

can i change - part 5 - it's a narrow squeeze

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Glenn Garvin

BIG IDEA – the gate or door is narrow for a reason

scripture focus - Matthew 7:13-14 NLT “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”

Jesus makes these bold statements about heaven, hinting that not everyone makes it. He tells a couple of stories about a narrow door or gate. Does Jesus want people to get into heaven and have eternal life? These verses make it seem impractical, if not impossible to gain entrance!

Jesus will never lie to us! And, Jesus, being God will always tell the truth and keep his promises.

These stories about heaven fly in the face of all of us who may have the grand imaginative idea that EVERYONE eventually makes it to heaven. We joke about the pearly gates and the quippy quizzes that Peter throws down a way to lighten the heaviness of our eternal destination.

One of my favorites, but offensive to both sexes jokes is the one where a husband sees these two lines to gain entrance to heaven. A man dies and goes to heaven. At the pearly gates, he sees two lines.

The first line has a sign that says, "Nagged Husbands." The line is full of an endless queue of men that stretches far out of site. The sign above the second line says, "Non-Nagged Husbands." This line is empty, aside from a single scrawny man who was just entering it. The recently deceased man approaches the single occupant of the second line and taps him on the shoulder. "Excuse me," he says, "but can I ask why you're the only man in this line?" The man in the line frowns defensively and says, "My wife told me to stand here."

Biblical commentators have a fun field-day with these two passages.

The first one...

Matthew 7:13-14 NLT "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it."

One: Jesus is clearly talking about HIMSELF as the narrow door/gate to gain entrance to God.

Two: The Bible experts go hard on all these deep philosophical, ideological concepts and principles about the beauty and mystery of narrowness! How deeply spiritual and enlightened this idea that "restricting" an entrance makes for a richer experience in life. See Vincent's Word Studies.

Three: The narrow gate or door seems so impossibly small that only a few even make it through.

Is the "narrow" just a huge hyperbole or is it a real truth?

Is the "narrow" a comparison or a competition?

Is the question "will I make it?" OR "Is it even possible?"

The narrow gate, door or even "path" is the one that **faith and obedience find is the way** to get to God and gain access to all things eternal.

Matthew, being a detailed person he is, points out one the words Jesus used in 7:14.

This gate mentioned is small and “compressed”, thlibó: to press, afflict, Cognate: 2346 thlibō (the root of 2347 /thlipsis, reflecting an original "b"/bēta) – properly, rub together, constrict (compress), i.e. pressed together; (figuratively) oppressively afflict (distress), i.e. like when circumstances "rub us the wrong way" that make us feel confined (hemmed in); restricted to a "narrow" place. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance states, afflict, suffer tribulation, trouble. Akin to the base of tribos; to crowd (literally or figuratively) -- afflict, narrow, throng, suffer tribulation, trouble.

This doesn't sound like an open invitation/grand opening kind of gate at all! A restrictive, constricted place? It makes it sound like Jesus is passing out straitjackets at the entrance!

The second one...

Luke picks up a similar story from Jesus, where Jesus uses another word to describe this narrow way. **He doesn't describe the size; Jesus describes the effort it takes to get through it.**

Luke 13:23-24 NLT

“Someone asked him, “Lord, **will only a few be saved?**” He replied, “**Work hard to enter** the narrow door to God's Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail.”

This crowd that gathered around asked a great question. And when we are talking about heaven and hell, who makes it and who doesn't – wouldn't you like to know the answer?

Jesus, masterfully, does not answer the question in a general sense, addressing the whole crowd, or even all the Jewish people the folks may have had in mind. In these two discussions Jesus focuses on the individual as if to say, “why don't you just focus on yourself and not the whole world!”

Oooh, that smarts!

We ask, “but what about the whole world? How’s does it work for the entire population of the planet or all of California or Los Angeles?

Jesus’ answer: how about we just talk about you right now.

Here, in this story, Jesus uses the word “door,” (**thura: a door**) instead of a “gate” (**pulé: a gate**).

Luke writes in 13:24, **people have to strive to get in**, **agónizomai: to contend for a prize, struggle** **Cognate: 75 agōnízomai** (from 73 /agón, "conflict/struggle," the root of the English term, "agonize") – properly, to **struggle, like engaged in an intense athletic contest or warfare** (Souter).

Why would Jesus tell us or me, that this gate, doorway, or path is restricting, rubbing us the wrong way, and making us feel confined?

Because it takes EFFORT! And maybe because we were born to be kind of like wild stallions!

The Spirit of the living God has been breathed in us, making us long for wide open spaces, running hard and free. We don’t want bridles or reins.

But without God’s wisdom, grace and love we would be wild and free **but not all that useful or submissive to his will. We would likely run over each other or run right off a cliff.**

Hashtag: This is Us!

And why would Jesus want us to **agonize and struggle to get in** when in other places He clearly told us not to even worry about things like clothes, food, and housing?

Welcome to the world of Spiritual Paradoxes where neither extreme is correct, but the middle, the tension is where God wants us to live, trust and believe in Him.

The Apostle Paul gives this to us in two simple verses. Many of us have memorized the first part, but forgot to mention the second part: Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

“For 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.

Vs 10... For **we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Paul, didn’t you just tell us that it WASN’T about our works for salvation? Why did you tell us that is all about good works, that God created us to DO?

Paradox: I can do nothing to earn God’s favor, but I must do everything I can to do the work God created me for!

Robin and I have three children. We’ve loved them since the day we found out Robin was pregnant with each one of them. And since we love them, we have done my best to guide and protect them. Even though they are all adults - that basic love never changed and will never change.

However, we also discovered that they are very uniquely different from each other. Once we started learning their gifts and abilities, **we began expecting MORE from them in their unique skills.**

Story about the physical differences between David and Matthew.

Mathew complained that I always and only asked him to help carry or move heavy things, like furniture or boxes. He asked why David rarely got asked to do these kinds of things. I told him, look at your brother! You seriously don’t see the answer to that question? Matt is 6’3”, stocky and muscular. David is 5’10”, thin and wirery.

And now that we know them well, we want them to work very hard to the best of their abilities and use the gifts God gave them. They

never “earned” our love, but our love for them has grown to want more, expect more for their own good and to bring joy to the world they live in - giving high honor to God!

Luke recorded this disheartening story Jesus used as an illustration.

The master shuts and locks the door of his home and only answers to those he knows!

Luke 13:25-27

When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’

Thinking that we are known and belong.

Thinking the master knows us and recognizes our voice, we expect him to unlock the door and open it to let us in.

The master’s response is, “**you THINK I know you because you know me.**” **You THINK I know you by your voice and the fact that you know where I live.**” But here’s the truth! **I don’t KNOW you.** I don’t recognize your voice and I don’t know anything about you, especially where you’ve come from. You are a stranger to me.

Thinking that the **master must recognize your voice or appearance from some dinner party or while he taught classes held in the square,** you plead and protest, “but we all hung out with the same people, and I remember that amazing tri-tip you barbecued at the block party.”

The master doesn’t remember because you never really let yourself be known by him, not even through his friends, nor his parties or lectures.

If we really want to change, we must let ourselves be known by God and by others.

If your only prayer is “Jesus Christ,” followed by a curse word.

If the only time you say his name or reach out to talk TO him is in panic, just before a car accident, I guarantee God wants you to give him a little more than that.

This message is probably not a general message for everyone who hears it, but maybe it's just for you.

God wants to help you change, he wants to lead you, guide you and yes, put you to work in the family business of rescuing and restoring souls.

The narrow path is the road God wants you to travel on. You won't be alone because there are others on the same journey as you are.

NOTES

Scriptures

Matthew 7:13-14 NLT

“You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”

Luke 13:23-30 NLT

“Someone asked him, “**Lord, will only a few be saved?**” He replied, “**Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail.** When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘**I don’t know you or where you come from.**’ Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’ “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

“For 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. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Questions

Q: Is the “narrow” just a huge hyperbole or is it a real truth?

Q: Is the “narrow” a comparison or a competition?

Q: Is the question “will I make it?” OR “Is it even possible?”

Q: Why would Jesus tell us that this gate is restricting or confining?

Q: And why would Jesus want us to agonize and struggle to get in?

Q: How are you handling the “paradox” of believing AND being saved?

COMMENTARY REFERENCES

Vincent’s Word Studies

Matthew 7:13 “A remarkable parallel to this passage occurs in the “Pinax” or “Tablet” of Cebes, a writer contemporary with Socrates. In this, human life, with its dangers and temptations, is symbolically represented as on a tablet. The passage is as follows: **“Seest thou not, then, a little door, and a way before the door, which is not much crowded, but very few travel it? This is the way which leadeth into true culture.”**

The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Matthew 7:13–14 (BKC): 7:13–14 (Luke 13:24). Elaborating on the Golden Rule, Jesus presented the clear way of access into righteousness. **The righteousness He demanded (Matt. 5:20) does not come through the wide ... gate and the broad ... road. Rather it comes through the small ... gate and the narrow ... road.** In light of the whole sermon, it was obvious Jesus was comparing the wide gate and the broad road to the outward righteousness of the Pharisees. If those listening to Jesus followed the Pharisees’ teachings, their path would lead to destruction (apoteian, “ruin”). **The narrow gate and road referred to Jesus’ teaching, which emphasized not external requirements but internal transformation.** Even the Lord Jesus acknowledged that few would find the true way, the way that leads to life (i.e., to heaven, in contrast with ruin in hell).

The New Bible Commentary

Matthew 7:13–27 (NBC): 7:13–27 True and false discipleship (cf. Lk. 13:24; 6:43–46; 13:25–27; 6:47–49). Four vivid contrasts between true and false conclude the

discourse. The division between true and false is drawn at different points in the four scenes, so that the whole complex forms a searching basis for self-evaluation.

First (13–14), comes a **straightforward contrast between the saved and the lost**; the two gates and the two ways lead respectively to destruction and to life. **True discipleship is a minority position**, a matter of deliberately opting out from the mainstream, but it is a matter of life and death.

Secondly (15–20), there is a more subtle division, which falls within the group of professed disciples. **False prophets present themselves as insiders** (in sheep's clothing), **but their intention is destructive** (ferocious wolves). So **not all alleged prophecy is to be taken at face value; it must be tested. And the test is not the prophets' profession but their fruit.** The meaning of fruit is not specified, but the metaphor occurs several times in Matthew to indicate behaviour which is genuinely pleasing to God (cf. 3:8–10; 12:33–37; 21:43).

Thirdly (21–23), and even more searchingly, we are introduced to **those who apparently believe themselves to be genuine disciples and can appeal to their charismatic activities to prove it, but nonetheless turn out to have no real relationship with the Lord to whom they appeal.** The false prophets of v 15 were deceivers, but these are self-deceived. Acceptance depends not on profession, nor even on apparently Christian activity, but on whether Jesus knew them. Note the extraordinary authority he assumes as judge; to enter the kingdom of heaven depends on his acknowledgment and consists in being with him.

Finally (24–27), a further division on the basis of behaviour. **Both wise and foolish are depicted as hearing these words of mine; the difference is in putting them into practice** (cf. the 'fruit' of vs 16–20). This division too, therefore, runs through the middle of those who belong to the Jesus-circle. This whole concluding section of the discourse thus leaves us with the uncomfortable demand to consider not just what we profess but whether it is based on a genuine relationship with Jesus and issues in the life of a true disciple.

The Lexham Bible Dictionary

The Closing (Matt 7:13–27; Luke 6:47–49)

The closing section of the **Sermon on the Mount/Plain (Matt 7:13–27; Luke 6:47–49)** provides illustrations and an **invitation to commitment.** In both the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain, **Jesus calls His audience to action—to do or not do, and to follow or not follow.** One response leads to life, the other to death. One produces good fruit, the other bad fruit. Three illustrations present this invitation:

1. Two gates or ways (Matt 7:13–14)
2. Two trees or fruits (Matt 7:15–23)

3. Two builders or foundations (Matt 7:24–27; Luke 6:47–49)

Witherington argues that **these illustrations are placed at the end of the sermon to urge the disciples to take action** (Witherington, Matthew, 162).

Elliott's Commentary for English Readers

Luke 13:23: We are left to conjecture to what class the questioner belonged, and what feelings prompted the question. Was he thinking of salvation in the higher Christian sense of the term, or of safety from that destruction of which Christ had spoken as coming on the impenitent people?

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

Luke 13:23 Then said one unto him,.... Not one of his disciples, but one of the company, in some one of the cities or villages he passed through, or as he was in the road to Jerusalem: are there few that be saved? It is a received opinion among the Jews (z), that all Israel shall have a part in the world to come; and this man might put the question to know whether Christ was of this sentiment or not. And by some things he had observed drop from him, and it may be the foregoing parables, which express the small beginnings of his kingdom, and seem to signify, that at first his Gospel should be received but by a few, though it should afterwards spread, he might collect, that his sense was, there would be but a few saved; or this might be a question of mere curiosity and speculation, as it seems to be, by Christ's treatment of it, who does not give a direct answer to it, but puts him and others upon showing a concern for their own salvation.

Got Questions

Just how narrow is the narrow gate?

The narrow gate, also called the narrow door, is referred to by the Lord Jesus in [Matthew 7:13-14](#) and [Luke 13:23-24](#). Jesus compares the narrow gate to the “broad road” which leads to destruction (hell) and says that “many” will be on that road. By contrast, Jesus says that “small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” What exactly is meant by this? Just how many are the “many” and how few are the “few”?

First, we need to understand that Jesus is the Door through which all must enter eternal life. There is no other way because He alone is “the way, the truth and the life” ([John 14:6](#)). The way to eternal life is restricted to just one avenue—Christ. In this sense, the way is narrow because it is the only way, and relatively few people will go through the narrow gate. Many more will attempt to find an alternative route to God. They will try to get there through manmade rules and regulations, through false religion, or through self-effort. These who are “many” will follow the broad road that leads to eternal destruction, while the sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him along the narrow way to eternal life ([John 10:7-11](#)).

While there will be relatively few who go through the narrow gate compared to the many on the broad road, there will still be multitudes who will follow the Good Shepherd. The apostle John saw this multitude in his vision in the book of Revelation: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" ([Revelation 7:9-10](#)).

Entering the narrow gate is not easy. Jesus made this clear when He instructed His followers to "strive" to do so. **The Greek word translated "strive" is agonizomai, from which we get the English word agonize.** The implication here is that those who seek to enter the narrow gate must do so by struggle and strain, like a running athlete straining toward the finish line, all muscles taut and giving his all in the effort. But we must be clear here. No amount of effort saves us; salvation is by the grace of God through the gift of faith ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). **No one will ever earn heaven by striving for it.** But entering the narrow gate is **still difficult because of the opposition of human pride, our natural love of sin, and the opposition of Satan and the world in his control, all of which battle against us in the pursuit of eternity.**

The exhortation to strive to enter is a command to repent and enter the gate and not to just stand and look at it, think about it, complain that it's too small or too difficult or unjustly narrow. We are not to ask why others are not entering; we are not to make excuses or delay. We are not to be concerned with the number who will or will not enter. We are to strive forward and enter! Then we are to exhort others to strive to enter before it's too late.

INTERNET LINKS

The Narrows - <https://www.nps.gov/zion/planyourvisit/thenarrows.htm>

The Narrow Gate - <https://www.gotquestions.org/narrow-gate.html>

Jokes about heaven - <https://jokesnjokes.net/the-funniest-jokes-about-heaven/>

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost has been colloquially subverted to say, "The Road Less Travelled." But Robert never said one as less or more travelled, one was seemingly more idyllic, "perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear." Nonetheless, he chose the one that seemed less travelled, "I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference," and was happy with his choice.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Taking_the_road_less_traveled

Summary of Messages – can i change:

- **The search is real:** you can change, but not without help from the one who created you.
- **The question is valid:** Can i keep changing? Change is hard, changing is harder.
- **It's in the yielding:** Obedience isn't listening, it's doing. Knowledge alone won't change anything.
- **We are better together:** Doing life-change together. We are braver and Jesus joins us when we're together.
- **it's a narrow squeeze:** The gate, the door is narrow for a reason. It's for your own good.