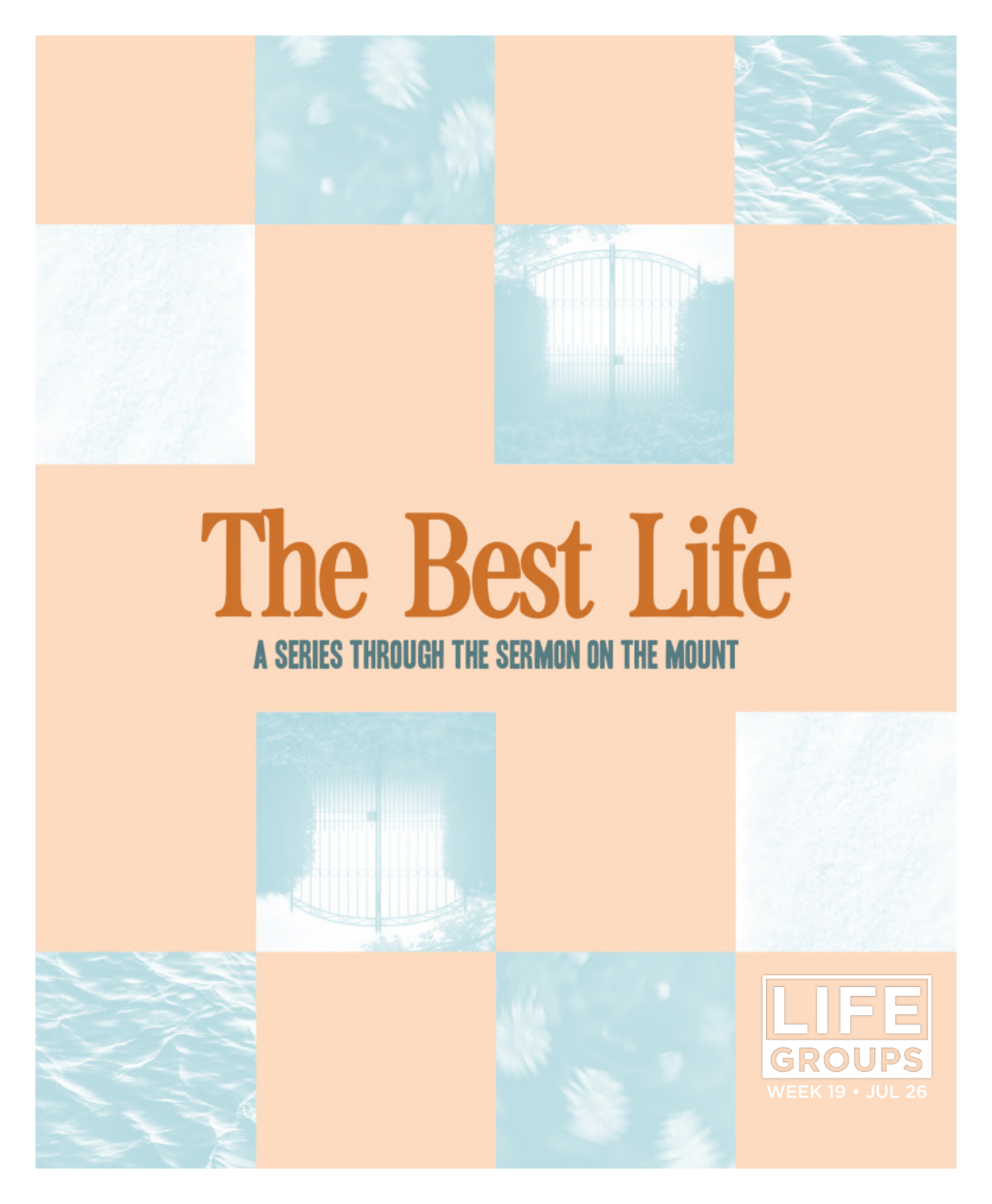




The Best Life

A SERIES THROUGH THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

LIFE
GROUPS
WEEK 19 • JUL 26

NORTHSHORE'S COMPELLING STATEMENT

Hope changes everything.

ICE BREAKER

Have you ever trusted someone right away because of how polished, kind, or confident they seemed on the surface only to be surprised later by what was underneath? How did you discern that something wasn't right?

BACKGROUND

Matthew 7:15-20 sits near the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' most extensive teaching on kingdom living (Matthew 5-7). Having just taught on the narrow gate and the narrow way (7:13-14), Jesus turns to a pressing danger for anyone trying to walk that path: false prophets. These were not obvious villains. They looked like faithful shepherds while functioning as "ravenous wolves," preying on the flock they claimed to serve.

Jesus tells His disciples to test false prophets by a simple, observable test: fruit. A good tree produces good fruit; a diseased tree produces bad fruit. The nature of the tree determines the nature of the fruit, and over time the fruit reveals the tree. This agricultural image would have been immediately familiar to His audience, who lived close to orchards and vineyards.

The passage closes with a sobering warning: a tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, echoing themes of judgment found throughout the Sermon on the Mount (compare 7:19 with John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3:10). This passage calls believers to discernment, not cynicism and to patiently watch for the fruit of a life and teaching over time, testing it against the whole counsel of Scripture, rather than being swayed by outward appearance alone.

REVIEW

What was meaningful from the above context or the sermon from last Sunday?



KEY VERSES: Matthew 7:15-16a

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits.

READ: MATTHEW 7:15-20

How are false prophets ultimately recognized?



HEAD LEVEL: *What does it say? These help us to examine what the Word tells us.*

1. What does it mean that a tree's fruit flows from its nature rather than the fruit creating the nature? What does this suggest about the relationship between someone's inner character and their outward actions?
2. Jesus says false prophets come "in sheep's clothing." Read John 10:11-13, where Jesus contrasts the good shepherd with a hired hand. How does that passage sharpen your understanding of what makes a person trustworthy versus dangerous?
3. Read James 3:11-12, which uses a similar image of a spring producing only one kind of water and a fig tree only bearing figs. What does this teach us about life.

DEEPER DISCOVERY:

- Matthew 12:33-55
- Galatians 5:22-23
- 1John 4:1



Heart Level: *What does it mean? These questions help us shape our beliefs around the objective truth of God's word.*

1. What emotions arise in you when you consider that Jesus takes this warning seriously enough to describe consequences as severe as being "cut down and thrown into the fire"?
2. How does it feel to know that God calls us to discernment rather than either blind trust or constant suspicion? Does one of those postures come more naturally to you than the other?
3. How does knowing that God's truth (not human charisma or persuasion) is the standard for testing teaching bring you a sense of security or stability?



HANDS LEVEL: *What does it mean to me? These questions help us commit to live out the truth in our everyday lives and commit to potential next steps.*

1. What is one practical step you can take this week to evaluate the “fruit” in your own life against the standard of Scripture rather than your own feelings?
2. How can you cultivate patience in your own discernment — giving time for fruit to become visible — rather than making snap judgments about people or teachings?



MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 7:16

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

PRAYER REQUESTS:

(Please remember that these requests are confidential and need to stay within the group.)