



St Barnabas Cray

"Discerning over Condemnation: Humility Over Judgment"

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - The Freedom of Not Playing God

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:1-2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There's something profoundly liberating about Jesus' opening words here, though we might not feel it immediately. Our natural instinct is to size up, evaluate, and pronounce verdicts on the people around us. We see a snippet of someone's behaviour and construct entire narratives about their character. But Jesus invites us into a different way of being—one that recognises the exhausting burden of constantly playing judge and jury over others' lives. The Greek word 'krino' that Jesus uses here encompasses both condemning judgment and careful discernment. Jesus isn't asking us to switch off our minds or ignore genuine wrongdoing. Rather, He's warning us against the soul-crushing weight of condemnation—that harsh, final verdict that writes people off as beyond

hope or help. When we condemn others, we're essentially claiming God's prerogative to see into hearts and know the full story. But we never have the complete picture. We see fragments, moments, surface behaviours, but miss the wounds, the history, the circumstances that shaped someone's choices. This doesn't excuse harmful behaviour, but it should humble our rush to final judgment. The freedom Jesus offers is this: we don't have to carry the weight of being the ultimate arbiter of another person's worth or destiny. We can observe, we can discern, we can even speak truth when necessary—but the final verdict belongs to the One who sees all and judges with perfect justice and mercy.

Reflection Question

Where in your life have you been carrying the exhausting burden of judging others, and how might releasing that weight change your relationships?

From Sunday's Sermon

"We don't have to carry the weight of being the final judge of another person's soul. We can want justice, we can speak up, we can name what's wrong – and we can leave the final verdict to God. That is actually a relief, if you let it be."

Today's Application

Today, practice the discipline of catching yourself in moments of judgment. When you find yourself making snap assessments about someone's character based on limited information, pause and ask: 'What don't I know about this person's story?' Keep a small notebook or use your phone to jot down these moments—not to condemn yourself, but to grow in awareness. In your family relationships, particularly with those who frustrate you most, try responding with curiosity rather than criticism. Instead of 'Why do they always...?' ask 'I wonder what's driving this behaviour?' At work, when colleagues make decisions you disagree with, resist the urge to question their motives and instead focus on understanding their perspective. This isn't about becoming passive or failing to address genuine issues, but about approaching others with the same grace you'd want extended to you. Before bed, reflect on how this shift in perspective affected your stress levels and relationships throughout the day.

Morning Prayer

Gracious God, forgive me for the times I've appointed myself as judge over others, carrying burdens You never intended me to bear. Help me to see people through Your eyes—with compassion for their struggles and hope for their growth. When I'm tempted to write someone off, remind me of the grace You've shown me in my own failings. Give me wisdom to discern truth without condemning hearts, and the humility to remember that I too am in need of Your mercy. Free me from the exhausting work of playing God, and teach me the peace that comes from leaving ultimate judgment in Your capable hands. Amen.

Evening Devotion**Resting in God's Perfect Justice****Evening Reflection**

As this day draws to a close, you may have noticed how often your mind naturally slides towards evaluation and judgment of others. This isn't necessarily wrong—God has given us minds to think and hearts to discern. But perhaps you've also felt the weight of constantly assessing, criticising, or mentally prosecuting others. Tonight, there's an invitation to rest from this burden. God's justice is not absent simply because we're not actively dispensing it. His understanding is perfect where ours is limited, His mercy is available where we might withhold it, and His timing is flawless where ours is often premature. You can lay down the gavel tonight, knowing that true justice—the kind that perfectly balances truth and love—remains in the most capable hands imaginable.

Evening Reflection

As you reflect on today, where did you notice the difference between healthy discernment and harmful judgment in your thoughts and interactions?

Evening Prayer

Lord, as I rest tonight, I release into Your hands all the people I've been mentally judging or carrying concern about. You see what I cannot see, You know what I cannot know. Help me sleep in the peace of knowing that Your justice and mercy are perfect, and I need not carry what belongs to You alone. Amen.

Tuesday - The Plank in Our Own Eye

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? (Matthew 7:3-4 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Jesus' imagery here is deliberately absurd—imagine someone with a wooden beam protruding from their eye trying to perform delicate eye surgery on someone else's tiny speck. It's meant to make us smile, but the truth it reveals is sobering. We have an extraordinary capacity for moral myopia, seeing clearly the faults in others while being blind to our own, often greater, failings. This isn't just about obvious sins; it's about the subtle ways we excuse our own behaviour while holding others to impossibly high standards. The parent who demands respect while showing little consideration for their children's feelings. The colleague who criticises others' work ethic while browsing social media for hours. The church member who gossips about someone else's spiritual struggles while ignoring their own pride and judgmental spirit. Jesus isn't saying we're worse than everyone else, but He is saying we're not better. We all carry planks—patterns of thinking, behaving, and relating that damage ourselves and others. These might be obvious moral failures, but they're just as likely to be character flaws we've learned to live with: impatience, selfishness, dishonesty in small things, or the way we treat those who can do nothing for us. The revolutionary aspect of Jesus' teaching is that self-examination must precede correction of others. Not self-flagellation or paralysing introspection, but honest acknowledgment of our own need for grace and growth. This creates the humility necessary for any helpful intervention in someone else's life.

Reflection Question

What 'planks' in your own character do you tend to overlook while being quick to notice 'specks' in others?

From Sunday's Sermon

"We are all carrying stuff. Failures, blind spots, things we've got wrong and haven't faced yet. And when we forget that – when we lose that humility – our judgment of others very quickly becomes something ugly."

Today's Application

Begin today with a personal inventory, but approach it with grace rather than condemnation. Choose one relationship where you've been critical or judgmental, and honestly examine your own contributions to any tension or difficulty. Are you demanding something from them that you're not offering yourself? In your marriage or close friendships, practice the discipline of owning your part first before addressing concerns about others. Instead of 'You never listen to me,' try 'I realise I haven't been very clear in how I communicate, and I'd like us both to work on really hearing each other.' At work, before criticising a colleague's approach, ask yourself whether you consistently model the standard you're expecting from them. This week, make it a practice to confess your own shortcomings to someone you trust—not for dramatic effect, but to cultivate the humility that makes you safe for others to be around. Notice how this self-awareness changes the tone of your interactions and creates space for more honest, gracious relationships.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, give me eyes to see myself as clearly as I see others. Reveal to me the planks I've grown so accustomed to carrying that I no longer notice their weight. Help me to approach my own failings with the same grace I long to receive, and let this humility transform how I relate to others. When I'm tempted to focus on someone else's faults, gently redirect my attention to the work You want to do in my own heart. Make me the kind of person others feel safe to be honest with, because they know I'm aware of my own need for Your mercy. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Gift of Self-Awareness

Evening Reflection

Tonight, as you reflect on the day, you might feel the discomfort that comes with honest self-examination. This discomfort is actually a gift—it's the beginning of spiritual maturity and authentic relationships. When we stop pretending we have it all sorted, we become people others can actually connect with. Your willingness to acknowledge your own planks doesn't make you weak; it makes you real. It also makes you safe for others who are struggling with their own failures and blind spots. The goal isn't perfection but progress, not sinlessness but humility. As you've perhaps noticed your own patterns today, remember that God's love for you isn't based on your ability to get everything right. His love is the foundation that makes honest self-reflection possible without despair.

Evening Reflection

How did acknowledging your own 'planks' today change the way you interacted with others, and what did you learn about yourself?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank You for the grace that allows me to look honestly at myself without being crushed by what I see. Continue the gentle work of transformation in my heart, and help me sleep in the assurance of Your love that isn't dependent on my perfection. Amen.

Wednesday - Discernment Without Condemnation

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck from your brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:5 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Here's where Jesus' teaching becomes beautifully practical. He doesn't end with 'mind your own business'—He actually envisions us helping each other deal with our blind spots and failings. But notice the order: first the plank, then the speck. First humility, then help. The difference between condemning judgment and loving discernment lies not just in our tone or technique, but in our heart posture. Condemnation flows from a sense of superiority, from the belief that we're fundamentally different from or better than the person we're addressing. It seeks to shame, to establish distance, to prove a point. Loving discernment flows from humility, from the recognition that we're all fellow strugglers in need of grace. It seeks restoration, connection, and growth. When we've done the hard work of acknowledging our own planks, several things happen. We approach others with gentleness because we know how painful it is to have our faults exposed. We speak with hope because we've experienced God's transforming power in our own areas of struggle. We offer practical help because we understand how difficult change can be. This kind of discernment actually serves love. It refuses to let people we care about remain stuck in patterns that are harming them or others. But it approaches them as a fellow patient in the hospital, not as a doctor pronouncing diagnosis from a position of health. The goal is always restoration, not retribution. It's about helping people see clearly so they can experience the freedom and joy that comes from living in alignment with God's design for human flourishing.

Reflection Question

Think of someone you care about who seems stuck in a harmful pattern—how might your own journey through similar struggles equip you to offer help rather than judgment?

From Sunday's Sermon

"There's a massive difference between: Condemning – slamming someone, cancelling them, deciding they're a lost cause, enjoying their downfall... and... Discerning – noticing something's wrong, caring enough to say something, doing it gently, staying humble about your own mess at the same time."

Today's Application

Today, practice the art of loving discernment. If there's someone in your life whose behaviour concerns you, spend time first examining your own heart and motives. Are you approaching them from love or frustration? From hope or superiority? Before any conversation, pray for them and for yourself, asking God to give you His heart for this person. When you do speak, use 'I' statements rather than 'you' accusations: 'I've noticed... and I'm concerned because I care about you' rather than 'You always...' Share your own struggles in similar areas if appropriate, making it clear you're speaking as someone who understands, not someone who has it all figured out. In your family, practice addressing issues while affirming the person's worth. At church, resist the urge to gossip about concerning behaviour and instead consider whether you're the right person to lovingly address it directly. Remember that timing matters—choose moments when the person is most likely to hear you, not when you're most frustrated and need to vent.

Morning Prayer

God of grace and truth, teach me to discern with love and speak with humility. When I see others struggling, help me remember my own journey and approach them with the gentleness I've needed from others. Give me wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent, when to act and when to pray. Let my words be instruments of healing rather than weapons of judgment. Make me someone who helps others see clearly, not because I'm perfect, but because I've experienced Your transforming love in my own areas of blindness. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Ministry of Gentle Restoration

Evening Reflection

As you've moved through this day, you may have found opportunities to practice discernment rather than judgment. Perhaps you've discovered that approaching others from humility rather than superiority changes everything—not just for them, but for you. When we see ourselves as fellow travelers rather than moral authorities, conversations become partnerships in growth rather than confrontations. The goal is never to win or to be right, but to see people flourish. Even if you haven't had specific conversations today, you may have noticed how differently you view people's struggles when you remember your own. This shift in perspective is itself a form of ministry—the ministry of seeing others with compassion rather than condemnation.

Evening Reflection

How did approaching others' faults with humility about your own change your interactions today, and what did you learn about the power of gentle restoration?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank You for the reminder that we're all in need of Your grace and gentle correction. Help me to be an instrument of Your restoration in others' lives, always remembering that I too am being transformed by Your love. Give me rest tonight in the knowledge that You are working in all of us. Amen.

Thursday - Truth and Love in Perfect Balance

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:15 NIV)

Devotional Thought

One of the most dangerous distortions of Jesus' teaching on judgment is the idea that love means never challenging anyone or that grace requires us to remain silent about harmful behaviour. This 'nice' Christianity that avoids all difficult conversations isn't actually loving—it's often a form of cowardice or indifference dressed up as spirituality. True love sometimes requires difficult conversations. Parents who truly love their children set boundaries and address concerning behaviour. Friends who care about each other speak up when they see self-destructive patterns. Church communities that value each other's spiritual health don't ignore sin that's damaging individuals or relationships. But here's the crucial balance: truth without love becomes harsh and destructive, while love without truth becomes enabling and ultimately harmful. Speaking truth in love means our motivation is always the other person's good, not our own sense of righteousness. It means we've examined our own hearts first and approached them with humility. It means we're prepared to walk alongside them in the process of change, not just point out the problem and walk away. This kind of truthful love is costly. It requires us to stay engaged when it would be easier to write someone off. It demands that we speak up when silence would be more comfortable. It asks us to risk relationship for the sake of someone's wellbeing. But this is exactly how God relates to us—with perfect truth about our condition and perfect love for our person. He doesn't ignore our sin because that would be unloving, nor does He condemn us for our sin because that would be untruthful about His grace.

Reflection Question

Where in your life have you been avoiding truthful conversations out of false love, or speaking truth without sufficient love?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Truth and love. Not one without the other."

Today's Application

Identify one relationship where you've been avoiding a necessary conversation because it feels uncomfortable. This might be with a family member whose choices concern you, a friend who's treating you poorly, or a colleague whose behaviour is affecting others. Before having this conversation, spend time in prayer asking God to give you His heart for this person and His wisdom for how to approach them. Plan what you want to say, focusing on specific behaviours rather than character attacks, and be prepared to listen as well as speak. Practice phrases like 'I care about you, which is why I need to share this concern' or 'I've noticed... and I'm worried because...' At the same time, examine areas where you might be speaking truth harshly without sufficient love. Are there people you've been correcting or criticising in ways that feel more about your frustration than their good? Consider how you might rebuild those relationships with more gentleness while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. Remember that speaking truth in love sometimes means saying hard things, but it always means saying them in ways that honour the person's dignity and express genuine care for their wellbeing.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are both full of grace and full of truth. Teach me to follow Your example in how I relate to others. Give me courage to speak difficult truths when love demands it, and give me gentleness to speak them in ways that reflect Your heart. Help me to care enough about people to risk uncomfortable conversations, and humble enough to examine my own motives first. When others speak truth to me, help me to receive it with grace, knowing that You often use the voices of those who love us to help us grow. Make me both bold and tender, honest and kind. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Courage of Loving Honesty

Evening Reflection

Tonight, reflect on the conversations you've had or avoided today. Speaking truth in love is one of the most challenging aspects of Christian relationships because it requires us to care enough to risk discomfort. It would be easier to either avoid difficult topics entirely or to speak harshly without concern for the other person's heart. But love calls us to a more excellent way—the way of costly honesty that seeks another's good above our own comfort. If you've had a difficult but loving conversation today, you may feel drained but also peaceful, knowing you've acted in love. If you're still preparing for such a conversation, you can rest tonight knowing that God will give you the words and wisdom you need when the time comes.

Evening Reflection

What did you discover today about your own capacity for speaking truth in love, and how might God be calling you to grow in this area?

Evening Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the example of Jesus, who never compromised truth for the sake of false peace, nor sacrificed love for the sake of being right. Give me rest tonight, and prepare my heart for the conversations You're calling me to have. Help me to be brave enough to love well. Amen.

Friday - Living Free from the Fear of Judgment

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18 NIV)

Devotional Thought

As we conclude this week's journey, we arrive at perhaps the most liberating truth of all: when we stop judging others, we also become free from the fear of being judged. This freedom is transformative because the fear of judgment shapes so much of our behaviour. We perform for others' approval, hide our struggles to avoid criticism, and exhaust ourselves trying to maintain images that aren't entirely true. But Jesus offers a different way of living—one rooted in the security of God's love rather than the uncertainty of human opinion. When we truly grasp that God's judgment of us has been satisfied in Christ, that His love for us isn't based on our performance but on His character, something profound shifts in our souls. We no longer need to prove ourselves worthy or hide our weaknesses. We can be honest about our struggles because our identity isn't threatened by our imperfections. This freedom transforms our relationships. When we're not constantly worried about what others think of us, we can focus on genuinely loving them. When we're not performing for approval, we can be authentic in our connections. When we're not defending our reputation, we can actually hear feedback and grow from it. The Henri Nouwen quotes from the sermon capture this beautifully: once we let go of our need to judge others, we experience immense inner freedom, and once we claim God's love that transcends all judgments, we overcome all fear of judgment. This is the gospel promise—not just forgiveness for our sins, but freedom from the exhausting cycle of judgment and fear that keeps us trapped in performance and pretense.

Reflection Question

How has the fear of being judged shaped your behaviour and relationships, and what would change if you truly believed you were secure in God's love?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Once we can let go of our need to judge others, we will experience an immense inner freedom.

Once we are free from judging, we will be also free for mercy."

Today's Application

Today, practice living from the security of God's love rather than the approval of others. Notice when you're tempted to judge someone and remember that you too are a recipient of grace. When you feel the fear of judgment creeping in—worry about what others think of your parenting, your work, your appearance, your spiritual maturity—remind yourself of your identity as God's beloved child. Take one risk today that you've been avoiding because of fear of judgment: share a struggle with a trusted friend, try something new despite not being perfect at it, or be honest about an area where you need help. In your interactions, practice the golden rule that Jesus mentions: treat others the way you want to be treated. When someone makes a mistake, respond with the grace you'd want to receive. When someone shares a struggle, offer the compassion you'd hope for. This week, make a commitment to one specific change in how you'll relate to others—perhaps speaking less critically about public figures, giving family members the benefit of the doubt, or addressing conflicts directly rather than talking about people behind their backs. Let this be a week where you taste the freedom that comes from living in God's love rather than human judgment.

Morning Prayer

God of perfect love, thank You for the freedom You offer from both judging others and fearing their judgment of me. Help me to live from the security of Your love rather than the shifting opinions of others. When I'm tempted to condemn someone, remind me of the grace You've shown me. When I'm afraid of being judged, remind me that my worth is found in You alone. Make me a person who extends mercy because I've received it, who offers grace because I've been graced, who loves without fear because I am perfectly loved by You. Let this freedom transform not just my relationships but my entire way of being in the world. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Resting in Perfect Love

Evening Reflection

As this week draws to a close, take a moment to rest in the profound truth you've been exploring: you are perfectly loved by the One whose opinion matters most. All the human judgments that have shaped your fears, all the criticism that has made you defensive, all the approval you've sought to earn—none of it compares to the settled love of God for you. This doesn't make you careless about how you live or indifferent to others' wellbeing. Instead, it frees you to love more authentically, to serve more joyfully, and to relate more honestly. You can go to sleep tonight knowing that the God who sees everything—your struggles, your failures, your secret fears, and your hidden hopes—loves you completely. Tomorrow you can wake up not needing to prove yourself worthy, but free to live from the worthiness already given to you in Christ.

Evening Reflection

As you reflect on this week's journey, how has your understanding of judgment, grace, and freedom evolved, and what will you carry forward?

Evening Prayer

Perfect Love, thank You for this week of learning to see myself and others through Your eyes of grace. As I rest tonight, I release all the judgments I've carried and all the fears that have bound me. Help me to wake tomorrow more free to love, more ready to extend grace, and more secure in Your unchanging love for me. Amen.