

GLENKIRK CHURCH



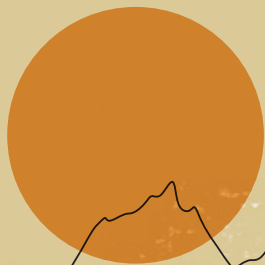
WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

NOVEMBER 13 - 17, 2023

Re-Formed:

Sermon on the Mount



Sermon Series 9/3 - 11/26

MONDAY

Read **Matthew 7:12-23**

Defining Discernment

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition of *discernment*: “to recognize or identify as separate and distinct.” *The Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* definition of *discernment*: “to know, recognize, or understand something, especially something that is not obvious.”

It is important to understand the meaning of discernment. Too often we think we have the gift of discernment when actually we are simply being defensive, judgmental, fault-finding, cynical and/or negative. Sometimes we think we are discerning and faithful when we are actually sinning. Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion into the Apostle Paul, is a striking biblical example of this.

One of the spiritual gifts God gives the Church is discernment:

“He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.”

(1 Corinthians 12:10 NLT)

The Church needs people who can discern truth from lies, false messaging, and misdirection. Jesus characterized such discernment as being “as *shrewd as snakes*.” (Matthew 10:16) Many times we need others—pastors, fellow believers, even loved ones— to help us discern. As followers of Jesus, we are asked to “*test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). The abundance of so many Christ-rejecting or Christ-minimizing religions all testify to the scarcity of discernment in our fallen world.

Unfortunately, there are “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15) seemingly everywhere. They might show up as celebrity pastors, faith healers, secular theologians, talk show hosts, best-selling authors, pop psychologists, or even a know-it-all loved one, neighbor or colleague. Watch out! In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautions us to be on the lookout for false prophets and false messages. “*By their fruit you will recognize them. ... A bad tree cannot bear good fruit*” (Matthew 7:16-18). As the beloved Apostle John wrote, “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1).

QUESTIONS

Have you been in a situation where you needed to discern a message from God? Did you need to seek help in discerning?

PRAYERS

For Israel and Gaza

Pray for a restoration of order and security throughout Israel and Gaza, for the leaders of Hamas to cease any further terrorist attacks on Israel, and for the leaders of Israel to focus on defense of the Israeli people and not on revenge.

TUESDAY

Read **Matthew 7:13-23**

Watch Out!

Jesus issued hard teachings regularly, particularly when the crowds swelled with those seeking Him for wrong reasons (e.g., to get fed, see some “magic,” etc.). Today’s devo features a couple of Jesus’ sayings whose consequences may have prompted some listeners to gasp. This truth contradicts the popular, sentimental view that “all dogs (and ‘good people’) go to heaven.”

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” (Matthew 7:15-20)

True and False Disciples

“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. 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?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

It is easier to say, “I love Jesus!” than to actually love Him. The Lord challenged, accordingly, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). I have Muslim friends who proudly and emphatically declare love for Jesus of Nazareth, whom they see as “the second greatest prophet, second only to Mohammed.” I pray that God might use this profession of love to quicken their spirits, to open them to receiving God’s true light, to soften their hearts so that they might never hear, “I never knew you. Away from Me.”

Everything in Jesus’ message here is black and white, right and wrong. Jesus says we will recognize false prophets by their fruit. Is it the fruit of the Spirit or bad fruit? Even Jesus will sort out everyone as in or out, sheep or goat, known or unknown, righteous and wicked.

There is also a warning in this Scripture. Don’t be someone Jesus never knows, an evildoer.

QUESTIONS

What kind of fruit are you bearing? Will Jesus know you? Will He know your friends and loved ones?

PRAYERS

For Israel and Gaza

Bring Israel and Gaza before God in prayer. Pray for the protection and safe return of all who are being held hostage, the healing and restoration of all who have been injured and traumatized by the senseless violence, and comfort for all who have lost loved ones.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Malachi 3:17-18**

Old Testament Discernment

There are many Old Testament passages wherein the Bible characterizes discernment. A few of them follow:

“‘They will be My people,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ‘On the day when I act in judgment, they will be My own special treasure. I will spare them as a father spares an obedient child. Then you will again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not’” (Malachi 3:17-18). God keeps “a book of remembrance” (Malachi 3:16), knowing those who accept the free gift of salvation in Christ from those who reject the Savior. Though “unwilling that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9), He honors the free will granted to all to enable love (which must be voluntary to be love indeed). “The fool says ... there is no God” (Psalm 14:1); conversely, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (discernment)” (Proverbs 9:10).

In Job 34:2-4, Job’s friend, Elihu, wants them to discuss Job’s situation: “Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning. For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good.” Elihu shared some discernment with Job; unfortunately, he was puffed up in his knowledge, hurting rather than edifying his tormented friend.

King Solomon asked for wisdom and discernment (1 Kings 3: 9-10). God honored this request: “‘So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?’ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.” God granted discerning wisdom to Solomon; sadly, Israel’s third king squandered this gift for much of his life, opting instead to wallow in human “wisdom” and pleasure-seeking.

Solomon shared godly wisdom regarding discernment in Proverbs. Here are several examples:

- Proverbs 15:14: “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.”
- Proverbs 16:21: “The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction.”
- Proverbs 18:15: “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out.”
- Proverbs 28:2: “When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers; but a ruler with discernment and knowledge maintains order.”

QUESTIONS

Have you asked God to give you wisdom and/or discernment?
Have you used it wisely?

PRAYERS

For Israel and Gaza

Pray for the strengthening and witness of the church in Israel and Palestine, and for the world—that even today people in this region and across the globe would choose to follow Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

THURSDAY

Read **1 John 4:1-6**

New Testament Discernment

The Apostle John shares some hard truth regarding discernment. John is encouraging each of us to test messages and people around us to discover if they are from God or not. John even shows that we have the tools and the power to do so.

“Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here” (1 John 4:1-3). Does what the “truth-teller” shares harmonize with Scripture? If not, they are perilously misguided.

“But you belong to God, My dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world. Those people belong to this world, so they speak from the world’s viewpoint, and the world listens to them. But we belong to God, and those who know God listen to us.

If they do not belong to God, they do not listen to us. That is how we know if someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of deception” (1 John 4:4-6). Those who do not follow Christ should not provoke our anger, but loving care. Like Jesus, seek the lost so that He might save them.

Paul prays for Philippian believers to increase in knowledge and discernment in Philippians 1:9-11: *“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”* *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8)—reflect this love toward others not yet knowing Him.

QUESTIONS

Where is God telling you to use His wisdom and discernment and not your own?

PRAYERS

For Israel and Gaza

Pray for guidance for all who are involved in diplomacy to end the immediate conflict in Israel and Gaza, and prevent any external efforts to provoke continued violence.

FRIDAY

Read **Matthew 13:9-15**

Improving Discernment

So how do we improve our discernment? How do we learn to tell the difference between truth and error?

First, recognize that God is the only One who can increase wisdom. Solomon was on the right track when he asked for wisdom and the ability to see the truth (although he regularly squandered this God-given gift until he was older).

Second, pray for it (James 1:5; Philippians 1:9). How do we increase our ability to see the truth? We must ask God to increase our discernment. It is impossible to discern without God. Jesus told His disciples, “*To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [Pharisees] it has not been given*” (Matthew 13:11). These are “secrets” not because God wants them unknown, but because people are naturally (fallenly) opposed to God’s truth in pre-Christian unbelief. God, therefore, calls upon His own to be bearers and examples of His truth and love.

This is why Jesus spoke in parables. *The Message* version of the Bible puts it this way: Jesus answered, “*That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till*

they’re blue in the face and not get it. I don’t want Isaiah’s forecast repeated all over again” (Matthew 13: 13-14). God does not impose His love and salvation—that would be unloving. Jesus’ parables stirred those willingly receiving. Concurrently, the parables’ indirectness extended grace to those lacking the discernment to understand at that time.

“*Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand*” (Matthew 13:13). Fortunately, God’s persistent love means that this need not be final. Truth sometimes takes time to take hold. Thus we’re not to judge others’ salvation, but to “[*speak*] *the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15).

Third, gaining the wisdom to distinguish good from evil comes by training and practice, going to the Bible to learn the truth, meditating on the Word and asking the Holy Spirit to increase your understanding.

Fourth, learn to hear and recognize God’s voice. This comes by sitting in His presence and being still and quiet; then we will know God’s character and will. This is the heart of spiritual discernment: being able to distinguish God’s voice from ALL others’.

QUESTIONS

What will you do to be more discerning? Are you committed and surrendered here?

PRAYERS

For Israel and Gaza

Pray for the restoration of conditions in both Israel and Palestine in which the longer-term issues of sustainable peace and justice for all can be addressed.



Glenkirk Church | 1700 Palopinto Ave, Glendora, CA 91741 | 626.914.4833
GlenkirkChurch.org |  **@GlenkirkChurch** |  **Facebook: GlenkirkChurch**