# Set Up

# Introduction

## Open with clip from The Big Kahuna. “I'm saying you've already done plenty of things to regret, you just don't know what they are. It's when you discover them, when you see the folly in something you've done, and you wish that you had it do over, but you know you can't, because it's too late.”

## We are moving through the Gospel of Luke – the report filed by Luke, the Gentile physician, amateur historian and travel companion of Paul. It was written initially for Theophilus, who I’ve argued is likely: a Greek official, a new Christ-follower and the source of Luke’s funding. My belief is that Theophilus is the one who said to Luke, “I want you to learn as much as you can about Jesus. Go investigate his life, claims, teaching, death and resurrection. Go talk to the witnesses, visit the sites, check it out and then give me a report.” We are studying the report. So far:

### We’ve moved through the birth narratives – where just about everything about Christ’s birth is unique and everyone who comes in contact with him is stunned.

### We skipped over his childhood because Luke does, pausing ever so briefly at a weekend when he was twelve. We then jumped ahead to his baptism and a period of prayer and temptation in the desert wilderness.

### Most recently we were Amazed at the things Jesus said and did immediately after beginning his public ministry. He taught with unmatched authority. He made the most amazing claims – to be the fulfillment of prophecy, the Lord of the Sabbath, the One they’ve been waiting for. And He did all manner of things – healing the sick, turning water into wine, casting out demons, filling Peter’s boat with so many fish that it starts to sink – to make it clear that he’s not just a Jewish Rabbi.

## In this series – Right Side Up – we’ve been focusing on his first major set of teachings. We’re wrestling with the big ideas he set before the twelve apostles on their first day of orientation. What Jesus is doing here is laying the groundwork for a new community, a new way of living. What he is setting in front of them is a set of radical ideas that disrupt our default assumptions but that have to be in place for the world to work the way it should.

## Matthew gives more time to this sermon. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus comes off as the new Moses.

### The old Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with The Law which was designed to teach people how to live – designed to help people who had been slaves live as free people. In so many ways this was the defining moment for the Jewish people.

### Well, Jesus has just spent the night on the mountain, and he’s come down and is now explaining the details of the New Deal – the New Covenant. He is helping people who are slaves to sin and death find freedom in a relationship with God. He is calling people into a way of life that isn’t based on power and wealth but meekness and poverty of spirit. A community that values peacemaking and purity of heart.

## What are the new rules? Well, this is the fifth message in this series.

### In the first we noted that we are to live in light of forever – to shine our headlights past the grave because: Eternity Changes Everything

### In the second we saw that we were to love our enemies. We are to be the kind of people who treat our enemies as if they were friends.

### In the third, Syler noted that we are to build our life on a solid foundation – and that begins with obeying what Jesus teaches. And he had some pictures of a beach in Texas after the hurricane cycled through. There are more pictures – such as this one that show the importance of a solid foundation. It matters.

### Last week, Pastor Harry Stackhouse from Sign of the Dove Church in Waukegan, focused on the high calling of being salt and light. That is what we are. If we are doing our job as Christ followers we should stop decay and show the path forward.

## Today we are told to stop being hypocrites. Rather than sitting in self-righteous judgment of others, we should love others and judge ourselves. It pivots around the verse everyone wants to quote.

### It used to be that if someone only knew one verse it was John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Now the passage everyone knows is, “judge not,” and they are quick to judge you if they think you are judging them. (The irony goes in every direction.)

## Let me read our passage. It’s from Luke 6:37-42. This is part of Jesus ongoing teaching. He says:

### “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

### He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

### “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

## Blind tour guides leading everyone off a cliff and then someone with a telephone pole sticking out of their eye – the Greek word here is dokon, which means, the load bearing beam in a home – making fun of someone because they have a fleck of saw dust in their eye, this sounds more like a Monty Python sketch than the New Testament. Makes you wonder if the initials J.C. stand for Jesus Christ or John Cleese.

# But it is Jesus and there some important things to see.

## As we start please understand, this is not a condemnation of discernment, but of hypocritical judging. We have to assess. We have to judge. Life does not work if we are not making judgments about people and ideas. Think about it, and while you are “thinking about it” realize the thinking you are doing requires making a judgments – you are assessing the merit of what I am saying against other options. There is no way around this. We have to judge.

### And, by the way, we are told to judge.

#### In Matthew 7, Jesus instructs us to pay attention to the fruit of someone’s life – to assess how their life is working before we decide to take any of their advice.

#### In John’s Gospel we are told how to judge. Jesus says, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."[[1]](#endnote-1)

#### In I Thessalonians 5:21, Paul tells us to, “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."

### The Bible is full of counsel about our need to be thoughtful and discerning, and Jesus and Paul and others will make lots of assessments about other people’s thinking and actions.[[2]](#endnote-2)

### We need to make judgments. In fact, we need others making sound judgments. Society doesn’t work without teachers grading papers, coaches critiquing performance, umpires calling fouls and judges rendering assessments. And we do not get better without others helping us see ourselves more clearly. We need feedback.

### I’ve taken a couple painting classes at the Art Center in Highland Park. I quit a few years ago because the instructor would not give me any critical feedback. It was maddening. I’m a pretty easy-going art student because: I know very little; I’m aware that I do not have lots of talent; and I’m not tying much self-worth to what I paint. That said, my first teacher would not criticize what I did. I’d ask, “What am I doing wrong? What do you see? What advice do you have?”

#### How do you feel about it?

#### Like it could be a lot better.

#### Well, work with that.

#### Work with what?

## As we get started, I want you to realize, the problem is not judging per se. We need to be discerning. We need others to be discerning. Judgments have to be made. The problem is our judgments are flawed – biased, skewed and incomplete – and, and this is a big AND, they are riddled by a double standard.

## For starters they are wrong because we are limited. We cannot know everything. We cannot see everything, understand everything, remember everything. We are finite beings so we are not going to operate on perfect information and understanding. We can’t help that. We can grow in wisdom – and we are told to! – but we will always be limited. We need to understand that.

## But the real problem is our self-righteousness. We need to understand our broken heart’s tendency to manage our image. Our big problem here is not a lack of understanding about a situation. Our big problem is that we are hypocrites. We focus on the flaws of others instead of focusing on our own. We are bothered by the things other people do when we do the very same thing. And – in ways we often fail to see – we highlight the mistakes of others in order to divert attention from our own issues.

## We lack integrity – which is the opposite of hypocrisy. The term hypocrite is a Greek word that is brought over almost letter from letter into English. It is translated actor and hypocrite. Not that all actors are hypocrites but all hypocrisy is acting.[[3]](#endnote-3) Ancient actors wore masks and we often wear masks. We pretend we are something that we are not – we pretend that we are better than we are. Jesus is calling us out on this. He is pointing out that we are often two-faced and making it clear that this causes problems.

## But, part of the genius of what Christ is doing here is pointing out that this is happening at such a deep level we are not even aware of it. We fool ourselves first. We are so deep into image management that we lie to ourselves first.

## The human heart is very broken and very good at protecting itself. So the first thing that happens is that we fool ourselves. We think we are better than we are.

## Ever hear of the Lake Wobegon effect? Lake Wobegon is Garrison Keillor’s fictional town – the one that “time forgot and the decades cannot improve.” Where, “all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average." It’s a fictional town, except it’s not. We tend to think more highly of ourselves than we should. Study after study shows that we overestimate our knowledge, skills and abilities. Ninety-three percent of American drivers rated themselves better than average.[[4]](#endnote-4)

## And here’s how deep this runs. Some of you are thinking, “those idiots! Can’t they see that not everyone can be as good of driver as I am! I can’t believe how clueless they can be!” That is how deep the lies and deception run. We have a very hard time seeing ourselves accurately. It’s a universal problem. We think our country is better than it is. Our company is better than it is. Our sport’s teams are better, our High School is somehow better than other high schools. We lie to ourselves because it’s easier than facing the truth. We then claim the moral high-ground and start disparaging others. Jesus says, “stop it.”

## Now, let’s be honest. Jesus is not the first person to call you a hypocrite. Chances are very high that if you are married someone else has pointed out your double-standards. And if you have kids – if you have teenagers – they have probably pointed out an inconsistency or two in your life. It hurts but it’s helpful. And those of who hang out on the conservative end of the theological spectrum – as I do – we especially need to see this because we occupy the same space that the Pharisees held.[[5]](#endnote-5) And Jesus rips the Pharisees for being self-righteous religious jerks. Small minds, big teeth – like pit bulls (and that is unfair to pit bulls).[[6]](#endnote-6) We are inclined to take these principled stands and judge people for failing to hold them – even as we fail to hold them.

# Now we are not alone. There are a few main camps out there.

## One of the main streams in culture right now tries to get around the problem of judging by arguing that there are no rules. There are no objectives standards. There is no transcendent truth. No right or wrong. Consequently, they will argue that judging others is wrong. It’s unconscionable. Tolerance is the highest virtue. For the record, this group is quite judgmental. They insist that they are right and they are intolerant of anyone who disagrees with their calls for tolerance.

## This differs from the position advocated by many of us, which is: there are standards – which is controversial enough. The problem is, we then point out the many ways other people fail to keep them even as we fail to keep them ourselves, or we keep them but are self-righteous bores.

# Thankfully there is a third way. And that is what we are called to.

## First, believe the Gospel. Embrace it. This changes everything.

### Many people in this room do not get it. At a fundamental level you are trying to be good because you think you have to.

### You are lying to yourself because having an accurate view of yourself is too painful. And you think that a lot depends on being good.

### There is such freedom that comes from embracing the idea that God knows the worst and accepts you as you are. God knows the worst about me and He is so good and gracious that Christ died for all of that. Once I get that, once I confess – co- fess, agree with God that I’m that bad – then there are no hidden secrets. I don’t have to pretend to be good. And there is such freedom there (release, joy, security) that I can stop hiding and start extending grace to others.

### The first thing we have to do in order to follow Christ into the new community he is setting up, is embrace the Gospel.

## The second thing we need to do is assume the log is in there.

### Start with ourselves. Stop trying to fix others and starting trying to fix yourself – not so God will love you, but because He does and this is the right way to live.

### Let me pause here to say: it’s very hard to have an accurate view of ourselves. The heart is so good at image management that it’s hard to see it plainly. When I was a management consultant I came to believe that a big part of my work was in helping companies – individuals, departments, divisions, entire companies – see themselves and their performance clearly. That’s much harder to do than you think. Before you can fix a problem you have to identify it. You need to define it. But often, even with objective data, people would not accept how they were doing.

### I’d quietly gather data about their performance, and then I’d find a company that was doing the same thing – only better – to benchmark them against. I’d present what I’d found and then settle in for the fireworks. People would attack me, attack the data, attack the other company. They would lash out in every direction possible before – finally – looking honestly at themselves. It’s hard to do. It may be impossible if you do not know that you are loved and safe – but in Christ, you are loved and safe. We have to start with the Gospel.

### How can you get an accurate view of yourself? There are a handful of ways. Some are more fun than others.

#### A way that God seems to use to help us understand things more clearly is suffering. It doesn’t always work, but sometimes it does.

#### Contemplation is another way forward. Sitting in silence - learning to turn off the voice that is feeding us less than accurate information.

#### Giving people permission to speak into your life – and then not shooting them when they do.

##### I have a few friends with whom I occasionally go through the 2 + 1 exercise. Two affirmations and a challenge. Affirm me twice but give me something to work on.

##### As I’ve said before, we pay money to get better for things that often do no matter. I pay an art teacher to teach me how to paint, a golf pro to correct my swing. If we want to get better we invite criticism. Often in those areas where we would profit the most our heart is so defensive we will not even solicit input.

## Third, treat others in the way you want to be treated.

### Be kind and gracious to others. Treat them the way you want God to keep treating you!

### Jesus is clear on this point, people who are relying on forgiveness must extend it to others. People who are relying on mercy need to be merciful.[[7]](#endnote-7) The parallel passage in Matthew says, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." If we extend grace and love and care – it will be given to us. “Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.’”

## There is more that can be said when it comes to appropriately judging others. The New Testament has some pretty specific counsel.

### It should be done on the basis of the truth.

### People should be considered innocent until proven guilty. That’s not just an aspect of US law, it’s an idea that grows out of Christ’s teaching in Matthew 18, where we are told to confirm every fact by two or more witnesses.

### When our feedback is negative, it should be done privately as possible.[[8]](#endnote-8)

## There is more that could be said, but let’s keep the main thing the main thing. We are hypocrites and it needs to stop. We need to understand how easy it is to be wrong in our assessments of others and of ourselves.

## We need to believe the Gospel. It starts here.

### We need to understand that the plank that was in our eye was so big Jesus had to be nailed to it – and he was.

### We were that bad – that lost. But He is that good and loving. And so He died in our place. Knowing the worst about us, to very worst about you, He accepts you. He died for you. He loves you. So we don’t have to hide that, we can own it and move on, helping others own their own problems and pointing them to Christ.

## It’s much harder to be self-critical, gracious and affirming. Jesus is building a new community.

# Closing Prayer

## Lord, help us to be slow to speak, quick to hear, and slow to anger. Help us to be mindful of the logs in our eyes. Help us be teachable and humble so that we can learn from you. Help us also be loving enough and courageous enough to speak truth into one another's lives.

## God help me to see myself and my condition as you see me. Don't let me take for granted that I have sinned, but help me to see my sin for what it is. It is only by your grace that I am able to stand, without You I am no different to anybody else in the sin department. I relate to sinners because I know what it is like to be one. Now help me to help other people remove the speck from their eye by showing them the way to Jesus with love, passion and humility.

# Quotes

## “Rebuke a wise man, he’ll thank you. Rebuke a fool, he’ll hate you.”

# Questions

## Read Luke 18:9-14 - The Parable of the Pharisee (who represents religious people) and the Tax Collector (who represents “immoral” people. What can you learn from this passage about what Jesus said in Luke 6?

## In what ways are you now – or have you been – a hypocrite. Who are you judging?

# Wrap Up / Announcements

## One of the groups of guys I am a part of has been

## One of them signed a recent letter, “I own a lumber yard.” Life would be a lot easier if we could all see how much lumber we have in our own eyes.

1. John 7:24 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In [James 4:11-12](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/James%204.11-12), James does not prohibit Christians from confronting those who have strayed; rather, he warns against believers who maliciously slander others. Jesus underscored this same point in [Matthew 7:1-4](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matthew%207.1-4). The conclusion many Christians have drawn from these two passages can be boiled down to just three words: Do not judge! [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Thanks to Tim Keller for this point. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Svenson, 1981. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ##  But it starts with a big problem.  A community that has high ideals and high standards like ours is even more vulnerable to becoming toxic, precisely because of its high standards.  We know what kind of life is congratulated as “blessed” and what kind is not.  A high-standards community is uniquely vulnerable to becoming a judgmental community as we hold one another accountable to those high standards.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. We have to face this squarely.  We have a well-earned reputation for being judgmental. We have made people wear scarlet letters.  We have shamed people.  [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. When William Gladstone was Treasurer of Great Britain, he sent down to the Treasury for certain statistics upon which he was to base his budget proposals. The statistician working there made a mistake. But Gladstone was so sure of the man's accuracy that he did not take time to verify his figures. He went before the House of Commons and made his speech, basing his appeal on the incorrect figures that had been given him. His speech was no sooner published than the newspapers exposed its glaring inaccuracies. Gladstone was naturally overwhelmed with embarrassment. He went to his office and sent at once for the statistician who was responsible for his humiliating situation. The man came, full of fear and shame, certain that he was going to lose his position. But, instead, Mr. Gladstone said: "I know how much you must be disturbed over what has happened, and I have sent for you to put you at your ease. For a long time you have been engaged in handling the intricacies of the national accounts, and this is the first mistake that you have made. I want to congratulate you and express to you my keen appreciation." It took, a big man to do that. It took a merciful, man to do that. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. According to a publication I receive, the food science department of Michigan State University, after years of careful research, finally found a way to peel onions without making the eyes water. They claim there will be no tears when you perform the chore if your keep your mouth shut! Now I haven't had a chance to test that conclusion myself, but I can say that it points out a good addition to our discussion. If you must "peel the onions" of other men's faults and evil deeds, learn to keep your mouth shut until the appropriate time! [↑](#endnote-ref-8)