

The Gospel of John Series

**Stop Judging By
Appearances
John 7:11-24**



5-Day Devotional Companion

A 5-Day Journey Through John 7:11-24

Welcome to the Journey

This 5-day devotional companion is designed to help you get into the truths explored in the sermon "Stop Judging By Appearances" from John 7:11-24. Over the next five days, you'll explore how Jesus challenges us to move beyond surface-level judgment and discern God's truth with willing hearts and righteous judgment.

How to Use This Guide

- Set aside 15-20 minutes each day in a quiet place
- Read the Scripture passage slowly and thoughtfully
- Work through the devotional reflection
- Answer the reflection questions honestly (consider journaling your responses)
- Pray the provided prayer or use it as a starting point for your own prayer
- Complete the daily action step

Opening Prayer

Father, as I begin this journey through Your Word, open my eyes to see beyond appearances. Help me to recognize where I've been quick to judge by surface impressions rather than seeking Your perspective. Give me a heart that is willing to receive truth, even when it challenges my assumptions. Teach me to discern with Your wisdom and judge with Your righteousness.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 1: "Jesus Cannot Be Ignored"

Scripture Reading:

John 7:11-13 "Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?" Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders."

Daily Devotional

Have you ever noticed how certain people command attention even when they're not in the room? Their very absence creates a presence. That's exactly what we see happening at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7.

Jerusalem is packed with pilgrims. Families are celebrating in their temporary booths, remembering God's faithfulness during Israel's wilderness wanderings. The temple courts are buzzing with worship and joy. But one name dominates every whispered conversation: Jesus.

Before He even arrives, the religious leaders are hunting for Him. The crowds are divided; some calling Him a good man, others a deceiver. Yet verse 13 reveals something striking: "no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders." Everyone has an opinion, but fear keeps most voices to a whisper.

Here's what this reveals: Jesus demands a response. You cannot encounter Him, even just hear about Him, and remain neutral. The religious leaders couldn't ignore Him. The crowds couldn't stop discussing Him. Even His absence created tension and expectation.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote that Jesus must be either Lord, liar, or lunatic; but He cannot be merely a good moral teacher. The claims He made and the authority He wielded force a decision. "Good teacher" isn't an option when someone claims to be the Son of God.

Think about your own response to Jesus. Perhaps you've grown up hearing about Him, and familiarity has bred a kind of casual indifference. Or maybe you've kept Him at arm's length, unwilling to let His claims disrupt your comfortable life. But Jesus won't stay in the background. He won't be reduced to a historical figure or a nice philosophy.

The same question that echoed through Jerusalem two thousand years ago still echoes today: "Where is He?" But the real question is: What will you say about Him?

Reflection Questions

- What has been your honest answer to the question "What do you say about Jesus?" Has your response changed over time?
- In what areas of your life have you tried to keep Jesus at a safe distance instead of letting Him have full authority?
- Are there ways you've been influenced by "fear of the leaders," letting concern about others' opinions keep you from publicly acknowledging Christ?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I confess that sometimes I've tried to keep You at arm's length, because I've felt uncomfortable with the full weight of Your claims on my life. Forgive me for the times I've whispered about You privately but been silent when it mattered publicly. You cannot be ignored, and You will not be relegated to the sidelines. Help me to move beyond casual familiarity to genuine surrender. Give me courage to confess You openly as Lord, regardless of what others think.

In Your name, Amen.

Today's Action Step

Write down your honest answer to this question: "What do I truly believe about Jesus?" Then identify one specific area where fear or comfort has kept you from fully surrendering to His lordship. Pray

specifically about that area and share your decision with one trusted friend or family member.

Day 2: "True Teaching Comes From God"

Scripture Reading:

John 7:14-18 "Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having been taught?' Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.'"

Daily Devotional

Credentials matter in our world. We check diplomas, verify degrees, and demand certificates of qualification. So when Jesus showed up teaching in the temple without rabbinical training, the religious leaders were stunned. "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

They couldn't deny His authority, His depth, or His clarity. But they stumbled over His lack of formal credentials. No rabbinical school. No official approval. No stamp of validation from their system.

Jesus' response cuts to the heart of the matter: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me."

Real spiritual authority doesn't flow from human institutions, it flows from God Himself. Jesus didn't need their approval because He had the Father's commission. His authority was divine, not academic.

But then Jesus says something even more radical in verse 17: "Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

Notice what He's saying: the key to recognizing truth isn't intellectual brilliance or advanced education. It's a willing heart. If you genuinely want to obey God, you'll recognize His voice in Jesus' teaching. But if your heart is closed, no amount of evidence will convince you.

We often get this backward. We say, "God, explain everything to me first, then I'll decide if I'll obey." But spiritual discernment works the opposite way: surrender first, and then understanding follows.

Think of tuning an old radio. The signal is always broadcasting, but you can't hear it unless your receiver is tuned into the right frequency. Jesus is saying the same thing about truth: if your heart is tuned toward God's will, you'll recognize His voice.

Where are you demanding understanding before obedience? Maybe it's a calling you sense but can't fully explain. Perhaps it's a relationship you know needs to change but you're waiting for all the answers first. Or possibly it's a step of faith that seems illogical by human standards.

True understanding comes "from" obedience, not before it.

Reflection Questions

- In what areas of your life are you measuring spiritual truth by human credentials instead of by alignment with God's Word and character?
- How could your spiritual growth be hindered by demanding full understanding before you're willing to obey?
- Can you identify a time when you stepped out in obedience without full understanding, and God provided clarity along the way?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive me for the times I've valued human approval over Your divine call. I confess my tendency to demand understanding before I trust, and explanations before obedience. Thank You that Your truth doesn't need validation from human systems. Instead it carries its own authority because it comes from You. Tune my heart to Your will so

that I might recognize Your voice above all others. Give me the courage to obey before I fully understand, trusting that clarity follows surrender.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's Action Step

Identify one specific area where you've been saying to God, "I'll obey when I understand." Write it down, then intentionally flip that statement to "I'll obey in order to understand." Determine one concrete step of obedience you can take in the next 24 hours, and commit to taking it, without having all the answers.

Day 3: "Exposing Our Hypocrisy"

Scripture Reading:

John 7:19-21 "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed."

Daily Devotional

We're often blind to our own inconsistencies. The religious leaders certainly were.

They prided themselves on being guardians of Moses' Law. They studied it, taught it, and built elaborate systems to protect it. But Jesus exposes a devastating truth: "Yet not one of you keeps the law."

Their response? "You are demon-possessed! Who is trying to kill you?"

The crowd denies it, but Jesus knows the truth. The religious leaders are actively plotting His death; the ultimate violation of the Law they claim to uphold. They accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath, yet they're planning murder.

This is hypocrisy at its worst: using religion to justify opposition to God Himself.

Jesus then reminds them of the incident that sparked their hostility: healing a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. One miracle. One act of mercy. And it unleashed a storm of opposition, not because they didn't see God's power, but because it challenged their rigid interpretations.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: it's possible to be an expert in Scripture and still completely miss God's heart. The leaders knew the Bible inside and out, but when the Word made flesh stood before them, they rejected Him. Their obsession with rules blinded them to the reality of righteousness.

We do the same thing. We can go to church every Sunday, know all the right theological answers, and still harbor bitterness, pride, and unforgiveness. We can preach grace while showing none. We can demand mercy for ourselves while showing judgment to others.

Jesus isn't interested in religious performance. He wants heart transformation.

Where are you most at risk of hypocrisy? Perhaps you're quick to judge others' sins while excusing your own. Maybe you present one image publicly while living differently privately. Or possibly you've become so focused on defending your theological positions that you've lost the heart of compassion all together.

The real test of devotion to God isn't how much you know, it's how you live.

Reflection Questions

- Where is there a gap between what you profess to believe and how you actually live?
- Are there areas where you've been harsh toward others while being lenient with yourself?
- How can you cultivate genuine self-awareness about your own blind spots and inconsistencies?

Prayer

Father, search my heart and expose the places where I've been hypocritical. Forgive me for the times I've hidden behind religious knowledge while my heart has been far from You. I don't want to be like the Pharisees; knowing all the right answers but missing You entirely. Show me where my actions contradict my words, where my private life doesn't match my public faith. Give me the humility to acknowledge my blind spots and the courage to change. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's Action Step

Ask someone who knows you well (a spouse, close friend, or mentor) this vulnerable question: "Where do you see inconsistency between what I say I believe and how I actually live?" Listen without defending yourself. Then take their feedback to God in prayer and determine one specific area where you need to align your actions with your professed beliefs.

Day 4: "The Heart of the Sabbath"

Scripture Reading:

John 7:22-23 "Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?"

Daily Devotional

Jesus' logic here is absolutely brilliant, and devastating to His critics.

He reminds them of their own practice: they perform circumcision on the Sabbath when the eighth day after birth falls on that day. Why? Because covenant obedience takes precedence over Sabbath restrictions. They cut away a small piece of flesh to keep the Law of Moses.

Then Jesus delivers the knockout punch: "Are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?"

Do you see the contrast? They allow a minor cutting on the Sabbath to maintain covenant identity, but they condemn Him for restoring an entire person to wholeness on the Sabbath. If a small symbolic act is acceptable, how much more should a complete healing be celebrated?

Their outrage wasn't really about the Sabbath, it was about their resistance to Jesus. They twisted the Law to justify their opposition, all while claiming to be its defenders.

Here's what Jesus is teaching us about the Sabbath, and about God's heart in general: God's commands are never about restriction for restriction's sake. They're about restoration, wholeness, and life.

The Sabbath was given as a gift, not a burden. It was meant to point toward the rest and renewal that God offers. Healing on the Sabbath

doesn't violate its purpose, it fulfills it. What better way to honor the Sabbath than to restore someone to the fullness of life God intended?

But the religious leaders had become so focused on protecting their interpretation of the rules that they missed the very purpose behind them. Their traditions had become a barrier to experiencing God's mercy.

We can do the same thing. We create our own religious systems: our preferences, our traditions, our comfortable interpretations. And then we defend them more fiercely than we pursue God's actual heart.

Maybe it's a worship style we insist is "right." Perhaps it's a ministry approach we won't reconsider. Or possibly it's a theological position we hold so rigidly that we can't celebrate when God moves in unexpected ways.

God values wholeness over ritual. He cares more about transformed lives than preserved traditions.

Reflection Questions

- Where are you clinging to religious traditions or preferences while missing opportunities to celebrate God's restoration work?
- Are there ways you've prioritized rule-keeping over compassion and mercy?
- How does understanding the true purpose of God's commands (restoration and life) change how you approach spiritual disciplines and church practices?

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times I've defended my traditions more passionately than I've pursued Your heart. Help me to see that Your commands are meant to bring life, not burden. Teach me to celebrate wholeness and restoration instead of policing rules. Give me discernment to know the difference between biblical truth and human preference. And when You work in ways that challenge my comfortable categories, give me the humility to rejoice instead of resist. May I always value mercy over sacrifice, just like You do.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's Action Step

Identify one religious tradition or practice you've held as important. Examine it honestly: Is this rooted in Scripture, or is it simply preference or tradition? If it's personal preference or tradition, consider whether it might be keeping you from celebrating when God works in unexpected ways. Commit to holding your preferences more loosely and God's restoration more dearly.

Day 5: "Judge With Right Judgment"

Scripture Reading:

John 7:24 "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Daily Devotional

After exposing their hypocrisy and flawed reasoning, Jesus delivers a command that applies far beyond that moment in the temple courts: "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

The religious leaders had judged Jesus by externals:

- No formal training? He can't be from God.
- Healing on the Sabbath? He's breaking the Law.
- Doesn't fit our categories? He must be a deceiver.

They looked at the surface and missed the reality. They saw "work on the Sabbath" when God saw mercy and restoration. They focused on credentials when they should have recognized divine authority. They defended tradition when they should have celebrated transformation.

"Stop judging by appearances." The Greek literally means "by sight". In other words, stop judging by what something seems to be from a superficial glance.

"Judge correctly." This means righteous judgment, discernment aligned with God's heart and truth. It requires looking deeper, asking: What is God actually doing here? Does this reflect His character? Does it align with His Word?

We live in a world obsessed with appearances. We judge restaurants by their signs, houses by their curb appeal, and people by their social media feeds. We make snap decisions based on surface impressions, rarely taking time to look deeper.

But Jesus calls us to a different standard. He challenges us to:

- Look beyond outward appearances to see people's hearts
- Discern God's work even when it doesn't fit our expectations
- Evaluate truth by God's Word rather than by popular opinion
- Seek His perspective before rendering judgment

This doesn't mean we abandon all judgment; that would be impossible and unbiblical. It means we judge rightly, with humility, wisdom, and in agreement with God's truth.

Think about the judgments you've made recently. Have you dismissed someone because they didn't look the "right" way? Have you rejected God's work because it came through unexpected channels? Have you been quick to criticize without taking time to understand?

Surface-level judgment distorts truth. Righteous judgment requires and uses God's perspective.

There's a famous story of a pastor who dressed as a homeless man and sat outside his church one Sunday morning. Hundreds of people walked past him, some glancing, some avoiding him, but no one welcomed him. Then during the service, he removed his disguise and preached from this very passage.

How many times do we miss Jesus because He doesn't come the way we expect? How many times do we reject truth because it lacks the credentials we demand? How many times do we judge by appearances and miss what God is actually doing?

Reflection Questions

- When have you judged something or someone by appearances only to discover you were wrong?
- In what areas of your life do you need to shift from surface-level judgment to deeper spiritual discernment?
- How can you practically develop the habit of seeking God's perspective before forming judgments?

Prayer

Father, forgive me for the countless times I've judged by appearances instead of seeking Your perspective. I've been quick to form opinions, slow to seek understanding, and prone to evaluate people and situations by external factors instead of spiritual truth. Give me the wisdom to discern rightly; to see with Your eyes, judge with Your standards, and respond with Your heart. Help me to recognize Your work even when it comes in unexpected packages. Teach me to pause, pray, and seek Your truth before I render verdicts. May my judgments reflect Your righteousness, not my limited perspective.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today's Action Step

This week, commit to pausing before making judgments. When you catch yourself forming a quick opinion about someone or something, stop and ask: "Am I judging by appearances, or do I have God's perspective on this?" Choose one person you've mentally dismissed or judged negatively and intentionally seek to understand them better; through conversation, prayer, or simply giving them the benefit of the doubt. Share what you've learned from this five-day journey with someone else.

The Journey Continues

Thank You

Thank you for completing this 5-day journey through John 7:11-24. Our prayer is that you've been challenged to move beyond surface-level judgment and embrace the call to discern with God's wisdom and judge with His righteousness.

Jesus' words to the religious leaders are His words to us: Stop judging by mere appearances. Look deeper. Seek God's perspective. Recognize that true authority comes from Him alone, and that His heart is always for mercy, wholeness, and restoration.

The Next Step

Spiritual growth doesn't happen through a single devotional. It's a lifelong journey of daily surrender to Christ. The verses you've studied this week contain truths so profound that you could spend a lifetime exploring their depths.

As you continue your walk with Him:

- Return to these passages regularly, asking the Holy Spirit for fresh insight
- Put into practice the commitments you've made during this study
- Share these truths with others in your community
- Remain open to how God continues to speak through His Word

Stay Connected

We're committed to providing resources that help you grow in your relationship with Christ and navigate the challenges of faithful living in a hostile world. To continue your spiritual journey with us:

- **Join us for Sunday Morning Bible Study** at 9:30am where we dive deeper into God's Word together.

- **Worship with us each Sunday** at 10:30am as we encounter God's truth and encourage one another in the faith.
- **Subscribe to our YouTube channel** for sermon videos, additional teaching content, and resources for spiritual growth.
- **Follow us on social media @cbcmorrilton** for daily encouragement, prayer requests, and community updates.
- **Visit our website CBCMorrilton.com** for additional devotional resources, and opportunities to connect.
- **Join a small group** where you can discuss and apply these truths in community with other believers who understand the cost of following Jesus.

If you have questions, prayer requests, or feedback about this devotional guide, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at CBCMorrilton@gmail.com or 501-354-2117. We'd love to hear how God has used this resource in your life and how we can continue to support your spiritual growth.

Remember: Jesus doesn't just call us to hear the truth, He calls us to live it. Keep seeking His perspective, and keep judging with righteous judgment.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Scott McDonald

This resource is provided by:



Calvary Baptist Church

101 E. Clifton St
Morrilton, AR 72110



Phone: 501-354-2117
Email: CBCMorrilton@gmail.com
Website: CBCMorrilton.com
Facebook: [@cbcmorrilton](https://www.facebook.com/cbcmorrilton)
YouTube: [@calvarychurchmorrilton5136](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)