In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus continues to outline what the Kingdom person looks like. Jesus focuses on how his followers are to relate to other people.

He begins by talking about judging. We do it all the time – it starts when we size people up. We decide who are the winners and losers just by looking at someone. It happens at the grocery store, it happens when you go for a walk, and it even happens at church. Judgment of others is really about condemnation. And condemnation is the dehumanization of other human beings. Dallas Willard explains it as, “communicating that he or she is bad as a whole, and to be rejected.” We sentence that person to exclusion because that person is seen as unacceptable.

Judgment like this is about control. It’s about making people into who we want them to be – who we think they should be. But this rarely works out well.

Jesus uses a bit of a mysterious teaching about dogs, pearls, and pigs. But Dallas Willard helps us understand how these parts connect. He explains that Jesus us painting a picture of our efforts to correct and control others by pouring out our good things. These things may not even be something that they can use, but often we don’t even listen to them. Our good intentions make little difference. The needy person will finally become angry and attack us. The point is not that the pearl is wasted, but that the person given the pearl is not helped (229).

In the end, the “pearls” of wisdom that we try to throw at people in the midst of judging them make little impact. So Jesus follows this teaching with instruction on humility. When we talk with people humbly, we see the change that we desire. When we show them respect by asking honest questions, we see the change that we desire.

In the act of talking to someone – asking someone if they need help – we acknowledge that the other person can say no. Then, as ‘innocent as doves’ we accept that response. Take the time to get to know someone – and show love to him or her. Loving him or her can be difficult, because doing so would mean dealing with the stuff that comes along with loving them.
Discussing the Text:
1. Dallas Willard offers his opinion about the ‘plank’ Jesus refers to. He argues that the plank = the condemnation that we show over the “speck of sawdust in someone else’s eye.” The fact that we are condemning someone shows that our heart does not have the kingdom rightness Jesus has been talking about.
   a. How does this perspective help you understand the text?
   b. Do you agree with Willard’s perspective? Why or why not?
   a. Talk about how these verses are similar.
   b. Talk about how they might be different.
   c. How can we use one to understand the other?
3. Dallas Willard interprets verse 6 as saying that we shouldn’t force our spiritual “pearls of wisdom” on people who aren’t ready for them. Doing this would only make them angry with us and they would refuse to listen to what we are saying.
   a. What are some of the “pearls” that Jesus might be referring to?
   b. How does verse 6 fit in to the broader Sermon on the Mount?

Discussing the World:
1. Discuss the planks that we tend to ignore in our own eyes.
   a. How have they been in the way of becoming a kingdom person?
2. Read 1 John 5:14-15 and compare it to Matthew 7:7-12.
   a. What kinds of things do we ask of God? Do we expect certain answers before we ask things of God?
   b. What do these passages help us understand about teachability?
   Leader: Don’t be afraid to discuss the times when people felt like God didn’t answer prayer.

Action: Consider practicing the Spiritual Discipline of Teachability.
- The purpose of teachability is to remain open to the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit
- Try curbing a know-it-all attitude
- Listen more, talk less
- Ask questions. Many times, this will allow you to help people – or lead to deeper God awareness
- Don’t make snap judgments based on appearances