

# How to Know That You Know

Good to see you guys this morning. If you have a bible, turn with me to the book of **Matthew, chapter 7**. If you're new to our church, **we are currently studying** through the book of Matthew over the next few years, but we're doing it in *sections*: a few chapters here, a few chapters there, and we'll mix in other teaching series in the meantime. Today will be the last week in *this section* of Matthew. It's also the very **end of Jesus' famous "sermon** on the mount," one of his most well-known teachings of all time.

And **in how he ends**, Jesus probably does **one thing we would expect** him to do at the end of a sermon, and **one thing we wouldn't** expect him to do at the end of a sermon. The thing we'd expect is that **he simply summarizes** briefly everything he has just taught. We find that in v. 12—take a look there with me:

*[12] "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*

The **New International Version** of the bible actually translates that verse as "...*this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*" What Jesus has been doing ever since chapter five is giving us *his in-depth take* on living out the things written in the Law and the Prophets. And after doing all that, Jesus here *summarizes* everything in one sentence: "treat other people the way you wish they would treat you." That's what all of this sermon on the mount has been about. So **Jesus, like many communicators, summarizes his message to close.** That's the part we would expect.

**The thing we probably don't expect** is the *next* part. **Because unlike a lot of communicators today, Jesus doesn't then wrap his sermon up with an emotional plea, or a heartwarming story, or a warm invitation.** Instead, he ends his sermon with a series of **warnings**. With a series of stark contrasts between those who genuinely follow him, and those who don't. It seems like Jesus' intention here wasn't to leave people feeling good or inspired or uplifted. It seems like his goal was to—as much as possible—draw crystal clear lines around who was "in" and who was "out" when it comes to his kingdom. **Simply put, Jesus in this passage wants to help us determine who is a Christian and who isn't one.** That's his goal.

Now, **something I've noticed** the longer I've been around evangelicalism is that we often really *struggle* with that idea. **We struggle** to state definitively or confidently where

anyone is at with Jesus. We discourage it with statements like “well who am I say where they’re at with Jesus?” Or “well that’s only between them and God.” Or “well man looks at the *outward* appearance, but the *Lord* looks at the *heart*.” We tend to **get really nervous** about making any hard and fast assessments about where people are at with Jesus.

I think *some* of us even struggle to know whether **we ourselves** have a genuine relationship with Jesus (if we’re honest). For me, growing up in the church, I would constantly go on these youth retreats all over the Southeast. And at least once on each trip, the mainstage speaker would give an invitation to either “give your life to Jesus,” or “*rededicate* your life to Jesus.” And I personally was pretty sure I had already “given my life to Jesus,” but just to be sure, I responded to just about every one of those invitations when they were given. It just seemed like something you wanted to be *sure* about. I think I got saved in at least five different states in the Southeast between the age of about ten and eighteen. Because in my head, *I just wasn’t sure*. And whether it involves retreat invitations or not, **I think a lot of us can identify with the experience of uncertainty when it comes to knowing we stand with Jesus.**

But **Jesus doesn’t want us to be nervous or uncertain.** He wants to help bring *clarity* (one way or another) to people’s relationships with him. And I think *that* is what he’s attempting to do here. For the rest of our passage, Jesus is going to give us **four marks** (*indicators*) of a person who genuinely knows and follows him. And as we walk through each of these, I want you to think through people *you know* that *claim* to follow Jesus, but also take a good long look at your *own* life, and use what Jesus says to honestly ask the question, “based on what Jesus says, do *I* understand what it means to follow Jesus?” And use that to wrestle through the things Jesus mentions here. Okay, the first mark of whether or not someone follows Jesus is...

## Walking a difficult path (v. 13-14)

*[13] “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard (or difficult) that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*

So this language about “gates” and “paths” would’ve been **familiar** to Jesus’ audience. Many cities were surrounded by large, **towering walls** that protected them from invasion. And there were only a handful of ways to get *inside* the walls of the city—generally,

through “gates” in the walls. And different *gates* led to *different* parts of the city. If you went through one gate called the “sheep gate,” it would take you to the central *marketplace* in the *middle* of the city, where sheep and cattle were bought and sold. If you took *another* gate, it might take you on a path that spit you out into the royal palace of the city where the kings and officials were. The *gate* you chose determined the *path* you took, which in turn decided your *destination*.

So Jesus uses **that imagery to talk about following Jesus.** The *wide gate* leads to the *easy way*. If you live exactly like everyone else in the world does, you won’t encounter much resistance to how you’re living at a cultural level. But that path, Jesus says, will *end in destruction*. On the *other hand*, **the narrow gate of a relationship with Jesus leads to the difficult way of discipleship**, but it ends in *life*. It ends with *becoming who God made you to be all along*. But **here’s the kicker**: whichever one you choose, it comes as a *package deal*. This isn’t a mix-and-match type of situation. You don’t get to enter through the *Jesus gate*, and then choose to walk the *easy path*—that’s just not how it works.

I say that **because it tends to be a popular notion**, at least here in the Bible Belt, that if you make a one-time decision to become a Christian, that’s more or less all you need. You can pretty much do whatever you want from that point on, because your eternal destiny is determined by that one spiritual transaction you made with Jesus way back when. But that understanding doesn’t seem to work within Jesus’ analogy, does it? Because that would be saying that you can pick the *narrow gate*, but then the *easy path*. But **that’s not an option** in Jesus’ framework. And listen: the problem isn’t necessarily that your decision was *insufficient*—the problem is that you misunderstood the very nature of the decision you were making.

Because **choosing the narrow gate necessarily means** choosing the *difficult* path. Think about some of those things we’ve discussed in the sermon on the mount so far: how Jesus said we approach sex as followers of Jesus. How he said we should relate to our *enemies*. How he said we should relate to our *money* and *possessions*. There’s not a single one of these teachings that is *easy* to live out in our day and age. You will not put any of this into practice if your goal is to take the path of least resistance. Followers of Jesus enter through the *narrow gate*, which means they *follow the difficult path*.

But followers of Jesus are **willing to endure that path**, *despite* the difficulty of it. There’s a **story in the gospel of John** where Jesus says some tough things to a group of people, and they all *walk away* from him as a result. They decide *not* to follow Jesus because it

was going to be tougher than they thought it was. So Jesus turns to his disciples after those other people leave and says “are you guys going to leave too?” And one of the disciples looks at Jesus and says “Jesus—where would we go? Where else would we go, who else would we follow? *You* hold the words of life.” *That’s* the posture of a follower of Jesus. Not that we don’t struggle, not that we don’t have doubts—but that even in those moments, our response is “where else would I go? Jesus, *you* are the only one worth following.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus is saying that **if you want to spot a legitimate follower of Jesus, watch their life when the going gets tough.** That’s when you’ll know. They’ll struggle, but they’ll struggle from *inside* the relationship with the Father. They’ll cry out, but they’ll cry out *towards* the Father. They’ll doubt, but they will *push through* it rather than let it push *them away*. People will ask them why they still follow Jesus, and they’ll respond like the disciples and say “where else would I go? *He* holds the words of life.” **You see, following Jesus when the way is easy is logical—you could be doing it entirely because of the perceived benefits. Following Jesus even when it’s *difficult* means you’re doing it because of who Jesus is—because he is the only way to life.**

**That’s the *first* mark** of someone who genuinely knows and follows Jesus: *following a difficult path.* Here’s the second one...

## Bearing observable fruit (v. 15-20)

[15] “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] **You will recognize them by their fruits.** Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Some of us are like “I don’t *think* so? Idk. But if we were farmers like much of *Jesus’* audience, we would all answer instinctively, *no.*) [17] So, **every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.** [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that **does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** [20] **Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.**

So Jesus *specifically* lays out **this test for** proclaimed followers of Jesus who are “**prophets.**” Prophets were essentially spiritual *leaders*, or people who claim to speak on *behalf of God* into our lives. So **we probably don’t use that terminology today**, but it would likely include people like **pastors**—people with my job—who shepherd people on how to follow Jesus. It would also include other **pastors and authors and podcasters** that

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<sup>1</sup> See John 6:60-69, specifically v. 66-69.

we *listen* to for those same types of reasons. It could refer to **therapists** that we defer to often to tell us how to live and how to think. But it also could apply to **anyone** in our life that **we view as spiritually mature**—anyone we have given the space and the authority to consistently speak into our lives from a spiritual perspective.

**So Jesus' goal with *this part* of the passage is to help us know, as followers of Jesus, which of those people we should listen to.** How do we know if *those people* know Jesus, and therefore if we should give them consistent authority into our lives? Because *anybody* can *sound like* they're solid. Anyone can *sound* like they're worth listening to. That doesn't mean they *are*. Jesus says that sometimes these *false prophets* will show up in "sheep's clothing." They'll *look* just like everyone else. They'll *look normal*. **Very few people that want to lead you astray preface it with "okay, this is the part where I lead you astray!"** It's usually a lot more subtle and sneaky than that.

So the question is **how do we tell the difference** between *true* prophets and *false* ones? How can we tell when we *should* give someone spiritual authority into our lives, and when we *shouldn't*? Jesus says there's one very important way: look at the *fruit* of their life. He says repeatedly in v. 15-20, "you will recognize them by their *fruit*. You'll *know* them by their *fruit*." *Fruit* in the bible often refers to someone's *character*. Anybody can *sound* smart and convincing and clever and compelling. But you can't fake *character*—at least not for *long*.

Because **character takes time**. It's **easy for us to miss the metaphor** Jesus gives here: ~~when you and I want "fruit," we drive five minutes to the grocery store and we buy some fruit that's waiting there on the shelves for us. But Jesus' audience would not have heard it that way at all. He's talking to an agrarian society—tons of farmers within earshot of this teaching. When Jesus said "fruit," they would've thought "if I want fruit, that means I need to get seed, till the ground, plant the seed, water it, cultivate it, and then in two to ten years, I'll have some fruit." Growing fruit was a slow, gradual, meticulous process. It required care and attention and persistence—but more than anything, it required time. That's the imagery Jesus invokes to talk about the development of character. It takes time.~~

**You cannot microwave character.** Sure, you **can fake general niceness** and *pleasantness*. But Jesus isn't just talking about that—he's talking about *faithfulness*, *goodness*, *self-control*, *patience*. Those are things that you can't fake for long without people finding out. So Jesus says when it comes to who you allow unfettered access to speak into your life, take note of their *character*. **How do they treat their spouse? How do**

they interact with their *kids*? How do they treat their *roommates*? What do the people who know them *best* say about them? Or does *anybody* know them well enough to say anything about them (if not, that should be a red flag right off the bat). **A person's character will often reveal whether that person just likes being in authority over other people, or whether they've actually implemented the things they're telling you into their own *life*.**

And just to be abundantly clear, I'm including *myself* in this. I'm including the other people you see up on *this* stage talking about Jesus. You shouldn't receive *anything* we say up here just because we're *up here*. Don't accept what we say just because it *sounds* right, or was *communicated* well. Evaluate what we say based on its consistency with the Scriptures, and based on our *character*. Are *our* lives *consistent* with the things we're telling you to base *your* lives on? If you don't know us that well, ask other people that *do* know us, "should I listen to them, or should I not?" Jesus says before you give *anyone* complete authority and influence into your life, be as sure as you can that their *character* can be trusted.

Now I *get* that we obviously *can't know that about every* podcaster or online pastor we listen to—I get that. But **that just means we shouldn't be looking to them as *the primary source of spiritual authority into our life*. It's kind of *crazy to me that I have to say this*, but in today's world, it does need to be said: *a pastor hundreds of miles away who posts their sermons online cannot be "your pastor."* *A person who hosts a podcast where they talk about Jesus cannot be your primary source of discipleship to Jesus. A therapist cannot be the only voice of authority into your life.* Feel free to *listen* to them to learn, to take and sift through what's good and what's bad—but **for anybody you trust fully with spiritual authority in your life, look at the fruit.** The *fruit* will tell you whether or not they practice what they preach, and therefore whether or not you should give them authority into your life. Does that make sense? The second mark is *bearing observable fruit*. Number 3 is:**

## Doing the will of God (v. 21-23)

[21] "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, **did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?**' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never **knew you**; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

So here, I think Jesus offers an important clarification to what Jesus *just* said about fruit. And that's that by "*fruit*," he doesn't mean "people that do impressive spiritual things." He doesn't mean "people who *appear* spiritual." Because here, there are a group of people that did *impressive* spiritual *things*, and yet didn't know Jesus. A person can use spiritual-sounding language all the time, and still not know Jesus. A person can be the most passionate worshiper you've ever seen and still not know Jesus. A person can know tons of bible and still not know Jesus. What does Jesus say is a sign of knowing Jesus? It's right there in v. 21: "...those who ***do the will of my Father who is in heaven.***" The sign of a genuine follower of Jesus is someone who *does* God's will.

Now there may be few ideas that feel more *mysterious* than the expression "God's will." I've learned that if you work for a church, and you offer any type of class or seminar about "God's will," people will come out in *droves* to attend it. Because *we all want, so desperately, to know* what God's will for our life is. And usually, we all feel a bit lost as to what God's will for our life is. It just feels so *ambiguous* to so many of us.

But do you know what's interesting to me? In the bible, the idea of God's will is very rarely ambiguous. A majority of the time, *doing God's will* is actually very straightforward. For example, in 1 Thessalonians it says that the will of God is for us to *abstain from sexual sin* and exercise self-control. It also says in 1 Thessalonians that the will of God is for us to be *thankful* in all circumstances. In 2 Peter it says that the will of God is for us all to *repent* of our sin. In 1 Timothy 2 it says that God's will is that we would *pray* for other people. I could go on—but do you see how God's will in the bible is often way clearer and more knowable than we sometimes think it is?

We might even say that "doing the will of God" in Jesus' language, is simply *aligning our lives* with what *God* clearly says our lives should look like. And Jesus says those who truly follow Jesus are those who "do the will of God." So if you come across someone who says and does impressive spiritual things *in the name of God*, but refuses to implement what the Scriptures clearly teach into their life, there's a good chance they're not actually a Christian. But if you see somebody who leads a very normal, run-of-the-mill life, does very few impressive things—but fights to align every aspect of their life with who Jesus is—there's a good chance that person *is* a Christian. Because the mark of following Jesus is *doing the will* of God.

Which leads us to our **final test**, which is:

## Practicing the teachings of Jesus (v. 24-27)

[24] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine **and does them** (or some translations say “puts them into practice”—that person) *will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.* [25] *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.* [26] *And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them (or does not put them into practice) *will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.* [27] *And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”**

I’m **going to be brief** on this last one simply because we’ve taught on this passage *many* times before as a church family.<sup>2</sup> But I do want you to see that **the contrast in these four verses** *isn’t* between those who hear Jesus’ teachings and those who *don’t* hear them. It’s not even between those who *agree* with Jesus’ teachings and those who *don’t* agree with them. The contrast is between those who *practice* Jesus’ teachings and those who *don’t practice* them. Do you see that?

I bring that up simply because **I know us as a church**. I know that probably not many of us have *disagreed* with the things Jesus has been teaching us over the past three-plus months. I doubt there were many of us who heard Jesus telling us to deal with our resentment back in chapter five and went “I disagree! I think resentment is a *delightful* thing, and we should hold onto it for as long as we can!” I doubt any of that happened in us—I doubt any of us disagreed intellectually. But **at the same time**, **I bet there are a lot of us who have agreed with every word out of Jesus’ mouth in the sermon on the mount, and still are actively resisting putting some of them into practice.** But Jesus says *that’s* what matters: not whether or not we *agree* with what he says, but whether we hear *and do* what he says. Whether or not we put them into *practice*.

Now, **Jesus’ expectation certainly isn’t** that we have to put his teachings into practice *perfectly*. His point *isn’t* that *no part of our life* can ever be inconsistent with his teachings; otherwise *none* of us would be the house “built on the rock.” There would be *no such thing* as a house built on the rock. Every single one of us will *struggle* with putting these things into practice. But **there is a difference between struggling to put them into practice and choosing not to put them into practice.** *Struggling* with something indicates that there is that there is an ideal you’re shooting for, and that you

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<sup>2</sup> Listen to those teachings [here](#) or [here](#) or [here](#).



sometimes fall short of that ideal. Some of us aren't struggling—we're deciding to not aim at all.

If you have moved in with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you aren't *struggling* to put Jesus' teachings on sex into practice—you've *chosen not* to put those teachings into practice. If you exclusively watch and read news outlets that stoke animosity towards the other political party—whoever that is—you're not *struggling* to put Jesus' teachings on loving your enemies into practice. All of us *struggle* to put Jesus' teachings into practice, but followers of Jesus never choose *not* to put them into practice.

And Jesus says what often *reveals* whether or not a person has put these things into practice is **what happens when the rain comes**. When everything in your life hits the fan, that often shows you what your foundation truly is. **And what an interesting time to teach that idea.** Because at least for a lot of us, things are currently hitting the fan. A worldwide pandemic. Crazy divisive political climate. Some of us have lost jobs. Some of us have had our hours cut. Some of us are struggling financially. Some of us are anxious. And at least for most of us, at bare minimum, our rhythms of life have been significantly interrupted.

But that also means **what a great time to accurately evaluate what foundation we've been building our life on.** What has this difficult season exposed about your life? When the pandemic hit and things got difficult, were the spiritual disciplines in your life the first things to go? Was *church* the first thing to go? Was LifeGroup and relationships with other followers of Jesus some of the first things to go? If so, **doesn't that reveal that the way of Jesus wasn't all that central to your life to begin with?** If all it takes is for life to get a little more difficult for following Jesus to be the furthest thing from your mind, I think that shows us that following Jesus wasn't the foundation in the first place—it was an add-on. But if when life gets tougher, that stuff stays, it reveals that that is the *foundation* of your life.

**So...** *following a difficult path, bearing observable fruit, doing the will of God, and practicing the teachings of Jesus.* That's what it truly means to belong to Jesus. And if those four things seem like a lot to you, consider this: really, those are just four ways of saying the same thing. They're all different ways to say that following Jesus means **integrating the way of Jesus into the fabric of our lives. We're called not just to know who Jesus is or know what he says about life—but to *live out* what he says about life, and live in relationship with him.**

Another way to put that is that it really all comes down to *authority*. Look with me at v. 28-29:

*[28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

A relationship with God through Jesus comes down to *authority*. Anyone can like Jesus—he was in some ways, a pretty *likeable* guy. Anyone can think Jesus said some clever or helpful things. A *follower of Jesus*, though, is someone who gives Jesus *authority* into their life. Someone who says to Jesus, “whatever you say, goes.” “Whatever you want of me, is what I want.” “And whatever you say I should do, is what I will do.” That’s the posture of someone who has given Jesus *authority* into their life.

I’ll put it one other way: you can’t “friend zone” Jesus. Does everybody know what I mean by that expression “friend zone”? Okay, I think some people, especially here in the South, try to *friend zone* Jesus. They want to have him available to them when they need him, they want him to help with things when they get in a bind, they want to pick and choose the parts of his teachings that they think are *helpful* and leave behind the ones that feel too *burdensome*. But it doesn’t work that way. Following Jesus is about *rightly recognizing the authority* that Jesus claims over every square inch of our lives, and every square inch of the universe itself. To friend zone Jesus is in actuality to reject him altogether. **Jesus isn’t auditioning to be an *advisor* to your life—he’s rightfully claiming *authority* over your life.**

Now I’m aware that there may not be a word we’re more averse to—at least for my generation and younger—than the word *authority*. But what you need to understand is that Jesus is an altogether different type of authority. His authority isn’t derived from a man-made title or position, or an org chart, or a gender or a race. His authority comes from him being God in the flesh, and from the fact that every single thing he teaches, he *embodies*. I love Eugene Peterson’s translation of v. 29—he says (about Jesus) “*It was apparent that he was living everything he was saying.*”

So it’s not just that Jesus *should* get authority over your life—it’s also that he’s *worthy of it*. When you encounter the Jesus of the bible—the Jesus who poured out his life for sinners, the Jesus who spent his time with the weak and the poor, the Jesus who went to the cross for his enemies, you see that he is *worthy* of giving our lives to. And when you see him that way, he’s *worth* the difficult path. He’s worth the time it takes for his

presence to bear fruit in your life. His will is worth following. And his teaching is worth *building our life* on.

So here's the thing: no doubt, there are **many of you** in this room **that know all of this**. There are so many of you who have decided that Jesus is worth it all and have given your life to him accordingly. Praise God for that. There are **others of you** who might be realizing for the first time this morning that you may have **misunderstood** what a relationship with Jesus is—and I praise God for that *clarity*. **If you want to talk to someone about that this morning, feel free to grab your LifeGroup leader, or text them, or come down front and we'd love to talk to you about beginning a genuine relationship with Jesus.** And maybe for **yet others** of us, we're a little **confused**. Maybe you need to spend some time this week with those who love Jesus and know you best and ask for their honest feedback: where do they think you're at with all of this? That would no doubt be a valuable, fruitful conversation to have.

But this morning, **like Jesus, I don't have an emotional story** or heartwarming invitation for you. All I have for you is the question Jesus laid before us: which way are you going to choose? The easy way or the difficult one? The shifting foundation or the solid one? That is the question that determines everything else in your life. That is the question that can lead you to death or to life—and my prayer is that you choose life. You have Jesus' teachings—what are you going to do with them?

Let's pray.