



## Go Connectedly (Matthew 7:1-12)

Have you ever struggled with how you should *go* to others with the gospel of full surrender to Christ? When a person is caught in his sin, desiring life apart from God, we tend to go to him in one of two extremes: we are either *condemning* or *careless*. These are rooted in the two expressions of a proud heart: (1) stone (*condemning*) or (2) sand (*careless*).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described the *be-do-go* of full surrender, teaching that who we are to *be* (Matthew 5), determines what we are to *do* (Matthew 6), which determines where we are to *go* (Matthew 7). The Master Communicator elaborated on the heart and mannerisms of an effective carrier of His gospel message. He conveyed that we should not go to the world either *condemningly* or *carelessly*; rather, we should go *connectedly* with the Spirit of God in total humility with a heart of clay (Matthew 7:1-12). Consequently, every encounter with another person is a three-way call. When we are *connected* with God and *connected* with others, then they are *connected* with God. Whereas pride brings static to the line; humility offers a clear connection.

**Do not go condemningly with a hard heart of stone (Matthew 7:1-5).** Jesus commanded, “Do not judge” (Matthew 7:1). Jesus was communicating that we should not *condemn* because we will be in turn condemned by God and others (Matthew 7:2; cf. Luke 6:37-38). Paul taught that when we condemn others, we pass judgment on ourselves because we do the same things (Romans 2:1). Jesus indicated that the judgment of God is predicated on how we flesh out His heart with others (Matthew 5:7). A hard heart of stone *tells condemningly* out of judgment and legalism, often pretending to connect with God, while disconnecting with others. A heart of stone requires a severe tool to be shaped and restored.

Jesus linked a condemning heart with the eyes, or one’s perspective. Borrowing an illustration from His construction days, He said that the antidote to a condemning heart was to take the plank out of our own eye so that we can see clearly enough to help someone with the speck in his (Matthew 7:3-5). The plank in our own eye is our personal sin of pride, and it leaves a blind spot (Ephesians 4:18). Jesus referred to a person with this blind spot as a *hypocrite*—an actor, one with a mask, a pretender. Paul called the Galatians to go restore someone caught in sin with total humility as if they were capable of committing the same mistake—no acting, no masks, no pretending (Galatians 6:1). Someone who has truly received God’s grace simply cannot condemn another person. Jesus, the Author of grace, did not condemn the woman caught in adultery (John 8:10-11).

A tool we can use to recognize and remove the plank in our own eye lies in two simple words: “Me, too.” Before we go to anyone caught in his sin, we need to be able to



look inside our hearts and say, “Me, too.” These two words free us from going to others with a condemning heart of stone.

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Remove the plank from your own eye. Whom have you been condemning? Why? How did their behavior fall short of your expectations? How could you get the plank out of your own eye and connect your mistakes with the person(s) you condemned, so that you could say, “Me, too”?

**Do not go carelessly with a hard heart of sand (Matthew 7:6).** Jesus warned of the opposite kind of pride, one that is *careless* and loose with the gospel message, naively scattering it to cynics who would automatically reject what they hear. Jesus painted the image of wild, ravenous dogs and pigs that would not give any consideration to a pearl of wisdom (Matthew 7:6). Proverbs teaches of the same dilemma that occurs when one attempts to argue with a fool (Proverbs 26:4-5). A hard heart of sand *tells carelessly* because a sand heart is loose and licentious, often pretending to connect with others, while disconnecting with God. A heart of sand requires a storm to be malleable and restored.

This is why Jesus taught in parables. He was careful with His words, discerning the wisdom appropriate for the level of hard-heartedness among listeners. Jesus pointed out that cynical hearts were already hard, so if He merely *presented* truth, it would automatically be rejected. However, He knew that if He would share a story, then people would leave thinking about its details, and from that could perhaps *discover* the truth of the story in an unthreatening fashion. The truth *concealed* could be the truth *revealed* by sharing a story. This practice followed a typical pattern: two thousand years ago, a Rabbi would teach a parable and then explain it more fully to those who would call themselves his disciples.

Jesus warned the hard-hearted Pharisees of carelessly speaking against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:34-37). Contrastingly, Jesus was careful with His words with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). Jesus discerned the wisdom appropriate for the level of hard-heartedness with the rich young ruler. Solomon communicated that when attempting to connect with others, we must discern the wisdom appropriate for the level of hard-heartedness: “Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning” (Proverbs 9:7-9). Paul agreed, teaching that we should be wise with outsiders, discerning the wisdom appropriate for their level of hard-heartedness (Colossians 4:5-6).

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With whom have you been careless with communicating the gospel? Why? What steps could you take in order to discern their level of hard-heartedness?



**Go connectedly with a soft heart of clay (Matthew 7:7-12).**

*Connection One: ASK God.* Jesus revealed that we should go to others with a heart of humility that is first *connected* with God. Whereas a stone heart *tells condemningly*, and a sand heart *tells carelessly*, a clay heart *asks connectedly*. Jesus commanded His disciples to *ASK*—Ask, Seek, and Knock. He described a progressive intensity of humility in prayer, one’s heart *connected* with God’s. He promised that if we ask humbly, we will receive; if we seek (making our muscles move with our prayers) we will find; and if we knock persistently, the door will be opened (Matthew 7:7-11).

You might ask, “Receive what? Find what? Open what door?” In Luke’s parallel passage, we discover that the answer is not *what*, but *who*. “Your father in heaven (will) give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Luke 11:13, [parentheses added]). The Holy Spirit removes the planks from our own eyes, giving us wisdom to discern, but not *condemn*. He keeps us from being *careless* with the pearls of the gospel message, giving us wisdom to answer outsiders (Colossians 4:5-6). He offers us a clay heart that *connects*, one that is malleable in the hands of the Potter. A clay heart is a picture of the humble heart of Christ (Matthew 11:29). We must ask the Holy Spirit into our lives and then ask Him for wisdom regarding each encounter.

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Have you asked the Holy Spirit into your life? If not, fully surrender your heart to Him as Savior and Lord, today. Then ask Him for wisdom for each encounter with another person.

*Connection Two: Ask Others.* Jesus summed up the Sermon on the Mount with the main thing: “So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). When we do to others what we would have them do to us, we *connect* with them. Jesus communicated that if we ask others about their needs, then we are better equipped to meet them in order to *connect* others with God. We will never know how to serve them in the way that they want to be served, unless we humbly ask and listen. Solomon said that anyone who answers before listening is foolish (Proverbs 18:13). A humble clay heart connects with both God and others.

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Here are four simple questions you can use to connect with others:

“What is your church or spiritual background?”

“Will you please tell me your story?”

“Where is God in all that for you?”

“In terms of the God thing, would you describe yourself as skeptic, seeker, or surrendered?”



*Connection Three: Others Ask God Into Their Lives.* When we ask God and ask others, the Holy Spirit *connects* others with God. The Law and the Prophets were designed to *connect* others with God. Jesus described this humility toward God and others as the greatest commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). Paul said that the entire law was summed up in one command, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14). He taught the Romans that love fulfilled the law (Romans 13:9-10). Jesus’ half-brother James agreed (James 2:8). The apostle Peter clarified the importance of others asking God into their lives: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15).

On a hot Middle Eastern day, Jesus provided the ultimate picture of a three-way call when He connected with the heart of the Father and with the woman at the well, who then connected with God. He was not condemning. He was not careless. He was connected, and He asked. Consequently, she asked the Restorer into her life (John 4:1-54).

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Think of the person with whom you have been condemning or careless. *ASK* the Holy Spirit to take the plank out of your own eye so that you can clearly see the speck in that person’s eye. Ask God to give you the wisdom to answer that person’s questions and discern his level of hard-heartedness. Ask that person how you can serve him. Ask the appropriate questions to engage his heart. In everything, act with Christ’s heart of humility, and His Spirit will *connect* him with God.

Here is a life-changing question to ask someone who might be ready to surrender to Christ: “Would you like to draw a line in the sand, put a stake in the ground, and fully surrender your heart and life to Christ as Savior and Lord?” You can follow an affirmative answer with a request to pray this prayer to God: “I can’t. You can. I can’t free myself from the penalty of my sin. In Christ, You can. I can’t free myself from the power of my sin. In Christ, You can. I fully surrender my heart and life to You as Savior to free me from the penalty and Lord to free me from the power of my sin. Please forgive and restore me.”

#### **Conclusion**

Trade your *condemning* heart of stone or the *careless* heart of sand for a soft heart of clay that is *connected* with God and others. *ASK* the Holy Spirit to take the plank out of your own eye so that you can clearly see the speck in others’ eyes. Ask Him for wisdom to answer outsiders. Ask others how you can serve them. Listen. In everything, act with Christ’s heart of humility, and His Spirit will *connect* them with God. Every encounter is a three-way call. Whereas pride causes static on the line, humility offers a clear connection.

