

All right, good evening everyone. Welcome to our Bible study for the evening. As always, let's go to the Lord in prayer before we begin.

Father, thank you that as disciples of Christ, you've given us understanding of what the Lord Jesus Christ says in his own words. God, I pray that we would be a people that would want to understand more of his truths. That we would have greater desires for spiritual life in our devotionals at home. And also more application of not just being hearers but doers of the word.

I pray Father that you would remind us that Jesus said that he would give us life and then he would give it more abundantly. And so I pray for all that Father in any area of our lives or where lacking in just spiritual growth. I pray Father that you would speak to each one here in this auditorium through your word. Father, well, thank you that you will be present, that you would invoke upon each and one of us the Spirit to convince us Lord that we need you and depend upon you in all areas of our lives. Please Father, work in this way and we'll thank you in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Continuing our series as we are now in week three of series on how to starve the algorithm to feed our souls. I want to start off with the area of the age that we live in. It's good to know the times that we live. That's one of the things that the spirit and dwells us with to discern truth from lies primarily and then how to understand the culture we live in and what are the areas that we're not to fall into trap. Whether by spiritual deceivers, people that lead in churches that are not following the word but rather their own emotions or their own desire to bring their self up in reputation and not really bringing Christ and exalting Christ before everyone. And I want us to have that discernment tonight as I continue this series.

One of the things about algorithms a little bit more about that is they are designed to not separate the truth over lies. Meaning that that's not where the end goal is. The end goal is that they are programmed to focus primarily on engagement. So, how many clicks, how much outrage in the message or in the video or fascination with conspiracy of sorts. Like money, it only amplifies more of what one desires because after all it's human beings that are feeding algorithms. In itself, it's neutral, but the humans are the one that's driving these algorithms. Again, generated by the clicks and rage and fascination with outrage.

So, whether it can be AI deep fakes. So, let me just define that if you don't know what that is. So, it's defined as it looks or sounds real, but is ultimately fake. So, that's AI deep fakes or manufactured internet rumors. That would be claims people or groups intentionally create and spread online to deceive the public, push a specific agenda, or to just simply want to earn money. Again, the way that a lot of these platforms work is if you get this many views, this is how much you'll make.

So, we are constantly bombarded by content designed to look believable, feel urgent, and evoke strong emotional reactions. So, in our culture, we're constantly the attention is whatever can be outrageous, loud versus the true. So again, loud versus true voices. So let's flesh that out. Here's our four things that a discerning person should watch out for.

So number one, it's popularity. Popularity assuming that if this person or group has millions of views or likes means something must be true. That's the first thing that we need to be aware of. Number two, repetition. Thinking that seeing a claim, let's say four or five times or more on your feed makes it more credible. Number three, overconfidence. Mistaking a polished production, high-value production, big budget for spiritual integrity. Oh, they work so hard, they must be spiritually integral. And the fourth is emotion. Believing that if a message makes us feel intense outrage or validation, it must be right.

So the algorithm then is trained us to trust these things. These four things. This is what we considered the loud voices, but not the truest ones. Not the truest ones. But Jesus addresses this exact danger from his sermon on the mount over 2,000 years ago, warning us that deception often arrives in these attractive packages. So if you will, turn with me to Matthew chapter 7, and we're going to be in verses 15 and 20. Matthew chapter 7 verses 15 to 20. The Lord Jesus says this in verse 15, "Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. But a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Verse 20, "Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them."

Notice 20, the Lord Jesus repeats verse 16, "By their fruits, by their fruits ye shall know them." So, again, repetition is important in the Hebrew text. So, Jesus saying this twice is saying pay attention to their fruits. Pay attention to their fruits. So, let's go into this then. What is it? What is the fruits? Let's kind of take a step back and immerse ourselves in the context of the Lord Jesus Christ saying these words. Whether it's an ancient world or today, sheep are sheep. They don't change their identity. So, what is the identity of a sheep? They are gentle, they are useful, and they're harmless. Those are three characteristics that you will notice in a sheep. While wolves are three opposite, predatory, destructive, and cunning.

Jesus warns that spiritual deception rarely enters looking dangerous. It arrives disguised, as he says, in sheep's clothing. Wearing the vocabulary, they right? Speaking like a sheep. Or to look, again, he literally says sheep's clothing. Or as in 2 Timothy 3:5 says this, puts it like this, having a form of godliness, the outward exterior, but denying the power thereof. Doesn't mention God. And so Paul writing to Timothy says, "From such turn away. Turn away." So, the Lord Jesus instructs his disciples not to measure spiritual truth by the fleece, the outward appearance, but by the fruit, the long-term character of the individual, the conduct. What is the person saying? And is his saying consistent with what he acts upon what he says? And then their outcome of their lives, their outcome of their lives. You'll notice Paul's writing, he would mention about the pastors to watch their life, their faith, that their as he puts it, outcome of their lives. Watch their life. Are they consistent with what they preach? Another way of saying it.

So, as Jesus said here, he puts a question, says, "Can thorns produce grapes and thistles produce figs?" And the rhetorical question leads to a definite no. A person's true nature

eventually will reveal itself in what their life yields over time. Some can be short, some can be long. But the idea is the sowing and reaping principle. You will reap what you sow. That's the idea of what Jesus is saying here. He also, if you will see in the text, is also pointing out the importance of proximity. The importance of proximity, meaning being close to the actual speaker. You have to get close enough to see how someone actually lives. You actually have to see them in real time. And how they serve and how they treat others and handles trials. Often times you can't do that when you're watching someone on these digital platforms.

Let me give you an illustration. Imagine with me I had a bowl of fake fruit. Okay? And I just placed it here and fortunately many of you are not very close up if it was here. You're at a distance. And so if you would have seen this plastic bowl of fruit from your distance, you would probably see that it's flawless. Because you're seeing it from across the room. Color's perfect. Zero blemishes. And you'll notice there's just absolute symmetry. An apple is perfectly round. But if you take a bite and I would give it to you and I say take a bite, what would your reach action be? Well, you would quickly realize that you're biting into something that doesn't taste good. It's hard and ultimately there's no nourishment. In contrast, real fruit might have blemishes. But it carries life. It carries life, has seeds, it has nourishment.

So, the idea is you might see something someone rather portraying a life that's perfect on the screen. You might see but rather if you examine them closely that they're really not perfect. That their life actually reveals no actual spiritual nourishment. That's what Jesus is saying. You're going to see the exterior, but is your soul being spiritually nourished or is it like the fake fruit? Are you just impressed by the looks? But there's no relationship. There's no proximity to the individual that you're listening to or watching.

So, the Lord Jesus made this statement over 2,000 years ago. And how relevant is it today? How relevant is that today? To discern, to understand, and then to follow accordingly. So, what can we learn from the Lord Jesus based on Matthew 7 verses 15 and 20? Your feed is can be potentially filled with things that are superficial. That are they look good on the outside, but inside there's no spiritual nourishment. And you can tell by this by a real fruit. If you would eat a real fruit, there would be growth in you. There would be health in you. But if you're eating let's say something that is fake that looks like fruit, but it's not, well, you're deceiving yourself into thinking that there is actually spiritual growth, there is spiritual nourishment, and overall spiritual health in your life.

So, as I'm saying this right now, think of those who are you are following. Now, some of them may be good, but are they all good? Are they all good? Ask yourself, what is the long-term fruit of following this particular person? Have you followed this person long enough to see consistent in their life and consistent in your life's virtual growth? Do they produce the fruit of the Spirit? That's a good way to examine someone, the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, or does the person produce anger, division, and pride? Does that resemble in your soul when you hear this person? Because proximity is the fastest way to truth. The closer you are to a person, the more you can find the truth about the person. Value the real-life fruit of trusted believers right here in this very room. I

did a whole sermon on having face-to-face discipleship. That's the way the Lord Jesus has always made discipleship to be and it's never meant to be anything else. Right next to you is someone who is a fellow believer. And you can know them. Their truth. Yes, blemishes, we're not perfect by no means. But that person is giving spiritual nourishment. That person is cultivating spiritual growth in themselves and also in your life. See, that's by far way more important than a distant digital stranger, right?

And so we're going to see in the next point, point number two, from appearance in point one to now knowing the voice. How to discern the voice. So now you go from discerning the looks to the voice. Turn with me to John chapter 10. And we're going to go over verses 1 through 15 and then I will share some comments from the Lord Jesus. So knowing the shepherd's voice, discerning the shepherd's voice. Verse 1 of chapter 10. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter or the doorkeeper openeth, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, specifically the flock out of the pen, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him. For they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them. But they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. By me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep, but he that is an hireling, which someone who works only for money, and not the shepherd, whose own sheep are not, see the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth. And the wolf catcheth him, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As a father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

In 1st century Judea, just to bring some context to this text, multiple shepherds would often combine their flocks together into a single communal enclosure for the evening. And then the next day, in the morning, there were no physical tags, no color code uh part uh put this is my sheep, this is your sheep on the sheep. No. The shepherd simply walked up to the gate and called out his own sheep. Because the sheep had spent so much time with the shepherd in close proximity, they recognized the distinct cadence, the tone, and even the pitch of the shepherd's voice. They didn't move because he drove them from behind with a whip. You'll notice that in the text. No. They follow because they trusted the voice leading them from the front. Always the shepherd is at the front. A good shepherd. So, when a stranger or a thief called out, the flock scattered, not out of panic, but because a stranger's voice was unfamiliar. Again, they recognized the tone, they recognized the pitch, the cadence.

So, looking at John chapter 10, the Lord Jesus here highlights two critical realities for us as

disciples of Christ to understand. The first point is this, the thief climbs over. The thief climbs over. False guides seek access through back door, and here it is, manipulation, excitement, and control rather than this straight-forward truth. Straight-forward truth. Next, the second one. The sheep discern by familiarity. The sheep do not spend their days trying to figure out and discern every stranger's voice. No. They spend their days walking so closely with the shepherd that any counterfeit voice immediately sounds off and they leave. We live in a culture that overvalues signals. The ones I mentioned, popularity, repetition, overconfidence and emotion. And undervalues real presence. Real presence. And we can undervalue Jesus incorrectly in that same in that same way for not discerning and careful with the times that we live in.

Think of a mother's voice in a crowded playground. I've seen this happen. Picture a noisy indoor playground filled with dozens of shouting children and music playing in the background. An adult can stand there and hear nothing but chaos. But the moment a young child trips and cries, they don't look around at all the adults in the room. No, the parent listens for one specific voice, his or her own child. And among all the noise, a mother's voice cuts through instantly as a mother cries out, "Why?" Not because it's the loudest voice in the room, but because it is the most familiar. It is the most familiar. The cadence, the tone, the familiarity of the voice, that's what counts. That's how God designed us.

Modern digital scammers now use short audio clips to generate AI spoofed phone calls. I don't know if you ever got one, but I have. Pretending to be a family member in distress asking for urgent money transfer. But when someone calls who has spent decades living with that family member, here it is, the scam breaks down within seconds. Why? Because an algorithm cannot copy the familiar voice. Cannot mimic the real authentic relationship history. Ask some questions to the algorithm, see what happens. Vocabulary in the heart of the person, right? That's what proximity does. That's what proximity does. We get more than just the words coming out, but the conduct, character, and everything else.

You see, let's just go back to our text in John 10. You cannot recognize the shepherd's voice, the good shepherd's voice, in a moment of crisis if you're only listening to the world's noise in moments of calm. The times that you are in solitude is the time that you need to spend in his word. Our minds consume hours of algorithm streams, commentaries, and outrage feeds daily, but only receive a few minutes of God's word a week, the stranger's voice, here it is, will feel natural. Will sound familiar more than Christ's voice. And you will now hear Christ's voice as foreign. That's a dangerous place to be. Spiritual discernment is built through daily time with the good shepherd by what? His word and praying. And praying. Communing with the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. The triune God working together. Together.

Let's remind ourselves, where does lies come from? Turn with me to John chapter 8 verse 44. John chapter 8 verse 44. In John 8:44, Jesus is speaking to a group of hostile Jewish religious leaders who were actively rejecting his words and plotting to kill him. That's the context of John 8:44. And so he says this about them. Verse 44. Ye are of your father the devil. And the lust of your fathers ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning from Cain and abode not in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own for he is

a liar and the father of it. He is the father of all lies. He is the father of all lies. He is the father of all lies. Here are the steps the devil uses for all of us to discern and how he works. The first thing he does the first thing rather his character is that he is the father of all lies. Lies originate from the devil. So, any lies that you hear is coming directly from the devil. It is his native language, as it were. It is his native language, as it were. Number two. He finds root in our disordered desires, disordered desires. So, be very careful when you're in a weak place in your flesh. That's the time when the devil acts. And he will take a root in that weakness, and he will sprout a seed of thorns in your life. The flesh is this, to value the created things over the creator. The created things over the creator. Valuing the created things over the creator. So, anytime your flesh is desiring more of the created things over the creator, that's when your flesh is weak, and that's when Satan's going to take a root and put a root of bitterness in your heart. Number three. Once he can take a root, and allow that to grow in your life, in your flesh, where you're now admiring more created things over the creator, he then makes it normalized in your viewpoint. And then he brings people along where you feel comforted in that root of bitterness. And then, you begin to rationalize, "Well, everyone else is doing it. Everyone else is valuing created things, so, you know what? I'm just going to join them. I just feel comfortable with them." And then the fourth. He makes a broken thing start to feel right. He makes broken things feel right. That's what sin does. That's what sin does. The heart of the devil's deception is he uses lies to trick people to do this, to turn away from the creator, from God. I don't want us to focus in now back to our text in John 10.

Now that we get a glimpse of the steps that the devil takes to create deception in our lives, let's notice the words of Jesus. You know, when he makes statements, they're declarative. They're declarative. And he makes a declarative statement in John chapter 10 verse 11. Look down with me there. He says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." You can meditate on that. Just that text. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. You see, he cares for us when we're in weak in our weak place. He cares for us for our life. He cares for us for our life. As he's willing to give up his own life for us, even in our sinful condition.

Here's where the words of Jesus Christ pivots from understanding discernment to the core of the gospel. We must always come back to the gospel. We must always come back to the gospel. We must never leave with just, "Okay, I understand how to live on our own on my on your own." That's never the gospel message. That's never the gospel message. Gospel will always bring you back to the good shepherd. To the good shepherd. Every sermon should always go to understanding the good shepherd is the one that we must trust in. Not even in our own discernment. Not even in our own discernment.

So, here it is. We are not merely sheep who need better competence of understanding technology. Sure, I share those things with you, but that should not be it. Nor should it be that you have a stronger way to critically think of how to not live in the flesh. That's not good enough, either. We as believers in Christ are sheep who are fundamentally lost. Can you say that of your past? You were once lost. You were once lost. You were prone to wander after the created things. The grass is greener on the other side. And helpless against the thief who comes to kill and to steal and to destroy your very soul. The hireling has one purpose. It's to serve himself.

Not to give up his life for the sheep, but rather to give the sheep to the thief. That's what the hireling does. That's what the hireling does. We see that in what Jesus says about them. They flee when the wolf comes. Any spiritual predator to scatter God's people. That's what a spiritual false leader does. Scatters God's people. He sees the sheep merely as a means to an end. We see that in John chapter 10 verses 12 and 13. His goal is that to get what they want. To work only for money. To work only for money. And you can tell by their lifestyle, can't you? They're living so lavishly when Jesus never lived that way. And no true disciple of Christ has ever lived lavishly. Jesus is not in hiring. Praise God. Praise God.

When sin, death, and judgment stood against us, Jesus did not run. No, he stepped in front of his flock. And on the cross at Calvary, the good shepherd willingly laid down his life for the sheep. He absorbed the strike of death that we might walk out into the eternal pasture. You saw that in the text. The idea was that he laid down his life so that he can give us spiritual life and not just he says in life, but life more abundantly. Does that not invoke in your in your spirit when you hear that part, well, like it did with me, it struck me in the heart. So, I don't deserve this. So, I don't deserve this. Why would you do this, Lord? Why would you do this, Lord? Why am I the chosen? Why am I the chosen? I don't deserve any of this. I don't deserve any of this. That's the heart of a true disciple of Christ. I don't deserve this, Lord. I don't deserve this, Lord. I don't deserve your mercy. I don't deserve your mercy. I don't deserve your grace. I don't deserve your grace. I think Peter when he denied Christ three times when Jesus said he will, I believe he had that moment. Lord, why did you warn me? Lord, why did you rescue me in this situation? You knew I was going to fail you. Have you ever felt like that? I failed you. I failed you. Not just once, not just twice, many times. And yet he gives up his life for the sheep. We're coming to a person. We're coming to a person. This truth is the Lord Jesus Christ. He has a name. Who bled for you, rose from the grave, and calls you by your name. And calls you by your name.

You know, whenever I pray and there's moments where it's it says what a disciple is supposed to pray like. For example, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. I remember I was praying that and then it wasn't audible, but it said the spirit within me God's spirit working in me called out my name, Anthony, you're going to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Have you ever felt that that personal connection to God's word where he's calling you by name, this is how you are going to be and nothing's going to stop you from my love for you from my grace being poured out to you lavishly, my mercy withholding that which you deserve? Oh, those are the moments that he's talking about, he gives life more abundantly. A constant supply of spiritual life. A constant supply of spiritual life. See, once you've tasted that he is good you'll want more of him, you want more of this life in you.

This week I want to put this boots on the ground, as it were. Pause before you view anything on your device. Pause before you view anything on your device. Ask this very driving question. Is this moving you towards having more fruit of the spirit or is it feeding more outrage? Again, passing beyond reasonable bounds or passing beyond reasonable limits. Those are the things that bring anxiety. Those are the things that bring anxiety. Those are the things that brings fear, that brings. By the way, I mentioned this earlier, but I wanted to find it. Outrage is the noun.

Outrageous is the adjective. Outrageous meaning excessive or shocking. Go and look at the content that you view. Is it excessive or shocking? You'll know by the outcome. You'll know by the outcome. You'll know by the outcome.

Here's another thing to think about. Who are the top two voices forming you online right now? Just two. Just two. Who are those voices online that you're listening to and being formed by them right now? And then, who are the top two voices forming you face-to-face? So, one is online presence, and one is in person. Take time to pause before you view. Next, commit time in the morning or in the evening when there is time where there's no distractions. I gave them message. I believe it was in the parenting for life. And I mentioned there the reason why Martha was wrong was that she was listening to Jesus while fixing the table. And the analogy was Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones a famous very godly man said, "I didn't want people to listen to my sermons on cassette while they're washing their dishes. Because I want them to be in the presence of the Lord fully without any distraction." Do you take your devotion time that seriously? That's when you're supposed to have your devotion without any distractions like Mary. Fully focused attention on the Lord. So, if that means you don't use your phone or your devices to read your devotional, but rather a physical open Bible do whatever it takes so that there is no distractions, no notifications popping up. None of it. So, that you can turn down the volume of the thousand of digital voices so you can learn and recognize the singular voice of your shepherd. Isn't that what you want? Isn't that what Christ wants for us?

Let us be a church family where we're so anchored in the good shepherd and his voice that no matter what kind of panic or fake news or divisive outrage comes against us that we're not shaken because our foundation is strong and we can hear clearly the singular voice of the good shepherd. Imagine walking through a confused, noisy world that we live in that is getting worse and worse in that viewpoint. And you can still have steady peace. Peace that surpasses all understanding as the word of God says. And you don't have to operate out of fear for man, but walking in the quiet confidence of a sheep who knows the shepherd's voice, rests in his care, and walks daily in his truth. That's the kind of people that Christ desires, namely, and that I desire as your pastor. So, as we continue on with these series of sermons, I want us to cultivate this within ourselves. And may God help us do that. Amen.

I want to ask some of the men, as I have been, to pray for three things based on this sermon. Number one, brother Daniel, if you can please pray for this. Uh, pray that the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual discernment to guard our hearts against deceptive loud and