



Theme: The Sermon on the Mount

"Living for Gold...God!"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...

May 8-9, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

1-2 "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging." –Matthew 7:1-2 (The Message)

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE "Living for Gold...God!"

Today we conclude our series on the Sermon on the Mount, the most important body of teachings we have from Jesus. We do that by focusing on Matthew chapter 7 in which we are going to find buried treasure, gold in the form of several simple rules Jesus challenges us to live by. We're going to learn how to follow and please God, living as authentic human beings that God dreams for us to be. While I am not a rule person, these are rules which will make all the difference in the world and help us find meaning and purpose. They are the kind of rules which

help us become the person God intends for us to be, and many people who are successful in life will tell you these rules were key to their success. These rules apply to almost every area of our lives and I invite us to listen carefully for how they might impact our lives today.

Here are the four golden nuggets we will be focusing in on today.

SLIDE Show grace and don't judge.

This is one of our core values as a church and we are going to dig into it today, but here are the other three.

SLIDE Persevere and don't give up.

SLIDE At the fork in the road, take the narrow path.

SLIDE Do on to others as you would have them do unto you.

This final, golden rule, in many ways sums up the entire teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures, according to Jesus himself. If you have a Bible, take it out, and here is what we read in Matthew 7:1. I am going to use the Message today because we have been using that throughout this series of sermons to give us a very, down to earth reading of these teachings. This is our Scripture memory verse for the week, so let's say it together.

BIBLE

¹ "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults— unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging."

We have learned throughout this series that Jesus speaks in prophetic hyperbole. Prophetic means that Jesus is offering blanket statements, which are bold and strong. Don't judge and don't pick on people or jump on their failures or criticize constantly. There is no room for any kind of gray in the statement Jesus uses. Jesus is not trying to cover every situation or any exceptions to the rule, by giving us a big

statement to get our attention.

The truth is that we must judge all the time. We judge who should babysit our children. We have had to make judgments about what is safe and not safe or us and for our families during the pandemic. This does not mean we are thinking something bad about someone's character, but we must make those judgments every day. When we hire employees, we make a judgment call because we are choosing between five possible candidates. We judge whenever we cast a vote at the ballot box. We make these kinds of judgments decisions every day, and sometimes those judgments are about people. Those judgments are about choosing the right person in a particular situation.

Jesus knows that this kind of judgment is important as later in chapter 7, in a section we will not be focusing on today, he talks about judging false prophets. Jesus will give us some criteria and tells us to judge them based on the fruit they bear. If someone is bearing very good fruit, they most likely are a good prophet or leader. If they are bearing bad fruit, often pretending to be a good person, we can tell by their results.

Jesus is talking about something different in these first few verses of chapter 7, where we have this habit of routinely judging other human beings in ways that we should not. One of the reasons I like this version of the scripture we use today is because it gives us this list of how we can pick on people, jump on their failures, and criticize faults, in ways that tear people down and don't build them up. We judge based on assumptions such as what people are wearing or what kind of car they drive or where they live or the color of their skin. We remember how Dr. Martin Luther King talked about children being judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, and Jesus is talking about our tendency not to do that but pass judgment based on the exterior—and on what's going on inside of us!

I think of those moments when we have a coworker or family member who are doing well and sometimes our tendency is to look for faults. We can feel threatened by how well they are doing, or how much people like them, so we tear them down. We are broken inside which leads us to tear people down so we can feel bigger and built-up. We have these habits of backbiting or slandering or speaking poorly of others. I know I have gotten caught up in this kind of behavior as well. As followers of Jesus, we are asked to set this aside and behave differently.

Every single survey done in the last 30 years asking young people why they don't go to church has one answer at the very top of the list. We have seen a dramatic decline in people being part of the church in many ways because we have gotten this particular rule wrong. We hear over and over again that Christians are judgmental, which is ironic given how much time Jesus spends in the Gospels telling us not to be, even giving us direct commandments to live differently. We have this tendency to look down our nose at others and feel superior. We treat people as inferior or ignorant and often we do that to make us feel better about ourselves. Our ego gets the best of us. Remember what we learned a few weeks ago about the acronym for ego.

**SLIDE Edging
 God
 Out**

We do this not just with people we don't like, but also with friends and family members if we're honest. Jesus is telling us there is no room for us to be pointing out the faults of other people. He uses hyperbole, which is exaggeration, to make a point and take it deeper. We are familiar with the idea of the log and the splinter in our eye, but I love once again how we read this in the Message in the next verses of Matthew seven.

BIBLE

It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

Jesus is crystal clear in this hyperbole that when we are in the business of pointing out the faults of others, we fail to realize the look on our own face and how many faults we have ourselves. It makes all the difference in the world when we begin to recognize and claim and own our faults. The fact is, we will all have a sneer on our face at one time or another. The point Jesus is making is that we always will miss the mark and never be perfect, so don't expect that from others.

Now, there is a place where we as a friend or coworker or someone who cares about another person might offer a helpful suggestion to someone else. However, when someone is not asking for it or they don't sense we have their best intentions at heart, people just won't hear it. It might even be great advice, but people still won't hear it if we come with a judgmental heart. They are not open to us because we have not treated them well. We have this tendency to have a critical spirit and look for faults in others and when we do that, people will never listen to anything we have to say, even if it is constructive.

GRAPHIC Magnifying glass

We often hold up the magnifying glass to other people's faults and we see everything that is wrong with them but fail to see those same things in ourselves. Maybe you have seen one of these concave mirrors which magnify our own imperfections. Many people use them with their makeup.

GRAPHIC Concave mirror

When we look in that mirror, we see our imperfections larger-than-life. This is, in essence, what Jesus is saying to us. Let's look in the mirror and recognize our own faults before we start pointing out the faults of others. This has been especially challenging for many of us during this pandemic, where we are quick to criticize because many of us are stressed or isolated or just plain irritated because of the situation. When we are willing to recognize our own faults, and work on those first, we don't really have time or energy to focus on everyone else.

In the end, these warnings from Jesus about pointing out the faults in others, are warning us about the temptation of putting ourselves at the center of our lives and having our ego push God out when then pushes other people away. We are called to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Our task is to recognize what is broken inside of us first without feeling the need to point out the sins of everyone else.

Let me ask a simple question. How does it feel when people constantly criticize you? Do you like that? Is that fun? I know that I need constructive criticism and I value that, even though it's not easy to receive. It is easier to receive it from someone who shares out of a place of love and wanting us to be better. It's impossible to hear it from someone who expresses it with resentment, bitterness, or words that are harmful and hurtful. What I recognize is that most of the time I need to work on myself first before I worry about the sins of others.

Let me ask another question, and please be honest. This week, have you been judgmental? Maybe it's more appropriate to ask the question this way. **WHEN** this week have you been judgmental?! When this week have you thought negatively or critically about someone else before dealing with what's going on inside of you? When have you felt something

negative about someone else around you?

Jesus also tells us in this passage that the measure in which we judge will be used to judge us. Yikes! I don't want to be measured according to the way I have sometimes judged others and I'm guessing you might feel same way. Maybe this passage doesn't speak to you at all, but it does speak to me.

Part of my role as pastor has been visiting people in nursing homes and care facilities as they age. What I have seen and discovered in those moments is that the way we have cultivated our personalities throughout our lives become magnified as we age. I also witnessed during Covid that what was already present in people's lives was magnified because stress does this as well as aging. I often find people who were critical growing up or in normal times, become hypercritical as they age or when stress hits. The filter which stops us from saying those critical things get lost and instead we become hypercritical of every nurse or schoolteacher or people who are there to serve us. After a while, no one wants to be around them because no one wants to be around someone who is hypercritical.

In many ways, I think Jesus is reminding us of this truth by telling us that if we continue to be judgmental, we will find ourselves being judged by others because of our judgmentalism and we end up lonely and isolated. People are going to blow it and make mistakes and sometimes we are not going to like it, and in those moments, we are invited to practice grace and offer empathy. WE need that grace which is why we are asked to offer it to others. We even are asked by Jesus to pray it whenever we pray, and the way we now find it in the Lord's Prayer. Let's say together.

SLIDE Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

I'm reminded of that moment when the religious leaders brought the woman caught in the act of adultery to Jesus to have her stoned to death. They had their stones in their hands, raised to pass judgment because that was what was called for in the Hebrew law. In John 8, Jesus said, **"The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone."** It's almost as if he's egging them on. He is teaching us that same rule here in this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

We sometimes think there are moments in life where we get to put this rule on hold such as election season, or big social issues. We are convinced that our way is the right way and Jesus clearly is on our side and we often say and do things which are, quite frankly, embarrassing as followers of Jesus. I think it's important for us to have these conversations about important issues, but we are asked to do so in love, recognizing that there are often problems and blind spots in our opinions as well. In particular, I want to encourage all of us, when we are looking at something that might seem conflictual, to live by this truth.

SLIDE Assume the best, and not the worst intention.

In my own life, I know it is easy to assume the worst about others and their intentions when I don't know them or their heart. I have been on the receiving end of this as well, where people have assumed the worst of me, and I hear what they say and I'm shocked. Why would they think that about me? It hurts when people do this to me, and I'm guessing it hurts when they do it to you as well. Jesus invites us to not judge and instead to demonstrate love. What's more, if we are going to judge anyone, we are to start with ourselves and recognize that every one of us needs grace which is why Jesus went the cross, for everyone, and not just for me. We offer grace because we need grace. The measure we give when it comes to grace and judgment will be the measure we get.

SLIDE Persevere and don't give up.

We read this in verse 7 and following.

BIBLE

⁷⁻⁸ “Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. Ask for what you need. This isn’t a cat-and-mouse, hide-and-seek game we’re in.”

This passage is about persistence. Jesus is telling us not to give up. When we are facing something difficult, we pray about it and we get direct with God and don’t try to bargain. All of us, at times in our lives, feel like giving up. I have felt like giving up at different moments. Sometimes, we feel like giving up on our jobs, or our marriages, or our relationships with friends. We feel like throwing in the towel and giving up on life sometimes because it feels overwhelming. Part of what Jesus is encouraging us to do is hold on.

We know that adversity will come. Throughout the Bible, every key figure of faith faced difficulty. People disappointed them. People didn’t like them. People wanted to kill them. This is a common theme throughout the Scriptures, from beginning to end. When people are trying to do God’s will or do the right thing, there is resistance from people who are unhappy. There is pain and things will be hard, and sometimes it is from the very people from whom they thought they would support. Jesus tells us not to give up.

This has been an especially important rule and message during the last year of pandemic and political and social unrest. There are moments where we feel like giving up because of the loneliness or isolation or strange behavior we read about on the web that feels to be taking over everything. I have talked to many people over the last year who gave up the news because it was so discouraging and overwhelming. To that I say, “Good for you!” People are ready to be done with masks and distancing and routines being upended. In the midst of the angst, the message from Jesus is not to give up because these things will never have the last word.

Over the past months I have read about pastors who are retiring or leaving ministry in alarming numbers. I lead several groups of pastors and hear many of them who are discouraged and all I can tell them is not to give up but hold on. The people who end up having the greatest impact on the world are those who are willing not to give up and persevere. I know there are some of you in worship today, whether in person or online, or watching the sermon later in the week, who feel like giving up. Tears are flowing because you feel like throwing in the towel. Daily life or work or relationships feel overwhelming. Jesus is telling us to continue to be direct, ask for what we need and be persistent. Don't give up.

Now, it is possible a move or a change in our lives would be better. This prophetic hyperbole that Jesus uses doesn't apply to every situation. I know we are not asked by God to stay in places where we are perpetually abused. God does not expect any job or relationship to be a lifetime prison sentence of misery. But the truth is that most of what we experience is temporary, and we hold on because we believe God will be faithful. There are always exceptions to the rule, but the general idea is that when we get knocked down, we get up and dust ourselves off and keep moving forward. We put 1 foot in front of the other and place our trust in God and not the circumstances brought on by the world.

I can tell you that in my marriage, and in my ministry, there have been times over the last 35 years it has not been fun, and I have felt like giving up. It was just hard. I am so grateful Tami has not given up and we have found the courage to hold on and keep moving forward. There were times during the pandemic, when I preached to an empty room and my soul felt empty at the end because there was no interaction with anyone.

I have been your pastor here for 19 years and in total for 30 years and I have loved MOST of it! But there have been a few times where I wanted to go and do something else because of discouragement. Sometimes, in those moments I have been offered other opportunities,

but I'm so grateful I never said "yes" when I felt like giving up. I would pray and move forward even when it was hard and I was struggling, because God would always bring me through and there would be joy on the other side. I think of this experience Jesus had in John 6.

BIBLE

⁶⁶⁻⁶⁷ After this, many of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: "Do you also want to leave?"

I love Peter's response.

BIBLE

⁶⁸⁻⁶⁹ Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."

We remember who is the Holy One and we keep moving forward. We remember the words of real life, eternal life, and we keep moving forward. I don't know each situation or circumstance happening in each one of your lives, but I know we all have felt like giving up. I believe Jesus is inviting us not to give up because, it is in Christ, we find eternal life that can sustain us through everything this life has to offer. Don't give up.

This rule ties directly into the next one in many ways because not giving up means we are willing to do the hard thing and take the hard road, which is narrow and challenging. Jesus puts it this way in verses 13-14 of Matthew 7.

BIBLE

¹³⁻¹⁴ "Don't look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don't fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life—to God! —is vigorous and

requires total attention.

SLIDE Take the vigorous road!

I love that image of taking the vigorous road and how that is the way that leads to God. Let's be honest, we all like the easy road. We want things fast, and we want them now and we want them convenient. We want a remote control for everything and now we don't have to push buttons but can simply say things and magically the lights come on or the television show plays that we want. I don't have to type anymore because now I have speech recognition. It is normal to want the path of least resistance, and that's how we are as human beings.

Think about this for a minute though. When there is a fork in the road, and one path is easy and the other is hard, which is the one that is typically most rewarding or brings us most joy by the end? Which is the one God is usually asking us to take? Which is the one that brings greater blessings? Almost always it's the vigorous road, which requires attention, which leads to life. Another way to think about this, which I have heard mentioned at several leadership events over the years, is what is affectionately called...

SLIDE Discernment by nausea!

The idea is that if one of the options you are discerning makes you nauseous and a little sick to your stomach when you pray, it's probably the correct one. God is calling us to have courage and persevere, to take the vigorous road, and to take up our cross and follow. I can tell you that over my years as a human being and a pastor, when I have had the courage to take the vigorous road, I may have become sick to my stomach in the beginning, but in the end, it was the correct choice.

Life is hard and usually that difficult path is the one that leads to success. It typically is the path which leads to Christ and leaves a mark on the world, when it is the one which challenges us and is vigorous. Part of

being the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, and being a follower of Jesus, is being willing to take that hard path and take up our cross and follow. Jesus chose a cross because he knew it would lead to the redemption of the world. We are called to follow in those steps, by living selflessly and sacrificially. It is there that we find life. It is why I say often that we are best as followers of Jesus when we are giving ourselves away and not demanding our way. We typically demand our way because it seems to be the easy and comfortable one. Jesus is asking us to choose differently.

I think back over my entire life and I noticed those moments which were more challenging and vigorous, those times when I chose the difficult path, were the ones that led to the most growth and learning and life. We are invited to take that road less traveled, which is vigorous, because it leads to life and to God.

There is a final rule which is one that each of us memorized as children. Even if we didn't go to church, someone taught us this rule in school or some other environment. Let's say it together from Matthew 7:12.

SLIDE Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Jesus then tells us that this sums up the law and the prophets, meaning the entire Hebrew Bible. Within Judaism, there was already a rule like this, but it was phrased a bit differently, in the negative.

SLIDE Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.

As Jesus often did, he took this rule from his Jewish heritage and turned it on its head to make it a positive statement. I love the way we read this in the Message version of the Bible.

BIBLE

¹² **"Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what**

you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them.”

If we want to be loved, then we give love to others. If we want to be forgiven and shown grace and mercy when we mess up, we show grace and mercy to others when we feel they have not done the correct thing. If we want someone to show us kindness when we are tired or need encouragement, then we should do the same for others. If we want someone to visit us in the nursing home when it's our time to be there, then we better do that now for others. If we want to be treated with respect by those who serve us, then we better treat others with respect. If we don't want people to be grumpy or demand their way constantly, or tell us what to do all the time, then we shouldn't do that to others.

Now, this doesn't cover the fact that some people may not care if they are mistreated or ignored. Another way to understand what Jesus is saying is to...

SLIDE Do unto others what they would have you do unto them.

I think about the videos I've seen over the past year of people having meltdowns in the grocery store because they didn't wear a mask, and someone confronted them. Maybe you have seen those interactions or been one of those people who was upset. Maybe you are someone who is not concerned about spreading Covid 19 or don't think facemasks make a big difference, so you think, "I'm going to do to others as I would have them do unto me and so I'm not going to wear a mask and I don't care if they do either. I'm not going to wear one for someone else because it doesn't matter to me."

This is where we need to understand the point of this teaching of Jesus. Jesus is asking us to not demand our own way, but to seek the best for the other person and to bless them based on what they need and not our own needs. As a follower of Jesus, you may or may not think wearing a

mask is important, but there are many for whom it is important. It is important because of their health, or because it makes them feel safe, or maybe they don't want to pass something on to a loved one or family member. Even though we may not think something is important, it may be very important for many others, and so one expression of love and the golden rule can be putting on a mask as a way of loving our neighbor.

It is why I have said often during this pandemic that if Jesus wore cross, we can wear a mask. I'm not saying that wearing a mask is fun and I hope and pray we get to a point where we no longer need them, but the teachings of Jesus should compel us to be willing to give ourselves away and not demand that we get our way. It's an expression of love in the Christian faith when we are concerned for others. We can be mindful for others even if we don't feel like it's important, whether it's wearing a mask, washing our hands, or getting the vaccine.

I want to encourage you to make this the wallpaper on your phone or print out a copy and put it on your mirror or make something which says we should do unto others. What I know is that employers, supervisors, and bosses who live by this rule have more fulfilled and satisfied employees. When couples in marriages are living this rule, they find their marriages stronger and healthier. Our children feel loved when we live by this rule. Our neighborhoods are more cohesive. Our nation can be more unified if we live by this rule.

When we are living the golden rule, we are living a life of love and demonstrating something which transforms the world. We find life, we find gold, that buried treasure, that way that leads to God when we live the Golden rule. Jesus invites us to do this in everything—politics, marriage, friendships, business—not just some things, and then we will find life.

SLIDE Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Do you believe it? Will you live it? This is the gold God offers. These are the teachings of Jesus which help us live for God and find life. Let's read them together out loud.

SLIDE Show grace and don't judge.

SLIDE Persevere and don't give up.

SLIDE Take the vigorous road.

SLIDE Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Let's pray.

PRAYER

God, you know how we struggle with these rules, most likely this very week, maybe even an hour ago! Lord, we pray that you would cure us of our tendency to judge other people, of our critical spirit, of the way we look down at others and build ourselves up in the process. May we look at ourselves honestly, seeing our shortcomings rather than pointing the finger at someone else. Help us to offer grace, the same grace you offer to us. Place deep within our hearts love, grace, and mercy, so we might leave behind judgment and a critical spirit.

Lord, help us not to give up. You know there are some right now who feel like giving up. I pray you would speak directly to their hearts today. Encourage them to persevere. Jesus, there were moments that you felt like giving up, but you refused. Strengthen us...encourage us.

God, you know we have often chosen the easy path of least resistance. Give us boldness and courage to choose the vigorous road which leads to you. Help us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow you Jesus.

Finally, help us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

May 15-16 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people
2. First Song and Prayer
3. Welcome by Jeff and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. We're glad you are here in worship with us today. If you are new here, or this is your first time visiting us, we have a special gift for you (hold up welcome bag). If you're new and have not received a welcome bag yet, please be sure to grab a bag at one of the tables by the exit doors as you leave today. There are some awesome gifts in the bags (pull out coffee mug with chocolate) and some more information about the church. There's also a "Connect Card" we would encourage you to fill out and give to one of our ushers whenever you are comfortable sharing more information about yourself with us. This will help us stay connected to you and share what's happening in the life of the church.
5. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Attendance.
 - Softball.
 - Seniors.
6. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
7. Video bumper plays.
8. Sermon