

I Never Knew You

*Escaping Religious
Performance and Returning to
Jesus*

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Matthew 7:22-23AMPC)

²² Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name and driven out demons in Your name and done many mighty works in Your name?

²³ And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [disregarding My commands].

These words confront us with a reality many prefer to ignore.

There are few statements in Scripture more sobering than the words Jesus speaks in Matthew 7:22–23. They are not directed at unbelievers, skeptics, or the openly rebellious. They are spoken to people who prophesied, cast out demons, and performed mighty works — believers who were convinced they were doing the work of God. Saul of Tarsus once stood in that same tragic space: armed with religious authority, overflowing with zeal, and absolutely certain he was defending the honor of God, even as he persecuted the very church Christ died to establish. His story reminds us that it is possible to be sincere, passionate, and active in ministry, yet profoundly mistaken about our standing with God. This book is written for every believer who refuses to settle for a faith that is busy but barren, gifted but disconnected, active but unknown. It is a call to return to the kind of relationship Jesus recognizes.

The Weight of Being “Unknown” by Christ

Jesus’ words are not a warning about losing salvation; they are a revelation of never having had it. “I never knew you” is not the language of a broken relationship — it is the language of a nonexistent one. These individuals were not strangers to ministry, but they were strangers to Jesus. They had mastered the work of God while missing the heart of God.

This distinction is the burden of this book: **spiritual activity is not spiritual intimacy**. It is possible to preach Christ without knowing Christ, to serve His church without belonging to His kingdom, and to perform miracles without possessing obedience. The tragedy of Matthew 7 is not that these people failed — it is that they succeeded in all the wrong ways.

Saul: A Mirror for the Modern Believer

Saul's story stands as a living illustration of this danger. Before his encounter on the Damascus road, Saul was not indifferent toward God — he was consumed with zeal for God. He was trained, disciplined, passionate, and convinced he was protecting the purity of Israel's faith. Yet in all his religious fervor, he was fighting against the very Lord he claimed to honor.

Saul reminds us that deception does not always look like rebellion. Sometimes it looks like devotion. Sometimes it looks like ministry. Sometimes it looks like authority, influence, and spiritual success.

And yet, Saul's transformation also reveals the mercy of God. The same Jesus who said, "I never knew you," is the Jesus who stopped Saul in his tracks and made Himself known. The warning of Matthew 7 is severe, but the invitation of Christ is still open.

The Modern Church's Blind Spot

We live in a time when spiritual performance is often mistaken for spiritual health. Churches celebrate giftedness more than godliness. Platforms grow faster than prayer lives. Ministry activity is praised, while personal holiness is assumed. Believers can be applauded for what they do publicly while collapsing privately.

In such an environment, Matthew 7:22–23 is not merely a warning — it is a mirror. It forces us to ask hard questions:

- Am I serving God or performing for Him?
- Do I know Jesus, or do I only know ministry?
- Does my activity reflect obedience, or does it hide disobedience?
- Am I building a résumé for God or a relationship with Him?

These questions are not meant to condemn; they are meant to awaken.

A Call to Authentic Discipleship

This book is not written to frighten believers but to free them. It is an invitation to step out of performative Christianity and into authentic discipleship — the kind of life Jesus recognizes, receives, and rejoices over.

Throughout these chapters, we will explore:

- the difference between gifts and fruit,
- the danger of spiritual self-deception,
- the seduction of ministry success,
- the necessity of obedience,
- the beauty of intimacy with Christ,
- and the hope of returning to a faith that is real, rooted, and relational.

My prayer is simple: that every reader will encounter the Jesus who says, “I know My sheep,” and will never hear the words, “I never knew you.”

This is a journey back to the heart of God — a journey from activity to intimacy, from performance to relationship, from being busy for Christ to being known by Christ.

Let’s begin.

Chapter 1 The Most Terrifying Words Jesus Ever Spoke

Matthew 7:22–23 stands as one of the most sobering warnings Jesus ever gave. It is not a passage we read casually, nor is it one we should rush past. These words confront us with a reality many prefer to ignore: it is possible to be deeply involved in ministry, active in religious environments, and confident in one's spiritual résumé — yet still be unknown by the Lord.

Jesus does not describe unbelievers, skeptics, or the openly rebellious. He describes people who prophesied, cast out demons, and performed mighty works. These were not spectators in the faith; they were practitioners. They were not indifferent to spiritual things; they were immersed in them. They were not hostile toward God; they believed they were serving Him.

And yet, on the day when truth can no longer be hidden, Jesus says to them, “I never knew you.”

This chapter begins with a question every believer must face: **How can people be so active in ministry and yet be so far from God?**

The Context of Jesus' Warning

To understand the weight of Jesus' words, we must remember where He spoke them. Matthew 7 is the closing section of the Sermon on the Mount — the longest, most comprehensive teaching Jesus ever delivered. He is speaking to disciples, not outsiders. He is forming the hearts of those who claim to follow Him.

As He concludes His sermon, Jesus gives three warnings:

- false prophets,
- false disciples,
- false foundations.

All three warnings deal with the same issue: **self-deception**. Jesus is not exposing ignorance; He is exposing people who believe they are right with God when they are not.

The warning of Matthew 7:22–23 is the climax of this theme. It is the moment when Jesus reveals that spiritual activity can mask spiritual emptiness.

The Profile of the “Many”

Jesus describes the “many” with three categories:

- *We prophesied in Your name.*
- *We cast out demons in Your name.*
- *We performed many mighty works in Your name.*

These are not small claims. These are high-level ministry functions. These individuals believed their spiritual accomplishments proved their spiritual authenticity. They believed their works validated their relationship.

But Jesus does not evaluate their ministry. He evaluates their intimacy.

They used the right language — “Lord, Lord.” They claimed the right actions — prophecy, deliverance, miracles. But they lacked the right relationship — obedience and surrender.

This is the tragedy of Matthew 7: **Activity is not identity. Gifts are not fruit. Ministry is not relationship.**

The Danger of Spiritual Self-Deception

Self-deception is subtle because it grows in environments where activity is celebrated more than obedience. It thrives where people equate visibility with spirituality, and where ministry performance is mistaken for spiritual power.

Here is a critical distinction that must be made early in this book: **people cannot perform true spiritual work without the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.** According to Scripture, the Spirit is the source of all authentic ministry. Without Him, people may engage in religious activity, church work, or emotional performance, but they cannot produce spiritual fruit or spiritual power.

This means the “many” in Matthew 7 were not operating in the Spirit — they were operating in themselves. Their works were impressive to people but unrecognized by the Lord, because spiritual work cannot be manufactured by human effort.

This is the essence of spiritual self-deception: mistaking *church work* for *Spirit work*, mistaking *performance* for *power*, mistaking *activity* for *intimacy*. When believers begin to assume that visible ministry equals invisible relationship, they step into the very danger Jesus is exposing.

Saul of Tarsus: A Case Study in Misguided Zeal

Saul of Tarsus is one of Scripture's clearest examples of religious activity without spiritual life. Before his encounter on the Damascus road, Saul was overflowing with zeal, armed with religious authority, and absolutely convinced he was defending the honor of God. He was sincere, passionate, disciplined, and committed.

But he was wrong.

Saul's first words when confronted by the risen Christ were, **"Who are You, Lord?"** He recognized divine authority, but he did not recognize the Lord Himself.

Saul's story proves that:

- zeal does not equal truth,
- passion does not equal obedience,
- religious authority does not equal spiritual intimacy.

He was doing *church work* — work rooted in tradition, training, and personal conviction — but he was not doing *Spirit work*. His activity was impressive, but his relationship was nonexistent.

Saul reminds us that deception does not always look like rebellion. Sometimes it looks like devotion.

Why Jesus Says “I Never Knew You”

The word “knew” in Scripture speaks of intimacy, relationship, and recognition. Jesus is not saying, “I once knew you but no longer do.” He is saying, “I never knew you at all.”

This is not the language of a broken relationship — it is the language of a nonexistent one.

Jesus is not impressed by:

- gifts,
- miracles,
- titles,
- spiritual accomplishments.

He looks for obedience, surrender, and relationship. He looks for hearts that belong to Him, not hands that perform for Him.

The “many” had works, but they did not have Him.

When Ministry Becomes Identity

One of the first warning signs of spiritual self-deception is when ministry becomes identity. When believers begin to measure their worth by what they do rather than who they belong to, they drift from intimacy into activity.

Ministry becomes:

- a mask,
- a performance,
- a source of validation,
- a substitute for obedience.

This is why Jesus does not list their sins — He lists their works. He exposes the danger of building one's identity on ministry instead of relationship.

A Pastoral Appeal to the Reader

This chapter is not written to condemn but to awaken. Conviction is mercy. Warning is grace. Jesus exposes deception so He can invite us into truth.

Saul's story proves that transformation is possible. The same Lord who said, "I never knew you," is the Lord who stopped Saul in his tracks and made Himself known.

This book is not about fear — it is about clarity. It is not about doubt — it is about discernment. It is not about shame — it is about intimacy.

Before we can understand how ministry becomes a mask, we must first understand how easily the human heart drifts from intimacy to activity. Chapter 2 will explore how believers begin to substitute spiritual performance for spiritual relationship — often without realizing it.

Chapter 2 — The Subtle Drift Toward Religious Performance

There is a quiet danger that creeps into the life of every believer, and it rarely announces itself. No one wakes up and decides to drift from God. The slide is subtle — almost invisible — because it often feels productive. The believer becomes busy, active, and involved, yet increasingly empty. Religious performance begins to masquerade as spiritual vitality, and the soul starts starving while the schedule stays full.

This is the condition Jesus described in Matthew 7:22–23. Jesus wasn't describing a random moment — He was speaking about the end of the age, the final judgment, when every life and every work will be tested before Him.

These were not rebellious people. They were not atheists. They were not hostile toward God. They were *busy* for God. They were active in ministry. They were doing things that looked spiritual, sounded spiritual, and impressed seemingly spiritual people — individuals who appeared discerning but were themselves measuring ministry by activity rather than intimacy. Yet Jesus said, “I never knew you.”

How does that happen? How does someone become deeply involved in the work of the Lord while becoming increasingly disconnected from the Lord of the work?

This chapter answers that question.

The First Step: When Ministry Becomes Identity

For many believers, ministry begins with sincere passion. They want to serve. They want to help. They want to be useful in the kingdom. But over time, the work itself can become a source of identity. The applause of people, the respect of the church, the feeling of being needed — these can quietly replace the joy of simply being known by God.

When ministry becomes identity, the believer begins to measure spiritual health by **activity**, not **intimacy**. They assume that because they are doing more, they must be becoming more. But activity is not transformation. Busyness is not holiness. Productivity is not presence. And when identity shifts from Christ to calling, the heart begins to drift even while the hands remain busy.

This is the first step in the drift: **the believer becomes more committed to the work than to the One who empowers the work.**

The Second Step: When Gifts Replace Relationship

The people Jesus described in Matthew 7 were gifted. They prophesied. They cast out demons. They performed miracles. These are not small things. These are not casual ministries. These are significant, supernatural works.

But here is the danger: gifts can function without intimacy. A person can operate in a gift while their heart is far from God. Gifts are tools; intimacy is relationship.

There is also a crucial difference between talented people and Spirit-gifted people. Talent can move a crowd, but only the Spirit can move a heart. Talent can stir emotions, but only the Spirit can transform lives. Talent can imitate gifting, but it cannot produce spiritual fruit. A talented person can perform in the flesh, but a Spirit-gifted person ministers from the overflow of the Holy Ghost. This is why relying on talent is dangerous — talent can function even while the soul is drifting, but the gifts of the Spirit only operate rightly through surrendered vessels.

This is why Paul warned Timothy to “stir up the gift” — not because the gift was gone, but because the fire behind the gift was dying.

A person can preach powerfully and pray weakly. They can lead publicly and dry up privately. They can minister boldly and worship rarely.

When gifts replace relationship, the believer begins to trust what they can *do* more than who they *are* in Christ. And once that happens, the drift accelerates.

The Third Step: When Church Work Is Mistaken for Spirit Work

This is the distinction that must be understood.

Church work is not the same as Spirit work.

Church work is what humans can accomplish with talent, discipline, charisma, and effort. Spirit work is what God accomplishes through surrendered vessels filled with the Holy Ghost.

Church work can impress people; Spirit work transforms people. Church work can build crowds; Spirit work builds disciples. Church work can be done without prayer; Spirit work cannot exist without it.

A person can do church work without consecration. They can do church work without holiness. They can do church work without ever being transformed.

But **no one can do Spirit work without the Spirit.**

The tragedy of Matthew 7 is that these individuals believed their church work was Spirit work. They assumed that because the results were impressive, the relationship was intact. They confused effectiveness with intimacy.

This is the third step in the drift: **the believer becomes more impressed with their own results than concerned about their own relationship.**

The Fourth Step: When Obedience Is Replaced by Activity

Jesus said, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” This is stunning. These were not people living in open rebellion. They were people living in open ministry. Yet Jesus called their works “lawlessness.”

Why?

Because **activity without obedience is disobedience**. When believers become so busy doing things *for* God that they stop listening *to* God, their ministry becomes self-directed. And self-directed ministry eventually becomes self-deceived ministry.

They are no longer following the Shepherd; they are following their schedule. They are no longer responding to the Spirit; they are responding to opportunities. They are no longer obeying God; they are performing for people.

This is the fourth step in the drift: **the believer becomes more committed to doing than to obeying**.

The Final Step: When Jesus Becomes Familiar but Not Known

The most sobering part of Jesus' words is not "Depart from Me." It is "I never knew you."

These individuals knew His name. They knew His power. They knew His works. They knew His authority.

But they did not know His heart.

They were familiar with Jesus, but they were not intimate with Jesus. They were active for Jesus, but they were not surrendered to Jesus. They were busy in His kingdom, but strangers to the King.

Familiarity creates comfort; intimacy creates transformation.

This is the final step in the drift: **the believer becomes acquainted with Jesus but not connected to Him.**

A Pastoral Warning — And a Pastoral Hope

This chapter is not meant to condemn; it is meant to awaken. The drift is real, but it is reversible. The danger is subtle, but it is avoidable. The warning is severe, but it is filled with hope.

Jesus does not say, “I never knew you” to frighten us. He says it to invite us.

Invite us back to intimacy. Invite us back to relationship. Invite us back to the secret place. Invite us back to the joy of simply being known by Him.

The cure for religious performance is not more performance — it is presence. The cure for spiritual drift is not more activity — it is abiding. The cure for empty ministry is not louder ministry — it is deeper surrender.

Jesus’ warning is not a closed door; it is an open invitation to return to the place where you are known by Him. If Chapter 2 exposes the drift, Chapter 3 will reveal the remedy — how to cultivate a life that is truly *known* by Jesus, not merely active for Him.

Chapter 3 — Returning to the Life Jesus Knows

If Chapter 2 exposes the drift, Chapter 3 reveals the way home. Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:22–23 is not merely a verdict; it is an invitation. He does not say, “I never knew you” to condemn us — He says it to call us back to the place where we can be known by Him. The remedy for religious performance is not more performance. The cure for spiritual drift is not more activity. The answer to empty ministry is not louder ministry. The way home is intimacy.

The life Jesus knows is not built on public ministry but private surrender. It is not built on gifts but on relationship. It is not built on talent but on transformation. It is not built on what we do for Him but on who we are with Him.

This chapter is about returning to that life.

The First Practice: Cultivating a Secret Place

Intimacy with Jesus always begins in the secret place. Not the stage. Not the pulpit. Not the ministry assignment. The secret place is where the believer meets God without an audience, without a microphone, without a ministry agenda. It is where the soul breathes again.

Jesus Himself modeled this. He withdrew often. He prayed alone. He sought the Father in solitude. If the Son of God needed the secret place, how much more do we?

The secret place is where:

- identity is restored
- motives are purified
- burdens are lifted
- direction is received
- intimacy is cultivated

A believer who neglects the secret place will eventually drift, no matter how gifted they are. A believer who protects the secret place will remain anchored, no matter how busy life becomes.

The Second Practice: Living Surrendered, Not Skilled

In the previous chapter, we distinguished between talented people and Spirit-gifted people. Now we must take the next step: intimacy requires surrender.

Talent is loud. Surrender is quiet. Talent performs. Surrender obeys. Talent impresses. Surrender yields. Talent can function without prayer. Surrender cannot survive without it.

The life Jesus knows is not built on what we can do naturally but on what we allow Him to do supernaturally. Surrender is the posture that keeps the believer from drifting into performance. It is the daily decision to say:

“Lord, I am Yours before I am useful. I am surrendered before I am skilled. I am known before I am active.”

This posture protects the heart from becoming a performer instead of a disciple.

The Third Practice: Prioritizing Obedience Over Opportunity

One of the most subtle dangers in ministry is confusing opportunity with obedience. Not every open door is a divine door. Not every invitation is a calling. Not every platform is a purpose.

The people in Matthew 7 were active, but they were not obedient. They were busy, but they were not surrendered. They were effective, but they were not intimate.

Obedience is the safeguard against spiritual drift. It keeps the believer aligned with the Shepherd instead of the schedule. It keeps the believer listening to the Spirit instead of chasing opportunities. It keeps the believer anchored in God's will instead of their own ambition.

Obedience is not glamorous, but it is glorious. It is not impressive, but it is transformative. It is not loud, but it is powerful.

The Fourth Practice: Pursuing Transformation, Not Performance

Jesus does not measure our lives by what we accomplish but by who we become. Performance focuses on results; transformation focuses on relationship. Performance seeks applause; transformation seeks alignment. Performance builds platforms; transformation builds character.

The life Jesus knows is a transformed life — a life shaped by His presence, molded by His Word, and purified by His Spirit.

Transformation is slow. Transformation is quiet. Transformation is internal. Transformation is holy.

And transformation is the only path that leads to intimacy.

The Fifth Practice: Remaining Filled With the Spirit

Church work can be done without the Spirit. Spirit work cannot.

A believer who is not filled with the Holy Ghost will eventually drift into religious performance. A believer who remains filled will walk in power, purity, and intimacy.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time event; it is a continual posture. It is the daily yielding of the heart, the daily surrender of the will, the daily invitation for the Spirit to lead, guide, convict, empower, and transform.

A Spirit-filled believer is a known believer.

A Pastoral Invitation

Jesus' words in Matthew 7 are not meant to frighten the believer but to awaken them. He is calling us back to intimacy. Back to relationship. Back to the secret place. Back to surrender. Back to obedience. Back to transformation. Back to the life He knows.

The drift is subtle, but the return is simple.

Come back to the secret place. Come back to surrender. Come back to obedience. Come back to intimacy. Come back to being known.

This is the life Jesus recognizes. This is the life Jesus rewards. This is the life Jesus welcomes at the end of the age.

If Chapter 3 reveals the remedy, Chapter 4 will explore the evidence — what a life *known* by Jesus actually looks like in practice.

Chapter 4 — The Life Jesus Knows

The most sobering truth in Matthew 7:22–23 is not simply that Jesus says, “I never knew you.” It is that He says it to people who were convinced they knew Him. They preached in His name, served in His name, and built reputations in His name — yet their lives lacked the one thing He recognizes: **relationship**. Jesus does not authenticate people by their ministry résumé; He recognizes those whose lives bear the marks of intimacy with Him. Chapter 4 is about those marks — the distinguishing features of a life truly known by Jesus.

A life known by Jesus is not glamorous. It is not loud. It is not built on platforms, titles, or spiritual accomplishments. It is marked by quiet obedience, consistent surrender, and a heart that stays soft before Him. It is the life that remains in Him, not merely works for Him. And while the “many” in Matthew 7 were busy performing, the ones Jesus knows are busy abiding.

This chapter explores five defining characteristics of a life Jesus recognizes — not because these traits earn His approval, but because they naturally grow in those who walk with Him.

1. A Life Known by Jesus Is Rooted in Daily Surrender

The first mark of a life Jesus knows is **daily surrender**. Not occasional surrender. Not emotional surrender during worship. Daily surrender — the kind that bends the will, quiets the flesh, and yields the heart. People who perform for Jesus ask, “What can I do for You?” People who walk with Jesus ask, “What do You want to do in me today?” The difference is profound.

Surrender is not dramatic. It is not a moment; it is a rhythm.

The greatest picture of surrender is Jesus Himself in the garden of Gethsemane. On the night He was betrayed, with the weight of the cross pressing upon His soul, Jesus prayed the most surrendered words ever spoken: *“Not My will, but Yours be done.”* In that moment, He showed us that surrender is not the absence of struggle — it is the victory of obedience over desire. Jesus did not follow the Father because the path was easy; He followed because His heart was yielded. And if the Son of God embraced the Father’s will in the darkest hour, then those who belong to Him must learn to embrace surrender in the daily hours. Gethsemane is not just a story; it is the pattern of a life known by Jesus.

It is waking up and saying, “Lord, I belong to You again today.” It is laying down preferences, ambitions, and self-will. It is choosing His voice over your own. And it is refusing to let ministry, gifting, or opportunity become substitutes for obedience.

Jesus knows surrendered people because surrender is the posture that keeps the heart open to Him. It is impossible to drift into religious performance while living surrendered. Drift happens when surrender stops.

2. A Life Known by Jesus Bears the Fruit of Transformation, Not Performance

Performance impresses people; transformation impresses Heaven.

The “many” in Matthew 7 performed miracles, but their hearts remained unchanged. They cast out demons, but never cast out pride. They prophesied, but never repented. They ministered publicly, but never transformed privately.

A life known by Jesus is a life being changed by Jesus.

Transformation is the evidence of intimacy. It shows up in character, not charisma. It shows up in holiness, not hype. It shows up in repentance, not reputation. It shows up in the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

These are not ministry gifts; they are relational fruits. You cannot manufacture them. You cannot perform them. They grow only in people who remain connected to the Vine.

Jesus recognizes His own work in His own people. Transformation is Heaven’s fingerprint.

3. A Life Known by Jesus Prioritizes Obedience Over Opportunity

One of the clearest signs of spiritual drift is when opportunity becomes more important than obedience. The “many” in Matthew 7 were opportunity-driven — preaching, casting out demons, performing miracles — but they were not obedience-driven.

A life known by Jesus is built on simple, consistent obedience.

Obedience is not glamorous. It rarely gets applause. It often goes unnoticed. But obedience is the language of love. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” He did not say, “If you love Me, do great things for Me.”

Obedience is the proof of relationship.

People who perform for Jesus chase opportunities. People who walk with Jesus follow instructions.

And Jesus knows those who follow Him, not those who merely seem to represent Him.

4. A Life Known by Jesus Lives From the Secret Place

The secret place is the great separator between performers and disciples.

Performers live publicly. Disciples live privately.

Performers draw strength from crowds. Disciples draw strength from communion.

Performers build ministries. Disciples build altars.

The secret place is where Jesus becomes real — not as a concept, not as a sermon topic, but as a Person. It is where the heart is shaped, corrected, comforted, and filled. It is where motives are purified and desires are aligned. It is where the soul is anchored.

Jesus knows those who meet Him in secret because the secret place is where relationship is formed. You cannot fake a secret place. You cannot perform intimacy. You cannot manufacture devotion. The secret place reveals who truly walks with Him.

5. A Life Known by Jesus is Filled With And Led by the Holy Spirit

The final mark of a life Jesus knows is a life both filled with and led by the Holy Spirit. Not occasionally filled. Not emotionally filled. Continually filled — and consistently led.

The “many” in Matthew 7 did ministry without the Spirit — which is why their works were rejected. They did church work, not Spirit work. They operated in talent, not anointing. They moved crowds, but never moved Heaven. They were active, but they were not led.

Scripture makes it unmistakably clear that being led by the Spirit is the defining characteristic of those who truly belong to God. Paul writes, *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”* (Romans 8:14). In other words, spiritual leadership is not measured by ministry activity but by Spirit-led identity. The Spirit does not simply empower God’s children — He guides them.

Paul reinforces this again in Galatians: *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (Galatians 5:25). Living in the Spirit speaks of being filled; walking in the Spirit speaks of being led. One is the source of life; the other is the direction of life. Together they form the rhythm of a life known by Jesus.

A life known by Jesus is a life empowered and directed by His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit produces intimacy. The Holy Spirit produces obedience. The Holy Spirit produces transformation. The Holy Spirit produces surrender. The Holy Spirit produces fruit. And the Holy Spirit produces **guidance** — the daily leading that marks true sons and daughters.

Everything Jesus recognizes in His people is the result of His Spirit working in them and leading them.

To be known by Jesus is to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus — and to follow where He leads.

Conclusion: The Life Jesus Recognizes

Jesus does not know people by their ministry accomplishments. He knows people by their relationship with Him. And relationship always produces recognizable fruit — surrender, transformation, obedience, secret-place devotion, and Spirit-filled living.

This is the life Jesus knows.

This is the life He calls us into.

This is the life that cannot drift into performance because it is anchored in intimacy.

Chapter 5 will explore the warning signs that intimacy is being replaced by activity — the subtle indicators that the heart is drifting from relationship into religious performance. If Chapter 4 shows us what Jesus recognizes, Chapter 5 will show us what we must guard against.

Chapter 5 — The Warning Signs of Spiritual Drift

Spiritual drift never begins with rebellion. It begins with subtle shifts — small compromises, quiet neglect, and unnoticed changes in the heart. No one wakes up one morning and decides to perform for Jesus instead of walk with Him. Drift is gradual. It is slow. It is silent. And it is dangerous precisely because it is easy to miss.

The “many” in Matthew 7 did not become performers overnight. They drifted. They drifted from intimacy into activity, from obedience into opportunity, from surrender into self-reliance, and from Spirit-dependence into talent-dependence. Their hearts moved while their ministries continued. Their relationship weakened while their reputation strengthened. Their intimacy faded while their influence grew.

This chapter identifies the warning signs — the early indicators that the heart is shifting away from relationship and toward religious performance. These signs are not meant to condemn; they are meant to awaken. They are invitations to return before the drift becomes a destination.

1. When Ministry Becomes Easier Than Prayer

One of the first signs of drift is when **doing things for God becomes easier than talking to God.**

Prayer requires the heart. Ministry requires the hands.

Prayer demands surrender. Ministry demands skill.

Prayer exposes weakness. Ministry can hide it.

When prayer becomes a burden but ministry feels natural, the heart is drifting. The secret place begins to shrink while public activity expands. The soul becomes busy but not nourished. The believer becomes productive but not connected.

The “many” in Matthew 7 were active in ministry but absent in intimacy. Their hands were full, but their hearts were empty. Drift begins when prayer becomes optional.

2. When Obedience Is Delayed but Opportunities Are Accepted Quickly

A drifting heart responds slowly to God but quickly to people.

Obedience becomes negotiable. Conviction becomes inconvenient. Instructions from the Spirit become interruptions.

Yet opportunities — invitations, platforms, ministry engagements — are accepted without hesitation. The believer becomes opportunity-driven instead of obedience-driven.

This is the opposite of Jesus' life. Jesus never chased opportunities; He followed the Father. Drift begins when the believer starts chasing what looks fruitful instead of obeying what is faithful.

3. When Personal Holiness Is Treated as “Private” Instead of Essential

Another warning sign is when holiness becomes a private matter instead of a spiritual priority.

A drifting believer begins to separate their **public ministry** from their **private purity**. They maintain the appearance of righteousness while tolerating small compromises. They preach repentance but avoid it personally. They teach holiness but excuse their own habits.

Holiness is not a performance; it is the evidence of intimacy. When holiness becomes negotiable, intimacy is already fading.

4. When Conviction Feels Like Criticism Instead of Protection

Conviction is one of the greatest promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is not condemnation; it is protection. It is the Shepherd calling His sheep back to safety.

But when a believer begins to drift, conviction no longer feels like love — it feels like criticism. What once softened the heart now irritates it. What once drew you closer now feels like pressure. The gentle nudge of the Spirit becomes something you resist instead of receive.

Romans 8:14 reminds us that sons and daughters are led by the Spirit, not annoyed by Him. Galatians 5:25 calls us to *walk* in the Spirit, not merely acknowledge Him. When conviction starts feeling like criticism, it is a sign that the heart is shifting — not because God has changed His tone, but because we have changed our posture.

Conviction is proof that God still wants you. Criticism is what it feels like when you no longer want what God wants.

When the heart drifts, even God's protection feels intrusive. But when the heart is surrendered, His correction feels like love.

5. When Talent Begins to Replace Dependence on the Holy Spirit

This warning sign is subtle but deadly.

God gives gifts. But gifts can function without intimacy.

Talent can preach. Talent can sing. Talent can lead. Talent can organize. Talent can impress.

But talent cannot transform.

The “many” in Matthew 7 relied on their abilities, not the Spirit. They did ministry without dependence. They performed without surrender. They operated without relationship.

Drift begins when the believer trusts their gift more than the Giver.

6. When Scripture Is Used for Sermons but Not for Personal Transformation

A drifting believer reads Scripture to prepare messages, not to prepare their heart. The Bible becomes a tool for ministry instead of a mirror for the soul.

They study to teach, not to change. They read to inform others, not to be formed by God. They handle the Word professionally, not personally.

When Scripture stops shaping the believer and only shapes their sermons, drift has already begun.

7. When Spiritual Success Becomes More Important Than Spiritual Health

This warning sign is often hidden beneath good intentions.

A drifting believer becomes more concerned with:

- attendance
- engagement
- influence
- reputation
- results
- ministry growth

than with the condition of their own soul.

They measure success externally while ignoring decline internally. They celebrate fruitfulness while neglecting faithfulness. They pursue impact while losing intimacy.

Spiritual success becomes the goal; spiritual health becomes the casualty.

Conclusion: Drift Is Reversible

The warning signs of drift are not signs of rejection — they are signs of invitation. Jesus reveals drift so He can reverse it. He exposes the heart so He can heal it. He confronts the believer so He can restore intimacy.

Drift is not final. Drift is not fatal. Drift is not irreversible.

It is a call to return.

Chapter 6 will explore how to respond when drift is discovered — the pathway back to intimacy, the steps that restore relationship, and the practices that anchor the soul in Jesus again.

Chapter 6 — Responding to Drift and Restoring Relationship with Jesus

Drift is never sudden. It is subtle, quiet, and often unnoticed until the soul feels distant from the One it once loved deeply. But the mercy of Jesus is that He never exposes drift to shame us — He exposes drift to **restore** us. Conviction is not condemnation; it is protection. It is the Shepherd calling His sheep back to safety.

This chapter is about responding to that call. It is about recognizing the invitation of Jesus to return, and understanding the steps that lead the heart back into intimacy with Him. Drift is reversible. Distance is repairable. And relationship with Jesus is restorable — not by effort, but by surrender.

1. Recognizing the First Turn Back

Every return begins with one moment: **honesty**.

Drift thrives in denial. Restoration begins in truth. The first turn back to Jesus is acknowledging where your heart truly is — not where your ministry is, not where your reputation is, not where your gifting is, but where **your soul** is.

Honesty is not weakness; it is worship. It is the moment the prodigal “came to himself.” It is the moment Saul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” It is the moment every believer realizes that Jesus is not asking for performance — He is asking for the heart.

The Holy Spirit cannot transform what we pretend to be. He restores what we confess.

2. Returning to the Secret Place

Drift always begins in the secret place, and restoration always begins there too.

The secret place is where intimacy is rebuilt. It is where the noise of ministry is silenced and the voice of Jesus becomes clear again. It is where the heart is softened, conviction is welcomed, and surrender becomes natural.

Returning to the secret place is not about length — it is about **presence**. It is not about eloquence — it is about **availability**. It is not about spiritual performance — it is about **being with Him**.

The secret place is where drift dies and relationship lives again.

3. Relearning the Rhythm of Surrender

Drift happens when surrender becomes occasional. Restoration happens when surrender becomes daily.

Surrender is not dramatic; it is consistent. It is choosing obedience over opportunity. It is choosing holiness over convenience. It is choosing transformation over talent. It is choosing the voice of Jesus over the applause of people.

Jesus said, *“My sheep know My voice, and another they will not follow.”* That is the essence of restored surrender — recognizing His voice again, trusting His leading again, and refusing the voices that pull the heart away from Him.

Surrender is the rhythm of a life known by Jesus. It is the posture that keeps the heart soft, the conscience clear, and the Spirit’s voice recognizable.

A drifting heart resists surrender. A restored heart returns to it.

4. Responding to Conviction Correctly

Conviction is one of the greatest promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is not condemnation; it is protection. It is the Shepherd calling His sheep back to safety.

Responding to conviction correctly is one of the clearest signs that drift is reversing. When conviction begins to feel like love again — when correction feels like care — the heart is healing.

Conviction is not God pointing out what is wrong; it is God pointing you back to what is right. It is His way of saying, “I still want you. I still choose you. I still know you.”

Restoration begins when conviction becomes welcome again.

5. Replacing Activity with Obedience

One of the most dangerous signs of drift is when activity replaces obedience. Ministry becomes movement, not submission. Opportunities become more exciting than instructions. The calendar becomes more important than the secret place.

Restoration reverses this.

Obedience becomes the priority again. The voice of Jesus becomes the standard again. The will of God becomes the desire again. Ministry flows from relationship, not from talent or momentum.

Activity impresses people. Obedience pleases Jesus.

Restoration is when pleasing Jesus becomes the goal again.

6. Rebuilding Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit

Drift dulls the senses. Restoration sharpens them.

The Holy Spirit is not silent — He is often simply unheard. Drift makes His whispers feel faint. Restoration makes His whispers feel unmistakable.

Sensitivity to the Spirit is rebuilt through:

- **Stillness** — quieting the soul
- **Scripture** — aligning the heart
- **Worship** — softening the spirit
- **Obedience** — training the ear
- **Repentance** — clearing the static

The Spirit does not shout at drifting believers; He calls them gently. Restoration is learning to hear that call again.

7. Returning to the Simplicity of Relationship

Drift complicates Christianity. Restoration simplifies it.

When the heart drifts, faith becomes about performance, image, success, opportunities, platforms, and outcomes. But when the heart returns, faith becomes about one thing:

Jesus.

Not ministry. Not gifting. Not reputation. Not results. Just Jesus.

Restoration is returning to the simplicity of loving Him, following Him, listening to Him, and being known by Him.

8. The Evidence of a Restored Heart

A restored heart is not louder — it is softer. It is not busier — it is steadier. It is not more talented — it is more surrendered. It is not more impressive — it is more obedient.

The evidence of restoration is not external success; it is internal transformation.

A restored heart:

- Welcomes conviction
- Prioritizes obedience
- Values holiness
- Seeks intimacy
- Depends on the Spirit
- Loves Jesus more than ministry

This is the life Jesus knows. This is the life that cannot drift far, because it stays close.

Drift is reversible because Jesus is relentless. He does not abandon drifting believers — He pursues them. He restores them. And He rebuilds what drift has damaged.

Chapter 7 will explore how Jesus restores the areas drift has weakened — the conscience, the calling, the character, and the clarity of the believer's walk.

Chapter 7 — How Jesus Restores What Drift Has Damaged

Drift does not just create distance — it creates damage. It dulls the conscience, weakens the calling, blurs spiritual clarity, and erodes character. But Jesus does not simply welcome drifting believers back; He **restores** what drift has broken. He rebuilds what distance has weakened. He heals what wandering has wounded.

Restoration is not a moment — it is a process. It is the Shepherd tending to His sheep. It is the Potter reshaping the clay. It is the Father embracing the returning son and rebuilding what was lost.

This chapter explores how Jesus restores the inner life of the believer so that intimacy becomes strong again, obedience becomes natural again, and the voice of the Spirit becomes unmistakable again.

1. Jesus Restores the Conscience

Drift always affects the conscience. What once convicted now feels distant. What once stirred the heart now barely registers. But when Jesus restores a drifting believer, He begins with the conscience — the inner compass that responds to His voice.

A restored conscience is:

- **sensitive** — able to feel conviction again
- **clear** — free from guilt and confusion
- **responsive** — quick to obey
- **tender** — easily moved by the Spirit

Jesus does not shame the conscience; He cleans it. He does not crush it; He softens it. He restores the ability to feel again — to sense His leading, His warnings, His comfort, and His correction.

A restored conscience is one of the greatest gifts of grace.

2. Jesus Restores the Calling

Drift does not erase calling — it only obscures it. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, but drift can bury them under discouragement, distraction, or self-reliance.

When Jesus restores a believer, He brings the calling back into focus.

He restores calling by:

- **renewing passion** — the fire returns
- **clarifying assignment** — the purpose becomes clear
- **purifying motives** — ministry becomes about Him again
- **rebuilding confidence** — not in talent, but in His Spirit

Jesus does not simply return the believer to ministry; He returns the believer to **Spirit-empowered ministry**. He restores calling by restoring intimacy, because true calling flows from relationship, not performance.

3. Jesus Restores Spiritual Clarity

Drift creates confusion. The voice of Jesus becomes harder to discern. The noise of life becomes louder. Decisions feel heavier. Discernment becomes cloudy.

But Jesus restores clarity.

He restores clarity by:

- **removing distractions**
- **realigning priorities**
- **reestablishing peace**
- **reconnecting the believer to His voice**

Jesus said, *“My sheep know My voice.”* Clarity is the fruit of proximity. When Jesus restores a drifting believer, He brings them close enough to hear again — clearly, confidently, and consistently.

Clarity is not the absence of noise; it is the presence of Jesus.

4. Jesus Restores Character

Drift does not always lead to visible sin, but it always leads to weakened character. The edges soften. The convictions loosen. The disciplines fade. The inner life becomes fragile.

But Jesus restores character gently and thoroughly. He restores character by:

- **strengthening holiness**
- **renewing integrity**
- **rebuilding discipline**
- **deepening humility**
- **reinforcing obedience**

Character is not rebuilt through effort; it is rebuilt through surrender. Jesus forms the believer from the inside out, shaping the heart until the outer life reflects the inner transformation.

Restored character is the evidence of restored intimacy.

5. Jesus Restores Joy

Drift steals joy. Ministry becomes heavy. Worship becomes routine. Prayer becomes duty. Scripture becomes information. The soul becomes tired.

But Jesus restores joy — not emotional excitement, but spiritual delight.

He restores joy by:

- **renewing gratitude**
- **reviving worship**
- **refreshing the soul**
- **reawakening love for Him**

Joy is the strength of the believer. It is the sign of a heart that has returned home. When Jesus restores joy, He restores the believer's ability to serve Him with gladness, not exhaustion.

6. Jesus Restores the Ability to Follow Him Fully

Drift makes following Jesus feel complicated. Restoration makes following Jesus feel simple again.

A restored believer:

- hears His voice
- trusts His leading
- obeys His instructions
- walks in His Spirit
- desires His will
- rejects competing voices

Restoration is not just about healing — it is about **alignment**. It is the believer returning to the posture of a sheep who knows the Shepherd's voice and follows Him without hesitation.

7. Restoration Leads to a Life Jesus Truly Knows

The goal of restoration is not better ministry — it is deeper intimacy. It is not increased activity — it is increased surrender. It is not louder gifting — it is quieter obedience.

A restored life is a life Jesus knows:

- a life of daily surrender
- a life of Spirit-led obedience
- a life of private devotion
- a life of holiness
- a life of intimacy
- a life of authenticity
- a life of being known by Him

This is the life that cannot drift far, because it stays close.

Conclusion: The Final Day

On the final day, Jesus will not ask about sermons preached, songs sung, ministries built, or platforms reached. He will ask one question:

Did I know you?

And the restored believer will answer with confidence — not because of perfection, but because of proximity.

Drift may happen, but restoration is always available. Jesus is relentless in His pursuit, gentle in His correction, and complete in His restoration.

The life He knows is the life He restores.

Closing Epilogue

Jesus said unless you are born again you can't see the Kingdom of God. So in order to be known by Him, one must be baptized in the name of Jesus and be filled with the Holy Ghost. This is the starting point and it is critically important to follow the leading of the Spirit of God to avoid the drift. The warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:22–23 was never meant to create fear — it was meant to awaken the heart. He does not desire distant disciples, busy servants, or gifted performers. He desires sons and daughters who walk with Him, hear Him, love Him, and are **known** by Him.

Drift is real, but so is restoration. The Shepherd still calls. The Spirit still convicts. The Father still receives. And Jesus still knows those who belong to Him. May every reader return to intimacy. May every heart stay surrendered. May every life be Spirit-led. May every believer be known by Jesus. This is the life He sees. This is the life He restores. This is the life He knows.