

## Living Word Small Group Study Guide

January 12, 2020 - January 18, 2020

Sermon Series: You Be the Judge

### Week Two: “The Weight of Being a Judge”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

#### **Suggested Opening Prayer:**

*Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.*

*God of grace, who has given us Jesus Christ to be our Savior, we pray for You to overcome our darkness with His light, our selfishness with His love, and our waywardness and cowardice with His steadfast devotion, so that we may live always in Your presence, and faithfully perform our appointed tasks, arriving finally at everlasting life. We pray in the name of this same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

#### **This Week’s Sermon Theme:**

To be a judge raises one to a level over others. There is a weightiness to the responsibility of being a judge. As Jesus speaks to us about judging others, He shares that weight. Can we measure up to the judgment we offer? What if a third party observed us? Would they say we were fair in judging someone more harshly than ourselves? Finally, I've heard it said, we judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions. Where is the fairness in judging then?

**Sunday Scripture Reading:** Matthew 7:1-5 (A group member should read the passage aloud)

#### **For Group Discussion:**

##### ***What does the text actually SAY?***

*The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.*

Who is Jesus speaking to in this section? (You will have to look back all the way to Matthew 5:1 – the entire section from 5:1 to 7:27 is part of the same teaching.)

Who else has been listening? (Look at the conclusion in Matthew 7:28-29)

What is the specific command? (Matthew 7:1)

What is the danger in judging others? (Matthew 7:2)

Note here that the word translated “you” is PLURAL in verses 7:1-2, but SINGULAR in verses 7:3-5. What does this say about who the command is directed toward?

What metaphor does Jesus use to point out the specific type of judging He is referring to here? (Matthew 7:3) Note that at this point, Jesus is only referring to an inward attitude on individuals’ parts.

How does Jesus say people are acting on their inward attitudes? (Matthew 7:4)

What name does Jesus use to address those who are acting in this way? (Matthew 7:5a)

Note that the command Jesus gives has two parts – what is the first thing He charges them to do? (Matthew 7:5)

What is the second thing Jesus charges them to do? (Matthew 7:5)

Why does Jesus say it is important to do the first thing before the second thing? (Matthew 7:5)

### ***What questions does the text raise for us?***

*The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Questions are suggestions, but open discussion is encouraged.*

What is your gut reaction to the declaration that the measure you use to judge others will be used by God to judge you?

How do you feel about the fact that God judges us at all?

Whose actions or faults are you most tempted to judge? Did a particular person come to mind when you read Jesus’ words? (Don’t ask for specifics – simply whether or not you can identify specifics in your own mind.)

Are you convicted by the charge of hypocrisy that Jesus levels against His listeners?

Is there an implication in verse 5 that as long as we avoid hypocrisy, it is fair to help to “remove the splinter” from others’ eyes?

Where have you seen examples of the kind of hypocrisy Jesus is speaking of among church members?

### **Commentary on the text:**

*The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.*

Read also: Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 6:12; 7:15-20; 10:11-15; 16:6, 12; 18:15-18; Romans 2:1; James 4:11-12

Jesus’ teaching on judging others comes within the broader context of the Sermon on the Mount, which occupies all of chapters five through seven of Matthew’s gospel. Notice also, from the first three additional verses from Matthew 6 noted above, that this particular section of the Sermon on the Mount focuses in on the problem of hypocrisy – being on a crusade to correct the faults of others while ignoring our own failings. Jesus has already warned against the hypocrisy of giving to the needy while really

desiring the accolades of the crowds, praying in public settings simply to project an image of piety to others, and making a big deal of fasting for the same reasons. Now, Jesus adds to the examples of hypocrisy the practice of judging others for actions a person is actually still committing themselves. In the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus has already warned that we are only forgiven by God to the extent we are willing to forgive others. Now, instead of talking forgiveness, Jesus talks judgment – but the same principle applies. Just as we are forgiven to the extent we forgive others, we are judged by the same measure we use to judge.

It is also clear that, tempted as we may be to use this command to prohibit ALL judging, Jesus does not intend that to be the case. The issue is judgmentalism, not judgment per se. To see that this is so, we need only look at other teachings of Jesus within Matthew's Gospel! In Matthew 7:15-20, the disciples are encouraged to make a judgment regarding false prophets; in Matthew 10:11-15, the disciples are encouraged to make a judgment regarding the welcome they receive in towns they visit; in Matthew 16:6 and 12, the disciples are encouraged to make a judgment regarding the teaching of the Pharisees; and in Matthew 18:15-18, the disciples are encouraged to make a judgment regarding the sin of others within the church. These examples show why we must be careful not to "cherry-pick" the Scriptures. The command here is not to avoid judging altogether, although taken alone, it could be interpreted that way. With a more comprehensive view of Jesus' teaching in Matthew, it is clear that the command is to avoid unfair or uncharitable judgments, and especially, to avoid judging others by a different standard than one judges one's self.

Another common misinterpretation of this passage involves the second half of the command – "or you too will be judged." At first read, this might suggest that if you avoid judgmentalism, you yourself will escape the judgment of God at the end of time. The point of verse 2 is not that we are not judged in the end times if we do not judge others in this life – it is that God's judgment of individuals at the final judgment will reflect the way they have exercised judgment in their own affairs, whether those judgments were harsh or charitable. Note that the apostle Paul echoes Jesus' sentiments in Romans 2:1, as does James in James 4:11-12. Jesus' teaching on judgmentalism was remembered and reverberated throughout the early church.

One final note – the continued reference to "your brother," or "your brothers and sisters" in gender-inclusive translations, indicates that it is the Christian community that is primarily in view here, not the outside pagan world in general. Relational, brotherly and sisterly language was common in the early church to denote the kind of close bond that was meant to exist within the Christian community. The temptation to exaggerate our judging within the Christian community is strong, and a self-righteous person is more likely than anyone to correct the fault of others while ignoring their own faults! The point is each individual's responsibility to correct their own faults before turning to the shortcomings of their fellow Christians.

### **Final Thoughts for Discussion:**

*The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.*

Do you feel like, in general, you are stern or charitable in your judgment of others?

Can you identify specific faults in other people that you judge more harshly than other faults?

Which of your own faults are you most likely to ignore?

Do you ever have a judgmental attitude toward others who share those faults?

Why do you think we are tempted to judge people who share these faults with us more harshly than we judge people with faults that we do NOT share?

Are there steps you can take to “remove the speck from your own eye” with regard to these faults?

How does the broader church community benefit from your steps to “remove the speck from your own eye”?

Are their “specks” you have already removed that enable you to see more clearly where others might need assistance?

How does overcoming a personal failing give you needed perspective for coaching or helping someone through their own similar struggles?

**Suggested Closing Prayer:**

*Merciful God, help us to reflect Your mercy in our judgments of others. Show us the specks in our eyes, and give us the power to remove them. Free us from the temptation to judge others more harshly than we judge ourselves. We acknowledge Your authority to judge in all matters, and pray that You form us into the kind of people who share in the charitable judgment we anticipate from You. In the name of Christ, Amen.*