Are you really a Christian?

You may think you are, but you may not be. After all, Jesus himself said that some people will do seemingly “Christian” things in his name but will not truly know him. Or maybe you know you are not a Christian and you wonder what it really means to be one.

To be sure, however, there is clarity from God’s perspective. He is not confused about who does and does not know him. And though our self-awareness is certainly limited, we have been given biblical criteria to help us evaluate whether we are indeed followers of Christ.

Mike McKinley shows us the importance of examining our standing with God and helps us to fearlessly ask the hard questions, ultimately allowing us to see whether we are in the faith and what exactly that entails.

“This is a truly important book in the most urgent sense—a book that serves the cause of Christ by raising the most important question human beings face, and helping to answer it, no less. I am thankful to McKinley for his faithfulness and for the pastoral concern that prompted him to write such an important work.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Mike McKinley (MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary), after serving on the pastoral staff of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington DC, was called in 2005 to revitalize Guilford Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia. He is the author of Church Planting Is for Wimps.
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“Simple, piercing, winsome, practical, honest, direct, and pastoral. If you know anyone questioning their conversion (or who should be questioning!), get this book!”

Dave Harvey, church care and church planting, Sovereign Grace Ministries; author, Rescuing Ambition

“Mike has always had the ability to talk about the mundane and serious aspects of life with both passion and depth in an endearing way. That is such a great and rare combination. Using those skills in his newest book, he references everyday experiences to explain much deeper and more important spiritual truths around the question of how do I know I am a Christian?”

Jackson Crum, Lead Pastor, Park Community Church, Chicago, Illinois

“Really, is there anything more important to know about ourselves than whether we are actually Christians? People have come up with a lot of different ways of thinking about that question—ranging from your ability to remember ‘praying the prayer,’ to possessing a signed card in your Bible from a revival meeting, to ensuring your ‘letter’ is safely tucked away in some church’s filing cabinet. Examining ourselves to make sure we are in the faith is about a whole lot more than that, and McKinley offers good help for that kind of heart evaluation. This is good devotional material, good small group material, and I expect that for some, it will probably even turn out to be the first time they’ve truly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Greg Gilbert, Senior Pastor, Third Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky
“There can be no more important question than ‘Am I really a Christian?’ and Mike McKinley helps us answer it with great skill. He manages to challenge nominal Christians while comforting genuine believers. McKinley’s writing is accessible, engaging, and simple without ever being simplistic. I particularly appreciate the way he encourages us to explore this crucial question in the context of a Christian community. If you’re not sure where you stand before God, or you know someone who’s not sure, then this is the book for you.”

Tim Chester, director, The Porterbrook Institute; author, You Can Change and A Meal with Jesus

“Can any question in life be as important as knowing whether you are right with God—whether you are going to heaven or hell? I’m quite sure that every person now in eternity—with not a single exception among the billions there—would affirm the urgency and priority of pursuing the answer to such a question. That’s why, if you have any uncertainties about the answer for your own situation, you should read this book. Some day, on a day as real as the one in which you entered the world, as real as the one in which you are reading these words, you will enter another world. There you will remain forever. Are you ready? If not, this book will help you understand how the Bible says to prepare.”

Donald S. Whitney, Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality, Senior Associate Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, How Can I Be Sure I’m a Christian?
Am I Really a Christian?
Other 9Marks Books:

What Is the Gospel?
*Greg Gilbert*

Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church
*Michael Lawrence*

Church Planting Is for Wimps
*Mike McKinley*

It Is Well
*Mark Dever and Michael Lawrence*

What Does God Want of Us Anyway?
*Mark Dever*

The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love
*Jonathan Leeman*

What Is a Healthy Church Member?
*Thabiti M. Anyabwile*

12 Challenges Churches Face
*Mark Dever*

The Gospel and Personal Evangelism
*Mark Dever*

What Is a Healthy Church?
*Mark Dever*

The Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made
*Mark Dever*

The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel
*Mark Dever*

The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept
*Mark Dever*

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church
*Mark Dever*
Am I Really a Christian?

Mike McKinley
To four men
who have gone out of their way
to teach me what it means to be a Christian:

Darryle Owens
Jackson Crum
Mark Dever
and my dad
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Most of us think it is wise to visit a doctor every now and then for an examination. It is reassuring to gain a clean bill of health, but it is also a relief when we identify a problem before it is too late to deal with it. However, many of us who live in the world of “modern Christian America” (and beyond) recoil at the thought of examining our lives to see if God’s Word gives our Christianity a clean bill of health. Yet this is precisely what Paul told the Corinthians when he said:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Cor. 13:5)

The reality is that hell is heavily populated with people who professed Christianity but never examined themselves. It is too late if we venture into eternity only to hear these terrifying words from our Lord:

“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:23)

During my twenty years of walking with the Lord, I have longed to know that I am a true Christian and labored to understand the right relationship between faith and the fruit of good works. The problem is when we think that producing the right fruit will make us into the right kind of tree. The owner of any orchard will tell you that fruit is what a tree naturally produces and merely reveals the nature of that tree. If the fruit is gnarled, rotten, or nonexistent, hanging plastic fruit on the branches is not the solution.
Foreword

“Doctor” Mike McKinley is just the guy to take us through this examination. Be assured that he has great bedside manner and cares deeply about our spiritual health—so much so that he invites all of us to look in the mirror of God’s Word and ask the question: Am I really a Christian?

Kirk Cameron
Introduction:
Is This Book Mean Spirited?

Well, here we are, at the introduction. Congratulations to you on successfully navigating the table of contents and Library of Congress information and making it this far! At this point, it is customary to do some introducing, specifically of myself and this book. So let's start there.

This is a book aimed at convincing you that you may not be a Christian. I want you to ask the question, “Am I really a Christian?” because I'm convinced there are a lot of people in this world who think they are Christians but are not.

Hearing that, you might be tempted to ask, “What kind of self-important jerk writes a book like this? Who delights in insulting and disillusioning people?” And, to be honest, I am a self-important jerk much of the time. You can ask my friends.

But if you will believe it, I am writing this book because I genuinely want to help. We who profess to be Christians in the world today have a serious problem. Many of us are confused about a matter that is larger than life and death, namely, whether everyone who claims to be a Christian really is.

Let me explain. A lot of subcultures and cliques are notoriously picky about who really “belongs.” When I was younger, I used to hang out with punk rockers. In those circles we had endless debates about whether some person or some band was a “real” punk. If you didn’t meet the right criteria or espouse a pure ideology, you were labeled a fake, a phony, a wannabe. In the world of punk rock orthodoxy, the worst thing that could happen to you was being branded a poseur. But who finally cares about the boundaries of punk rock, right? No one’s eternal destiny depends on whether the punk bona fides are in order or not.
Here's another example. Spend a few days with me and you'll discover I am a huge New York Yankees fan. I travel with my family to watch the team play; I watch most of their games on the television; I name my pets after the Yankees players; I am in a bad mood when the Yankees lose (which, fortunately, is not all that often).

Now let's say that you claim to be a huge Yankees fan as well. Yet as we talk, it becomes clear that you have not been to a game in years. You don't really know who is on the roster. You just check in around play-off time and ride the wave to World Series glory. Well, you would not qualify as a “huge Yankees fan” in my book. I would consider you a casual fan and something of a front-runner.

But again, who really cares? People don’t live or die because they are not huge Yankees fans. In the final accounting, it is pretty meaningless. However, turn the topic to whether you are a Christian, and suddenly we have left the realm of the trivial and we are swimming in the deep end. Nothing less than the eternal fate of your soul is at stake.

Jesus taught that the world was divided into two groups of people who would experience two radically different fates in this life and in the next. Those who are his followers will receive abundant life now and eternal blessings in his presence (John 10:10; Matt. 25:34). Those who are not his followers will squander their time on earth and ultimately experience the just wrath of God against their sins for all eternity. Friend, you have a lot at stake in knowing whether you are genuinely a Christian.

Imagine for a minute that we’re all running in a race. According to the rules of this race, it doesn’t matter how we place, but it is absolutely critical that we finish. Not only that, our eternal destiny hangs on whether we finish this race. Finishing means eternal joy. Failing to finish, for whatever reason, means eternal suffering. This would be a pretty important race, would it not?

Now imagine that, looking along the racecourse, we see people dressed in running shorts and fancy sneakers, but for some reason they are sitting by the side of the road. Other people are crouched down, still as statues, tense, poised, and ready in the starting
blocks. But they never move; they just stay there. Some people are wandering around in circles. Still others are running the wrong way.

Suppose then we stop to talk to these wayward runners and non-runners. Quickly it becomes clear that they are convinced they’re running well. They say they’re looking forward to completing the race and receiving the substantial reward. They smile and talk dreamily about life beyond the finish line. The problem is, we know that they will never finish the race given their pace or direction.

Tell me: What would be the loving thing to do in that case? Would love motivate us to ignore their confusion? Would love motivate us to politely nod and say nothing? Of course not. Love would require us to warn them, to convince them, to plead with them to change their course.

That is the spirit in which I offer this book to you. I hope to serve you by helping you determine if you are “running your race” in the right direction.

With that in mind, here are four points of clarification. First, I don’t think that I’m any better than you. I stand in the same place as you. I need to examine my life just as I’m asking you to examine yours.

Second, this book is intended for people who claim to be Christians or want to be Christians. If you know you are not a Christian (say, because you are a Muslim or an agnostic or anything else) you are welcome to keep reading, but you may find that other books will do a better job of speaking to your questions and issues.

Third, I don’t think that I’m an expert in these matters. You shouldn’t believe anything just because I say it. After all, I can barely balance my checkbook. Instead, my goal is to show you what the experts have said. I want to go to the Bible and see what Jesus and the authors of Scripture have said on the matter. I assume that because you think of yourself as a Christian, you are willing to do and believe and respond to whatever God’s Word says.

Fourth, I realize that a lot of people who are genuine Christians struggle with assurance. As a pastor, I often meet with brothers and sisters with sensitive consciences who feel every failure and struggle acutely. If that describes you, then you may want to enlist...
the help of some friends as you read through this book. Ask them not only to challenge you, but also to encourage you with God’s grace in your life. Or failing that, just skip ahead to chapter 8, which is described below.

Here is where we are going: In the first chapter, I want to look more closely at what Jesus and the apostle Paul said about the gravity of this matter. We’ll see that simply saying that you are a Christian doesn’t mean you really are one. In the second chapter, we will look at what the Bible says about what constitutes a “genuine” Christian.

In chapters 3 through 7, we will look at passages in the Bible that give us some specific criteria for determining that we are not genuine Christians. In chapter 8, we will consider the matter of assurance. After spending so much time on criteria for determining if you are not a Christian, which is really the main purpose of this book, it does seem important to also spend a few moments considering how to know if you really are a Christian.

In chapter 9, we will conclude by looking at the role of the local church in helping you know whether you are a Christian. In fact, as you read through this book, I hope you do it together with members of your church. God has given us local churches so that we have brothers and sisters in Christ who know us well and can help us answer this most important question.

Becoming a Christian means admitting that you are a sinner, and admitting that you are sinner means admitting that you are prone to self-deceit. Gratefully, God has given us other Christians to help us see the things we cannot see about ourselves. Therefore, you might say that this isn’t a book for individual Christians. It is a book for Christians in churches. The Christian who thinks he can do the sort of self-examination we’re going to do in this book apart from other members in his or her local church is off to a bad start and may never find the answers he or she is looking for.

Well, that seems like enough of an introduction. I’m glad you have stuck around. Now let’s hear what Jesus says on the issue at hand.
MY E-MAIL IN-BOX is clogged with opportunities to “become something.” Just this month, I have received messages from friends and spambots both offering me the chance to become:

- someone’s friend on Facebook,
- a member of Netflix,
- a member of the Democratic Party,
- part of a fantasy football league,
- an ESPN.com “insider,”
- part of an organization’s board of trustees,
- the recipient of an ATM card from the Central Bank of Nigeria (preprogramed with $10 million on it!).

I probably will not take advantage of any of these opportunities. I am already an ESPN.com “insider,” and I don’t have time to play fantasy football or be a trustee (though come to think of it, maybe I should follow up on the $10 million).

Still, consider what would happen if I were to avail myself of these kinds of offers: my relationship with those groups would become redefined, and I would clearly be a member. Not a lot of ambiguity here. Such group membership is a matter of self-selection: you either opt “in” or you opt “out.” Right now,
Am I Really a Christian?

both Netflix and I have a good grasp on the status of our relationship (or nonrelationship) because I have never opted in. But here’s the kicker: being a Christian is not exactly like that.

God Knows His Own

To be sure, there is great clarity on God’s side of the equation. He is not confused about who does and does not belong to him. In the Bible, we read that God has a definite record of those who will receive eternal life through Christ. When the seventy-two disciples return to Jesus, giddy from their recent ministry success, Jesus tells them, “Do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Elsewhere, Jesus tells the disciples, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (John 10:14). God knows who is truly a Christian and who is not.

That’s why the apostle Paul can speak of “Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3). So, too, the apostle John, in his vision of the final judgment before the great white throne, refers to a “book of life” which contains all the names of those who are truly God’s people. Everyone whose name is not listed in this book will be thrown into the lake of fire, while everyone whose name does appear will gain entrance into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 20:15; 21:27). So God knows who belongs to him and who doesn’t. He’s not short on clarity.

Your Spiritual Shirt Is Inside Out

However, the same cannot be said about us. We don’t see ourselves that clearly. In fact, our self-awareness is often comically limited.

Have you ever realized that you have been walking around with toilet paper stuck to your shoe? Or with your shirt on backward? Or with a blob of ketchup on your cheek? I’ve done
each of these at one time or another. When someone finally had mercy on me and pointed out the problem (“Hey, moron, your shirt is on backward!”) I felt a small-to-moderate sense of embarrassment. I had been walking around assuming certain things about myself (suave, devastatingly handsome, capable of dressing myself properly), but in that moment I discovered that reality was otherwise (not cool at all). Everyone around me could see the truth about me clearly, but I was oblivious.

I remember one occasion in particular that God used to teach me about the sometimes gaping difference between self-perception and reality. I had just become an assistant pastor. I had had the opportunity to lead a Bible study of about two hundred people in our church. I enjoyed leading the discussion and answering questions. By all accounts the Bible study seemed to go pretty well.

The next day I was sitting in the office of a friend of mine named Matt, and I asked him to give me some feedback about the study from the previous night. He told me that he, too, thought that it had gone well, and then he mentioned how surprised he was by the way I led the group. “Mike,” he said, “I could not believe how warm and friendly and connected you seemed. You really looked like you were glad to be there and engaged with people well. I was surprised.”

Matt meant these words as a compliment, but I didn’t take them that way. I pushed back: What did he mean that he was surprised? I am always warm and friendly and engaged! I always look like I am glad to be there! I prided myself on engaging people well. After all, I’ve always known that I wasn’t going to get ahead in life based on overwhelming intelligence; people with my limited wattage need to be warm and friendly.

But Matt didn’t see me like this. He explained that, though he liked me personally, he had always perceived me as aloof and a little distant. To make matters worse, he began to give
me some very specific examples of times that he had observed me behaving that way.

As you can imagine, I was disturbed by Matt’s words. After I left his office, I turned his words over and over in my mind. Finally, I came to the conclusion that he was crazy. Or if he was not crazy, at least he was overly critical. Even though Matt was a trusted friend who had known me for ten years, I was convinced that my perception of myself was right and his perception was wrong.

That afternoon I had a lunch appointment with Steve, who was another member of the church. I didn’t know Steve very well at the time, but in the course of his involvement with the church he had had plenty of opportunities to observe me in action. While we ate, I relayed to Steve the details of my earlier conversation with Matt. When I finished, I asked him if he agreed. I wasn’t really an aloof and distant person, was I?

Much to my surprise, Steve nodded his head furiously. Through a mouthful of enchiladas he said, “Yup. That’s absolutely you. You’re totally that way. Aloof . . . I like that. That’s a good word for it.” He then shared in detail why he thought I was. By the time my lunch with Steve was over, I was convinced that he and Matt were right about me.

I was also devastated. My perception of myself had been laughably inaccurate. I had been sure that I was Mr. Friendly, but everyone else thought that I was Mr. Distant-and-Intimidating. How could I have been so completely blind to the truth about myself? Have you ever felt that way?

The Only Opinion That Matters

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us about a group of people who come to realize the truth about themselves only after it is too late. He sets the scene for a harrowing account of what the final judgment will be like:
You Are Not a Christian Just Because You Say That You Are

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (Matt. 25:31–32)

The sheep here represent God’s people, the true followers of Christ. They are praised by their master and ushered into “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Theirs is the fate that we want!

The goats, on the other hand, do not fare well at all. Listen to what Jesus says to them:

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” Then he will answer them, saying, “Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matt. 25:41–46)

There are many things that we could say about this passage, which is why we’ll return to it in chapter 6. But two things are important for us to see right now. First, everyone gathered before that throne either considered themselves to be Christians or at least expected Christ’s approval. When Jesus confronted the goats with their eternal destruction, no one threw up their hands and said, “You are right Jesus! I was wrong. I always said that you did not really exist. I never believed in you. I should never have decided to reject you after all!”
None of them were consciously opposed to Jesus. In fact, when they heard Jesus’s verdict, they seemed to think that there must have been some mistake. They all showed up for the big event expecting to receive a reward from Jesus. But they were terribly wrong. They were self-deceived. They did not see their own state clearly, and their blindness cost them everything.

Second, notice that Jesus himself is the judge. He is the one who ushers people into eternal life or eternal punishment. The nations gathered before him do not make that decision. There is nothing they can say or do to change his mind. The only thing that matters on that last day is whether Jesus says that you are one of his.

When you stand before Jesus your judge, any evidence you marshal on your own behalf won’t matter. You might point to all the times you prayed “The Sinner’s Prayer,” or the time you walked down the aisle, or your baptism, or the other time you were baptized in case the first one didn’t “take,” or the youth retreats you attended, or the missions trips you went on. But if, in that final moment, Jesus does not look at you and say, “She is one of my sheep” or “He belongs to me,” none of that will matter. You will not be able to argue with the Judge’s verdict. Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matt. 7:21–23)

Can you see what Jesus is saying? It is possible for you to honestly believe that you are a follower of Christ, but not
You Are Not a Christian Just Because You Say That You Are

actually be one. It is possible to say to him, “Lord, Lord,” but never enter the kingdom of heaven. Merely checking a box and calling yourself a Christian doesn’t mean that you really are a Christian.

Recently, a high-profile website was established where people can sign their names and publicly “declare their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” I suppose that’s fine if that’s your cup of tea. But God will not refer to such a website on the day of judgment. It is his evaluation of you that ultimately matters, not yours. As Jesus said, only those who do the will of the Father in heaven are really Christians. Everyone else will hear Jesus say, “Depart from me.”

An Unpleasant Surprise
I realize that what I’m saying is different from what many churches teach these days. In their well-intentioned desire to make the good news of Jesus available to everyone, many churches make the decision to follow Jesus a little too easy. They make it about the decision. Just say you want to be a Christian, and you are one. Pray these words. Sign this card. Follow those steps. Presto, you are a Christian. End of story. Case closed. Welcome to heaven!

It is true that we need to make a onetime decision to follow Jesus. But a true onetime decision is followed by the everyday decision to follow Jesus. Jesus did not think that it was enough just to superficially identify yourself with him. There is more to being his follower than just a profession of faith. My fear is that too many churches have encouraged people to expect that Jesus will one day say to them, “Well done, faithful servant.” But in fact, they will hear him say, “Depart from me.” Such people will discover the truth only after it is too late.

Is it possible that you could be one of those people? Could it be that you are not really a Christian? How can you be sure?
Am I Really a Christian?

Jesus Isn’t Willy Wonka

Admittedly, this is a complicated subject, and there are lots of ways our thinking can go wrong. One misunderstanding we must guard against concerns the character of Jesus.

Do you remember the classic 1971 film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*? (I’m talking about the old freaky one starring Gene Wilder, not the new freaky one starring Johnny Depp.) After our heroes Charlie and Grandpa Joe have survived an arduous tour of the Wonka Chocolate Factory, they go to collect the grand prize that’s been promised to them: a lifetime supply of Wonka chocolate. But there’s a surprise at the end. Willy Wonka, the factory owner, denies Charlie the prize based on a technicality. The scene goes like this:

**Grandpa Joe:** Mr. Wonka?

**Willy Wonka:** I am extraordinarily busy, sir.

**Grandpa Joe:** I just wanted to ask about the chocolate. Uh, the lifetime supply of chocolate . . . for Charlie. When does he get it?

**Willy Wonka:** He doesn’t.

**Grandpa Joe:** Why not?

**Willy Wonka:** Because he broke the rules.

**Grandpa Joe:** What rules? We didn’t see any rules, did we, Charlie?

**Willy Wonka:** Wrong, sir! Wrong! Under section 37B of the contract signed by him, it states quite clearly that all offers shall become null and void if—and you can read it for yourself in this photostatic copy: I, the undersigned, shall forfeit all rights, privileges, and licenses herein and herein contained, et cetera, et cetera . . . Fax mentis incendium gloria cultum, et cetera, et cetera . . . Memo bis punitor delicatum! It is all there, black and white, clear as crystal! You stole fizzy lifting drinks! You bumped into the ceiling which now has to be washed and sterilized, so you get nothing! You lose! Good day, sir!
You Are Not a Christian Just Because You Say That You Are

GRANDPA JOE: You’re a crook. You’re a cheat and a swindler! That’s what you are! How could you do something like this, build up a little boy’s hopes and then smash all his dreams to pieces? You’re an inhuman monster!

WILLY WONKA: I said, “Good day!”

Here is the misunderstanding to guard against: Jesus is not like Willy Wonka. Our God is not a God who delights in keeping people in the dark, only to pull the rug out from under them in the last minute and deny them the rewards he promised. He is not a miser looking to withhold blessings on a technicality.

Instead, God delights in saving his people. Jesus says that he “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). That is why he came to earth, to save us from our sins. If he didn’t want to save us, he would not have come in the first place. Jesus is not a cheat. He is not a swindler. He is not an inhumane monster. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Furthermore, Jesus has graciously given us extremely clear guidance about who truly belongs to him. In the verses leading up to the passage we read a moment ago, in which Jesus says he will tell some to depart, he explains, “You will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:20). In the verses following this same passage, Jesus gives an illustration of a man who hears Jesus’s words and “does them” being like a wise man who builds on solid rock. Meanwhile, the man who hears Jesus’s words but “does not do them” is like a foolish man who builds on sand (Matt. 7:24–27). There are no hidden clauses here. Jesus is looking, quite simply, for “the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

Examine Yourself!
The very fact that Jesus tells us about the danger we are in is proof of his love and mercy. He has given us these warnings and he wants us to heed them. His words should ring in our
souls like a fire alarm. His cautions are meant to help us reach that last day without being self-deceived.

For the same reasons, the apostle Paul instructs the church in Corinth, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5). Likewise, the apostle Peter instructs, “Be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:10–11). Paul and Peter loved the people who would read their letters, and so they warned them to look carefully at their lives before it was too late.

That is what I hope to do throughout this book. I want to look at some of the places in Scripture where Jesus tells us exactly on what basis we can examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith. Ideally, this should be done in the context of a local church. Because we are not always the best judges of our own lives and behavior, it is extremely important to have wise and honest Christians around us who can help us see things in our lives that we cannot see on our own. So find someone in your church (or, maybe find a church!) to ask to come along with you on this journey. But first, we have one more bit of legwork to do.

How to Respond

Reflect:

Does Jesus’s warning in Matthew 7:21–23 make you uncomfortable? Why?

Why do you think it is not enough to just say that you are a Christian?

Have you ever examined your life to see whether you are really a Christian? If not, why not? If so, what criteria did you use? What did you conclude?
You Are Not a Christian Just Because You Say That You Are

**Repent:**

Ask God to forgive you for any ways that you have been wrongly confident about your spiritual state.

Think of one way you could grow in humility and learn to not always trust your own perception of things.

**Remember:**

Think about 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

You will never be righteous enough to please God. But thankfully, Christ’s perfect righteousness becomes ours when we come to him in faith. Praise God for that good news!

**Report:**

Talk to a leader or friend in your church and ask for honest, regular feedback about your spiritual life.