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Series: *Truth to Model for Our Neighbors*

Title: *Decisions, Decisions, Decisions!*

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Scripture: Matthew 7:13-23

How many of you have ever taken a personality test? Those of you who raised your hands know that most of these tests divide people into four basic personality types. Some give each type a descriptive title or even an animal name so as to help you better understand that particular type of person. Many just use a letter: "A, B, C, and D."

According to these tests, "D" people tend to be assertive, intense, and ambitious. Some refer to this type of personality as the "Captain." That's a good description because people who score high in the "D" area make good leaders, good commanding officers. They are usually pragmatic and results-oriented. They work quickly and make decisions with firmness and objectivity. So if you score high in the "D" area, making decisions comes easy to you. For example, when you need a new blue shirt, you just go on Amazon and order the right size. It hangs in your closet in two days or less. Decision made. Done.

If you are a "Little D" person, making decisions is harder. When you need a blue shirt you agonize over which one to purchase. You spend hours evaluating everything involved from the fabric to the design. You not only check on Amazon, you go to several websites and even actual stores where you walk up and down endless aisles and after you decide, after you purchase the blue shirt you don't feel relieved. No, you wonder if you made the right choice. People who score low in the "D" area tend to second-guess themselves. Decisions are difficult; both making them and living with them.

Just curious, how many "big 'D's" do we have with us today? You make decisions fairly easily.

How many little "D's?" Decisions are hard for you.

Understand it's not a put-down to be a little "D," nor is it a compliment to be a big "D." Some big "D's" make decisions too quickly. They benefit from little "D" people who help them learn to be more cautious and avoid making BAD choices.

I mention all this because in today's text Jesus says all of us, no matter what our personality type, all of us have a decision to make. It's the most important decision we make in life. Let's read about it. Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 7. Follow along as I read verses 13-23.

**13 - "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.**

**14 - But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

**15 - "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.**

**16 - By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?**

**17 - Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

**18 - A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.**

**19 - Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

**20 - Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

**21 - "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father Who is in Heaven.**

**22 - Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?'**

**23 - Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'**

Did you note the decision Jesus mentions? We each have to go through one of two gates. Option one is narrow. Option two is wide. The destinations that each gate leads to are clearly described. I mean, there's no guess work as to the result of each choice. The narrow gate leads to life. The wide one leads to destruction.

Of course, we aren't talking about actual gates. No, Jesus is referring to the decision we all must make as to whether or not to follow Him as Savior and Lord. The narrow gate refers to the decision to follow Jesus. That decision leads to an abundant quality of life now and eternity in Heaven when we die. Deciding NOT to follow Jesus, or choosing the wide gate, leads to separation from God now and forever.

Seems like an easy decision. Anyone, big "D" or little, should have no problem here. The right decision is obvious, of course we must choose the narrow gate! Yet many people still make the wrong choice, some of them our neighbors. Why? I want to mention two reasons.

**(1) First, there's our FLAWED culture.**

You see, in our culture the word "narrow" is almost always cast in a negative light. It brings to mind other words like: "stubborn" and "opinionated" and "narrow-minded." Our culture doesn't like NARROW things. In fact, it embraces the opposite. In our world BROAD is good! We don't believe in ONE choice for anything. No, we like a WIDE-variety of options. And we have them in almost every area of life.

Go back to that blue shirt decision as an example. Think of all the options we have when it comes to picking out a simple blue dress shirt:

- Do you want dark blue or light blue?
- What about a subtle pattern in the blue?
- Classic fit, casual fit or slim fit?
- Will you be wearing a tie with this shirt or is it for more casual dresswear?
- What about the collar? Do you want button-down or no buttons? Pointed or spread? How about a removable collar? How about a collar that stretches a bit?
- What about the fabric? Cotton, polyester, wool? Broadpoint, Twill, Chambray?
- Neck size? Small, medium, large, extra-large?
- What about the cuff? How many buttons do you want---two so it can be adjustable---or just one? Do you want a cuff with a different color inside so when you roll it up it looks especially cool?

And that's just dress shirt options. We have endless varieties of options in virtually every area of life. And there's not really anything wrong with that but you see, the majority of people in our fallen world think it should be the same when it comes to religion. Not one NARROW way; no, many ways---a WIDE, BROAD spectrum of ways to believe---all of them perceived as being equally valid. And options for shirts is one thing but when it comes to absolute truth--truth like how best to live this life and how to have assurance for eternity--well, narrow is the only way to go.

And let's just stop and remind ourselves that the truth is by its nature truth IS narrow. I mean, when Bill leads the orchestra and it calls for the woodwinds to play an "A flat" he doesn't say to Christy and Judi and Kim and Walter, "You guys do your best, come as close to an A flat as possible. But it will sound just as good if you hit a B or even a C." Let's say you're watching the Redskins play the Cowboys. If the skins kicker tries for a field goal that will give them the win and it misses the ref doesn't say, "Ah, we'll give it to them. It was only a foot off." No!

When we flew home from Europe a few weeks ago we sat on the tarmac three hours because the pilot said, "The controls don't feel right." He said he was calling for mechanics to check it out. No one said, "Who cares! Get this thing off the ground. It doesn't matter if they don't feel right. Close is good enough." No, we wanted our pilot to be narrow-minded when it comes to flying our plane.

And medicine, we want our docs to be narrow because when it comes to our physical well-being, we want the truth--the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Just OK, broad, is NOT ok---as this commercial shows.

<https://www.ispot.tv/ad/IZ6U/at-and-t-wireless-ok-surgeon>

Well, when it comes to abundant life now and the assurance of Heaven--BROAD won't work--no matter what our culture says. There is only ONE gate. ONE way to Heaven. Through faith in Jesus. That's why our Lord uses the word "narrow" here. He's saying there's no room to squeeze other religious beliefs in, no matter how sincere you hold them. As I have told you in the past, all religions are NOT the same, they contradict each other, so they cannot ALL be true. That's how

truth works. Truth by its nature is intolerant of error. Truth is always NARROW. Jesus is saying, there are not many truths when it comes to our eternal destiny. There is just One---and it's Me. As He put it in John 10:9, ***"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."***

Let me put it this way, there is no "approximate" gospel; there is only one: Jesus Christ. The truth we have to convey to our neighbors is that the popular way of thinking applied to faith---the perception that NARROW is wrong---is wrong.

Sadly, that makes it hard for many to make the decision to follow Jesus. Remember the man I told you about last week in Windermere? As we talked about our faith, at one point he looked at me and said, *"So you are saying if I don't accept Jesus I will go to Hell?"* And I said, *"Yes---that's the truth. We don't want you to go there. God doesn't want you to go there. But yes---that's what the Bible says."*

I could tell, he didn't like that. And he's not alone. But it's still the truth. We are all sinners, separated from our Holy Creator. Our sin must be punished---atoned for---someone must pay for our sin. God took care of that by sending His only Son to take the punishment for our sin on Himself That's what He was doing on the cross. Jesus was paying for our crimes. As Romans 3:23 puts it, ***"The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** We go through the narrow gate by confessing our sin---and asking for the forgiveness that only Jesus has made possible. We go through the narrow gate by accepting this FREE GIFT of God. It's the ONLY way---As the hymn puts it, *"There is no other way but this."*

Another reason people have a hard time making the right choice is because of:

## **(2) False prophets.**

I'm referring to people who teach that this the narrow gate is NOT the only way. This is what Jesus warns us about in verse 15. He says: ***"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."***

Now if you think back you can probably list several people who were obviously FALSE prophets.

- There was Sun Yung Moon who said he was Jesus and started the Unification "Church."
- There was Mary Baker Edy who founded the Christian Science movement.
- There's Charles Taze Russell who founded the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- Joseph Smith was another false teacher. He started the Mormon "church."
- There's L. Ron Hubbard who founded Scientology.
- There's Jim Jones who led nearly a thousand of his followers to commit suicide in New Guinea
- And David Koresh of Waco who led many of his followers to a similar end.

Those guys stand out, but most false prophets do not. As Jesus said, even though they are wolves, they look like sheep. They are deceptive---and very good at it---so good that many people are led astray by their teaching---teaching that says this *"narrow road"* stuff is nonsense.

Charles Swindoll tells the story of an unforgettable evening when a friend of his ate dog food. He wasn't starving with nothing else to eat. Nor did he down the dog food knowingly---as part of a fraternity initiation. No, it was a trick. The friend didn't know he was eating dog food. It happened at an elegant home owned by a wealthy physician in Miami. The dog food was served on delicate little crackers with a wedge of imported cheese, bacon chips, and an olive topped with a sliver of pimento. Think of it as Hors oeuvres a la Alpo! And these little treats were served not by some bad guy, but by a friend as a trick on her guests. You see, she had just graduated from a gourmet cooking course and decided she would put her skills to the ultimate test--and did she ever. After doctoring up those miserable morsels, she placed them on a silver tray. With a sly grin she watched them disappear. People kept coming back for more. They could not get enough. She apparently did very well in that cooking class. I mean she was able to make Alpo taste good!

Well, that's an illustration of the spiritual deception people experience with false teachers. The things they do and say SOUND good, LOOK good--but they are false. One man who found his way out of a group led by a popular false teacher said, *"Those people nearly loved me into Hell."*

This is why Paul warned the Christians at Ephesus, saying: ***“After I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”*** (Acts 20:29-31) In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes false teachers as ***“deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.”*** (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

Well, how do we recognize these “wolves in sheep’s clothing?” How can you spot a false teacher? Jesus says it’s by their fruit---the “teaching” they produce. Let’s review some of the bad “fruit” that helps us know a false teacher when we hear them.

**a. First, they teach that a book other than the Bible is authoritative.**

As Christians, as people who have entered through the narrow gate we know there is only one God and He only wrote one book---the Bible. So, people who say other religious books are authoritative, like the Book of Mormon or the Koran, or Science and Health by Mary Baker Eddy or the New World Translation of the Bible. The people who embrace these books are false teachers.

I love Denzel Washington movies and I thought the movie he did called, *The Book of Eli* was a powerful story---violent and not for young eyes---but powerful. Denzel plays the part of a man named Eli who lives in the future after a nuclear holocaust. Eli has in his possession the last Bible on earth and God has led him to go on a long dangerous journey to get that Bible to a special place. He faces incredible opposition on the way; an evil man wants the Bible to use as a source of power. Eli fights bravely but is mortally wounded and loses the Bible to this evil man, but that’s okay because Eli had memorized it. With the help of a young woman he makes it to his destination and while dying of his wounds he dictates every word of those 66 books to the people in this special place---the Bible is saved. At this point I thought, “YES! Great story!” But the last scene of the movie shows the newly printed Bible being put on a shelf next to other religious books like the Koran and the book of Mormon, intimating that the Bible is just one of many powerful books---all equal. Well, that’s false teaching. ONLY the Bible is God’s Word. It alone is our source of authority. It alone is inspired by God and as such is *“truth without mixture of error.”*

Here’s another indication of a false teacher:

**b. They exalt someone other than Jesus.**

A false teacher may admire Jesus---esteem Jesus---but they put others equal to or superior to our Lord. Dale Bruner, of Fuller Theological Seminary shares about this statement found in John 14:6: *“I had a personal, yet very public experience with this text not long ago. I was giving Bible studies in the morning at a week-long Lutheran pastors’ conference, and Dr. Prasanna Kumari, a lovely Asian-Indian woman, was giving the evening platform addresses. Dr. Kumari is the president of the Lutheran Church in India and was (I believe) the executive director of the Theological Commission of the Lutheran World Federation. She is a very impressive woman. In the mornings, I was teaching John, chapter 1, for all I was worth. The theme, as it is everywhere in John’s Gospel, is the exclusivity of Christ. John 1:18 is a good example: ‘No one has ever seen God before, but God the only Son, Who is at the very heart of the Father, He has explained God.’ In the evenings, Dr. Kumari was teaching that, indeed, Christ is the way for the Christian. But, she added, in India a sincere Hindu could also go to God, and Buddhists could find their way to God too. The ordinary way of salvation is sincere devotion to one’s own religious tradition---the extraordinary way of salvation is Jesus Christ. As long as people are sincere, they can get to God or to saving truth as they understand it. Dr. Kumari and I were obviously going in two different directions! It is bad form at a conference for one speaker to contradict another. All week long I wrestled with this inclusive/exclusive issue. This is the conclusion I came to and shared with the conference on the last morning: ‘In the past, when asked what my theological position was, I have described myself as a Christocentrist, but I now realize that that is not an adequate answer. I am a Christoexclusivist! Dr. Kumari is absolutely Christ-centered. She loves the Lord Jesus Christ---no question about it. But I have come to realize this week that, for me, Christ is not only the center---he is the circumference. He is the only way to the responsible knowledge of, or participation in, saving truth. Christ is exclusive.”*

Dr. Kumari looked good. Her teaching SOUNDED good---but it was false. I think of people like her when I read verse 21 where Jesus said, ***“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”***

Listen. God only had one Child, a Son named Jesus. He did what no one else has ever done or will do. He lived a sinless life. So, as Peter says in Acts 4:12 ***“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*** We have to be on our guard for teachers like Dr. Kumari. As John warns in his first epistle: ***“Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God—but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”*** (1 John 4:1-3)

**c. Another way to spot a false teacher is they say salvation is dependent on works---not on grace.**

We are a grace-driven church so we should know Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart. Say it with me: ***“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** Any person who says you have to DO something to earn abundant life, eternal life, is not from God.

Swindoll says,

*“Many years ago I was invited to attend a church with the family of a young man I had met in the Marine Corps. We drove up to the church buildings, which were immaculate in appearance. Beautiful lawn. Exquisite stained glass in the foyer. Elegant furnishings. Friendly people who greeted everyone as they arrived. Deep carpet. Original works of art in well-appointed rooms...the works. As we stood chatting with the greeters, I couldn’t help noticing a long row of tastefully framed oil portraits hanging along the brick wall separating the narthex from the sanctuary. I studied each one. I cannot recall them all, but they included an ancient Greek poet, a British statesman, a famous composer, the late President John F. Kennedy---a renowned winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and Mahatma Ghandi. It was a real mixture of human greatness, fame and achievement. These guys had DONE a lot of good. But the thing that stood out in my mind were the bronze, four-inch letters above the portraits that said: ***“For you are all sons of God.”*** Galatians 3:26*

*After we made our way inside the almost-full sanctuary, I turned to that verse in my Bible. I learned a great deal about the teachings of that church when I observed what had been omitted from the quotation of that particular verse of Scripture: ***‘...through faith in Christ Jesus.’***” We don’t become God’s sons by our own achievement---being a great statesman doesn’t do it. Winning the Nobel Prize doesn’t do it. Even being the president doesn’t do it. It’s only through faith in Jesus---it’s not of works so that no one can boast. Any leader who tells you otherwise---is false.*

You know, there comes a point in neighboring when God opens a door for us to share the gospel and when that point comes, we must remember this text. There is one gate and it is narrow. Jesus is the only way, all other ways lead to destruction. He is the only solution to the universal problem of sin.

I like how Greg Koukl puts it. He says: *“Most ailments need particular antidotes. Increasing the air pressure in your tires will not fix a troubled carburetor. Aspirin will not dissolve a tumor. Cutting up credit cards will not wipe out debt that is already owed. If your water pipes are leaking, you call a plumber, not an oncologist. And a plumber will not cure cancer. Any adequate solution must solve the problem that needs to be solved, and singular problems need singular solutions. Some antidotes are one-of-a-kind cures for one-of-a-kind ailments. Sometimes only one medicine will do the job, as much as we may like it to be otherwise. Mankind faces a singular problem. People are broken and the world is broken because our friendship with God has been broken, ruined by human rebellion. Humans, you and I—are guilty, enslaved, lost, dead. All of us. Everyone. Everywhere. The guilt must be punished, the debt must be paid, the slave must be purchased. Promising better conduct in the future will not mend the crimes of the past. No, a rescuer must ransom the slaves, a kindred brother must pay the family debt, a substitute must shoulder the guilt. There is no other way of escape.”*

There is only one way and it is NARROW. As Jesus said, ***“I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.”*** 1 Timothy 2:5 says, ***“For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*** John 3:36 says, ***“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, for the wrath of God remains in him.”***

Let’s pray.