Mt 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.

Mt 7:9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Mt 7:10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

Mt 7:11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Now generally, these verses are pulled out of context and are applied to anything and everything that we want from God. I think there is a secondary application here to prayer in general. I believe that Jesus' argument is building here and he is telling us the way we can avoid a judgmental spirit towards others and the way that we can graciously assist one another to get back on track. He is speaking to us in these verses specifically about intercessory prayer. We ask ourselves the question: How can I have the resources to love this difficult person that I am tempted to shut the book on? How can I have the resources to discern, to be

wise? How can I have the gentleness to do eye surgery? I am not sufficient for all of this.

Jesus says: Pray, ask, seek, knock. I think in this context, Jesus is talking to us about what Christians call intercessory prayer – prayer for another person. One of my favorite Christian books on the way we're to relate to each other in the church is called *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. We have it on sale in our bookstore. It is a great, short little book. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote it as the dark clouds of Nazism were gathering over Germany in the 1930's. Bonhoeffer says this:

SLIDE

*A Christian fellowship lives and exist by the intercession of its members for one another or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. There is no dislike, no personal tension, no estrangement that cannot be overcome by intercession as far as our side is concerned. Intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day. Intercession means no more than to bring our brother into the presence of God, to see him under the Cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace. Then everything in him that repels us falls away; we see him in all his destitution and need. To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely, to stand before Christ and to share in his mercy. This makes it clear that intercession is also a daily service we owe to God and our brother. He who denies his neighbor the service of praying for him denies him the service of a Christian.*

So, what is the one thing? The one thing that pulls together all of our responsibilities to everyone else? What is the one thing that can guide our behavior whether we are talking to a very dull clerk in a bank, who just doesn't get what we are going to say? What is the one thing that can guide our behavior and our attitude to people who we struggle with? Ask yourself how you want to be treated by others. You don't want to be judged. You want to have the opportunity to change and grow and be let out of the box that other people put you in. Then don't put other people in boxes either.

You want to be helped back onto the right track, but you want to have that done with gentleness, grace and mercy. Then help other people to get back on track with gentleness, grace and mercy. You want to be carried before God on the prayers of others, then make it your business to pray for others. Do to others what you would have others do to you. This is the Golden Rule. This sums up the entire Bible regarding our responsibility to each other. Let's pray.

## **The One Requirement for Living Life Well**

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Rich Nathan

April 29-30

Life As It Was Meant To Be Lived

Matthew 7.1-12

### **I. Living Well Reduced To Just One Thing (Lk. 10.38-42; Mt. 7.12)**

- A. The Humor Of Christ (Mt. 7.4)
- B. The Brilliance Of Christ (Mt. 7.12)

### **II. Three Ways We Wish Others Would Treat Us**

- A. We Want To Not Be Judged (Mt. 7.1, 2)
  - 1. Do Not Be A Critic
  - 2. Do Not Do Not Judge On Secondary Issues
  - 3. Do Not Close The Book On Another Person
- B. We Want To Be Brought Back On Track (Mt. 7.3-6)
- C. We Want To Be Prayed For (Mt. 7.7-11)