

# The Golden Rule:

A Guiding Principle for Life

Matthew 7:12 CBC 5/3/09 a.m.

Central Truth: **Because God is your Father in heaven and is generous to you, treat others as you would want them to treat you.**

**ENGAGE:** Most, if not all of us, have probably shopped at J.C. Penney at some time, but I want to tell you something you may not have know about J.C. Penney. J.C. Penney stores used to be known as “the Golden Rule store.” You see when J.C. Penney was a child his dad shared with him the verse we are going to look at this morning. J.C. Penney’s dad told him, “Son, **if you follow this Golden Rule, you will live a great life for the Lord, and God will take care of you.**”

That sermon left a lasting impression on Penney’s life. Years later, he started a chain of stores across the country. And he based his whole business philosophy on this verse. **He treated his customers & his associates the way he would want to be treated, & God blessed the business.** Mr. Penney did not like to use the word “employee.” He called those that worked for him, “Associates.” He treated them just as well as he would like to be treated. He was able to take a general store in 1902, & build it into a multi-billion dollar business, because he actually lived the Golden Rule. Mr. Penny tried his best to always treat people like he wanted to be treated. He treated them with love, respect, kindness, understanding and encouragement.

**Focus:** Do you try to treat others in your life as you wish to be treated? Now our normal instinct is to think we would be nicer to others if they would show these attributes to us. But, that’s the Problem. **Jesus didn’t say,** “Treat people with the same Respect they treat you.” Rather Jesus commands us: “In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets” (Matt 7:12 NET).

For us to fulfill this command then **we must love** not only our friends but also **our enemies.** We must do good not only to those who have been kind to us, but also to those who hate us. **This is not our natural reaction.**

**Donald Trump,** whose name has become synonymous with glitz and greed made this statement that expresses our natural tendency: **“I love to have enemies. I fight my enemies. I like beating my enemies to the ground.”** Trump’s get-even game plan stands in glaring contrast to what we know as the Golden Rule.

**SET THE STAGE biblically:** The Golden Rule begins in the original with the word “therefore” (Greek: *oun*). **Jesus’ golden rule, summarizes His core teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.** The Golden Rule Jesus’ gives sums up God’s requirements for people in the Old Testament, and is the essence of God’s will for you and me as followers of Jesus Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount after concentrating on the new relationship God demands of us in our relationship **with people** (cf. Matt 5:21B48), Jesus turns to the relationship between us as individuals **with God** (Matt 6:1B7:11). Then in our sermon text for today (Matt 7:12) Jesus returns to our relationship with one another (5:21B48) by using the Golden Rule as a summary of the way we are to live in terms of our new relationship with both God and others.

By placing this principle at the end of the main body of Christ's sermon, Matthew sets this "Golden Rule" then in the immediate context of our relationship with God the Father. **Our relationship with God should affect our relationship with others** (Matt 6:12, 14–15; 7:1–5, cf. 5:44-48). To fulfill this rule for life in the kingdom we must be in a right relationship with God. Then after this concluding saying, Jesus will call for us to make a decision between two ways: either w. Him or against Him (Matt 7:13-27).

**Scripture Reading:** Now to help you see how Jesus summarizes God's will not only for the people in the Old Testament, but also for you and me as followers of Jesus Christ, for the Scripture reading (and to get the context) turn w. me in your Bibles, first to Matthew 5:17-20 [p. 852]; then we'll read our text for today as well, Matt 7:12

The phrase "for this is the Law and the Prophets" (in Matt 7:12), shows us that Jesus is summarizing His Sermon on the Mount, since He opened up the body of His sermon back in Matt 5:17 (NKJV) with this phrase ("Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill"). The phrase "**the Law and the prophets**" brackets and sets out for us the main body of Jesus' Sermon the Mount.

Now "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you" could be understood as a sort of "**ten commandments**" of Jesus (summarizing Jesus' instruction to us in Matt 5:21-7:11) [cf. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 11:114]. By way of review here in Matt 5:21-7:11 Jesus commands us: [SLIDES]

1. You will make reconciliation w. fellow disciples your first religious priority (Matt 5:21-26).
2. You will deal decisively with your sinful thoughts (Matt 5:27-30).
3. You will make every effort to remain with your spouse (Matt 5:31-32). You will not divorce, except when infidelity has occurred (5:31–32).
4. You will always tell the truth (5:33–37).
5. You will be generous even to those who injure you (5:38-42).
6. You will love and pray for your persecutors (5:43-48).
7. You will perform religious duties only to gain eternal divine reward (6:1-18).
8. You will be exclusively loyal to God's Kingdom and righteous standards (6:19-34).
9. You will examine your own life before making judgments about others (7:1-6).
10. You will believe that God is good and rest in his answers to prayer (7:7-11). [Blank Slide]

Jesus' summary then of the law as **loving one's neighbor or doing for others whatever one would like for the other person to do to him or her** is not a higher law that replaces the Torah but **the true intention of the law**. [Paul's view is similar on this point (cf. Rom 13:8–9; Gal 5:14).]

**Transition:** Now Jesus Golden rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12 NIV) is, no doubt the most famous statement Jesus made. Many people who know very little about the Bible know the Golden Rule.

**The problem is that most people only partially apply Jesus' guiding principle for life. Most people do good to those who do good to them. But to their enemies? Forget it.**

But if you and I are serious about our relationship with God we will **live in love toward friend and foe, neighbor and enemy**. "In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you." This is the standard God expects from us as followers of Jesus Christ. **This is impossible unless Jesus Christ is at the center of our hearts, as it is only through Him that we find enough self-sacrificial love to love other people.**

**Preview & Trans:** Now this same verse that empowered the life of JC Penney, Matt 7:12, can empower the lives of you & me as believers today. **I want to share three ways that the Golden Rule applies to our lives.** How does the Golden Rule apply to our lives?

## **Treating others as you would want them to treat you means you should serve others the way you would want to be served.**

“Whatever you want others to do to you, do also to them.”

**APPL:** If you were the owner of your own company, **how many of you would want your workers to work as hard as they could?** How many of you would want them to maintain a positive attitude toward others, even when things get hectic?”

**If that’s the way you would want to be treated if you were the boss, then that’s the way you should treat your CURRENT boss!** Living out the truth of this Bible verse revolutionizes the way you do your job! You’re not just doing the bare minimum so that you can collect a paycheck. You’re living your life the way Jesus wants you to live it! You’re serving others the way YOU would want to be served! **1 Corinthians 10:31** (NET) says: “Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”

You say, “That’s not realistic! That’s not the way most supervisors act! That’s not the way most PEOPLE act!” You’re right! People are selfish by nature. Instinctively we are all self-centered. We want the best for ourselves.

**ILL:** One way parents sometimes try to curb selfishness is by telling children, whoever cuts the piece must let the other one choose first. Now of course, the idea is to teach the children to cut it as evenly as possible so as to not take unfair advantage of a brother or sister. **Then our unselfish children say, “You can cut the cake.”** And the other one says, “No, that’s all right, **you** can cut the cake.”

We see this natural self-centeredness in grownups as well. Whether it=s cutting in front of another driver to get a better position or fighting for power in our relationships, we tend by nature to be self-centered.

**\*\*\*This is why in order for us to live by the Golden Rule in every area of our lives we must have God’s Spirit living within us, and controlling us.** The apostle Paul reminds us:

SLIDE: “The outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. <sup>8:8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>8:9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you” (Rom 8:7B9a NET). [Blank Slide] When you trusted in Christ as your Savior God’s Holy Spirit comes to live within you. As we allow God’s Spirit to control us He can enable us to treat others as we would want them to treat us.

**APPL:** Now some people may practice what appears to be a form of the Golden rule; i.e., they do to others **what they want done to them.** In this type of giving, a person gives in hopes that he or she will get something out of it.

**ILL:** I think of one of my “hall of shame” gifts to my wife, Janel in the early years of our marriage. One year for her birthday I got her what I thought was a very practical gift, a large

“cast iron” skillet, that **I thought** every home needed. Janel was not impressed with my line of reasoning. She was about as thrilled, as when I took her to a Kansas City Royals baseball game as part of her same birthday present! When Jesus says, “Treat others as you would want them to treat you,” **we need to be careful we are doing what has the best interests of the other person truly at heart, and not our own interests!** When we give with expectations of getting something back, we aren’t really giving in the first place.

The other way to give is with absolutely no expectation of getting anything back. That is what Jesus is talking about. **The best way to show your love is to freely give, just because you want someone else to be fulfilled in some way.**

The apostle Paul tells us: SLIDE: “Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well. <sup>2:5</sup> You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, <sup>2:6</sup> who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, <sup>2:7</sup> but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. <sup>2:8</sup> He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:4-8 NET). Blank Slide

Be committed to the best interests of the other person. This only takes place as we are in a right relationship with others. The basis for a right relationship with others has been made possible for us through Jesus Christ.

**Now you and I can demonstrate God’s self-sacrificial love to others because of the unselfish love we have received from God through Christ.** (Cf. 1 John 3 & 4). Christ calls us to have a servant attitude.

Jesus instructs us: SLIDE: “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, <sup>10:44</sup> and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. <sup>10:45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43b-45 NET). Blank Slide

If you want to be great in the eyes of the Lord, then be the one who serves! Be an instrument of God’s blessing! Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” **Treating people the way you want to be treated fulfills the will of God.**

**Reit:** How does the Golden Rule apply to our lives? First, treating others as you would want them to treat you means you should **serve others** the way you would want to be served. **Second:**

**Treating others as you would want them to treat you means you should forgive others the way you would want to be forgiven.**

APPL: How many of you have ever said, “Oh, I wish she would give me another chance! I wish she would realize how sorry I am for what I said! I wish she could forgive me.”

If you’ve ever wanted to be forgiven, then you should have empathy for the people in YOUR life who need forgiveness. **The Golden Rule is the foundation of active goodness and mercy—the kind of love God shows to us every day.**

God commands you and me: Slide: “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. <sup>5:1</sup> Therefore, be imitators of God as dearly loved children” (Eph 4:32-5:1 NET). Blank Slide

**\*\*ILL:** **Billy Graham** had a weekly newspaper column in his local **Montreat, N.C.** Newspaper, where he answered questions that people sent him. One person wrote and said, “**My dad is dying, and he wants to see me one more time. But he abandoned me when I was a kid. Why should I go and see him now?**”

And Dr. Graham said, “What your father did was very hurtful, and I can understand why you wouldn’t want to go. But put yourself in his shoes. If you messed up your relationship with your family, wouldn’t you pray for one more chance to make things right before you died? Wouldn’t you want one last opportunity to say “I’m sorry?” Wouldn’t you want one last chance to be a blessing?”

And then Billy Graham said, “This isn’t just about your dad’s need for forgiveness. **This is about your willingness to extend forgiveness. When you give your heart to Jesus, God gives you the ability to forgive the hurts of the past.** God gives you the ability to **love** people that you could never love on your own.”

APPL: Forgiving and loving people who have hurt you is not something you can do in your own strength. But **with the help of God’s Spirit living within you**, you can forgive others the way you would want to be forgiven.

**Think about those who have hurt you.** The pain of what you have gone through may leave you feeling numb, but what response would you desire if you had wronged someone else the way you have been wronged? How would God have you respond to them? Jesus did **not** say, “Just when people have done you well, treat them as you would desire to be treated. Rather Jesus says to us, “**In everything**, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets” (Matt 7:12 NET).

**\*\*APPL:** What happens when you are at a **checkout counter**; or conducting some business with an individual and he or she is not very friendly to you? Do you respond back in kind to them? Or do you say to yourself; this person has some real needs. **I will try to help their day be better by being friendly to them?** Our natural tendency can be to respond in kind to how people respond to us, but Christ calls us to treat others as we desire to be treated! Be friendly! Brighten their day!

Trans: Rather than giving give in to the spirit of **vengeance**, our Lord teaches us to **avoid retaliation**. Solomon wisely counsels us: SLIDE: Do not say, “I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will pay him back according to what he has done” (Prov 24:28-29 NET). Blank Slide

Solomon warns us to not try to get even by paying back someone for the evil done. Rather Solomon instructs us to “wait” (תַּיָּבֵן, *qavveh*) on the Lord. SLIDE: “Do not say, ‘I will pay back evil!’ Wait for the Lord, so that he may vindicate you” (Prov 20:22 NET). Blank Slide Don’t take matters into your own hands. Let God make things right for you. To wait on the Lord requires **faith** in Him, **reliance** on God to make things right, and patience. To wait on the Lord means the wrongs done to us may have to be endured for a time.

**Reit/Trans:** How does the Golden Rule apply to our lives? **First**, treating others as you would want them to treat you means you should serve others the way you would want to be served. **Second:** forgive others the way you would want to be forgiven. **Third,**

## **Treating others as you would want them to treat you means you should show self-sacrificial love for others the way you would want to be loved.**

Jesus' command: "Treat other people as you would want them to treat you" is a command for us to demonstrate God's self-sacrificial love to one another. **Self-sacrificial love is at the core of being a follower of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14, 18).**

The apostle Paul picks up on this and summarizes the OT this way: SLIDE: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." <sup>13:9</sup> For the commandments, '*Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet,*' (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, '*Love your neighbor as yourself.*' <sup>13:10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:8-10 NET). Blank Slide In other words, "treating others the way you want to be treated fulfills the will of God."

**Demonstrate a love that is sensitive to others and aware of their preferences.** As you wish to be treated with sensitivity to your preferences, so treat others with sensitivity to their preferences. And husbands this is not just for your wives—this is for you as well. Jesus tells us that he that would be greatest must be servant of all.

The Golden Rule—treating others as we would want them to treat us revolutionizes the way we love others. **It challenges us to put the interests of others ahead of our own interests.**

That's what the Golden Rule is all about. Jesus says if you live your life like this, you are fulfilling the will of God. You are living out the essence of the OT.

The Golden Rule is all about loving and serving others with the same sacrificial love God has for us. Treat others as you would want to be treated. Give the same sensitive consideration to others that you want others to give to you. Treat other people with the respect and sensitivity that you would wish from them.

**ILL: A brother and sister were in the attic looking through the letters their parents had written to each other many years before.** The boy asked, "Are you sure these belong to mom and dad?" The sister assured him that they did. He then told her, "**That's not the names they call each other now!**"

Did you know that each time you talk negative to your spouse, you are actually robbing him or her of some of their self-worth? Yet, how many times do we come home very tired or get busy concentrating on something just to snap at the other? In those situations, we would never think about saying that we didn't love them, so why are we talking to them in such a way that says it to them?

**ILL: The marriage counselor told the husband to start being more attentive to his wife and start treating her with more love.** So, one day he comes home a little early with a dozen roses in one hand and a box of chocolates in the other.

His wife opens the door, sees him and bursts into tears. In between sobs, she says, "**Little Johnny** threw up, **your parents** called and said they were coming over for dinner, and now to top it all off, **YOU COME HOME DRUNK!**"

Even at the risk of being misunderstood, let's treat others as we wish to be treated. Look out for the interests of others; be sensitive to their needs. Jesus lays the responsibility on us as Christians to act so that others will imitate our deeds and in the end glorify God (Matt 5:16). **All God's commands lead to this one command: "In everything, treat other people as you would want them to treat you."**

**\*\*ILL:** Little Chad was in 2nd grade. He was a little slower than the other children and that made them shun Chad. A couple of weeks before Valentines' Day, Chad came home and told his mother that he wanted to make cards for everyone in his class. She knew how they treated her son, but she helped him make 35 cards.

On Valentine's Day, she waited by the curb for the school bus to bring him home. When it got there, she saw all the kids laughing and getting off the bus, and then she saw Chad walking by himself near the back of the bus.

**When he got off the bus, he was very happy, and told his mother that he didn't forget a single classmate, that he remembered them all.** They still shunned Chad, but he remembered each one of them with a card.

**We have shunned Jesus Christ from the very beginning, too, but He has remembered each one of us in His love.** And He wants us to show that love to other people, too, just like Chad did—for the sake of loving, not for the purpose of receiving anything back.

**Obedience is not always easy.** His classmates were not treating that little boy very well. But he treated them the way he wanted to be treated, no the way he was being treated. That little boy was living the Golden Rule. How many of us can say the same thing? If this lost and hurting world is going to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, it will not be from some epiphany of sorts. If that lost and hurting co-worker, neighbor, or family member is going to come to faith in Christ, it will be from people like you and me **showing the love of Christ to others from our hearts.** And God will ultimately reward us.

**Concluding ILL** (cf. Robinson, p. 268): **Charlie Brown** is a kind-hearted, do-good kind of character. Despite the abuse he receives from the other inhabitants in the late Charles Schultz's cartoon strip, *Peanuts*, Charlie Brown continues to practice the Golden Rule. Even though it rarely works to his advantage, **Charlie Brown keeps doing for others what he would have them do for him.**

In one strip Charlie and Lucy are lined up behind a bunch of other kids to see a movie. "Have you been here long, Charlie Brown?" Lucy asks. "No, I just go here. Actually, I shouldn't be going to the movies at all. I have homework to do. **If it were not for the fact that they are giving away free candy bars to the first fifteen hundred kids, I wouldn't even be here.**" **Lucy who has been listening to the ticket agent counting kids** while Charlie Brown talked asks him, "Do you mind if I get ahead of you, Charlie Brown?"

"No, please do. 'Ladies first' is always my motto. I don't think this is a very good movie. I just came because of the free candy bars for the first fifteen hundred kids. I really should be home doing my reading, but you know how it is when they are giving something away free," Charlie Brown continues as Lucy pays for her ticket.

**"Fifteen hundred!" announces the ticket agent, as Lucy gets the last candy bar. "Sorry kid, that's the way it goes."**

The world is full of Lucys. **When you practice the Golden Rule, don't do it for them; do it for your Father in heaven. He pays off with more than candy bars!**

Let's display the inner righteousness that characterizes those who are part of Christ's kingdom. Let's treat others as we would desire to be treated. What does treating others as you want to be treated look like? **Let's serve others as we would want to be served. Let's forgive others as we would want to be forgiven. Let's demonstrate God's self-sacrificial love for others as we would want to be loved.** "In everything, let's treat others as we would want to be treated." For this sums up Christ's requirements for you and me.

**Bow heads for time of self-examination:** As you consider your relationship with others, especially those with whom you are having conflicts, are you treating them as you would desire to be treated? As we prepare to partake of communion this morning in remembrance of Christ's self-sacrificial love for us, are you demonstrating that same self-sacrificial love to others? (Time of silent prayer.. to examine one's heart... ) Salvation.