

**The Fruit Test**  
**TRUEish Series**  
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Today is part four of our message series called True-ish. This is a very powerful and very important teaching for all of us. Things are being taught in the body of Christ that have a mixture of truth and error in them. They are True-ish and can lead you into some deceptive and harmful beliefs.

We live in a time of great spiritual confusion. There are Christian leaders and authors that are going down this True-ish path and taking innocent people with them. The Apostle Paul warns about a time in the future which describes our day.

**2 Timothy 4:3 For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. (NLT)**

We are in a time where some Christians are questioning everything they have been taught and are freely designing their own religion and spirituality based not on the Scriptures but on what feels right to them. What they like to hear.

They want a religion that is not offensive to anyone. A politically correct Jesus. No hell, no judgement – A sweet Jesus that allows you to choose your own morality and lifestyle.

These are feel-good teachings with Jesus stickers on them but no longer the true gospel.

Sadly, in our day the level of discernment for many has been reduced to what makes me feel good, the appearance of right and not the authority of scripture.

It reminds me of the warning in scripture that says:

**There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.**  
**Proverbs 16:25 (NIV)**

In this series we are giving you a number of tests to use to determine if something is true or true-ish.

So far, we looked at The Test of The Authority of Scripture, The Test of Sound Biblical Interpretation and The Test of The Faith Community.

Jesus also gave us another test to use to determine if a person, group or particular teaching is true or True-ish. **It is The Fruit Test**.

- What is the spiritual fruit in those that espouse a particular teaching? What fruit does it produce in their followers?

**Matthew 7:15-20** “Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves. <sup>16</sup> You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions.

Let’s look at some of the actions and characteristics of True-ish teachings. Some red flags that we need to continually be scanning for as we look at the fruit. 9 fruit tests.

### **1. Does it produce a deeper love and respect of the scriptures?**

Not only does the person or group believe in the full authority of scriptures, which is the first test, but does it also create a love and respect for the scripture? Not just an intellectual belief, but a heart response of loving God’s word. That is good fruit.

Like the Psalmist declared: **I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.... How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Psalm 119:16, 103 (NIV)**

**STORY**: We had a speaker come through here years ago to do a workshop. And in the midst of his teaching he said we don’t worship the bible, which is true, and then proceeded to put the bible on the floor and stand on it, implying it was nothing more than a good book. He flunked this test big time. He was disrespectful of the scriptures. He did not value them or create a love for them.

### **2. Does the person or group promoting this teaching reflect the nature and character of Jesus?**

Does it pass the Jesus smell test? Does it taste like Jesus fruit?

**In the gospels we have the nature of Jesus revealed to us.**

- He was full of grace and truth.
- He was kind and gentle and yet he never compromised on truth.
- He befriended sinners but never engaged in their sin.
- He valued everyone. He was no respecter of persons.
- He spoke the truth, but he always did it in a loving way.
- He was never disrespectful or condescending.

**STORY:** I remember the time when I was not very discerning, and I ignored this fruit test. A particular leader was moving in signs and wonders and drawing big crowds. People were getting saved. He had a great healing ministry. But he came across pretty arrogant and brash. At times he was disrespectful of individuals during ministry times.

- But overall his teaching seemed ok but I had this uneasiness in my spirit.

I rationalized, well if God has no problem using him for miracles, I guess I can overlook some things about his personality and style, after all, people were getting healed through his ministry and others were endorsing him.

- I ignored the **poor character fruit** and before too long this leader ended up divorcing his wife and married one of his team members. He was not accountable to those who tried to speak into his life.
- And all the time he was still doing healing miracles, which confused many people. Looking back now I wish I had been more discerning. The bad fruit was there but I ignored it because of the signs and wonders he was doing.
- If I would have used this fruit test I would not have got pulled into his orbit.

Many people get pulled into True-ish movements by charismatic leaders who can do miracles. **BUT - Jesus never tells us to use signs, wonders and miracles as a fruit test.** In fact, he says the opposite.

**Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV)** “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Don't be blinded by the charisma, promises or miracles. Be discerning. Test the fruit and character over a period of time. **Test by the fruit not the gift.**

### **3. Does it produce holiness and a deeper love for Jesus?**

Is there holiness fruit or license to live however you want? I'm not talking about religious legalism but biblical holiness. Too often when we say "holiness" people think legalism and get defensive, which is wrong.

- There is **Spirit nurtured holiness that produces life**, which is different than **legalistic imposed holiness that produces bondage.**

**1 Peter 1:15-16 (NLT) <sup>15</sup> But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. <sup>16</sup> For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."**

- **Legalism** tries to be holy to earn righteousness and God's love.
- **Grace** pursues holiness because of the righteousness we have already received. We want to be more like him.

Many of the cults and groups that move away from the authority of God's word begin to embrace sinful behavior. Holiness becomes a restrictive concept that is no longer embraced. **Freedom is defined as making up your own rules to live by.**

I think the reaction to the idea of holiness is often a **reaction to legalism** we have experienced in our lives as well as **allowing the culture to dictate our beliefs and values.**

I think it is accurate to say most True-ish groups are either into legalism or license.

- They both have a warped understanding of biblical holiness.

As we look for fruit, we want to avoid teachings that draw us into either legalism or license.

### **4. Does it exalt a person or teaching over Jesus?**

Is this person a big self-promoter? Promise you healing or special favor with God if you give them money. Do people promote the person more than Jesus?

Sometimes it is a **special doctrine or revelation** they promote that draws people after them. They claim that God gave them a spiritual truth or insight that no one else has. This is pride. Paul, says, no scripture is of private interpretation.

This is a huge red flag. It is how cults and splinter groups get started. Be discerning.

Be very careful if it is outside of **Orthodox beliefs** – **meaning common understood teaching over centuries of faithful church teachings**.

Some leaders start off good but get off track in their teaching after a while. We need to be like the Bereans in the bible who examined Paul's teaching with the scriptures.

### **5. Is it ok to ask questions and process your doubts?**

Does the ministry help you or shame you when you express your doubts or questions?

Groups that get off on True-ish teaching often **become controlling** after a while. In order to keep people from scrutinizing their teachings they discourage questions. In these groups it's **not ok** to express or process your doubts. You need to toe the line.

- In these groups often tradition, special revelation, or the legalistic leader and system are more important than the bible.

This has given rise to the **Progressive Christianity Movement** which is a reaction to restrictive legalistic religion. I understand their complaint, but they move from one True-ish form into another. From one form of bondage to another.

**It is ok to ask questions, examine your faith, and struggle with doubts. The problem arises when we look to tradition or culture, populist teachings and feelings to answer those questions instead of God's word.**

That's when we get sucked into True-ish beliefs and get in trouble.

### **6. Does it create a passion for reaching the lost or create a self-absorbed community?**

If our teaching and theology causes us to become **issue oriented** or **inward focused** instead of a **deepening passion for reaching the lost** with the good news of Jesus, we are off track.

A True-ish teaching that is becoming increasingly popular is that “**God is love and so he would never send anyone to hell**”. They usually also say there are many paths to God.

- The result then is we don't really have to concern ourselves with the lost because we all will eventually end up in heaven some sweet day.

This goes completely against the teaching of the Bible, but it feels good. It sounds so nice and loving, it is politically correct, but it is not only True-ish. It is total deception.

The fruit we are looking for is the heart of God burning in us for the lost. There is a hell and lost people are going there.

## **7. Does it draw people toward the church or away from the church?**

Pastor Brian talked about this last week.

*“Any person, ministry, voice, podcast, book or even internal voice of pain, bitterness that is tempting you to walk away from, the “Christian Church” or as some people label “organized religion”—that’s a dangerous voice.*

*Yes, Church is full of imperfect people—it’s full of us—we should all be striving towards a perfect ideal. We’re all trying to “live a life worthy of the call.” None of us get this right. The church is a gathering where we pursue God together and are transformed.”*

Be careful of those who try to draw you into their small group out of hurt or in reaction to the larger church body.

## **8. Is it exclusive?**

This is another good fruit test. Groups that get into True-ish special revelation teaching often become exclusive. They only gather with their own kind. They see themselves as **more spiritual** and look down on others. ...Not good fruit!

## 9. Does it leave room for disputable matters?

In Romans chapter 14 Paul makes it clear that not everything we disagree on is True-ish in nature. Some of it is simply differing convictions, preferences and interpretations.

There are **secondary matters of the faith that we can agree to disagree on**. Paul calls them **disputable matters**.

- For the early church it was things like which day you choose to worship, eating meat that was considered by some as being unclean.

Some groups do not allow room for personal convictions and preferences.

But there are many things about our faith that are **more preference and personal conviction than primary truth**.

**Here at Petra** we choose not to argue or separate over these secondary type issues of the faith. **Things the bible does not clearly call sin**.

A group that doesn't allow room for disputable matters or differing convictions is not healthy in their approach and may even be a bit cultish.

**Let's be people of grace in these areas. Let's agree on the primary doctrines and then give room for some differing convictions and personal preferences on areas the bible doesn't specifically speak to.**

Let's not separate over these type issues. **We have a world to reach**. We have a great work ahead of us as we await the return of Jesus.

May there be much good fruit that flows from our lives and from this church.

**May our fruit taste like Jesus and attract other to Jesus!**