

Taking the Log Out of Our Eyes Matt. 7.3-5

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One of the messages that hopefully has come through with this term's focus on having an awareness of those around us, is that we are not purely individual beings – that how we interact with others affects ourselves also.

I think Jesus' commandment to do unto others as we would have them do unto us is actually a deep truth about the nature of reality and of our connection with others.

Once you realise this, then our relationships with others can become a powerful tool for learning about ourselves. One of the ways we can learn about ourselves is by noticing what about other people triggers us.

Now we all get annoyed by people and their less desirable traits. Whenever we see someone being selfish, dishonest or mean to other people, we probably all get annoyed and disappointed by it. But being triggered by someone means another level of reaction. It means that person really get "under our skin". They really infuriate you and cause an almost uncontrollable emotional reaction in you.

There is a member of my family who gets really triggered by a person they know. The person who triggers them is very self-promoting and vain. They went to the gym for a month and then started posting pictures on Instagram of their newly

developing muscles, which were tiny. This visibly infuriated my family member who went around showing us all these photos and saying how mad it made them that this person behaved like this. Or they would share stories of how this person would try and force their way into being the centre of attention, or the lead in some drama production or even just to be the front person for class presentations.

My usually very quiet and calm family member would become almost speechless with anger at the way this person ruthlessly promoted themselves and was absolutely brimming with over-confidence.

I would question them as to why it was getting them so upset – why couldn't they just ignore them, and leave them to it. Most of us just looked at what this person did and laughed at it, or in some cases actually applauded their confidence and self-belief. So why was my family member going out of their way to get so offended and annoyed by what this person was doing, when often it didn't have anything directly to do with them? Why did they allow this person get to them so badly and upset them so much?

And I realised that this family member of mine actually had the opposite qualities from the person who annoyed them. They would never, ever promote themselves, or say anything good about themselves, or

ever let themselves be the centre of attention. They always held themselves back. So why did this other person's self-promotion get so under their skin?

The answer was because self-promotion was already there under my family member's skin. They had feelings of wanting to be noticed, of wanting to be the centre of attention (because of course probably we all do at some point).

But they didn't know that they had these same feelings because they had pushed them down or repressed them. Probably they had learned somewhere along the line that putting yourself first or blowing your own horn was bad, and so they had repressed and disowned their own self-confidence.

But pushing away parts of ourselves doesn't make them go away. We still feel them, but because we can't admit to ourselves that we feel this way, we think that someone else is making us feel this.

This is called projection – when we think the things we are feeling inside of us are being caused by other people.

This happens with a lot of different feelings. We react to people because we think that the way they are acting has made us feel a certain way. And we get triggered. We feel as if something they have said or done has gotten under our skin. But in fact, we are responsible for the way we feel – we are just blaming the other person for making us feel it.

If and when you ever get married or in a committed relationship with someone, then you will encounter this all of the time. Because we tend to project our repressed feelings onto the people closest to us. In fact, some psychologists think that we actually choose the very person who is most going to trigger these feelings in us.

But it also works in the opposite way. Whenever we repress our good feelings about ourselves, we often project those feelings onto another person. So, if we repress the fact that we are actually a spontaneous and wild person (perhaps because we have been taught that it's irresponsible to be like that) then we might meet someone who triggers those feelings in us – they are a little wild and spontaneous. And so those feelings of being wild and spontaneous inside of us get projected onto that person. And because they are actually our own feelings that we haven't owned, we think that the other person has something we feel like we are missing. And so we think, if I could just have that person, then I could have the thing that I feel as if I am missing. That's what happens when we get infatuated with someone – what some people even call being in love.

If that was all too complicated to follow, then just remember this. Our reactions to people are our responsibility. No one makes us feel anything that isn't already there inside of us somewhere. If someone says to me; "you're a thief" I would just laugh and say: "Sorry you've got the wrong person." Because I genuinely know

that I'm just not the kind of person who steals things. If someone says to me: "You are just a baldy, bald guy with no hair." I would laugh and say; "Yeah I am, so what!" Because I know that about myself and I'm ok with it. But when my wife says to me: "You're being selfish." I get angry and say; "No I'm not, you are. How dare you call me selfish." Because I have been raised to think that being selfish is bad, and so I cannot stand the thought that I might be selfish. I push down, disown and repress the selfish parts of me.

But if I can take responsibility for my feelings, then I can ask myself "why did I get so upset at being called selfish? Is it because I feel like it's bad if I'm selfish? And then perhaps I could think: But of course I am selfish. Everyone is at some times. That's natural and it's okay to be selfish sometimes. In fact it's important to put yourself first from time to time.

Then I have learned something about myself, and I have become a healthier version of myself.

If we can take responsibility for our reactions to people, then we can learn about our blind spots, and we can become a more healed, less reactive version of ourselves. It's just as Jesus said: if we can first deal with the log in our own eye, then we can more clearly see that what we are seeing in others is just a speck in their eye. And we can learn what a powerful tool other people are for our own growth as human beings.