

Can You Spot the Real Christians?

The unsaved see believers as hypocritical and no different than themselves. Here's how to live an authentic faith that stands out from "normal" American Christianity.

I hesitated to accept the gospel in college because of the behavior of people who claimed they were Christians. They were not much different than me. Their language, actions and behaviors weren't so special that I viewed what they had as a better life. Why would I want what they had? What was so special or different about it?

When it comes to our culture, it's more of the same. The music industry feeds our youth with profanity and sex, but then those same musicians stand up and thank "the man upstairs" at awards ceremonies. Our sports heroes party, use performance-enhancing drugs and get into fights, but then they kneel down and thank God the moment they score a touchdown.

What is the world supposed to think of this? Would the real Christians please stand up?

Jesus didn't come to make our normal, selfish, sinful lives just a little better. He came to radically transform life as we know it. He came to kill our sinful lives so we could experience true life. *A kernel of wheat doesn't flourish until it "dies" by being planted.* When Jesus said this (John 12:24-25), He was referring to His own death, burial and resurrection, which were only a few days away, but He applied this principle to us too. Jesus didn't come to hurt us; He came to kill us—to crucify our flesh, humiliate sin and propagate His Word through our mouths.

Paul was one of the smartest people the world has ever known, with incredible insights into theology. But before he was a

believer, he was arrogant. Upon meeting Christ, everything changed. Paul learned to trust in God's power—not his own intelligence—to change lives. He told the Corinthian church, "Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5, NLT). A changed life is evidence of God's power.

Are you the real thing? Could you spot it if you saw it? Here's how you know a life's been changed by God—for real.

Have No Fear

Upon salvation, boldness—the absence of fear—enters your life. And that's a good thing. Fear stops us from going forward in life. Fear blocks our faith. It stops us from dreaming, paralyzes our thinking, hinders our prayers, undermines our joy, affects our relationships and destroys our sense of direction. People who fear aren't joyful; fear prevents them from smiling and laughing. It affects relationships.

Who wants to be a Christian when the only opportunity to express our faith is on Sunday morning in a church service, because we're too afraid to proclaim it anywhere else? Take a moment and evaluate your life in the area of fear. Is it gripping you, or have you been set free from it?

Stay Connected

Connecting with God is the chief delight and biggest fight of a real-thing Christian. No technology, drug or treatment can replace God. Prayer is essential for a committed, vibrant, rich and real relationship with God—and real Christians know it. How can we love someone with whom we never communicate? The strength in my church is not based on Sunday morning's attendance but on Monday Night Prayer.

Prayer empties the heart of its worries. And how often do we need that? Often! Jesus told us to pray that God would "give

us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11, NKJV). When we ask God for what we need, prayer replaces worry with trust.

When we pray, we need to remember who is listening. We are not equals with God. He has unsearchable wisdom, power and love. We need to realize we can trust Him, even in our darkest times and deepest struggles.

We can tell Him everything on our hearts, but we need to take time to listen so His Spirit can whisper to our hearts reminders of truth from His Word. Don't let prayer become an afterthought.

Take No Offense

Real Christians don't get offended. Sometimes God will offend our minds to see what's in our hearts because offenses serve as windows into the heart. If our hearts don't line up with God's, we'll complain, gripe, lash out and run away.

We don't need to get our feelings hurt so easily. Let's remember that we are all equally loved, forgiven and accepted by Christ. Grace triumphs over petty offenses.

Also, we can't fall into the enemy's trap of nursing offenses. Instead, we need to release forgiveness. As we grow as Christians, the grace we've experienced in God's forgiveness of our sins deepens and matures us so we have the power to forgive those who hurt us.

Don't wait until the person asks for forgiveness or promises to never hurt us again. We need to forgive the way Jesus forgave us. Jesus said, "You need to think like Me, experience what I experienced, and do what most won't do. The world gets offended, but you are not of this world anymore."

Be Inconvenienced

The essence of the Christian life is to be inconvenienced to help others, no matter what the cost. Remember, a true servant

serves. When we see a need, we jump in to meet it, not with a grumble but with a smile. A servant doesn't have a checklist of criteria to see if the job fits perfectly. We just need to be willing to help. That quality characterizes a true servant.

In the end, doing is greater than speaking. Real Christians love God, serve people, give to the poor and reach the lost. God's Word tells us to serve gladly and sacrificially, expecting nothing in return (see Luke 6:30). That's how Jesus lived—He served and gave Himself for us.

People are watching us, so we need to have the same attitude Jesus Christ had: loving and serving to the end. Your actions toward people will speak louder than your verbal assessment of their worldly behavior.

Value People

Do you see every person as supremely valuable to God and hopelessly lost apart from Jesus? Most of the people we see every day are on the broad road. What do we see when we look at them? Do we see them as everlasting testaments or do we see only their hair, clothes, jewelry, titles and other things that don't matter at all?

The people we walk past each day probably aren't reading the Bible, but they're reading our lives. What message are we communicating? To the people around us, we are their Scriptures. Do we display the love and strength of Jesus? How accurately do our attitudes, reactions and intentional choices represent the King of kings? Can people see even a little of Him in us?

Be on Mission

God has created every believer to accomplish a specific, individual mission. Paul reminds us, "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Eph. 2:10

NLT).

Do you love God but feel disconnected from your God-given purpose? Some people feel disconnected because of a shameful past or devastating wounds. They look at their lives and see bad decisions and feel hopeless and discouraged. If this is you, remember this crucial fact: The powerful grace of God rules over the past, the present and the future.

Moses was a murderer who fled for his life and lived on the backside of nowhere for 40 years, but God hadn't forgotten him. He used Moses to confront the most powerful ruler in the world and lead His people out of slavery. Paul was involved in kidnapping and murder before Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and turned his life around. And when I was in college in Louisiana, I was more interested in Mardi Gras than God until I met Christ.

Every Christian is a masterpiece of God's mercy, created and crafted for great things. God has chosen all of us to change the world, and He never wastes our past or our pain. He masterfully weaves even the darkest strands of our lives into the fabric of His good purposes. He uses our deepest sins to help us appreciate His grace, and He uses our wounds to give us compassion for others who suffer.

It's Go Time

The Christian life isn't a game. The kingdom of God is the most important reality in the universe. Jesus, the Bridegroom, is coming back soon. We don't know the exact date, but we need to be ready. And as we wait, we need to live more than a diluted, decaffeinated version of discipleship. Nice church facilities and great technology are impressive, but they can't change a single life. Beautiful music inspires us, but by itself it doesn't have the capacity to permanently transform anyone. Correct doctrine is important, but it's not enough to change lives.

When I was saved, I knew everything about my life would change. What I had loved would become what I despised, and what I despised would become what I loved. Is the same true for you? And can other people see it?

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Glen Berteau explains what it means to change your world at