

# week nine

**Monday**

I love a good yard sale. There is just something thrilling about the hunt and finally... the discovery. It doesn't matter to me that in order to get the good stuff, you've got to begin really early on a Saturday morning. A good treasure is worth far more than sleep. I've got a teenage daughter that loves to go along with me. You know she's got the "bargain shopper gene" because no normal teenager likes to see dawn on a Saturday morning! One of the things I have really enjoyed over the years is noticing the patterns of things that people put up for sale. As the times change, what once was "in" is now yard sale fodder. What was the "latest and the greatest" is now thrown on someone's front lawn and offered for pennies. You've seen some of these items on late night infomercials: products that promise instant results with little effort, tools to solve your every problem, and gadgets that do all of the work for you! We all know that if it seems too good to be true—it probably is. And yet the "As Seen on TV" business continues to grow each year.

In Matthew 7, Jesus tells us to *watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*

I love the way "The Message" translation of the Bible says this: *"Be wary of false preachers who smile a lot, dripping with practiced sincerity. Chances are they are out to rip you off some way or other. Don't be impressed with charisma; look for character."* (Matt. 7:15)

False prophets abound. Jesus told us to guard against them and to expect to encounter many. They work the same way late night ads do; selling the eternally valuable as something cheap and easy. In fact, he encountered many of those types himself. But, the question is, how do we detect them? Sometimes I just don't trust myself or my judgment.

Jesus' answer is simple...it's all in the fruit.

*"By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."* (Matt. 7:16-20)

How do we recognize an apple tree? Some knowledgeable people might be able to tell by the leaves or the bark, but most of us rely on the clear evidence. If it bears apples, it's an apple tree. We can tell a tree by its fruit.

It's easy to get swept up in elaborate claims. Words are easy to fake. Behavior and results aren't. Jesus tells us that we will recognize false teachers by their produce. With bad trees, bad fruit will eventually become evident. And we can be assured that the trees not producing good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire...or the yard sale pile.

*"Father, help me to apply Jesus' principle of fruit to my own life this week. help me to discern what's real and from you, and what's someone's cheap forgery that comes from somewhere else. May the fruit that I produce be evidence of the truth of your word that is alive in me. Amen"*

Kris Stoner, Children's Pastor

Matthew 7:15-20

Sheep that turn out to be wolves. Bad fruit from a supposed good tree. Thorn bushes and thistles that were believed to be grapes and figs.

One thing, given time, can be revealed to be something else entirely.

It just takes time.

How often have you looked at your circumstances and regretted the hasty decisions that got you there. You jumped at an idea before you thought. You acted on an offer or a concept before you prayed. You pulled triggers on a proposition before you bounced any of your thoughts and hopes and motivations on trusted friends. And now you had to deal with issues that were worse than you imagined they could be. The sheep were hiding harm. The thornbushes never produced what they promised. You've forced yourself to live off fruit you don't want to eat.

In our culture, speed is of the essence. The problem, like most illusions, is that there is some truth in that. Often, speed is of great benefit. But we have, as a society (and followers of Jesus are largely no exception) become a people that operate on whims and hunches rather than wisdom and the guidance of the Spirit of our maker. The results are bad either way they turn out: If it falls apart, then, of course, we have to deal with it having fallen apart. But if our poorly prayed for and thought out decisions turn out okay, then it's been positively reinforced for us that we don't need to trust God or do life communally. *We got it.*

Jesus demands that his followers are discerning, and that they live in a rhythm and at a pace that allows for both the necessary speed to get things done well, as well as the ability to know when the seemingly assured promise of a sheep is actually the disguised teeth of a wolf.

What decisions are you making right now? What big/little things are on your horizon that you are calling an "opportunity", a "change" or an all out "transformation"? Jesus expects that you diligently pursue his voice in prayer, in the entrusting of your thoughts to others for guidance and prayer, and that you move forward dependent on the only one that can see wolves and thorns before they're revealed.

Spend a few moments asking God into whatever you are hoping and dreaming and deciding. Ask him to give you the wisdom you'll need to step into the next chapter of life, as counseled by his spirit and his desire for you to advance his Kingdom way in whatever you do. Then move with confidence, toward that which Christ points to as having results worth eating.

**"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. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."**

(Jesus, Matthew 7:13-14 ESV)

**"So Jesus again said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep...I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'" (John 10:7, 9-11 NIV).**

Jesus is inviting all humanity, from the well put together and successful, to the forgotten and dismissed, to come to him. To disregard standards of ease and popularity, and to walk through difficulty to bow at his feet. He never asks us to submit ourselves to ideas or theories, concepts or propositions- but to him. He asks us to live according the core of reality; he is King, and there is no other. Spend some time today reflecting and praying over whether you have submitted to ideas, to Crosspointe or some other church you have grown to love, to a teacher, a teaching, or teaching style, to a particular kind of church experience, with certain kinds of music in a certain kind of atmosphere, to an interpretation of the central message, to a certain kind of reading of scripture....  
...or if you have surrendered yourself to the person, Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of all things.

The former could have you tricked into missing the point. The latter is the deepest desire of your God. Depending on what you determine this distinction looks like in your life, allow God to help you take the next steps in following his one and only Son.

# week nine

**Thursday**

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***On this side of the page  
write your honest prayer, thanks  
and confessions to God.***

***On this side of the page,  
write what you believe God to  
be saying in response. Run all  
this by a friend or a fellow  
LifeGroupie and see if God's  
voice can be discerned.***

# week nine

**Friday**

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This is the final entry for the Color series. This Sunday marks the last installment, as the Sermon on the Mount gives way to Matthew 8 and beyond.

But you don't have to be finished. The 10<sup>th</sup> week is, perhaps, your first using your own wings.

You can continue this daily worship by reading a chapter a day, writing down your questions and wrestling with what it means to enter your whole self, and all your interests into the Kingdom of God. Staying in the text isn't a way of keeping God from becoming angry. That's dead religion. This is a simple discipline that teaches the heart to care about what your Spirit already deeply cares about. To let the words of ancient scripture form you, form your interactions and create a clinging to the savior.

May you read like one starved for Christ. Like one desperate to know God, and be known by him because of the door having been swung open in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. May you begin to see your daily, even seemingly mundane circumstances as a story you will once tell others to inspire them, as the pastoral staff has done for you throughout this guide. May you become Christ's student, knowing the teacher as well as his teachings. And may you invite others into this journey as you have been invited.

Go in peace.