

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Judging, Asking, and the Narrow Way

Matthew 7:1–29

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 7 brings the Sermon on the Mount to its great crisis point, and what is doctrinally at stake is the very nature of saving discipleship. Jesus draws a series of sharp lines: between hypocritical judging and right discernment, between the wide road and the narrow gate, between false prophets and good fruit, and finally between those who merely say “Lord, Lord” and those who do the will of the Father. The central truth the chapter presses on us is that genuine faith in Jesus is a faith that obeys. The closing parable makes it unmistakable: the wise builder is the one who hears these words and does them. This is the clear answer of the whole sermon to the idea that we can be saved by a belief that never bears fruit in a changed and obedient life.

Yet this chapter was never meant only to draw doctrinal lines. Jesus is doing surgery on the heart. He wants to free your students from the exhausting work of inspecting everyone else while neglecting themselves. He wants to reawaken their prayer lives by showing them a Father who delights to give good gifts. He wants to give them the courage to take the narrow road when the crowd streams past on the wide one. Above all, He wants them to test the foundation of their own house before the storm tests it for them. The aim is honesty, the kind that leads not to despair but to a life rebuilt on the rock.

So teach for both. Help your class see clearly that obedience is not the enemy of grace but the shape that grace takes in a real life. And help them feel the tenderness underneath the warnings: a Savior who tells us about the coming storm precisely because He wants every house standing when it comes.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus says, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (7:1), and yet a few verses later He tells us not to give what is holy to dogs and to watch out for false prophets, which requires real discernment (7:6, 15). How do we hold together Jesus’ warning against judging with His command to judge rightly, and what kind of judging is He actually forbidding?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open by clearing away a common misunderstanding. Jesus’ words “Judge not” (7:1) are among the most quoted and most abused verses in the Bible, often used to silence any moral discernment at all. But Jesus cannot mean that, because in the same paragraph He tells us not

to throw pearls before swine (7:6) and a few lines later to watch out for false prophets and inspect their fruit (7:15–20). All of that requires careful, discerning judgment.

What Jesus forbids is the judging that is hypocritical, condemning, and self-exalting, the spirit that loves to pronounce verdicts on others while excusing itself. The measure we use, He warns, will be measured back to us (7:2). The harsh critic invites God's scrutiny on his own harshness. This is judgment as a posture of superiority, not the loving discernment that helps a brother.

Help students see the difference. Right judgment looks at sin honestly, but it begins with the mirror, not the microscope. It aims at restoration, not destruction. Later in Matthew, Jesus will lay out a careful process for confronting a sinning brother (18:15–17), and Paul will tell the church to judge those inside it (1 Corinthians 5:12). Scripture never asks us to abandon truth; it asks us to handle it humbly.

Land the point pastorally. The cure for hypocritical judging is not blindness to sin but honesty about our own. When we have wept over our own plank, we are finally fit to help with someone else's speck, and we do it gently, as fellow patients rather than as judges on a bench.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between hypocritical, condemning judgment and loving, biblical discernment (7:1–5; John 7:24)
- The principle of measure for measure: how we treat others sets the standard we invite for ourselves (7:2)
- The call to discern false teaching and guard what is holy, which requires real judgment (7:6, 15–20)
- Biblical confrontation of sin aimed at restoration, not destruction (Matthew 18:15–17; Galatians 6:1)
- Humility as the proper posture toward the sins of others

Discussion Prompts

- How can you tell the difference in your own heart between honest discernment and a critical, condemning spirit?
- Why does Jesus say that the way we judge others will be measured back to us?
- Who has confronted you gently and helpfully, and what made their correction easy to receive?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus pictures a man trying to remove a speck from his brother's eye while a plank juts out of his own (7:3–5). In what specific relationship right now are you more aware of the other person's fault than your own, and what would it look like this week to take the plank out first?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This first self-examining question moves Jesus' teaching from principle to mirror. The image is almost comic: a man with a plank protruding from his own eye, squinting to remove a tiny speck from his brother's (7:3-5). Jesus means it to be ridiculous. We are often blind to large faults in ourselves while sharp-eyed about small ones in others.

Notice that Jesus does not say to ignore the speck. He says, "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (7:5). Self-examination is not the end; it is what makes loving help possible. The order matters. Deal with yourself first, and your sight clears.

Invite students to get specific without forcing public confession. Ask them to think of one relationship, a spouse, a coworker, a fellow Christian, where they are quick to catalog the other person's faults. Then ask what plank of their own they have been refusing to face in that same relationship: impatience, pride, a critical tongue, an old resentment.

Keep the goal restorative. The aim is not a guilt trip but clearer sight. When we deal honestly with our own sin, we become safer people, the kind a brother can actually trust to help with the speck.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination as the necessary first step before correcting others (7:5; 2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The human tendency toward self-justification and blindness to our own sin
- Humility and honesty as the soil of healthy relationships
- The goal of correction as restoration of the brother, not personal vindication

Discussion Prompts

- In which relationship are you most aware of the other person's faults right now?
- What plank of your own might God be asking you to deal with first in that relationship?
- What is one honest step you could take this week to clear your own sight?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus promises, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find" (7:7), and grounds it in the goodness of the Father (7:9-11). What is Jesus teaching here about the character of God and the place of persistent prayer in the life of His children?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus turns from warning to invitation, and the tone warms. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (7:7). The verbs are present tense, picturing a continued, persistent asking. Jesus is not describing a single request but a posture of dependent, ongoing prayer.

He grounds the promise in the character of God as Father. He reasons from the lesser to the greater: if a human father, flawed as he is, would not hand his hungry child a stone or a serpent, “how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (7:11). The whole confidence of prayer rests on the goodness of the One we are praying to.

Help students see that this is not a promise that God is a vending machine who dispenses whatever we want. The Father gives “good things,” which means He answers as a wise parent, sometimes with yes, sometimes with something better than we asked. Luke’s parallel even says the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13). The promise is that God hears and gives good gifts, not that He grants every request unchanged.

Encourage your class to take God at His word here. Many believers have quietly stopped asking. Jesus is reopening the door, reminding us that the Father is not reluctant or stingy but eager to give good things to His children who keep coming to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as a good Father who delights to give good gifts to His children (7:9–11; James 1:17)
- Persistent, dependent prayer as a normal mark of the Christian life (7:7–8; Luke 18:1)
- Prayer answered according to God’s wisdom and goodness, not as a guarantee of every request
- The confidence of prayer resting on the character of God rather than on our own worthiness
- Asking for the things God most loves to give, including His Spirit and His kingdom (Luke 11:13; Matthew 6:33)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it tell you about God that Jesus compares Him to a father giving good gifts to his children?
- How does the goodness of the Father change the way you come to Him in prayer?
- What is the difference between asking God for whatever we want and asking Him for good things?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus invites us to keep asking, seeking, and knocking, yet many of us have grown quiet in prayer. Where have you stopped asking God for something because you assumed He would not answer, and what would it mean to bring that request back to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses Jesus' invitation into the actual prayer lives of your students. Many believers have a long list of requests they no longer pray, because somewhere along the way they decided God was not listening, or that the request was hopeless, or that they did not deserve an answer.

Jesus' words "keep on asking" directly confront that quiet resignation. The Father is not annoyed by His children's requests. Jesus tells a parable elsewhere precisely so that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). Persistence in prayer is not nagging an unwilling God; it is the faithful return of a child to a loving Father.

Invite students to name, privately or aloud, one request they have abandoned. A wandering child, a broken marriage, a stubborn sin, a long illness, a dream that died. Then ask what it would mean to bring it back to God, not with a demand, but with renewed trust in His goodness.

Be tender here. Some have stopped asking because of real grief and unanswered prayer. Do not minimize that pain. But gently point them back to the Father whose answers are wise and good, who can be trusted with the request whatever His answer turns out to be.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Persevering in prayer as an act of faith in the Father's goodness (Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- The danger of letting disappointment silence our prayers
- Trusting God's wisdom even when His answer is not what we asked
- Prayer as ongoing relationship with a Father, not a transaction

Discussion Prompts

- What is one request you have stopped bringing to God, and why did you stop?
- What would it look like to bring that request back to the Father this week?
- How can you keep trusting God's goodness even when the answer is delayed or different than you hoped?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus describes a wide gate and an easy road that "leads to destruction," and a narrow gate and a hard road that "leads to life," and He says "those who find it are few" (7:13-14). What does this teach about the nature of salvation and the way of discipleship, and why does the popular road end somewhere other than where the crowd expects?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus paints two roads. One has a wide gate and an easy way, and “those who enter by it are many”; it “leads to destruction.” The other has a narrow gate and a hard way, and “those who find it are few”; it “leads to life” (7:13–14). The contrast is stark and deliberate, and it cuts against the assumption that the popular path must be the safe one.

Notice first that the narrow gate is not narrow because God is stingy with salvation. The gate is Christ Himself, and the call goes out to all (7:24; 11:28). It is narrow because there is one way to the Father, through Jesus (John 14:6), and because entering it requires that we leave behind the baggage of self-rule and sin. We cannot drag everything through a narrow gate.

Notice second that the road beyond the gate is hard. Jesus never promised an easy discipleship. He spoke of taking up a cross, denying ourselves, and remaining faithful to the end (Matthew 16:24; 10:22). The popular road is wide precisely because it asks nothing and demands no surrender. Its ease is the very reason it ends in destruction.

Be clear and gracious about why the crowd ends up somewhere other than it expects. Many assume that good intentions, religious activity, or simply following the majority will be enough. Jesus says otherwise. The question is not how many are walking beside you but whether you have entered through Him and are walking His hard, narrow, life-giving way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The two ways: the broad road to destruction and the narrow road to life (7:13–14; Deuteronomy 30:19)
- Christ as the one narrow gate, the only way to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- Discipleship as a hard, costly road of self-denial and faithfulness (Matthew 16:24; 10:22)
- The genuine, universal gospel call: the gate is open, and people can truly enter it
- The danger of assuming that the popular or easy path is the safe one

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus say the gate to life is narrow and the road is hard?
- How does the picture of two roads challenge the idea that the majority must be right?
- What does it mean that the narrow gate is genuinely open to everyone who will enter through Christ?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus says the narrow road is hard and the crowd is on the wide one. Where in your daily life are you most tempted to follow the comfortable majority instead of the harder way of Christ, and what is one place you need to choose the narrow gate?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the two roads off the page and onto Monday morning. The wide road is not only a destination; it is a daily set of small, comfortable choices to go along with the crowd. The narrow road is walked one ordinary decision at a time.

Help students locate the specific pressure points. For one it is the conversation at work where everyone is cutting an ethical corner. For another it is the entertainment everyone watches, the gossip everyone shares, the spending everyone assumes, the Sunday everyone treats as optional. The crowd is rarely loud; it simply moves, and it is easy to drift with it.

Ask each person to name one place where following Jesus would mean stepping off the wide road this week. Be concrete. Vague resolve fades; a specific choice can be made. The narrow way becomes real only in particular decisions.

Encourage them that walking the hard road is not walking it alone. The narrow way is crowded enough with fellow travelers, the body of Christ, and Christ Himself walks it with us. The difficulty is real, but so is His presence and the life it leads to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Daily faithfulness as the lived shape of the narrow road
- The pressure of the crowd and the courage to follow Christ instead (Romans 12:2)
- The encouragement of the body of Christ in walking the hard way (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Concrete obedience as the test of which road we are actually on

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to drift along with the comfortable crowd?
- What is one specific choice this week where you can step onto the narrow road?
- Who can walk the hard road alongside you and help you stay faithful?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus warns of false prophets who come “in sheep’s clothing” and tells us we will “recognize them by their fruits” (7:15–20). How does this teach us to evaluate teachers and teaching, and why does Jesus point us to fruit rather than to charisma, popularity, or impressive words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus warns of false prophets who “come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (7:15). The danger is camouflage. False teachers rarely announce themselves; they look and sound like the real thing, which is exactly what makes them dangerous to the flock.

How then do we tell them apart? Jesus gives a clear test: “You will recognize them by their fruits” (7:16, 20). Not by their charisma, their crowds, their eloquence, or their confidence, but

by their fruit. Fruit includes both the character of their lives and the effect of their teaching. A diseased tree, however beautiful its leaves, cannot in the end produce good fruit (7:17–18).

Anchor this in the wider New Testament pattern. We are to test teaching against the apostles' doctrine, the completed word of God (Acts 17:11; Galatians 1:8–9; 1 John 4:1). The completed New Testament is our authority and our standard. A teacher who departs from it, however gifted, is to be marked and avoided, no matter how impressive the packaging.

Help your students grow discerning without becoming suspicious of everyone. The point is not paranoia but watchfulness. Jesus loves His sheep enough to warn them about wolves. We honor Him by knowing His word well enough to recognize what does not match it, and by watching whether a teacher's life and message bear the fruit of genuine godliness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality and danger of false teachers who disguise themselves (7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13–15)
- Fruit, both character and doctrine, as the God-given test of teaching (7:16–20; Matthew 12:33)
- The completed New Testament as the authoritative standard for testing all teaching (Acts 17:11; Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The difference between charisma or popularity and faithfulness to the truth
- Watchful discernment as an act of love for Christ and His church

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus point us to fruit rather than to charisma or popularity when evaluating a teacher?
- How does knowing Scripture well help you recognize teaching that does not match it?
- What is the difference between healthy discernment and an unhealthy, suspicious spirit?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus says a healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit and a diseased tree cannot bear good fruit (7:17–18). When you look honestly at the fruit of your own life, your words, your relationships, your private habits, what is it telling you about the health of the tree, and where do you long for God to change it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns the fruit test inward. Jesus says a healthy tree bears good fruit and a diseased tree bears bad fruit (7:17–18), and elsewhere He adds that “out of the

abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Fruit is the honest report of the root.

Invite students to look at the actual fruit of their lives rather than their intentions. Our words reveal us, especially the unguarded ones. Our relationships reveal us, especially with those closest to us. Our private habits, what we do when no one is watching, reveal the health of the tree more truthfully than any public performance.

Be careful to lead this toward grace, not despair. The point of inspecting fruit is not to condemn ourselves but to be honest about where the tree needs the Lord's healing. A diseased branch is not the end of the story; the Vinedresser prunes and heals (John 15:1-2). Honesty about bad fruit is the first step toward real change.

Encourage each person to name one place where the fruit troubles them, a habitual sharpness of tongue, a strained relationship, a hidden compromise, and to bring it honestly to God. The goal is a healthier tree, transformed from the root by the work of Christ in the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fruit as the honest evidence of the heart's true condition (7:17-18; Matthew 12:34)
- The need for inward transformation, not merely outward performance
- God as the Vinedresser who prunes and heals His people (John 15:1-2)
- Honest self-examination as the path to genuine change, not to despair

Discussion Prompts

- When you look at the fruit of your words and relationships, what is it telling you about your heart?
- Where do you most long for God to bring healing and change?
- What would it look like to bring that area honestly to God this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father" (7:21), and warns that some who prophesied and cast out demons in His name will hear, "I never knew you" (7:22-23). What does this passage teach about the difference between saying we believe and actually obeying, and how does it expose the popular idea that we are saved by faith alone apart from doing the Father's will?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and it deserves your fullest care, because here Jesus speaks the most sobering words in the whole sermon. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father

who is in heaven” (7:21). The line is drawn not between believers and unbelievers in the world, but between two kinds of people who both call Jesus Lord.

Sit with the terror of verses 22 and 23. On the last day many will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” These are not pagans; they are religiously active people who used Jesus’ name. And He will say to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” The deciding factor was not their words or even their works, but whether they did the will of the Father.

Draw out the doctrinal point plainly and graciously. Jesus is teaching that a faith which says “Lord, Lord” but does not obey is not saving faith at all. This is the same truth James will later make explicit: faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). It directly exposes the popular idea that we are saved by faith alone, apart from doing the Father’s will. Jesus Himself refuses that division. To truly call Him Lord is to do what He says (Luke 6:46).

Be careful, at the same time, to guard the gospel of grace. Jesus is not teaching that we earn salvation by piling up works. The whole sermon flows from grace, and the obedience He calls for is the obedience of faith, hearing His words and doing them because we trust and love Him (Romans 1:5; 6:17). Saving faith and faithful obedience are not rivals; they are one. The will of the Father, supremely, is that we believe in the Son and follow Him (John 6:29), which the New Testament describes as believing the gospel, repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized into Him, and walking faithfully (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4).

Close with both warning and comfort. The warning is real: self-deception is possible, and saying the right words is not enough. The comfort is just as real: Jesus knows His own, and the one who does the Father’s will, however weak and stumbling, will hear not “I never knew you” but “well done.” Lead your class to examine themselves honestly, then to rest in a Lord who truly knows and keeps those who follow Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saving faith as a faith that obeys, doing the will of the Father (7:21; Luke 6:46)
- The sobering possibility of religious self-deception, calling Jesus Lord without truly knowing Him (7:22–23)
- The refutation of salvation by faith alone apart from obedience (James 2:17, 26; Matthew 7:21)
- Obedience as the fruit and expression of grace, not a meritorious earning of salvation (Romans 1:5; Ephesians 2:8–10)
- The will of the Father fulfilled in believing the gospel, repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized, and walking faithfully (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4)
- Christ’s true knowing of His own as the believer’s assurance (John 10:14, 27)
- The need to remain faithful, since some who once served can fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so sobering that the people in this passage called Jesus “Lord” and did mighty works, yet were not known by Him?
- How does this teaching expose the popular idea that we are saved by faith alone, apart from doing the Father’s will?
- How does obedience that flows from love for Christ differ from trying to earn our salvation by works?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole sermon, from the Beatitudes to the two builders. Name one specific area where you have been a hearer of these words but not yet a doer, and what is the next concrete step in building that part of your life on the rock of Christ this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather up the whole Sermon on the Mount and bring it to its decisive point. Jesus ends with two builders (7:24–27). Both hear the same words. Both build houses that look the same in fair weather. The only difference is that one acts on what he hears and the other does not, and that difference is invisible until the storm comes.

Press the central image. The wise man is defined precisely as “everyone who hears these words of mine and does them” (7:24). The foolish man “hears these words of mine and does not do them” (7:26). The whole sermon comes down to this hinge: not admiring the teaching, not even understanding it, but doing it. The rock is obedient faith in Christ’s words.

Invite students to look back across the sermon and find the one place where they have been a hearer but not yet a doer. The Beatitudes, anger, lust, love of enemies, money, worry, prayer, judging, the narrow gate. Ask each person to name the specific area and the next concrete step. The storm will come for every house; the time to build on rock is now, in fair weather.

Close with worship and hope, not anxiety. Notice that the crowds were astonished, because Jesus taught “as one who had authority” (7:28–29). This is the voice of the Lord Himself, and to build on His words is to build on Him. Lead your class to marvel that the same Christ whose words can shake us is the rock who will hold us when the rains fall and the floods rise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hearing and doing the words of Christ as the rock that withstands the storm (7:24–27; James 1:22)
- The certainty that testing comes to every life, and only the well-founded house stands
- The authority of Christ and His words as the foundation of the Christian life (7:28–29)
- The integration of doctrine and daily obedience as the goal of the whole sermon
- Christ Himself as the rock on which a faithful life is built (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Discussion Prompts

- Looking back over the whole sermon, where have you been a hearer but not yet a doer?
- What is the next concrete step in building that part of your life on the rock this week?
- How can this class pray for you as you build on the words of Christ?