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The Golden Rule

Good morning, if you have your bible with you today please hold it in your hand and let's say this together, "This is my bible. It is God speaking to me. I am who it says I am. I can do what it says I can do. I can have what it says I can have. So I open my heart today to hear God speak a word that will change my life forever." Now let's open up our bibles today and turn to Matthew chapter 7. Today's message is called "The Golden Rule". I'm sure we've all heard about this golden rule and why shouldn't we, it's been seen throughout antiquity in ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt, Babylon, China, India and incorporated in many religions, but the most important reason we should all know of it is because it's one of God's principles on how we should conduct ourselves. So what does our Father in Heaven, the one true God say about it? In the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18) the Lord says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."(NKJV) and in the New Testament (Matthew 7:2) Jesus says, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."(NKJV) and later in verse 12 Jesus says it plainly, clearly enough for us all to understand, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."(NKJV) You see, God is the same! From the beginning to the end, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, He is our "Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."(James 1:17) Malachi 3:6 says, "For I am the Lord, I do not change.", Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.", and John 1:1 says, "In the *beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We need to know that the whole bible is one story, a love story inspired by God showing us how He first loved us and how He continually desires to be in a relationship with us. And don't we know what a good God He is, that He not only shares His desires with us, but He also shares with us how we're to get there, what we're to do in order to be in a close relationship with our Father God.

Recently I've been trying to get in the habit of reading my bible before I go to bed, outside of my daily reading plan. Joshua 1:8 has really been convicting me lately, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it **day and night**, that you may observe to do

according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” I want to be prosperous and have good success but I often forget what I have to do to get there. So when this verse comes to mind, it’s a nice reminder what I need to do. Well, I was reading in Matthew chapter 7, specifically in verse 6 which starts off, “Do not give what is holy to the dogs.”, and I got stumped so I asked God to show me what this verse meant. I knew it had to be related to the material but I just didn’t see how. Well I believe God answered my prayer and gave me insight that I had never seen before.

Sometimes it’s difficult to read across sections to get the complete meaning. Instead we often pay attention to the smaller bits and get consumed in them. I used to teach saxophone lessons to beginners and that was a typical problem we had to work through. The first thing you would do is teach them how to produce a note correctly. I say “correctly” because anyone can play a note on the sax, but it takes a special person to listen and still give an encouraging smile as you hear what sounds like a flock of loud mad geese coming out of the bell of their saxophone. So playing a note correctly, well, it makes the rest of the lesson more bearable. Then as they progress, more pitches are added and eventually they can play the complete range of their instrument. Now in the process you introduce written music but they tend to play the melodies the same way they played the notes, without context. At this stage they don’t know that the composer, while caring about each note, cares more about the performer expressing to their audience the true nature of the piece. I find myself going through this process with God’s commandments. Ok, I need to rid myself of pride, of lustful eyes, of a filthy mouth, and on and on and I try to do each step but I’m so often focused on the command that I miss what it comes from, the true nature of God, and so I’m unable to express that to others. So even though they’re playing the right notes and rhythms in the piece they’re still missing the point, just like I’m missing the point when I follow God’s commands in deed but don’t understand God’s true nature. What is God’s true nature then? Well, in 1 John 4:8 the bible says, God is love. God wants us to follow His commands, but He ALSO wants our hearts. He wants to be in a relationship with us. I’ve heard many composers say this and as a fellow composer I would agree. It would be better to play some wrong notes and convey the message of the piece than to play all the right notes but miss the point. God knows we’ll stumble along the way but he wants our hearts and wants us to convey God’s message of love to others. That’s the point!

Now that I’m off track, let me bring this back around. Like the musician who can’t see the point of the piece through all the notes, or as the common idiom says, “you can’t see the forest through the trees.” Well, that’s how I was reading Matthew chapter 7. I was too focused on how each section related

to its heading that I couldn't see how the sections tied together to form a bigger picture. But I believe God answered my prayer and gave me a deeper understanding of what Jesus was saying. I believe all of chapter 7 is God revealing to us a deeper understanding of the Golden Rule and how this activates God's blessings for us. This Golden Rule not only applies to our relationship with others, but I believe it's the basis for our relationship with God.

I love that God is so practical. He knows us, how fragile we are, how needy we are, and yet He provides in all areas of life. He demonstrates this all throughout the bible, and He demonstrates this again to us as He gives us cautions, self-checks, tells us who His blessings apply to, what His blessing are to us, and how His blessings are activated. We haven't even talked about the good stuff yet, His blessings for us, but first we need to understand the type of person whom God is willing to bless.

So let's start with God's **caution** for us. Matthew 7:13-14 says, "Enter by **the narrow gate**; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Let's determine today to be one of those few who find it. It's not too late and we know where to find it, it's in Jesus! In John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." No matter what has happened in your life before today, no matter how far off you are from God's righteousness, God's grace will cover the gap. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God is not willing that we enter the wide gate, but He gives us the choice. God's telling us what we need to know at the onset. He's not sugar coating things for us, He's telling us that it will be difficult but it is *doable*, and like most difficult things, it is well worth it, it will lead to life!

After God gives us the caution He gives us a **self-check**, letting us know how we can tell whether or not we're going through the narrow gate or the wide gate. He says in verse 16 that "**you will know them by their fruits.**", and in verse 18, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit." So it's safe to say that those entering through the wide gate are bad trees bearing bad fruit and the destruction the gate leads to is detailed in verse 19, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Yikes, now that's a self-check and a reality check too... But that also means that those entering through the narrow gate are good trees bearing good fruit and this gate leads to life. Hallelujah!

Now we know that those who do good works are good and they enter the narrow gate in Jesus leading to life in the Father. This in itself is great news, eternal life with God our Father, but He also has blessings in store for us here on earth. So **who gets these blessings?** If you're thinking they only belong to those who bear good fruit, you're right! But you may be wondering how that can be since Jesus Himself said in verse 8 that these blessings are for "everyone". Well, both are correct and I hope to share with you some clarification that God recently revealed to me. This used to be a passage that I just couldn't believe, that those who bear bad fruit entering the wide gate will receive His blessings? The reason I couldn't believe it was because I didn't know who Jesus was talking about when He said "everyone". When we talk about "**everyone**", do we mean every person on the face of the earth? Or do we mean everyone we know of? If you say, "Everyone is going to so and so's party!" do you mean everyone one on the face of the earth is going to their party or do you just mean everyone you know of? You mean everyone you know of. Well, that's what I believe Jesus is saying. Look at verse 23, Jesus says, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Let's make this even easier to understand, Jesus says "**I never knew you who practice lawlessness!**" Or you could put it a different way, I never knew you who do evil works! So when Jesus says "Everyone" in verse 8, we know that He is *not* talking about those who are lawless, bearing bad fruit, and doing evil works because He doesn't even know them! But He does know those who practice the law, those who bear good fruit, and those who do good works. So who do His blessings apply to? They apply to everyone who does good works by practicing God's law, His commandments.

Now when we read my troubled passage it will make more sense. Verse 6 says, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." Now it seems clear that we know who the dogs are, they are the lawless. And when we cast holy things, God's blessings, or your pearls before them, just like swine the lawless will trample over them and turn against you. This brings to mind a proverb which illustrates how your relationship with someone can either be positively or negatively affected, depending on which type of person your good gift goes to. Proverbs 9:7-9 says, "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." Correcting, rebuking, instructing, and teaching are all referring to the same thing but they each indicate the type of person receiving them. To someone who doesn't want it, help is considered correction; but to someone who wants it, help is considered instruction and teaching. The difference is that the one who considers it correction is prideful, and the one who

considers it instruction is humble. The heart makes all the difference. You see, God is calling us to be humble, submitting to God, so we can receive His blessings. And God knows all who keep His laws and to *everyone* of them He allows to partake in His blessings.

Ok, now we know the cautions, the self-checks, and who God's blessings apply to, but **what is the blessing were talking about?** Well in verse 7 Jesus describes this blessing. He says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Wow, that sounds awesome! But some of you may say, "John, does this really apply to me?" Well, we know that God wants this for His whole creation, but it only applies to those He knows, those who keep His laws and who bear good fruit. So the question to ask is this, "Do I keep His laws and bear good fruits?" You know, God is a merciful God and the bible says in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But this isn't an open license to sin. Romans 6:15 says, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" God knows that we'll stumble along the way so His grace has been provided through our confession that will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. However we need to continue along the path towards Godliness by walking according to the Holy Spirit. Throughout the whole bible God is calling us to repentance, to turn away from a life of sin and turn towards a life with God. It doesn't matter where you are in life, turn now and don't turn back. If you read the Old Testament you see story after story about God calling His people back to Him despite the countless sins against Him. Don't be so full of pride that you can't turn from your ways and follow God. He wants you! But it's up to you to choose him. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."

Now we know who His blessings apply to and what His blessings are, is that it? You might be thinking, "John, are you saying if I keep His commandments and bear good fruit, then all I have to do is ask and I will receive?" I would say yes because the bible says in verse 8, "For everyone who asks receives." Unfortunately we can't count on people that often to keep their word, but you can count on God to keep His promises! In Ezekiel 36:36 God says, "I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it." These declarations of God's faithfulness are all throughout the bible. Now after Jesus states what His blessings are for us He says in verse 12, "therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." This is where **the Golden Rule comes into play, it activates His blessings in our lives**. You could put it this way, "if you want God to bless you, you also bless God". How do we bless God then? We bless God by

keeping His word, His Laws, His commandments. Like we said earlier, it is only *those* people that will receive His blessings so now we've come full circle. There is one more thing I want to point out. By applying the Golden Rule to the blessing in another way, we might think about it like this, "If you ask God and He gives to you, then likewise, if God asks you, you need to give to Him! If you seek God and He allows you to find Him, then likewise, if God seeks you, you need to allow Him to find you! And if you knock and God opens to you, then likewise, if God knocks, you need to open to Him!" Jesus is saying that it goes both ways, the Golden Rule. This is what really caught my attention. Am I doing what God is asking me to do? Am I giving what God is asking me to give? Am I allowing Him to seek me by spending time away from distractions and with Him? Am I opening up my heart to God as He knocks on the door of my heart? If I'm not, I believe I'm hindering God from giving to me like He wants to give to me. "With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

So how do I receive these blessings God already has in store for me?

- First, you'll want to **enter the narrow gate that leads to life**. How? By accepting Jesus into your heart. Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Remember Lord means King, Ruler, Master. In modern days we could think of Lord as a Leader, Supervisor, Commanding Officer, or your Boss. The bible says, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."(Hebrews 13:17) So when you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, you're saying that you'll let Him lead you and that you'll follow Him.
- Second, **be a good tree that bears good fruit**. Paul's letters provide many insights into cleaning up your heart so that you can produce good fruit. Also, King David, the man after God's own heart, has a lot of practical insights in his psalms and King Solomon likewise with his proverbs. It's also important to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit living inside of you. As He shines light on the dark areas of your soul, let Him work on cleaning you up, and continue the process. But do your part and protect your heart from the wickedness of this world.

- Lastly, **use good measure when blessing God** to allow Him to pour out His blessings on you. Think of the Golden Rule and how it applies to your relationship with your Heavenly Father.

When I think of this Golden Rule and how it applies in my own life regarding my relationship with God, two verses come to mind, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33) and “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:7) These two verses stick out in my mind because I can see how when I use good measure by pouring more of myself into God’s word, He likewise uses good measure making Himself known to me more personally. I can feel God’s presence in my life more tangibly when I spend more time with Him. How does that look in my life? Well, I try to be consistent reading God’s word in the bible every day. Some days I miss, and other days I read more than necessary. I’m working through a New Living Translation Chronological Bible this year and I find as I ask God for help and advice and truly expect Him to answer me that He does answer me in His word. He’ll either highlight a verse in my mind as I read or a verse will just come to mind that seems to answer what I’m struggling with. Also, I try to listen to sermons more than just on Sunday. Sometimes I might go days without listening to sermons on my ipod or computer, but I can tell you that when I do I get so much out of it. You know, life changes all the time and you have to adapt to it as your routine changes. I first started listening to sermons regularly while on deployment. I would have to wait in the laundry room on the ship for hours as I waited for available machines and then waited for my clothes to be done. For me this was a perfect opportunity to throw on a sermon or two and hear God speak to me. And boy, was it ever necessary while on deployment. Then when I got back to the states my routine changed again and with the new luxury of being able to multitask while doing laundry I found that old routine just didn’t fit me anymore. So what I found that worked for me in the states was to put on a sermon while I cooked breakfast and cleaned up afterwards. This worked great for me and still does, and another situation that works great for me now is while I’m driving to class. It usually takes between 30 min to an hour which is just right to fit in a sermon. Also, I love to get in some additional reading by different authors talking about biblical things such as biblical marriage, being a godly man, or apologetics. Lately I’ve been bad about this extra reading but I’ve been feeling a tug to get back into it. This process is different for everyone. But I believe the important thing to remember is that the more we get God’s word into us, into our hearts by hearing and seeing it, the more it will come out of us. “...For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) I’m turning 32 this year and I’m sad to say that I’ve lived the majority of those years out of God’s

will. 1 John 2:16 says, "For all that is in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world." This sums up the majority of my life, but not anymore! I refuse to be bound by satan anymore. He has no authority in my life anymore because I'm a child of God, redeemed by my Father in heaven, and I'm now the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. By humbling myself, giving God my cares, by confessing my sins to Him I'm cover by the blood of Jesus. My old life of sin was crucified with Jesus on the cross, and so the life I now live I live for God. The bible says, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." I finally get it! When I choose to put my life and my desires aside and seek God, He gives me life. He gives me a peace which truly surpasses all worldly understanding. We're called to trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding. It might not make sense to us, but it doesn't matter. Trust God! The bible says, "let God be true, but every man a liar". He's the one we can always count on if we seek him with our whole heart. Before God really spoke to me on deployment I couldn't see how I could give up my life. But when you're stuck on a ship, removed from your support system, and you feel all alone, you realize that being in God's peace is the best thing in the world. No matter what happened to me at work, if I humbled myself and put my focus on God life just got better. So now that I'm back in the world, not on an isolated ship, I have to daily make a decision to follow God and resist the devil. The bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." And He does!!!! So let's make a decision today to put God first in our lives, because He will not disappoint you if you do.

Let's pray. "Thank you God for loving us and for desiring to have a close relationship with each one of us. Forgive us for our sins and help us to seek You with all our heart. Rid us of pride in our hearts and give us a humble spirit. Give us the heart of a servant to follow You and to do Your will. Let us not forget that we can ask You and that You will answer us. Give us a heart to do all things for You and for Your glory. In Jesus' name, the name above all names, amen.