The Beam In Your Own Eye

MATTHEW 7:1-6 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

You've already been measured with mercy, so measure other people by the same mercy you got instead of by the harsh yardstick you keep in your pocket for everyone but yourself.

Opening Lines

Picture a man walking across the room to help his friend get a fleck of sawdust out of his eye, and there's a two-by-four sticking out of his own face. That's the joke Jesus is telling, and everybody in that crowd laughed, because everybody knew that guy.

Before You Teach

- Goal: By the end, each person names the beam they've been ignoring while eyeing someone else's speck, and leaves willing to deal with their own first. Nobody should walk out feeling licensed to keep score on a brother.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time runs short, cut most of the pearls-and-pigs discussion (verse 6) and protect the beam-and-speck exercise. That mirror is where the change happens.
- Where the moment lives: The turn happens the moment a person stops naming the coworker's fault and names their own version of it out loud. The room goes quiet and honest right there.
- Your prep: Come having already found the beam in your own eye this week — a real one, a person you've been silently grading. You cannot lead people to a mirror you refused to look in.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening with the pinched-fingers/wide-arms visual (4 min). Read Matt 7:1-6 aloud (2 min). Teach 'measure for measure' + the hypokrites/mask word (8 min). You go first with a real beam (3 min). Questions 1-3, taking written answers on the handout before discussing (18 min). Land on question 5 and the big idea (7 min). Commitments and prayer (3 min). Transformation lives in question 3 — protect it. Cut first: most of verse 6 / pearls-and-pigs discussion.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening with the group-text hands-up (4 min). Read the passage (2 min).

Short teach: mask word + measure for measure (8 min). You go first, real and specific (4 min). Questions 1-5 with real silence between each and handout writing time (30 min). Table question and out-loud commitments (8 min). Spontaneous prayer over what was named (4 min). Transformation lives in questions 3-4 as people move from naming others to naming themselves. Cut first: question 1 if the room's already honest.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — the direct 'anyone you're keeping score on?' question (3 min). Read verses 1-5 together (2 min). One line of teaching: the beam is bigger than the speck, and hypokrites means actor in a mask (4 min). You go first with your own beam (3 min). Questions 3 and 5 only (12 min). Each name one beam to deal with and one scorecard to drop, and pray for each other briefly (6 min). Transformation lives in the honest exchange at question 3. Cut first: any teaching beyond the one-line explanation.

Go First, Go Real

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Remember week 1, when you went first and went real? This passage raises the stakes, because the exercise is confession-shaped: you're asking people to name someone they've been quietly judging. Level 4 rep: before you ask anyone else, you name a specific, current, unflattering example of your own beam — not a safe one from ten years ago, and not 'I can be a little judgmental sometimes.' Name the actual person you've been mentally grading and the actual standard you exempt yourself from. If you soften it into a generality, the whole room will follow you into safe generalities and nothing will happen.

Why This Passage Matters

This is one of the most quoted and most misused sentences Jesus ever said. 'Don't judge' gets thrown around as a shield against any correction at all, and that is not what he meant — the same paragraph ends with pearls and pigs, which requires sharp discernment. So you are teaching people to hold two things at once: no self-righteous, self-exempting verdicts, and yes to clear-eyed, gentle honesty once your own eye is clean. That's a hard balance, and most rooms have never had anyone walk them through it carefully. Behind the humor of the beam sits the rabbis' old conviction that God deals with us in the same proportion we deal with others — measure for measure. And behind that sits the gospel: the one Man with every right to judge came to be judged in our place, so that a forgiven person could look at a brother's fault with the same mercy they were shown. You get to hand people both the relief of being off the throne of judgment and the freedom to love a friend honestly. Very few passages let you give both of those in the same hour. This one does.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does anything, you do the beam-and-speck exercise on yourself out loud.

Say it plainly: 'Here's whose speck I've been staring at this week' — name the fault you keep noticing in a real person. Then turn the mirror: 'And here's my beam — the exact same thing, or worse, in me, that I never charge myself with.' Sit in the discomfort of that for a second instead of rushing past it. When you go first and go real, you've shown the room that this is survivable, and you've made it far more expensive for them to hide behind vague answers.

Bring Your Own Story

- PROMPT: A time you were quick to spot someone's fault and later realized you did the exact same thing — the beam moment.
- PROMPT: A time someone corrected you gently, having clearly dealt with their own stuff first, and it actually landed instead of stinging.
- PROMPT: A conversation where you either joined a pile-on about someone not in the room, or refused to — and how each felt afterward.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'I've learned over the years to extend grace to others.' Real — 'I ripped my brother-in-law for being unreliable for a solid year before I noticed I hadn't returned three of his calls.'
- GUARDRAIL: Keep it one honest incident, not a cleaned-up moral summary — raw beats impressive every time.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Hold up two fingers pinched almost together — that's a speck of sawdust. Now stretch your arms wide — that's a roof beam. Jesus says we're the guy squinting at the speck in someone else's eye with the beam sticking out of our own. Everyone in that crowd laughed, because everyone knew that person. This morning we're going to find out if that person is us."

A concrete visual image disarms a heavy topic and gets everyone in the same picture before you make a point.

SMALL GROUP: "Quick show of hands, honest: who's been in a group text this week where somebody who isn't there got picked apart? Yeah. Me too. Keep that in mind — because that's exactly the room Jesus is talking into tonight."

A shared confession of a common, low-stakes habit lowers the wall before you go to the deeper places.

COFFEE: "Can I ask you something weird? Is there a person you've kind of been keeping score on — a running tally of everything they do wrong? Don't answer out loud yet. I've got one. Jesus has a few words for both of us."

A direct, personal question spoken between friends earns the right to the passage's honesty.

Teaching the Word

The word to sit on is 'hypokrites' — the Greek behind 'You hypocrite!' in verse 5. It doesn't originally mean a sneaky liar; it meant a stage actor, the man who spoke his lines from behind a mask. So picture that: the beam-eyed man reaching for his friend's face is performing the role of Doctor Eye Surgeon while wearing a mask that hides the plank in his own head. He's playing a part he has no business playing. That's what harsh judging is — acting the part of God, the one real Judge, while the mask slips. Jesus isn't telling him never to help his friend. He says: take the mask off, get the beam out, and THEN you'll see clearly to help. 'First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.' [Let that sit in silence.]

Discussion Questions

1. When you hear 'Don't judge,' what do you think most people mean by it, and what do you think Jesus actually meant?

Coaching note: Let them air the common misuse first; don't correct it immediately. Then steer toward verse 6 (pearls, pigs) which proves he isn't banning all discernment.

If it stalls: Have you ever heard someone say 'don't judge me' to dodge any pushback at all? Is that what Jesus is doing here — yes or no?

2. Why does Jesus make the difference so ridiculous — a splinter versus a whole beam — instead of comparing two equal faults?

Coaching note: Draw out that the size gap is the point: the judge's own fault is bigger and he can't even see it. Tie to 'measure for measure' from the source cards.

If it stalls: If the guy has a beam in his eye, can he even see well enough to do surgery on anyone? What's Jesus saying with that?

3. Whose speck have you been noticing lately — and be honest, where do you do a version of the same thing?

Coaching note: This is the mirror. You've already gone first, so hold silence and let it be uncomfortable. Do not rescue the quiet. Real answers come after about eight seconds.

If it stalls: Think of one person who's been annoying you this week. Just to yourself first: is there any way you're guilty of the same thing you're annoyed at?

4. Jesus says get the beam out FIRST, then help your brother. What does 'seeing clearly to help' actually look like versus 'lecturing'?

Coaching note: Pull in Galatians 6:1 — restore 'with a spirit of gentleness.' The goal isn't to disqualify all correction; it's to make help honest and humble. Push against 'so we should never say anything.'

If it stalls: Think of a time someone corrected you and it actually helped. What made it land instead of sting?

5. If God has measured you with mercy instead of the harshness your record deserved, how does that change the yardstick you use on other people?

Coaching note: This is the gospel turn — the whole point. Let it land: the forgiven eye sees clearly. Don't rush to application; let someone connect their own mercy to the mercy they owe.

If it stalls: Name one specific thing God has NOT held against you. Does knowing that make it easier or harder to hold something against someone else?

Questions You May Hear

"So does this mean I can never confront anyone or call out sin?"

No — verse 6 about not throwing pearls to pigs requires real discernment, and John 7:24 says 'start judging justly.' Jesus bans the harsh, self-exempting verdict, not honest, humble correction after you've dealt with your own fault first.

"What does 'with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' actually mean?"

It's from a Jewish idea the crowd knew well — measure for measure. God deals with people in the same proportion they deal with others: the merciful are met with mercy, the rigid meet a rigid reckoning.

"Who are the 'dogs' and 'pigs' in verse 6?"

Both were unclean animals in that culture, standing for people set on trampling holy things rather than receiving them. Proverbs 9:7-8 spells it out: correct a scoffer and you get insult, so discernment decides where holy words will actually be welcomed.

"Isn't calling someone a 'hypocrite' itself a judgment?"

The word means a stage actor wearing a mask. Jesus is naming a specific role someone is performing — playing judge over others while ignoring themselves — which is exactly the self-exempting judging he's warning against.

For Experienced Leaders

- Audit where your eyes went this hour. Most teachers lock onto two or three responsive faces and teach the whole room to them; on a confession-shaped lesson like this, the people you're not looking at feel it and go silent. Next time, physically stand on the side you usually ignore and teach toward one person outside your defaults.
- Do not let the room turn this into a session of naming other people's judgmentalism. The second someone says 'this is exactly my mother-in-law,' gently turn the mirror back: 'And where's your beam?'
- When you go first with a real, current beam, resist explaining it away or adding a redemptive bow. The unresolved honesty is what gives everyone else permission to be honest too.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one specific beam they're going to deal with this week — and one person they'll stop keeping score on. Then take the book-wide table question: name one thing from these weeks you actually want to start doing, and ask someone here to check in on you.

Close by praying out loud over the exact things people just named — the specific person someone said they'd stop grading, the specific beam someone confessed. Don't reach for a written prayer; saying their own words back to God is what makes it real.

If you run out of time: If the room gets honest at question 3 and stays there the whole time, stay there. That mirror moment is the whole lesson; you don't need to reach question 5 to have succeeded.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text each person one line: 'How's the beam? And did you drop the scorecard on that person yet?' Nothing more — just show you remember what they named.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/7-1-6/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- The speck I keep noticing in someone else this week is:
- My beam — where I do a version of that same thing:
- One person I've secretly been keeping a scorecard on. (You don't have to show anyone.)
- 'Hypokrites' = a stage actor in a mask. Write the role you've been performing over someone:
- One thing from these weeks I actually want to start doing — and who's checking in on me:

Take-home actions:

- Next time a conversation or group text turns to picking apart someone who isn't there, be the one who stops it — stay quiet, or say something honest and kind about that person instead.
- Before you correct anyone this week, deal with your own version of the fault first: name where you do the same thing, and only then speak, gently and without a lecture.
- Drop the scorecard on that one friend. Call or message them this week not to correct anything, but just to encourage them — and thank God for one specific thing about them before you hit send.

Grace changes how you look at everyone around you, because it first changed how God looked at you.