

A FIELD GUIDE FOR MEN

Wolves

The tests to run before you trust a man with your soul

Jake McCluskey

You already know how to spot the obvious ones. The guy asking for your credit card number so God can bless it. The prophecy-for-hire crowd. You'd never hand your soul to him, and neither would I. That's not who this is about.

The dangerous one is the man you like. The one who's easy to listen to, who never makes you squirm, who tells you what you already wanted to hear and calls it a word from the Lord. Paul warned Timothy about exactly this: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires" (2 Timothy 4:3). Read that again. The men following the false teacher aren't victims who got tricked. They went looking for him. They wanted their ears tickled, and they built a whole platform for a man who'd do it.

Jesus put it plainer. "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Nobody dresses up as a wolf. That's the whole point of the costume. So don't ask what he looks like. Ask what he does. Here are seven tests. Run every teacher you follow through all seven, not just the one that's convenient.

1. Does he call you to repent, or only tell you that you're fine?

A man of God will step on your toes. He has to. Sin doesn't announce itself, it hides, and a real shepherd goes looking for it and calls it what it is. If every sermon, every post, every podcast episode from this guy leaves you feeling affirmed and never convicted, that's not grace. That's a man refusing to do the one thing his job requires. Grace and conviction aren't opposites. A teacher who's given you nothing but the first isn't preaching grace. He's selling comfort.

2. Does he preach the whole gospel, or the parts that sell?

Sin. The cross. The blood. The empty tomb. Judgment. That's the gospel, all five pieces, not a greatest-hits set. Watch for the man who talks about your best life now and skips what you're being saved from, or who preaches a Jesus who died for you but never mentions He got back up. He'll use Jesus' name plenty. He'll build a whole brand on it. But if he's quietly filed off the parts about sin, resurrection, and judgment because they don't test well with an audience, he's not preaching the gospel anymore. He's preaching a product with Jesus on the label.

3. Does he point you to Christ, or to himself?

Watch where his finger points when he's done talking. A real shepherd disappears behind the message. You leave thinking about Jesus, not about him, not about his book, not about the brand he's built or the room he filled. If you can't remember what he said about Christ

but you remember exactly how he made you feel about him, something's backward. His job was never to be memorable. It was to be a pointer.

4. Does his life match his mouth?

Jesus didn't say you'd know them by their platform numbers. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16). Fruit takes time to show. It's not the highlight reel, it's the pattern underneath it: how he treats people who can't do anything for him, how he handles being told no, what happens when nobody's filming. A man can preach holiness for twenty years and still be rotting underneath, and eventually it comes out in the fruit, not in the sermon.

5. Does he handle Scripture straight, or bend it until it says what people want?

Peter wrote that false teachers "secretly introduce destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). Secretly. Nobody stands up and announces he's about to twist the text. He does it a verse at a time, quietly, in a direction that happens to land exactly where his audience already wanted to go. Test him here specifically. Open the passage yourself. Read what's around it. If his interpretation only works when you don't check his work, that's your answer.

6. Whose approval is he actually chasing?

Paul asked it straight: "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Watch what he apologizes for. Watch what he never touches. A man serving God will eventually say something that costs him followers, because some truths do cost followers. If you can't name one thing he's ever said that made his own crowd uncomfortable, he might not be serving God. He might be serving the crowd.

7. The nuclear test: is it even the same gospel?

This is the one that ends the conversation. Paul didn't leave room for a nicer version of this test. "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8). An angel. Paul himself, if he ever changed his message. Nobody's platform, credentials, or charisma buys an exception. If the gospel he's preaching isn't the one Christ died to deliver, the size of his following doesn't matter. Neither does how good he made you feel walking out of the room.

That's the trap right there. Crowd size isn't a test. Charisma isn't a test. How he makes you feel isn't a test. Those are exactly what got the men in 2 Timothy 4:3 into trouble in the first place. They didn't stumble into a wolf. They shopped for one and liked what they found.

When you have to walk away from one you love

Some of you are already thinking of a name. A guy you've followed for years. Maybe he led you to Christ, or he was there for you in a season nobody else showed up for. I'm not writing this to make that easy. It isn't. Walking away from a teacher you trusted feels like losing a friend, because in some sense you are.

Do it anyway if the tests come back bad. Not with a public pile-on, not with a grudge you carry for the next decade. Just walk. Quietly, if that's what it takes. Stop giving him your Sunday, your money, your attention, your trust with your soul. You don't owe a wolf a platform to explain himself, and you don't owe your own conscience an excuse to stay.

And don't tell yourself staying quiet is neutral. It isn't. A man who sees the wolf and says nothing to the men following him isn't being humble. He's letting other men walk into it blind. If you've run the tests and you know, say something to the men in your circle who don't. That's not gossip. That's watching each other's backs, which is the whole point of being brothers in the first place.

The verses to have ready

Keep these close. Not to win an argument, to check your own eyes.

- **2 Timothy 4:3:** "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires."
- **Matthew 7:15:** "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."
- **Matthew 7:16:** "You will know them by their fruits."
- **2 Peter 2:1:** "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies."
- **Galatians 1:10:** "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God?"
- **Galatians 1:8:** "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"

Run the man through them. Every one, not just the easy one.

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