

# CHAPTER II, SESSION 23: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT JUDGING OTHERS

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

It certainly takes patience and faith to avoid using condemnation engineering on people. But underneath it all, the great challenge of this teaching is surrender of control. When we judge and condemn others, we feel active in changing them. When we take Jesus' approach and begin with prayer, followed by asking, we are giving up our power and our ability to control the outcome. It is important for the group to realize that judgment and condemnation only *feel* like power and control. In reality judging someone doesn't give us any real control. As we realize this, we will be more comfortable embracing Jesus' approach ourselves.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopy of John 8:1-11 (see below)
- ☞ Worshipful room with table and chairs
- ☞ Two candles for each person in the group

## WELCOME

Once everyone has arrived, remind them of the plans for the closing retreat and confirm those who will be able to attend.

## RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

## 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

## PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may offer this prayer, one of your own, or simply end the silence with the word "Amen."

*Lord, Jesus Christ, you have taught us that you love us just as we are—not as we should be. Through this radical love we are slowly transformed into the people you created us to be. Grant us now the grace to learn how to love others and treat them as we would be treated rather than judging them. Amen.*

## SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the following questions to discuss your experience of going a day without gossiping.

1. What struggles did you discover when you couldn't gossip?
2. How did your perspective of other people change during this exercise?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that judging others is a common way we try to control others, but it fails. Jesus' method is to pray for, to ask, to seek and to stand with those we want to see change.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. The author summarizes why judging fails by saying, “Condemnation engineering fails because it doesn’t come across as loving, it doesn’t allow the person to own the need for change, it doesn’t offer help toward change, and it may be entirely inaccurate” (p. 190). What would you add or remove from this list of condemnation engineering flaws? Why?
2. Do you have family members who have used “condemnation engineering” on you? If so what was the result?
3. The author takes a different approach to Matthew 7:7-11’s ask, seek and knock (pp. 195-197). What is your reaction to his interpretation?
4. The author tells us that judging others comes from a desire to change others or a need to feel better about ourselves as beloved by God and living within God’s kingdom. Have there been times you felt more connected to the kingdom of God and as a result were less judgmental? If so, discuss these experiences with the group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

### ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Have a volunteer read John 8:1-11, then discuss these questions as a group:

1. What stated and unstated motivations did the Pharisees have for judging this woman?
2. Imagine yourself in the place of the woman caught in adultery. How might this experience change you?
3. What wisdom and encouragement can we gain from the Bible when it comes to our relationships with people that we want to change?

#### JOHN 8

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

“No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (NIV).

Move directly from your discussion of the Scripture passage to the following prayer experience.

### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

This guided prayer experience is intended to be read to the group as a way of directly engaging in non-judgment. You may need to set up this exercise in a separate room. Arrange chairs in a semi-circle facing the table upon which are one lit candle and one unlit candle for every member of your group.

With the meditation, read each sentence slowly. Whenever the group is invited to a specific action, such as naming someone they want to change or identifying their desire to change someone, give a few minutes so everyone can have something or someone in mind. Begin the experience with two or three minutes of silence, inviting the group to relax and become fully present.

Read:

*We all have people in our lives that we want to change. Sometimes our desire for them to change is intense, other times it is more passive. Sometimes we are motivated by love for them, other times we are motivated by selfishness. To help us experience a path that is different from judging, we will be engaging in this guided prayer experience.*

*Begin by recalling the process of transformation you have experienced throughout this study. This process involves identifying your narratives, engaging in soul-training exercises, being in a supportive community, living with an awareness of God's kingdom. Above all it requires the Holy Spirit. Notice these factors in your own life and give thanks to God for the way they have helped you along this journey.*

*Next, think of someone you want to change. Specifically identify for yourself what about this person you want to change.*

*Now imagine a scene similar to the Scripture passage of the woman caught in adultery. Imagine that you have brought the person you have identified in front of Jesus. Begin by telling Jesus what it is about this person you want to change and why.*

*What might Jesus say to you about this person and this situation?*

*What might Jesus say to the person?*

*How does it make you feel to hear Jesus speaking to the person you want to change in this manner?*

*In the Scripture passage, the Pharisees walk off in silence; they are not apprentices of Jesus. We are, and our desire is to learn to do things as Jesus did them. With this in mind, spend time praying for the person you want to see change. Pray that this person would have a spiritual awakening, falling deeply in love with God and discovering God's kingdom in their life.*

*Next, pray for God to show you ways to ask them about the situation that troubles you, ways to hear their struggles and understand their journey better.*

*When you are ready, I invite you forward to light a candle for them as a symbol of God's love being borne in them in a deeper, more powerful way.*

Once everyone has had a chance to light a candle, offer this prayer:

*Let us pray. God of transforming Grace, we give you thanks for the gift of this class, the fellowship of this group, the wisdom of your Son, Jesus Christ, and the power of your Spirit at work within us. We now offer to you the individuals who are represented by these candles. Empower us to love them boldly and to treat them as we would want to be treated. Amen.*

Spend a few minutes discussing any insights or questions that surfaced for individuals during the prayer time. It is important to mention to the group that this meditation can be done individually again, and don't forget that often we condemn ourselves as much or more than others. We drag ourselves before Jesus expecting him to condemn us. It could be very helpful to put ourselves in the position of the woman caught in adultery.

**ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTION:** *How might this teaching of non-judgment apply to people or groups on a national or international level?*

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

The author finishes the chapter by reflecting on the situation with his son. Close your time together by having someone in the group read this paragraph aloud:

If we really want to see someone change, we have to be willing to come alongside and participate with them, to make sacrifices of our own time and energy. I am so thankful that I have the privilege of prayer and the resources of the kingdom of God. Even if Jacob's problem had not been solved, it still would have been a great blessing. We learned about doing the hard work required of all life's endeavors, and in the process my son and I grew closer. Building your life on the commands of Jesus, though sometimes challenging, is building on a solid foundation (pp. 200-01).

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 12, which explores how living in the kingdom is a way of life.
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week is to live a day devotionally. You may want to observe this practice for several days, so read the chapter early to give yourself time to try it.