

The Golden Rule

Lesson 2: A Transformational Commandment



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

The Golden Rule

Lesson 2: A Transformational Commandment

Learn how applying the "Golden Rule" can transform your thoughts, words, conduct, and relationships

Watch the free video or listen to the audio of this study @ www.godsaidso.com/dgw164

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: DGW164

Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

Copyright: Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God's glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

Scripture quotations: Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

**FIND MORE FROM THE DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES @
WWW.GODSAIDSO.COM**

The Golden Rule

Lesson 2:

A

Transformational I Commandment

Our first study contrasted the commandment Jesus gave, known as the “Golden Rule,” with three other commonly practiced “rules” regarding how you can treat other people. We saw that God does *not* approve of forcing your will on another because you have power in a certain area (the “Iron Rule”). We saw that God does *not* approve of treating others how they treat you (the “Brass Rule”). And, we saw that even doing no harm to others is not entirely what God desires from your conduct toward others (the “Silver Rule”).

Instead, the standard Jesus sets for how you must treat others is the “Golden Rule” that is given in Matthew 7:12. Jesus said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” The standard for your conduct toward others *must be* how you want others to treat you. This certainly involves refraining from harming people in any way (as you would not want others to harm you). And, this also involves doing good to people in the ways you would want people to do good to you.

This is such a simple, yet transformational idea. You see, the fact of the matter is that people do not treat others in this way much of the time. People are often too self-absorbed to see the true needs of others and act in the best interest of the others. Then,

even when this “Golden Rule” is practiced, it is often only practiced toward certain people. Yet, Jesus’ commandment is much more far-reaching than this!

Those who are Christians must be determined to live differently from the “normal” activities that are seen throughout the world. This is because the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God (see 1 John 2:15-17). So, Romans 12:1-2 instructs Christians to give themselves entirely to the Lord and live in a transformed kind of way. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Matthew 7:12 is one of the many commandments involved in God’s law that will transform us from the ways of the world to a true imitator of Jesus Christ. So, having established what the “Golden Rule” says (in lesson 1), let’s consider the many ways that it will transform us. If we live according to Jesus’ teaching, it will transform our thoughts, our words, our conduct, and our relationships!

Transformational For Your Thoughts

One of the most important elements in true Christian transformation (from a life of sin to a life of godliness) is the mind. Romans 12:2 demonstrated this to be so. Paul instructed that you “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” If you are dedicated to living according to the “Golden Rule,” it will surely transform your thoughts!

In focus

The Bible speaks about the importance of your focus. For instance, Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” Therefore, what you choose to focus on (what fills your heart/mind)

is what you will often find impacting your life – either for the better or the worse!

Jesus also put the focus on *focus* in Matthew 6:19-34. He said that your focus should not be on the earthly treasures because they will not last. Instead, your focus should be on the spiritual (heavenly) treasures that are eternal. Then, He warns about having more than one focus in life, saying that “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (verse 24). Ultimately, Jesus instructs you to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (verse 33) – even above putting your focus on the pursuit of your physical needs (i.e. food, drink, and clothing).

Now, I want you to think about what applying the “Golden Rule” to your life will do to your focus. If your desire is to treat others how you would want them to treat you, your focus must be on them! So, you must go from a self-centered focus to a selfless focus.

Philippians 2:3-4 helps to understand the kind of selfless focus God wants you to have. “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Then, you could continue reading verses 5 through 11 to see that this was exactly the kind of humble and selfless focus that Jesus Christ had in leaving Heaven, coming to earth, living as a man, and dying on the cross!

Your focus cannot be on your own desires and pleasing yourself if you are going to live according to the “Golden Rule.” It requires you to focus on how other people feel, things that other people need and desire, how other people will interpret what is done, etc. So, living in this way tries to see things through the eyes of the people you are around rather than just from your own selfish perspective. You will want to focus on others, just as you would like others to focus on you.

In judgments

One of the ways in which people often hurt others is by making rash, irresponsible, and false judgments about others. You see, the judgments that you make about others impact how you treat them. So, you must consider how the “Golden Rule” will transform the judgments that you form in your private thoughts.

Jesus teaches the need to be careful how you judge others. Matthew 7:1-2 says, “Judge not, that you be not judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” Now, a closer study of this passage demonstrates that Jesus is *not* forbidding all judgments from being made. Instead, His primary concern is hypocritical judgments (see verses 3-5). But, even in this, you should see that you must consider how you would want others to judge you.

Jesus also taught about making the proper judgments in John 7:24. When others were trying to judge Jesus in an improper way, Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” So, from this, we can conclude that there are right judgments that should and must be made (as the Scriptures teach on many different occasions). However, we must be very careful how we judge.

It is far too common for folks not to consider others whenever they make judgments. They often reach rash conclusions because they do not weigh out all of the evidence. Perhaps they judge based only on appearance. Perhaps they judge based only on hearsay or gossip. Perhaps they judge based on only having part of the information. Perhaps they judge based on their own suppositions. Perhaps their judgment is without mercy. Then, after forming a rash judgment, they often pass those judgments along to others.

Now, not only does this violate what Jesus teaches about making judgments, but it also violates the “Golden Rule.” Certainly, you would never desire to have those kinds of judgments made about you. Surely, you would desire others to come to you for your side of the story before drawing conclusions. Therefore, the “Golden Rule” will transform your

thoughts about other people because you will consider them in making judgments.

In recognizing opportunities

It is far too easy to get caught up in our own lives, worries, pleasures, etc. and fail to have any consideration for others. Thus, there are many opportunities to serve, encourage, and do good to others that pass by unnoticed because our focus is not in the right place. So, as you put your focus on others, this will cause you to recognize the opportunities that are all around you to do good to others and treat them in the way that you would desire to be treated yourself.

Think about Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In lesson 1, we studied how the Samaritan recognized his opportunity to do good to the man who fell among thieves. And, we considered how the priest and Levite passed him by without helping. Now, Jesus does *not* tell us the reason why they did not help the man and show him love.

I suppose there could have been any number of reasons these two men did not help. But, as you make application of the parable, you should consider if there are ever times when you could be passing someone by and failing to act in their best interest because you are not even looking for opportunities to do good to them. Maybe you are in a hurry to get somewhere. Maybe you are focused on your schedule. Maybe you are concerned about your own worries. Maybe you are lost in your own pleasures.

It is interesting and encouraging to me to recognize that God only expects from us what we are capable of giving to Him. He does not expect more than I am capable of giving Him. But, He also does not accept anything less. Therefore, this means that you should be looking for every opportunity that is available to you. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." And, if you are living by the "Golden Rule," you will be focused on others so much that you will recognize the opportunities that are given to you to do what is good for them. You will be looking to do good to

others as you want others to look for the opportunity to do good to you.

Transformational For Your Words

The transformation that is experienced due to the "Golden Rule" needs to begin in the mind. Your thoughts should be on others rather than just on yourself. You should be thinking about others how you want them to think about you. Then, this transformation in thought extends to a transformation in words. For, you must recognize that your words are very powerful to others (see James 3:1-12). They have the power to either help or destroy.

Words of truth

Speaking the complete truth must be the commitment that is made by everyone who is a Christian. Since God is a God of truth (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), He certainly expects this from those who follow Him. So, this is routinely reflected in the Scriptures. And, in application of the "Golden Rule," you should be committed to speaking the truth because you surely want others to speak the truth to you!

For instance, when Paul speaks concerning the transformation of those who become Christians, he said, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). Then, Romans 1:29 lists "deceit" as something that is "deserving of death" (Romans 1:32).

Notice the things that are *unacceptable* to God and that fail to fulfill the "Golden Rule." You must not lie or deceive. Both condemn any practice of saying things that are not true or that leads another to a false conclusion. Sometimes this happens by just blatantly saying something that is false. Other times this happens by giving misleading information. For instance, on two separate occasions, Abraham told people that his wife, Sarah, was his sister (see Genesis 12 and 20). Now, this was *technically* true

(she was his half-sister). However, he purposefully misled them by failing to say she was also his wife.

There are many circumstances in which you might be tempted to be untruthful. Maybe you want to “keep the peace” with someone, so you tell him/her a lie. Maybe you want to flatter someone, so you “stretch the truth” to make him/her feel good. Maybe you are afraid of the consequences the truth will bring, so you lead another to draw a false conclusion based on the truth.

Now, the “Golden Rule” demands that you consider whether you want to be misled by others or whether you want people to always be completely honest with you. For, it is not enough to just *not* lie and deceive. But, you must also speak the truth – even when the truth is not pleasant.

Words of edification

If you were to describe how most people speak about others, would you say that they speak in selfish ways or in ways that are in the best interest of the others? How many times do you and others speak words that harm those who hear you? The simple fact of the matter is that God wants you to be transformed in your speech, and following the “Golden Rule” will go a long way to accomplish that.

Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” You must set a guard at your mouth, never allowing your tongue to harm someone else. Now, this does not mean that you must never allow your words to cause someone to feel bad. For, there are plenty of times when the truth will make people feel bad. Instead, this means that you must never allow yourself to speak words that do not meet God’s standards for your speech.

Furthermore, true edification (according to how the word is used in the Scriptures) refers to building up others spiritually. It is *not* always equal to a good feeling. In fact, sometimes you will need to tell people that they are sinning against God. Still, even though they may not like what you say, you edify them because you helped identify sin in their lives so that they can make changes and be right with God.

Just think about all of the ways people speak words that are harmful (physically or spiritually). People speak words of unproven accusation. People gossip about others. People speak out of anger. People speak without thinking. People speak in hateful ways.

But, in accordance with the “Golden Rule,” you should be considerate in the words that you speak. You should question whether each word will build someone up or tear someone down (spiritually speaking). You should put yourself in the situation of another and consider what you would *need* someone to say to you and how you would *want* him/her to say it. In all things, your speech must be such that it draws others toward God rather than push them away from Him.

Words of love

Speaking the truth and words that edify others is only part of how you should speak to others. Ephesians 4:15 also adds the responsibility of “speaking the truth in love.” Now, this implies that it is possible to speak the truth in ways that are not right. In fact, I would suggest to you that there are many Christians who harm people with the truth.

Even as it pertains to preaching the gospel and correcting sin, many Christians do not harness their zeal for God with the proper degree of love. So, they rebuke others without any consideration of how they would want others to rebuke them. They “preach” to others in ways that they would not want others to teach them. In doing so, they push people further away from God and the truth!

When Jesus sent out His twelve apostles on a “Limited Commission” to the house of Israel in Matthew 10, He told them, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (verse 16). So, speaking the truth is only one part of what God wants from us. He also wants us to do no harm and be wise in our conduct and conversation toward others.

1 Corinthians 13 will prove to be extremely helpful whenever you consider how you can speak the truth in love. In describing the things love does, Paul said, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed

up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (verses 4-7).

Isn't this exactly how you desire for folks to speak to you? Don't you want them to speak in patient ways? In kind ways? In ways that are not about their own selfish desires and egos? In ways that are not rude? In ways that do not provoke an emotional response in you that would be ungodly? In ways that give you the “benefit of the doubt” rather than assume your guilt? In ways that rejoice whenever you do what is right? In ways that demonstrate trust and hope? Therefore, if this is how you want others to speak to you, you must also speak to them in the same kind of ways, according to God's standard of love.

Transformational For Your Conduct

Love should describe every part of how you think and talk about/to others. But, it only *starts* there. Everything about how you conduct yourself must be described by love (as we saw from 1 Corinthians 13). The “Golden Rule” will surely transform your life regarding how you conduct yourself toward others.

Demonstrating mercy

One of the most difficult things any person can be asked to do for another is to show mercy. Mercy involves compassion for another. And, the word is especially used in the Scriptures to talk about forgiveness. Mercy does *not* give someone what is truly deserved.

Everyone who lives long enough on this earth experiences wrong and suffering. But, this is not always just due to the circumstances of living on this earth. Instead, it is sometimes the direct result of someone else's sin. Sometimes people say things that cause us to suffer. Sometimes people think things

that cause us to suffer. And, sometimes people do things that cause us to suffer.

Then, there are differing degrees to which people cause us to suffer. Sometimes the things that are done against us are quickly forgotten and moved on from. However, there are things that people do against us that truly leave lasting scars. And, especially in these situations, it is easy to fall for the temptation of seeking revenge or always holding on to the wrong that was committed and never moving on.

Yet, Jesus taught, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). And, there are *no* limits to this forgiveness that you should offer to others (see Matthew 18:21-35). Just as God has offered you *limitless* forgiveness whenever you ask Him, you must extend that same kind of forgiveness to those who have wronged you! Now, let me also be clear that the forgiveness God expects you to extend to others concerns situations in which your forgiveness is being sought. For, even God does not forgive if His forgiveness is not sought.

Now, consider how you want others to treat you in this regard. Whenever you realize that you have wronged someone else and caused suffering, do you want him/her to hold on to your sin for the rest of his/her life? Or, do you want an opportunity to start over? Even though you recognize that you do not deserve to start over, this is what you desire. So, if you are going to treat others according to the “Golden Rule,” this is how you must treat them!

Demonstrating kindness

“Kindness” is such a broad idea and is somewhat hard to define. But, it is something that we all recognize. It is gentleness and consideration of others. Unfortunately, much of the way in which the world treats other people lacks genuine kindness. In fact, much of their conduct demonstrates rudeness.

Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Although there is some overlap between this point and the last one, I

think that this one challenges us to go even further. The contrast in this verse is to the kinds of actions described by verse 31. Christians must let “all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking...with all malice” be put away from them. These are to be replaced with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.

I like the word “tenderhearted.” How many times do we see people in this world who are “hard-hearted”? It is so familiar to us that we know what this looks like all too well. It is when people have no consideration of others. But, a “tender” heart means that the way in which other people are treated impacts you. Your heart can be penetrated by *their* feelings.

You must remember that one of the characteristics of true love is that love “is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). So, if your actions do not show kindness (and if your speech is not with kindness), then you do not love that person. And, if you do not love that person, your life is *not* acceptable to God, no matter how many other good things you may do in serving Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!

Now, you must consider how you desire other people to treat you. Do you want their hearts to be so hard against you that they do not care how you feel or about what you need? Or, do you want their hearts to be soft enough that your life really matters to them? Don’t you prefer someone to show you acts of kindness and tenderness (even if they are very small gestures) rather than to act with selfishness and rudeness? If so, the “Golden Rule” makes it necessary that you act in the same kind and tender ways toward others.

Demonstrating care

Part of being tenderhearted and kind is showing people that you care about them. But, while there are even small and relatively insignificant ways you can be kind to be people, I want you to think more about helping and serving people at this point. Again, think about the good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. He cared enough about a complete stranger that he did what he was capable of doing to help the man.

We have already seen that Galatians 6:10 requires Christians to take advantage of their opportunities to do good to all, especially those who are also Christians. Now, there are many ways in which you can do good to other people. For the purposes of this lesson, we will just be considering the *physical* ways you can do good (as we will consider spiritual things in the next lesson).

I think we often overlook the specifics of what Jesus taught about the Judgment Day in Matthew 25:31-46. Although there are some general applications we should make about the righteous and the unrighteous, we should not overlook the specific criteria Jesus states in the passage. He speaks about feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and those in prison.

While there are other ways to do good to people, this is a good start. There are people who have physical needs living around you. And, as we considered earlier, you should be focused on recognizing these opportunities. Then, you must not just dismiss yourself of any responsibility to them. Instead, you should do the most that you can with your opportunities. For, Jesus said that if you do these good things to others, you do them to Him. And, if you do not do these good things to others, you do not do them to Him.

Now, consider yourself in the situation of those who have a physical need. If you were hungry and had no means to provide yourself or your family something to eat, wouldn’t you want someone to feed you and your family? If you were so poor that you had insufficient clothing, wouldn’t you want someone to give you an extra set of their clothes or buy you your own set? If you were sick and unable to get out of the house or were in prison, the hospital, or nursing home, wouldn’t you want someone to come visit you? So, if you would want others to do these kinds of good things to you and show you that they care about you, the “Golden Rule” makes it necessary that you do the same for others!

Transformational For Your Relationships

I am sure that there are other things we could consider regarding how the “Golden Rule” will transform your thoughts, your words, and your conduct. But, I believe you have the point. Up to this point, we have been talking generically about how we should treat “others.” Now, I want you to start putting faces with these “others” and applying the “Golden Rule” to your specific relationships. For, there is no book on relationships, advice column, counselor, etc. who will do more to transform your relationships than God! And, the “Golden Rule” will go a long way in accomplishing this.

Your neighbors

Jesus taught that your “neighbor” is anyone you have the opportunity to show love toward (go back and review the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37). It is *not* limited to the people who live in your physical neighborhood. For instance, there is no mention of the good Samaritan having any prior relationship with the wounded man. In fact, I believe the two were strangers. Yet, Jesus taught this parable in order to answer the question, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29).

So, Jesus expects you to love and apply the “Golden Rule” to all of your neighbors. This includes the people in your neighborhood. But, it also includes strangers you come into contact with. It includes your friends, your adversaries (which we will talk about more in a moment), your co-workers, your classmates, your acquaintances, and *everyone* you contact. Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” in such a complete kind of way. Everyone who came into contact with you would be treated with love, respect, and kindness – and would be better off than if they had not come into contact with you.

Your enemies

Sometimes it is fairly easy to apply the “Golden Rule.” But, even those in the world (who often live according to the “Brass Rule” of getting

even) can sometimes deal kindly with those who are kind to them. The real test of the “Golden Rule” is when you are *not* treated with love, dignity, and kindness. Still, Jesus taught, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

The fact of the matter is that the “Golden Rule” applies to how you treat *everyone*! So, you must be committed to applying all that we have been studying in these lessons to those who hate you and want to see you destroyed. Now, just imagine if your enemies who want to harm you were treated according to the “Golden Rule.” Rather than harming them in return, you would only act in ways that were beneficial for them (physically and spiritually).

Your brethren

Christians are part of a spiritual family. Not only is God their Father, but all other Christians are their brothers and sisters. It is very sad that these brothers and sisters often harm each other in how they think, speak, and act toward one another. Sometimes this causes hard feelings, division in local churches, and even brothers and sisters falling into sin.

Yet, God has given Christians the responsibility to love one another, not just in word or tongue but in deed and truth (1 John 3:18). And, there are many responsibilities the Christian has toward all his/her brothers and sisters in Christ. For instance, Romans 12:10 says, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.” Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” to every brother and sister in Jesus Christ – not just to those who are easy to get

along with, but also to the difficult ones. Rather than fighting and dividing, you would only act in ways that were beneficial to them.

Your family

Every member of the family has the responsibility to love all the other members of the family. However, selfishness can creep into the home unaware and wreak havoc on a home. It can turn husbands and wives into great enemies. And, it can separate the bond that should exist between parents and children. Beyond this, siblings and many other family relationships are often destroyed because of a failure to love and apply the “Golden Rule.”

Yet, we have seen that God expects you to love your neighbor (which includes every member of your family you encounter). This means that you must act like the good Samaritan toward every member of your family, no matter how they act toward you. Now, just imagine if you applied the “Golden Rule” to every member of your family. Rather than contributing to the problems of the family, you would always be part of the solution because you would only act in ways that were beneficial for all the others.

Conclusion

If you want your thoughts, words, and conduct toward others to have God’s approval, you must allow them to be transformed by the “Golden Rule.” And, it is *not* enough just to pick and choose who you desire to show this kind of love toward. Instead, you *must* apply the “Golden Rule” to everyone you come into contact with – no exceptions! If you will, you will be pleasing to God in this area of your life, no matter how other people treat you.

Study Questions

What kind of transformation does God require? How will the “Golden Rule” transform you?

1. Transformational For Your Thoughts

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your focus?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your judgments?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your recognition of opportunities?

2. Transformational For Your Words

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of truth?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of edification?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your words into words of love?

3. Transformational For Your Conduct

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating mercy?

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating kindness?

How will the “Golden Rule” result in you demonstrating care?

4. Transformational For Your Relationships

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your neighbors?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your enemies?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your brethren?

How will the “Golden Rule” transform your relationships with your family?