

Will God Really Say, 'Depart From Me, I Don't Know You?'

I remember it as if it were yesterday—it was the summer of 2000. I was a corporate executive in Southern California for the world's fastest-growing fitness company, 24 Hour Fitness.

I had just concluded a phone call with the president of the Central California Division of our operations. He was generating a year-end report for the board of directors and needed to know how much revenue my area would generate in the last quarter of 2000. Instead of answering his question, I responded, "I need to speak with you about my future with this corporation." He insisted that I drive to the corporate office and meet with him later that day.

As I drove, I reflected on my eight-year career. It was amazing that I had made it this far—a country boy working in corporate America. I had learned well through my dad's example—long hours and hard work, and I applied them.

During the first six years of my career, I received awards, set sales records, received large bonuses and climbed the corporate ladder; I was living the "American dream" (all while in my mid- and late-20s). But I wasn't meeting with the president to talk about future opportunities; I was meeting with him to resign.

This may not have made sense to my friends and colleagues, but to me it made perfect sense. For years I was driven, but for the wrong reasons. Although I felt a sense of purpose, it often left me feeling empty. I was passionate, but for the wrong things. I focused on everything society has to offer, but ultimately I found that it offered little of lasting value.

While I had focused on money, status and recognition, I had

starved other important areas of my life, including my relationship with God. Due to my misguided focus, my life took many turns for the worse.

Desperate for direction and fulfillment, I began to search the pages of a Bible shelved long ago. As I read, two Scriptures seemed to leap from the pages: "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, yet loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:25), and "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7).

I realized that I had been looking for fulfillment in all the wrong places. It was then that I finally surrendered my life to Christ. I quickly learned that before meaningful, lasting change can occur on the outside, it first must occur on the inside. We cannot successfully change actions and circumstances without first changing the inner condition of our heart—we must humbly choose to change from the inside out.

Just as investing in physical exercise builds and strengthens the body, ongoing spiritual investments build and strengthen our relationship with God. One redeeming, yet largely unacknowledged fact of life is that our past does not have to determine our present or our future—a true measure of a person is not who they were, but who they will become.

Yes, there are consequences to our actions, but past failures do not have to prevent future success. In fact, many successful people have replaced the concept of "failure" with a more positive concept of "feedback". Don't misunderstand ... if failure is related to sin, it's wrong, but God wants us to move forward in forgiveness, rather than remain imprisoned by regret.

It was sobering when I finally read, for the first time with open eyes, Matthew 7:22-23, where Jesus said that many people will say that they know Him, but His response will be: "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice evil." How

can Jesus say, "I never knew you"? He's not denying their existence; He's denying a relationship with them.

It became very clear when I applied it to my life, "But Lord, I attended church on the days that I didn't play golf, or go to the gym, or sleep in, and I was basically a good person." The answer was the same, "I don't know you."

As an example, I can watch my favorite team on television, read the player's biographies and study their stats, but if I were to meet them, they would say, "I don't know you." Knowing about someone is not knowing someone. I've walked on both sides of the fence, and there's no comparison.

The verses preceding Matthew 7:23 add extra insight: "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruit you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven (7:19-21). I asked myself, "Is it possible for a person to verbally acknowledge Christ and not be saved if there is no evident change in their lifestyle?"

Yes, it is very possible. If you sense that your relationship with Jesus is shallow and incomplete, it probably is. I encourage you to revisit your commitment and understand that believing in Jesus Christ isn't the finishing line; it's the starting point.

When we genuinely repent and embrace God's gracious gift of forgiveness via the cross, there is a complete change in the way we live our lives, or, at least, a strong desire to do so. If there isn't a significant change or a desire to serve Him, our relationship may be superficial, and that is a scary place to be. This is why I often say, "Don't live your life with a question mark here."

No matter what you've done, you have the opportunity to believe in Jesus and be forgiven of sin: Acknowledge that you

are a sinner in need of a Savior (Rom. 3:23). Acknowledge that Jesus died for your sins (John 3:16). Repent and turn from your sins (Acts 3:19). Live your life for Him (Heb. 12:1-2).

Click here to watch Shane's sermon: "WARNING: This Sermon Many Offend."

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