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Applications from the Mountaintop

This chapter is based on the second part of the sermon on the mount passage from Matthew 5. I addressed the first part of the sermon, the Beatitudes, in a prior book (Winston 2018) as a basis for selecting and developing employees who are a good fit for the organization. The second part of the Sermon on the mount looks at the behaviors that leaders and managers should exhibit.

Salt and Light (You're a Christian, so Show It!)

Matthew 5:13–16:

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in

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the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (NAS)

Martin (1986) believes that when Jesus called His followers ‘salt,’ that it was a statement of fact, not a calling to a higher place. In calling his followers ‘salt,’ Jesus was articulating what everyone should have already known. Augsburg (1982) states that salt represents three vital qualities: (a) purity, (b) preservation, and (c) flavor. Believers are to have these qualities to be agents of change.

Today, most of us don’t appreciate salt as the Hebrews and Romans did at the time when Jesus presented his lesson from the mount. You have to realize that in Jesus’ day, soldiers often received their pay in salt (the root word is the same as salary). Don’t let the limitations of the English language deprive you of the rich opportunity to grasp this truth. After all, we have so much salt that many of us are on salt-restricted diets! We even have salt substitutes. Salt was a rare and valuable commodity that was essential for preserving food and for adding flavor.

Jesus also called his followers to be the light of the world. In our society today, we have a hard time valuing “light,” compared to the biblical era when the brightest household light was a candle. In the inner city, we suffer from a condition called “light pollution.” Many inner-city dwellers have not seen the grandeur of a starry night and have to drive dozens of miles to get far enough away from the city to see a meteor shower. Pictures from the space shuttle reveal the eerie glow of urban streetlights on our planet at night. One can only wonder what would happen if Jesus gave this sermon today. Perhaps, instead of salt and light, we would have been called to be the “clean air” and “clean water” of the earth. Okay, I’m not going to rewrite Scripture, but I want you to consider the value and importance of salt and light to the people sitting on the mountainside listening to Jesus’ words.

Palmer (1986) helps us understand the value of salt by reminding us “[e]very listener in the first-Century Mediterranean world would be able to appreciate the importance of this salt image. The value of salt is tested not by the way it appears, but by what happens as a result of its use” (p. 30). As Christian leaders put more of their Christianity into the workplace, the more favorable and preserved the workplace becomes.

However, if the Christian leader goes overboard in pushing his or her Christianity, the workplace can become too salty and will be unsuitable for consumption by fellow workers.

Consider the use of salt to flavor food. When a cook adds salt to a broth, the salt is no longer visible, but if sufficient salt has been used; the taste of the salt is present. However, if the cook continues to add too much salt to the broth, it is not likely that the broth will be good to the palate. On the other hand, when there is a need to preserve food, such as meat, the amount of salt is increased to the point that the taste may be negatively affected, but the meat is still preserved and protected. Before consuming, the meat is usually soaked or otherwise treated to remove the excess salt.

There is a strong admonition given to those who wish to follow Jesus. Our Lord tells us that if a Christian loses his or her “saltiness,” i.e., purity, or ability to preserve or flavor, then the only option is to be discarded. The New International Version of the Scriptures puts this passage this way, “... to be thrown out and trampled by men.” In Luke 14:35, Luke states it this way: “It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.” The original Aramaic, according to Bowman and Tapp (1957), reveals a play on words. The Aramaic words for ground and dung are *lara* and *lrea*, respectively, that sound very much alike when pronounced.

Matthew’s account in the King James translation of the Scriptures refers to trampled by man. The Greek word for trodden is *katapateo* meaning to reject with disdain, or to be trampled underfoot (Strong’s word 2662). This is strong language, for it implies that if a Christian leader does not act as salt in the workplace by preserving and flavoring, then Christ will reject him. Since I follow the evangelical teachings that consider salvation as secure, then this passage implies that although salvation is secure, Christ will not be able to use the Christian to further His kingdom.

Pelikan and Cardman (1973), in their analysis of St. Augustine’s teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, point out that this crucial admonition harkens back to the aforementioned Beatitude. Jesus warned His followers that they would receive persecution. St. Augustine added this to the salt analogy saying that the Christian must not be

afraid to act from fear of persecution. For if he or she does fail to act, then what good can the Christian provide to the world.

Now let's dive into the virtues of Christians being light. Eddleman (1955) offers an excellent analogy for what Jesus was referring to in this Sermon on the Mount. Eddleman says: "Light warms as it radiates. Its life-giving quality sustains us physically on the earth. 'In Him was life: and the life was the light of men' (John 1:4). The light of God's love, warm and life-giving, is the source of all religion that is not counterfeit. The word 'light' in New Testament language is the root of our word 'phosphorescent'; there is a continual glow" (p. 31). The Greek word Eddleman refers to is *phos* meaning to shine or make manifest. Both are appropriate words to describe the Christian leader in the workplace. Because of the leader's Christian light, it should be clear to all employees in the workplace that this person is indeed a Christian, but the light should not be so overpowering that those around the leader turn away.

Jesus went on to say that believers are a city on a hill. This is a metaphor for the Christian leader to act as a guide for the sojourner. Imagine walking across a large plain at night. There ahead is a city set on a hill, with the city's lights visible for tens of miles. The city's lights act as a beacon to guide you to your destination. This is an excellent analogy for a Christian leader whether he or she is mentoring a younger employee or sharing the vision of the organization.

Jesus uses light as a multi-faceted symbol. He uses light to show illumination or phosphorescence, and as a lighthouse guiding the wanderers. And He uses light as a source of warmth and comfort. I lived many years in Alaska where the winters are cold, long, and dark. Many stores installed large heat lamps just inside the outer doorways that afforded the entering patrons a refreshing presence of warmth and light as they entered. The departing patrons enjoyed the same experience just before entering the frigid arctic air as they left the store. Coming and going, patrons received a welcome respite from the world's torment. Imagine the Christian leader, now, as a warm, comfortable respite in a tormented world. How much more could this Christian do for the kingdom than one who was dull and cold, indistinguishable from the worldly leaders that abound?

Jesus calls Christian leaders and supervisors to be both salt and light. This is a statement of “required” functional behavior. Lloyd-Jones (1962) said it well:

I suggest to you, therefore, that the Christian is to function as the salt of the earth in a much more individual sense. He does so by his individual life and character, by just being the man that he is in every sphere in which he finds himself. For instance, a number of people may be talking together in a rather unworthy manner. Suddenly a Christian enters into the company, and immediately his presence has an effect. He does not say a word, but people begin to modify their language. He is already acting as salt, he is already controlling the tendency to putrefaction and pollution. Just by being a Christian man, because of his life and character and general deportment, he is already controlling that evil that was manifesting itself, and he does so in every sphere and in every situation. He can do this, not only in a private capacity in his home, his workshop or office, or wherever he may happen to be, but also as a citizen in the country in which he lives. (<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/salt.html> about two-thirds down the webpage)

Murder (Anger in the First Degree)

Matthew 5:21–26:

You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. (NAS)

When Jesus referred to the Commandment, saying, “Thou shalt not kill,” he was directly challenging the day’s interpretation of the law, but He didn’t stop there, He added the clause “Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.” The original commandment was not to kill—no exceptions. With the addition of what would happen if you do kill, the statement ceased to be a commandment and became law. In the second half of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus sought to restore the commandments to a former higher calling (Lloyd-Jones 1962, p. 222).

The word angry, that Matthew uses is the Greek word *orgizo*. *Orgizo* means, “provoking or enraging another, to become exasperated, or to become angry with another” (Strong’s word 3710). This infers the need for patience. *Raca* is a word of disgust and disdain which one person might feel toward another. The word means an empty-one. The phrase, You fool, comes from the Greek word *moros* meaning “dull, stupid, heedless, or absurd” (Strong’s word 3474). Jesus instructs everyone to avoid even the thought of ill will toward another. Martin Luther King, in his work *Stride Toward Freedom*, admonished people “to avoid not only violence of deed but violence of spirit” (Augsburger 1982 p. 72).

Augsburger (1982) wrote:

While one may say he has never killed, Jesus asks about the inner attitude of anger and hate, of destructive words and hostility. Anger wounds others and also warps the spirit of the one immersed in the feeling of wrath or indignation. We need to understand our feelings to be honest about them, but we must resolve anger in other ways than focusing on personalities with destructive attitudes toward them. Paul writes, ‘If you are angry, don’t sin...’ (Eph. 4:26). Anger is a temporary madness and its expression has no place in the community of disciples. (p. 72)

Does this imply that the Christian leader or supervisor must not have angry thoughts? In other parts of the Scripture, we see Jesus speaking poorly of the Pharisees and the moneychangers who were doing business in the inner walls of the temple. Note the example set by Jesus, though. In Jesus’ anger, He is angry at injustice and the blindness of those who should be able to see.

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount speak of being angry without cause. Being angry without a cause is like the leader who sees an employee sitting for a moment and then becomes angry with the employee for slothfulness. There may be many reasons why the employee was sitting idly. The leader in this example violated Jesus' teaching by getting angry without cause. Jesus calls the Christian leader to understand the spirit of the commandment rather than the letter of the law.

Continuing with this thought, Lloyd-Jones (1962) wrote:

The holier we become, the more anger we shall feel against sin. But we must never, I repeat, feel anger against the sinner. We must never feel angry with a person as such; we must draw a distinction between the person himself and what he does. We must never be guilty of a feeling of contempt or abhorrence, or of this expression of vilification. (p. 226)

Consider Matthew 12:34b: "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (NAS). Also, consider the Beatitude, Blessed are the pure of heart. Jesus sees our heart as the place where we must block evil and prevent it from entering, for to think evil and to do good is hypocrisy. Jesus admonishes anyone who harbors ill will to reconcile the differences with the other person. Jesus elevates His reconciliation directive to even greater heights by saying that Christians should not sue their brothers. The word brother in Greek is adelphos (Strong's Word 80), means a literal or figurative brother. Jesus is saying that you will be better off by settling with the one you have wronged than waiting and having the matter tried before people who do not know you.

I wonder how many leaders who are caught embezzling, engaging in insider trading, or conducting illegal corporate espionage would be better off confessing their wrong-doings to their CEO and negotiating a settlement rather than trying to hide within the legal system by pleading not guilty. These Scriptures indicate that the Christian leader who commits a wrong against an employee or another leader must go to the injured party, reconcile, and settle. It takes a mature leader to admit that he or she is wrong and to offer physical or emotional restitution. Accompanying this is, of course, repentance.

Christian leaders should see from this passage that if they harbor ill will toward an employee, then they must quickly discuss the matter and not let it fester into a seething wound of anger. Anger, left to its own, soon becomes a tool for Satan. Think of yourself or someone you know who became angry with another person and allowed it to stew for a while without dealing with it. If you are like most people, sooner or later an explosive encounter occurs between the two parties with harsh words that develop into emotional hurts. How do you think the world would see a Christian leader in this light? Certainly not as a beacon on the hill set there to guide others!

The Abilene Paradox (Harvey 1988) is a wonderful book filled with many insights that seem to fit the Sermon on the Mount. One of the essays in the book discusses a Japan Airlines pilot who, through pilot error, landed six miles short of the runway at the San Francisco airport, in the water. The passengers said that it was such a smooth landing no one realized that the plane was in the water until a boat passed by! Later, when the pilot, named Asah, entered his hearing to answer charges of poor performance, the pilot said, “Like Americans say – Asah screwed up” (the text of the conversation implies a harsher word here). No one could argue with the pilot since it was exactly as he said. At least he was honest. I can’t help but wonder how President Nixon would have fared in the press had he followed the same line of action as this Japan Airlines pilot. I wonder what our court systems might look like if we all owned up to our actions.

Anger doesn’t have to be big anger, even little anger is included in this teaching by Jesus. After one year of studying and attempting to develop into an agapao-leadership style, I was particularly busy with a full pile of work on my desk. I walked out of my office to get some materials that I needed, and I noticed my assistant talking with friends on the phone. I could always tell when she was talking with friends because the tone of her voice and the selection of words varied from when she was talking to other administrative staff or her family. I thought to myself, “I hope she gets off the phone quickly, so that we can complete all this work!” If I was busy, I was sure everyone else was, too!

An hour later, I came out of my office for more materials, and my assistant was on the phone again, but with a different friend. I could feel my anger rising, and I began to mutter to myself as I gathered the next round of materials for my slowly decreasing pile of work. This time I could not keep quiet. I interrupted her conversation and asked about a project that I had assigned her the day before. She answered that the project was complete and that she had sent it on to the next administrative office. I went into my office and placed the materials on my desk and then went back to my assistant. I interrupted her phone call again and asked her about a second project. Her response, like the first, was that the project was done and had been shipped on along its administrative path. An hour later, I left my office to get a cup of coffee, and my assistant was no longer at her desk but was now at the coffee pot talking with a co-worker. My anger rose. I walked up to my assistant and asked her about a third project. Her answer, like the previous answers, was the same. Then she asked me a question: "Bruce, why are you asking me if these projects are done?" I answered quickly that there was a lot of work to be done and that I was concerned. She responded that the only person in the office who was not caught up on work was me, in fact, and that she was convinced that I really didn't trust her. I stammered that it wasn't true, but the longer I stood there and thought about it, the more I realized that what she said was right. We had an informal policy, in the office, that when we had a lot of work to do, we worked hard, and if we were caught up, we enjoyed the time as we desired. I admitted to her that she was right. She then looked at me and said: "Bruce, you learned something today!" And with that, she turned and walked down the hall. I stood there realizing that like the main character in the book *The Flight of the Buffalo* (Belasco and Stayer 1994) I had just reverted back to my original buffalo nature and had crashed back to the prairie.

According to the Sermon on the Mount, my thoughts of anger and frustration were totally unjustified. But what do you do with justified anger? As we discussed earlier in the book, Jesus gives us an excellent example. In the account of Jesus chasing out the money changers and the sellers from the temple, we see Jesus acting out of righteous anger, but acting with controlled discipline.

Adultery (Sexual Harassment/Discrimination)

Matthew 5:27–30:

You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than * for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. (NAS)

Jesus’ message regarding adultery countermands traditionally held beliefs of the Jewish community. In this passage, the law talks about adultery, but Jesus condemns lust. How often do we read about the leader who lost his job or took early retirement because of a sexual harassment suit? Some might say that he didn’t commit adultery, and they would be right, but the problem remains. The spiritual law talks about the danger of lustfulness, and many leaders have paid the price for breaking this spiritual law.

Augsburger (1982) says that the interpretation of the old law was directed at the married man, and that adultery referred to “marriage breaking,” or the violation of a covenant. But, Jesus broadened the meaning to both married and single people who needed to respect other people in the highest regard. Eddleman (1955) sheds more light on this passage by pointing out that Jesus refers to lust as coming from the heart of man. A man can only blame himself for this sin. Augsburger (1982) and Eddleman (1955) both agree that Jesus considered this issue to be one of great severity, one to be avoided at all costs. Eddleman (1955) contends “Christ did not call for actual mutilations of the body but rather mastery of it” (p. 54). It is obvious that Jesus was referring to men in this passage to emphasize the importance of the message to male leaders and supervisors, but naturally, women are not excluded from this teaching. I see this passage commanding leaders to control lustful thoughts toward employees. Sexual thoughts are powerful emotions

and Jesus' teaching aims at bringing this emotion under control. Martin Luther said: "I cannot keep the birds from alighting on my head, but I can restrain them from making nests in my hair."

Oaths (You're as Good as Your Word)

Matthew 5:33–37:

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot * make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil. (NAS)

At the time that Jesus spoke these words, Augsburg (1982) explains, the Jewish community had developed a hierarchy of oaths making some statements more binding than others. Jesus was instructing His listeners that they must be honest and forthright with an oath. Today, if we could trust what another person told us, do you think we would need all of the attorneys and the mounds of legal paper that our nation generates each year? Imagine what it would be like to work for a leader or supervisor who always supported and fulfilled what was promised to you. Imagine what it would be like to be a supplier to an organization where the leader's words were binding. There would be no contracts, no invoices. Is it possible? There are actually some firms that are working at this level of relationship. Jesus calls leaders and supervisors to be careful about what they promise and then to always fulfill what they promise, regardless of the cost. The King James translation uses the word communication. The Greek word for "communication" is *logos* meaning, "something said" (including the thought). The Greek words for "yes" and "no" are *nai* and *ov* (Strong's words 3483 and 3756), respectfully, which brings to mind a strong affirmative and strong negative condition

with no room for interpretation of meaning. Jesus commands leaders and supervisors to make their commitment either yes or no. Remove the gray areas and speak clearly so that your employees and peers can understand your message and know exactly what to expect.

Along these same lines, Lloyd-Jones (1962) clarifies what Jesus meant when He said that no one should ever take an oath. Lloyd-Jones illustrates this referring to numerous occasions where God's people (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph of the Old Testament; and Paul of the New Testament) and God, Himself, took oaths. Lloyd-Jones concludes from Scripture that there are places and times for oaths when there exists a sense of solemnity and differentiation. Jesus forbids the use of oaths in ordinary conversation, for there is no need to take an oath about an argument. Jesus calls for simple veracity, the speaking of truth, in all ordinary communications, conversations, and speech (pp. 268–269).

In contrast to Lloyd-Jones, Govett (1984) believes Jesus was saying that no one should ever take oaths. Govett makes a strong case by asserting that the Christian who takes an oath comes under the law and not under grace. Still, it seems that if Govett were correct, Jesus would have had to explain away the serious oaths of the Jewish fathers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus presented a series of principles that all people should live by every day. These create the code of behavior for our daily living. It seems logical from Jesus' teachings that we can conclude that He is addressing heart-issues in this passage, just as He addressed heart-issues in the preceding passages. He seeks to show that we should live our life for good, in our hearts, our heads, and in our behaviors. To act righteously is not enough; Christian disciples must be righteous. Jesus did not forbid lusting after one's spouse (because in that context, the behavior is appropriate), nor from showing anger when the situation called for anger (again, the context is critical), and He does not say that disciples should not swear an oath when the context calls for it. Matthew records Jesus responding to a question under oath in Matthew 26:63–66:

But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of

God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; what do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death!” (NAS)

And again in 2 Corinthians 1:23:

But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth. (NAS)

Consider Hebrews 6:16–20:

For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (NAS)

In the Hebrews passage, God took an oath as a sign to His people. Thus, it seems to me that there must be an appropriate time to take an oath. The issue in this lesson is how others see the disciples’ behavior.

Jesus’ earlier lesson stated that disciples should be like “a city on the hill”? This current lesson on oaths goes hand-in-hand with this teaching. As a city on a hill, Christian leaders are out in the open for all to see. Christian leaders must not exaggerate, or allow people to exaggerate for them. For the world will judge Christians by what they say, what they do, and what they permit. And ultimately, what others think of Christian leaders they will also attribute to Christ.

An Eye for an Eye (Discipline)

Matthew 5:38–42:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (NAS)

Jesus refers to the Old Testament advice from Exodus 21:23–25:

But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. (NAS)

And Leviticus 24:20

fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. (NAS)

In the Code of Hammurabi, we see similar messages, but in the Code of Hammurabi, punishments exceeded the crimes. For many people in that day, these passages became the “Law of Revenge” requiring, in Jewish custom, the immediate punishment of one who committed an infraction against another person. Jesus pointed out how the Scribes and Pharisees misinterpreted the Scriptures. The intent of the Exodus and Leviticus passages was to limit the punishment that one might mete out. Jesus sought to show the Jewish community that the law bound no one, but rather that He came to fulfill the law, which was a greater call to love one another. Thus, all should live according to love.

Jesus also called believers to resist evil. The Greek word for resist is *anthistemi* meaning to stand against or to oppose, (Strong’s word 436) and the Greek word for evil is *poneros* referring to mischief, malice, grievous, harmful, malicious, or wickedness (Strong’s word 4190).

On this subject, some authors such as Lloyd-Jones believe that Jesus commands all disciples not to resist evil, but to maintain a pacifist position at all costs. This pacifist view could not be true for it would violate many other parts of Scripture where Jesus admonishes us to resist the evil one and to control our emotions. Jesus, Himself, drove demons out of people and enabled the apostles to do likewise. If such a premise were true, why would God give us Ephesians 6:10–18 about preparing for battle against the prince of this world? Why would Jesus have driven the moneychangers from the temple? Jesus is the epitome of resisting evil! Look again at the Greek. Jesus shows that disciples must live life according to the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. The letter of the law demanded revenge for every infraction. Individuals would take the law into their own hands and seek retaliation. How many feuds have developed because an individual's interpretation led to retaliation? This is how feuds escalate to war. I believe that this passage calls Christian leaders who have been hurt by someone to respond in the spirit of love rather than a spirit of revenge. You have heard of leaders and supervisors who live by the motto: "I don't get over it, I get even." What message does this behavior communicate to followers? Augsburg (1982) says:

We must recall Jesus' words that the citizens of His Kingdom are like salt to the earth, light to the world and yeast in the loaf; the minority which influences the whole but never dominates it, which lives by the higher ethic of love even at the cost in one's own life of the way of the cross. (p. 81)

Many times, evil people or leaders (poneros) will mistreat those under them just to watch them react negatively. But how does the evil person react when the victim doesn't respond? He will soon give up and seek another victim. There is a story (I doubt it is true, but it does illustrate the point) about an old man that lived in a small run-down house just a block from a junior high school. Every afternoon, a group of boys from the school would stop by the old man's house after school and taunt the old man and call him names. The old man would come outside and yell at the boys and raise his cane at them. The boys would laugh mischievously and run away satisfied with their success.

At the beginning of a new school year, the old man changed his strategy. As expected, the boys stopped by the old man's house and called him names. This time though, the old man came out and waved hello to the boys from the porch. The old man then said: "If you boys will come back tomorrow and yell at me some more, I will give each of you one dollar." With that, he turned and went back into the house.

The next day the boys returned and fulfilled the man's wishes. True to his word, the old man came out and gave each of the boys one dollar. He waved to the group and said, "See you tomorrow." Tomorrow came and so did the boys. After the boys had yelled and taunted the old man, the old man came out and said, "I cannot pay you a dollar anymore, for all I have is a quarter for each of you. Please come back tomorrow." The next day the boys, again, yelled and taunted the old man. The old man came out and said, "I can only pay each of you a dime, for I am nearly out of money."

With this, the leader of the group of boys said: "A dime? It's not worth it. Let's go guys." The boys left and never bothered the old man again. When the evil one (poneros) does not get the desired result, his behavior changes.

Let's now look at what it means to go "the extra mile." Let's consider the laborer who is required to work eight hours, but routinely works nine hours without a request for more pay. Should the leader be expected to pay without being asked? If the leader is required to pay for eight hours of work, but instead pays for nine, should the worker come to expect that generosity? When we live by law, we also work and pay by law. This is the great sin of the economic world that Adam Smith laid out for us in his work *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith's call was for each person to pay as little as possible for as much gain as possible. This has become the great mantra of capitalism, but of course, it is incorrect. The greatest gains come from the greatest commitment of workers and followers, not by paying them as little as possible. Carnegie is credited with giving away 90% of his income near the end of his life and supporting all of the people that he could. He was quoted as saying that his gain came from what he gave, not from what he made. I agree that there are people who will take advantage of others who are so generous, but no leader is required to keep and build relationships

with those who would do harm. The goal of agapao leadership is similar to the goal of transformational leadership in that both leader and follower seek to lift the other to higher levels. Like Carnegie, leaders and followers who go the extra mile have the greatest chance to influence those whom they serve.

Love Your Enemies (Competition)

Matthew 5:43–48:

You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NAS)

I treat this passage separately because so many people see this as a separate concept from the “Law of Revenge” that we just discussed. I also treat this passage separately because it is at this point that I part from the thinking of other writers (Augsburger 1982; Lloyd-Jones 1962; Govett 1984; Eddleman 1955).

I do agree with these other writers that this passage is a continuation of the previous and that you will more fully understand by reading the two as one long thought (Matthew 5:36–48). To set the stage for my explanation of this passage, consider the following facts from Scripture. God already set the rule of loving your neighbor in the Old Testament. Jesus said this was the second greatest commandment. As a result, the Israelites were supposed to treat each other well and to not charge excessive interest, or to deny the wants of another. The Old Testament also held strong language regarding enemies, in fact, Exodus and Leviticus recommend destroying enemies in battle.

The question that the Israelites debated for centuries is Jesus' central theme. The Israelites learned from early childhood that their countrymen were their neighbors, while all non-Israelites were their enemies. Imagine growing up believing that someone who is different from you is your enemy. This sheds light on the Middle East struggles of today, doesn't it? The Israelites grew up believing that bigotry was a natural state of events. If someone came from Samaria, no Israelite would trust that person. Most likely, the Israelites would try to cast the Samaritan out of Israel.

This is why Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan, told in Luke 10:30–37, is such a shock to the Pharisee's question regarding just who is "a neighbor." Jesus intentionally uses a Samaritan, a person that most Israelites would have described as an enemy, to be the neighbor in His story. The thieves were not neighbors, the priest was not a neighbor, but the one to whom most Jews would not have given the time of day, was the neighbor.

Let me digress for a moment. The Winston family (the branch from which I am descended) settled in what is now southern Virginia and northern North Carolina during the 1670s. In the late 1990s, I met my father's cousin who still lived in northern North Carolina. During our visit, she recalled a conversation that she had with her great-grandmother in the early 1920s. My father's cousin was beginning to date and her great-grandmother wanted to give her some advice, and this is what she said, "Stay away from those Virginia boys because you know what they are like!" Imagine that just because you lived across a state line you were considered to be bad. I'm wondering just how much has changed since the time that Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount!

Many people see this passage as Jesus advocating a pacifist lifestyle. But this whole treatise, so far, has been to show the Israelites how they misunderstood God's laws. God commanded people to love their neighbor. Jesus showed the Jewish crowd that the spirit of this law abides in the heart. To hate someone whom you do not know, and who has committed no violation against you is simply wrong. Today, we call it bigotry.

To drive this home, let's consider some of the Greek language in this passage. The Greek word for hate is *miseo* that means to detest or to love less (Strong's word 3404). The word for enemy comes from the Greek *echthros* meaning hateful, hostile, or adversary (Strong's word 2190). Remember the passage on the Law of Reciprocity? If the

Israelites hated people from other countries, it is only logical that people in other countries would hate them and would retaliate with equal, if not escalated, feelings and actions.

Jesus showed the Jewish community that their misinterpretation of the old laws led to hatred toward people they did not even know that resulted in a breakdown of relationships. Instead of hating, Jesus showed them that they should love their enemies. The Greek word for love here is *agapao*, the very basis for The Beatitudes!

Jesus stated in this passage that the spirit of the law called for people to naturally feel goodwill toward one another, even if the other person was a stranger. However, a quick reading of Jesus' comments to the Pharisees in the Gospels will dispel any belief of Jesus being a pacifist.

Of additional interest in this passage is the use of the Greek words for sons and brothers which are *huios* and *adelphos*, respectfully (Strong's words 5207 and 80). Both words imply a distant or figurative kinship. Jesus did not speak about true sons or brothers, but rather that people should look upon those with whom they are interacting as if they were either their children or siblings.

Jesus calls Christian leaders to learn about people before making judgment. If a positive relationship occurs, then feelings of goodwill are in order. This passage relates to competitors, as well. Unfortunately, many business management writers teach that business is like war and you must fight against your competitors. However, if we follow Jesus' teaching here, we must approach competitors with feelings of goodwill and seek ways to collaborate instead of seeking destructive competitive methods.

This does not mean that we stop operating as separate companies. For instance, the Japanese taught United States firms how to work in symbiosis. Japanese firms shared research and exploration, and then each firm, using the jointly gained information, developed the best products possible for the customer.

There was a time when my printing company had a fire in the plant. It was a small fire with minimal damage, but it was big enough to get a mention on the 6:00 p.m. news. At 6:30 p.m. I received a call from a major competitor who had seen the news report, and to my surprise was calling to see if we needed additional press capacity. He offered to provide one of his presses for us to use while the damage was repaired.

The competitor's action showed love and concern. We did not need the capacity since the fire did not affect any of the production equipment, but I can tell you that from that moment on, my attitude toward the competitor was one of support and concern. Our two firms later worked together on joint ventures that benefited both of our firms, and especially our mutual customers. Would this have been possible had we hated each other? Of course not. Jesus calls us to think, feel, and behave in ways that bless everyone around us, including ourselves. This must start with our heart attitude. Matthew 12:34 says

You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. (NAS)

And Matthew 15:18 says

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. (NAS)

In this first verse, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees, and in the second verse, Jesus is explaining a parable to his disciples. Jesus' message throughout the New Testament continually stresses and re-stresses the spirit of God's original message.

Now, re-read this Sermon on the Mount passage and the one before it as a single passage showing the interpretation of the law and the spirit of the law. This passage is about heart attitude, not pacifism. This concludes Jesus' teaching on the heart, and then he turns to observable behavior and the correct reasons for the behavior.

Lifestyle and Motive (Being Good Rather Than Looking Good)

Matthew 6:1–4:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. (NAS)

Augsburger (1982) addresses this section of the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' treatment on lifestyle and motive. Jesus selected the three most important elements of Jewish religious tradition: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting and brought them to the forefront. I combine them because the message is the same in all three. Jesus condemns service with an ulterior motive and emphasizes service for the sake of righteousness. The New International Version of the Scriptures translates this into acts of righteousness, and the King James translates it into alms from the Greek word *eleemosune* meaning compassionateness, beneficence, or good deeds (Strong's Word 1654) Jesus calls the *agapao* leader to behave in righteous ways because it is the right thing to do. This behavior is in contrast to the actions of a leader who participates in company functions just so that upper leadership might see him "being" good. These actions are also in contrast to the leader who would offer training to a younger leader as a way of proving what a good corporate citizen he is. Jesus says that God will not reward leaders who do acts with a hidden agenda, because the leaders have already received their rewards.

While we should behave in private ways, we should also expect God to acknowledge us publicly. For a long time, I did not understand this passage and I interpreted the text to mean that leaders should do good deeds out of the public's sight, so that if anyone found out and gave recognition, the act of kindness would be even more out in the open, thus further violating Jesus' teaching. But what the passage says is to do acts of kindness with the right attitude of just wanting to help for the sake of wanting to help. If you receive recognition and gratitude from someone, as a result, accept it warmly and sincerely, but never do the act expecting a reward.

I suppose the question is, "Do you want to serve or to be served?" Servant leadership teaches that we should follow Jesus' teaching to do

good acts with the right motive. Think about yourself, or someone that you know, who agrees to speak before a group of people. After the event, when the participants are preparing to leave, the speaker lingers near the table or podium in the hope that people will come and say how much they enjoyed the speech. Did the speaker come to serve or to be served? While everyone enjoys a compliment, Jesus warns us to be aware of our motives behind our behavior. Do you act because you thought you would get a compliment, or did you act because it was the right thing to do?

Treasures in Heaven (Building Righteous Relationships that You Can Take with You!)

Matthew 6:19–21

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NAS)

Jesus follows the motive passage with a “reward” passage. There is a saying that “money follows ministry” and Jesus assures us that God honors our actions if we perform them for the sake of righteousness. In this particular passage, Jesus compares the rewards of this world with the rewards of heaven. He does not condemn possessing material goods; He condemns seeking them as the primary focus in life. Paul repeats this message later to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:10.

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (NAS)

The passage from Matthew 6:19–21 builds upon the previous passages about motive to show that not only do you need the right motive, but

you also need the right focus. Jesus also gives the Jewish community a measuring tool to use in judging others. He says, “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (NAS). People will be able to see the focus of your heart by the treasures that you store. The Greek word for “heart” is *kardia* that means “the thoughts or feelings of a person.” Here we see a connection to the Beatitude of being pure in heart.

Leaders and supervisors usually have demands put upon them to perform toward specific goals and objectives that provide gain for their organizations. Companies that primarily seek to gain wealth will become known as being interested only in their customers’ money. Supervisors that store up reports of high output at the expense of their employees’ health and welfare will be known as the supervisor to be avoided. When the firm puts the customer ahead of profit, they will be known to customers as a firm that can help them. And, the supervisor who puts the health and welfare of employees first will be known by employees as the one to work for. Why wouldn’t people want to work for leaders that look out for their employees’ interests? This is a reciprocal relationship. The employer is looking out for the employee. Hence, the employee is looking out for the employer.

Be Singled Minded (Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing)

Matthew 6: 22–24

The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (NAS)

This Scripture passage relates to the passage that we just covered and reveals that the central force of behavior behind the motive is integrity. The word “lamp” is the Greek word *luchnos* meaning a portable

lamp or illuminator, perhaps a candle (Strong's word 3088). The word light is the Greek word *phos* meaning "luminescence in the widest form" (Strong's word 5457). The Greek word *haplos* that we translate to 'clear' means to be single, which communicates a focus on vision (Strong's word 573). Jesus uses a complex metaphor here speaking of eyes and light and body. If a person has clear eyesight, then his body can operate well. But if the eyes are cloudy with disease or damaged tissue, then the body does not receive the full picture of the surrounding world. Even more intense is the image of the blind person who is unable to receive any visual clues from the outside world. Jesus tells us that if we do not focus on what is good, our vision will be cloudy and dark.

Today, we often say that people are looking through dark lenses, or rose-colored glasses, or that someone can see clearly. The analogies imply that the filters used to see the environment around us determine what we see. Our spiritual worldview is another expression that we use to filter what we gather through our eyes. Thus, to see things perfectly, we must have clear eyes that are devoid of all evil. Leaders may find themselves forming opinions about an employee's idea before actually hearing the presentation, all because the leader is blind to the truth. Leaders and supervisors must ensure that their eyes are clear and singularly focused. Once focused, all secondary things become clear.

Jesus continues with His thoughts on focus and single-mindedness by explaining that man cannot serve two masters. The Greek word *antechomai* means to hold fast or to support, from which we translate devoted, (Strong's word 472) and the Greek word *kataphroneo* means to think against or disesteem, from which we translate despise (Strong's word 2706). The King James Version uses *mammon* instead of wealth, which is closer to the Greek word that the New American Standard translates as 'wealth.' When Jesus used the word *mammon*, He may have referred to the Chaldean god of money or to avarice. It is quite possible that He talks about both, and possibly even a third use of the term, the deification of money. All three could be at play here, and it would have made an interesting word play during Jesus' lecture. Jesus' point is that you must serve one primary master and that the Jewish community had to decide if it was going to serve

God or if it was to focus on gaining earthly treasures. From the arrangement of the passages, it is quite possible that many in the audience were concentrating on gaining earthly treasures.

Do not Worry (God Is in Control—Reduce Your Stress Level)

Matthew 6:25–34:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NAS)

How surprising it must have been for those people to hear Jesus instruct listeners to not worry about their lives. Life was especially hard during Bible times. The Greek word used for “worry” is *merimnao* and it means, “to be anxious about” (Strong’s word 3309). Today, many people express fear in the workplace, not fear of a co-worker doing physical harm to them, but fear of what will happen if they fail. Workers usually fear that they will lose their jobs if they do not do what their supervisor wants. I have talked to hundreds of people who, out of fear, did

things on the job that they knew were not ethical totally out of fear. This passage is especially for those employees. Remember the story in the Beatitude of Peacemaking about writing the letter of resignation and leaving the date blank? Well, it applies here too.

Jesus calls us to seek first the kingdom. Seek in Greek is the word *zeteo* that means to require or to seek after (Strong's word 2212). Added comes from the Greek word *prostithemi* meaning, add, increase, or proceed further (Strong's word 4369). Jesus is continuing a message that He presented earlier by saying that having material items is all right as long as it is not your main focus. He emphasizes that God will provide for your wants if you operate in righteous ways. The paradox of the Christian lifestyle is that we get the material things that we do not seek when we first seek righteousness. Leaders should seek what is right for the company and not just the next promotion. Leaders should seek what is right for the employees and not for the extra ounce of production they can get out of them. Companies should promote the leaders who seek what is right because companies want what is best for the firm. Employees will produce the extra ounce of production simply because they find joy in serving a righteous supervisor.

I once heard that a politician acts in ways that benefit his next election while a statesman acts in ways that help the next generation. I think Jesus calls us to be statesmen and to do what is right for the organization rather than what is right for us individually.

If we stop worrying about tomorrow and live righteously today, tomorrow will take care of itself (with God's help, of course). And whom would you rather have in control of tomorrow—God or you?

Judging Others (Be Willing to Submit to the Same Criteria by Which You Judge)

Matthew 7:1–6:

Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do

not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, 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. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (NAS)

Many Christians read this passage and believe that we are never to judge anyone. This is not the case, for in many other places, Scripture asks us to judge. Scripture calls us to test (meaning to judge) the spirits of a man and see if what he teaches is true. We judge not by the outward appearance, but by the inward appearance of the man. The first verses of this passage are simply the Law of Reciprocity in action. Jesus explains to the Jewish community that whatever standard of worth they use to measure another, they should be willing to be measured by themselves. Writers on this subject (Augsburger, Eddleman, and Govett) believe that Jesus tells us not to judge at all. But in reality, there are times to judge and times not to judge. The following Scriptures give credence to the belief that we should judge: Leviticus 19:5; 27:12; Numbers 35:24; Deuteronomy 1:16; 16:18; 17:12; 1 Samuel 3:13; Proverbs 20:8; 31:9; John 8:15; Acts 4:19; 1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:6; 10:15; and 11:13. Equally important, there are also passages in Scripture that tell us God should be the only judge of certain actions. It is important that we know when and how to judge and be willing to submit to the same criteria.

Fox (1966) said it clearly, "[t]he plain fact is that it is the Law of Life that, as we think, and speak, and act towards others, so will others think, and speak, and act towards us" (page 2 of Chapter 6 retrieved from <https://reader.bookshout.com/reader/9780062010674/read>) Leaders who evaluate employees in the dreaded annual employee evaluation should consider whether they would want superiors evaluating them by the same criteria.

Over the past years, I have written several documents for use in my courses. Students know that my writing contains considerable typos and grammatical mistakes. I tell students that while I will grade them

on their use of English and grammar, they should grade me by the same criteria when it is time for the course evaluation. It is hard to accept this criticism. Sometimes I feel that I would like to criticize their work, but not allow them to criticize mine. However, I know that as I judge them, I must willingly accept their judgment based on the same criteria.

Remember Jesus' teaching in an earlier passage about not hating your enemy just because he or she is different? Jesus is reinforcing this concept in this passage. How often do people judge another because of the color of their skin, the appearance of their clothes, or their speech dialect? If you judge people in any of these ways, you must be willing for them to judge you on the same criteria. Earlier, I mentioned that I grew up in a small rural farming community in the Midwest. There were no African-American families in this little community of 2000 residents. One day, an African-American family moved to town and rented a trailer in the local trailer park. The family had two children; one of them was a boy my age that was in my class at school. During his first week, I socialized with the boy during lunch and recess and enjoyed his company. But then he told me that his family was moving away. I asked why but he wouldn't say. I learned sometime later that the town leaders forced the family to leave because of the color of their skin. I never understood why and still do not understand. I would hope that we could judge people by their hearts rather than their skin. The Book of Acts provides an excellent example of how to judge correctly. After Paul's conversion and training, the Christians still did not trust him and judged him to be evil until Paul proved his transformation to them. When the Christian leaders saw Paul's heart and understood Paul's new birth, the leaders judged him to be good and welcomed him into their lives. Can you imagine what would have happened if Christians had judged Paul solely on his past without consideration for his conversion? Jesus couched this whole discussion this way before you are going to pick on something small and petty in a person's life, you had better consider the big awful thing in your own life. That is what Jesus meant in his analogy of the speck and the mote. No one is perfect, and no one has the right to judge someone acting as if they are perfect. If we are

going to judge at all, it needs to be from the perspective of knowing that we also have defects that others should point out in order for us to improve.

Proverbs 27:17 tells us that one man sharpens another just as iron sharpens iron. Each man challenges the other to improve, and by this process, each person becomes better. But, if only one person is judging and the other is constantly submitting, then there can only be limited improvement.

Leaders should take heed of this concept and seek as much judgment from employees as they mete out in judgment to employees. With leaders and followers challenging each other, both can improve. This is, of course, totally contrary to much of the leadership in the United States today. We see many leaders prowling around the office roaring judgments like angry lions. Here's the truth, real lions do not need to roar, they need to be lions, and respect will follow.

I hear many employees complain that the leader who judges them is not competent to do the employee's job. I have seen this to be true in many cases and wonder how a leader might accurately judge the work of another if he is incapable of doing the job. Is the leader willing to let someone who cannot do his job judge him? Does he or she have a choice? If someone who cannot do his job judges the leader, how credible can the evaluation be? In the final verse of this passage, we are introduced to the recognizable concept of "casting pearls before swine." What Jesus is telling us is to have discernment in our judgment. If we find someone who is unworthy to receive valuable things, don't reward them, hence, don't cast pearls before swine, for whatever reason. The Jewish audience to whom Jesus spoke did not have much use for pigs, at all (although there was a sect of the Hebrews in the area that raised and ate pork). This is a difficult passage to apply to leaders and supervisors because of the obvious reference in Scripture to what is sacred, but let's see what happens when we look closer. Many leaders and supervisors practice "closed-mouth" leadership styles in contrast to "open-book" leadership. First, there is the belief that too much information entrusted to employees will prove harmful to the company in some way. But there is another way of looking at this. If company information is a matter of record, there should be nothing in the records that can ultimately hurt

the company. If you judge the employee to be good in heart, then share the information. If you judge the employee to be bad in heart, then do not give information. The good employee is interested in the firm's goodwill, and the bad employee is interested in his or her goodwill. The leader must judge with discernment.

Ask, Seek, and Knock (Persevere and Serve)

Matthew 7:7–12:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (NAS)

In these verses, the Greek words for ask, seek, and knock, imply a continual state of activity. These words could read, “Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking.” Jesus encourages His followers to keep continuously petitioning God for what they need. Jesus is reminding the Jewish community there on the hillside that even they, as mere humans, treat their children well and such it is with their Heavenly Father who desires, all the more, to treat His children well.

Eddleman (1957) reminds us that this passage supports the earlier passages on judgment, discernment, and action. He illustrates this by showing that if a child asks for bread, the father will not give a stone (people of this period baked bread in a flat hard form that someone might mistake for a stone if given only an indiscriminating look).

I think that this passage goes much deeper for leaders and supervisors concerning behavior toward employees. Consider the employee

who asks for new tools to perform her work because the current tools are insufficient. The leader should examine the facts, test the heart of the employee, and if at all possible, give her the tools. So often I observe leaders and supervisors who take employees' requests and cut the actual request in half just on general principle. Do I need to remind you of the reciprocal component of this act? Will the employee be motivated to give her best effort? Sometimes leaders and supervisors set production objectives artificially high just to test the employees. This is generally unproductive and can generate mistrust between employees and their leaders.

Another effect that can occur is that employees soon learn their managers' "tricks" and begin to ask for more than what's actually needed to try to ensure that they will have what they need. These reactions are not surprising. Leaders should give employees what they need to do their work, presuming that there are sufficient funds to provide the equipment, and sufficient training as well as sufficient understanding of processes and methods to maximize the investment. In these situations, leaders are in the role of the father giving their child, the employee, the bread or fish they need. Note that bread and fish were staple items of the diet during Jesus' time. Try interpreting this passage in light of staples in today's office setting.

If leaders do not want employees padding budgets and cutting back on targets, then leaders should give employees what they need. Leaders find themselves in the employee role when they must ask for budgets and targets from those above them. How much better would it be if we all asked for what we needed and produced what could accomplish, without playing the "fake negotiating game."

A Tree and Its Fruit (Task Completion Is Central to Leadership Activity)

Matthew 7:16–20:

You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad

fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. (NAS)

This passage is a major continuation of Jesus' theme. He stated earlier that people would speak and behave in ways that are consistent with their hearts or values. Here, He admonishes the audience to observe what others do and to judge the results. He is expanding his thought now by warning about people who might temporarily alter their appearance or actions to mislead others.

Jesus advises us to watch for the long-term results of an individual's efforts, explaining that by this you will know the true person. He tells us that as we observe people's values in action, we can tell what kind of fruit they will yield. Sometimes fruit takes a long time to grow, and the appearance of buds and flowers, and even the earliest sign of fruit are not true indications of what the ultimate fruit will look like. In fact, Jesus is training us to become trained observers of people; you might even say people-fruit examiners.

Many times, we interview people and hire them because they appear to be very competent and just what we want and need in a particular job opening. Only later we discover that the person is not as good as we thought. Leaders and supervisors should evaluate people in the workplace for some time before they allow people to have significant responsibility. This requires us as leaders to allow workers to go through the various stages of growth: pollination, blossoming and bearing fruit. We must fertilize and add water if we want to be able to see what kind of fruit we can expect in a person's life. This passage also emphasizes the works of the person as proof of the heart. So often we tend to look at either a person's heart or their accomplishments when we need to observe both.

Palmer (1986) uses this passage to demonstrate the ethical concept of ends vs. means. Palmer believes that Jesus does not see ethical behavior as merely ends or merely means, but rather a combination of the two. Thus, we moved toward situational ethics. This is difficult for most people to accept since it places the ethical decision in the hands of each person to do as they wish. On the other hand, this may not be difficult to accept if we live by the rules Jesus taught in this Sermon.

The Wise and Foolish Builders (if You Know Something Is True—Live by It!)

Matthew 7:24–28:

‘Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell -and great was its fall.’ When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; (NAS)

Jesus concludes His teaching with a wonderful analogy that summarizes the importance of His points. The Greek word for “put them into practice” is *poieo* that implies a wide application without delay (Strong’s word 4160). To make our application clear, Jesus uses the analogy of a home with a firm foundation to demonstrate how we as leaders need to build our lives upon Him. The wise leader and supervisor will listen to lessons Jesus taught from the mountainside and put them into action immediately.

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