

What measuring device do you use to measure your relationship with Jesus? How do you know when you're maturing in Christ or if you're regressing? What makes you feel close to God, and what makes you feel distant? When do you feel spiritually strong versus feeling spiritually weak? How do you know if you're spiritually hot or cold or lukewarm? How can you even tell? Do you gauge the maturity of your faith based on moral decisions, based on how much or how little you overdid it this weekend with friends, or what websites you visited, or whether or not you lost it on your family this week?

What do you use to measure spiritual maturity? Maybe it's not moralism. Maybe you measure it with spiritual vitality. You base it on the quality of your spiritual practices. Have you engaged in the disciplines this week? Or maybe you check your health based on how many times you've opened the scriptures, how much time you spent in prayer. Maybe it's less focused on inward peace. Maybe it's focused on an outward witness and your expression of faith. Maybe it's on how much you've volunteered, or the coworker that you prayed for and you followed up with. What do you measure your spiritual maturity with?

Maybe slightly differently, how do you know you're on the right path? How do you know that you're moving in the direction that Jesus is inviting you to follow? Do you ever think about this? Because we've just spent quite a long time through many different weeks focusing on the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus has offered us a whole lot of things to think through.

He's given us teachings that go to the very heart of what it means to be human. We've talked about anger, lust, relationships, and more. And that's just to name a few. This doesn't even begin to unpack the fullness of what even the New Testament teaches about the witness of commands and instructions that we as followers of Jesus are meant to follow. With all of that in mind, what do you use to measure to see if you're moving in the direction of spiritual maturity? There's an old story of two rival rabbis, Rabbi Shammai and Rabbi Hillel.

There was an incident involving a Gentile who came before Shammai and requested: "Convert me to Judaism on condition that you will teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai pushed the man away with the building rod he was holding. Undeterred, the man then came before Hillel with the same request. Hillel said to him, "That which is hateful unto you, do not do unto your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Now, go and study."

It's familiar, isn't it? But slightly different. We just read the text that will lay out what we're going to talk about this morning, which is Jesus essentially entering into that same dialogue that Hillel and Shammai were a part of. It's Jesus' response to the question of what do we use

to measure our spiritual maturity. While we hear the words of Hillel, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." And we think that this is not altogether bad. It certainly seems to cast it in a negative light. It focuses on what not to do.

Jesus will push us "to do" instead of "not do." But this has a word for us because in the modern world, what Rabbi Hillel offered sounds like what we espouse today. We stand against hate, which is a good thing, and I affirm that we should stand against hate, but is that all mere tolerance? Isn't there something more active that can at least come alongside that?

So what I want to do is look to Jesus and say, after everything that he has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, because this one, Matthew 7:12, is the final verse in the main body of teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

When we get to verses 13 and 14, the discussion of the gate, that's when Jesus is moving towards his conclusion. So the main bulk of teaching will end this morning as he returns to something he said at the beginning of the sermon to summarize all that he had set out to preach.

As we read Matthew 7, one thing to note is that the chapter numbers, verses, headings, and subheadings were all added much later than when the scriptures were made, because they're helpful for us to know how to navigate this book. But sometimes they cause us to stop at places where it isn't the right place to stop. Somebody made a decision that this verse belongs to this section, not the section to come.

In your Bible, verse 12 comes right before a subheading called the Narrow and Wide Gate. And that's okay. It's helpful, and there's an argument to be made that those verses attach to the first. But I'm making the point that verse 12 is a summary statement of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount. And with that in mind, that's the angle that I want to focus on for this verse.

**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12**

Now, just there, Jesus says, it sums up everything. So he's beyond just the Sermon on the Mount; he's saying it sums up all the Law and the Prophets, which would've been essentially the Old Testament. The whole of the Hebrew scripture is summed up right there. It's the response to that question, tell me the whole law while I stand on one foot.

Jesus' answer to that would be to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But notice, just one more preface statement on how this functions within the Sermon on the Mount, that back in Matthew 5:17, we read, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*"

When Jesus set out at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, unpacking the Old Testament teachings, he understood that he might receive the accusation that he was trying to abolish the Law and the Prophets. But right at the beginning, Jesus says, “No, I have not come to erase them. I’ve come to fulfill them. I’ve come to offer the fullest expression.” So in Matthew 5:17, he names the Law and the Prophets, and that brings us back to Matthew 7:12. *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

This is the other bookend of the main teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says of everything, and that’s what that phrase “in everything” means, by the way, it’s quite a good translation. It means, in everything you do, in every action. It’s emphatic. It’s a comprehensive statement, and it’s used as a summary type statement. It’s at the end of the sermon when the preacher finally says, “If you forget anything I’ve said, remember this one thing.” That’s what Jesus is offering.

And it’s a pretty good summary because if you go back and go through that list that I mentioned earlier of anger, lust, greed, and wealth, and all those sorts of things, if you were to layer in Jesus’ teaching here to do to others what you would desire them to do to you, it works out pretty well. It’s exactly the thing that summarizes all that Jesus had taught.

The statement itself is not a complex one, and we all need to resist complexifying it. This is one where I need to not complexify. It’s as simple as it sounds: act towards others in the way that you desire that they act towards you. It’s a simple practice of reciprocity in some ways. It’s put yourself in their shoes, imagine for a moment what your actions would look like as it lands on them, and then adjust your behavior accordingly.

This, to Jesus, is what all the Old Testament is about, as simple as that. The active portion of love. How can I feel what they experience and then bring my own life in accordance with those actions? Now, this isn’t necessarily original, at least this concept, to Jesus. There were, as I already mentioned, two rabbis who were in this, but it was a common conversation for rabbis to try to distill down the teaching. If you were to look at ancient Jewish writings, you’d find all sorts of different ways. This one is a bit unique to Jesus, but some of you are thinking that didn’t Jesus have an encounter like this in a different spot in his life? The answer is yes—Matthew 22.

**“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:36-40**

Well, what is it, Jesus? Is it do unto others as you would have them do unto you? Or is it love God and love others? Then he would probably say to us. “Yes. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and love God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself—all the law and the prophets hang on these commandments.

You’ll see this play out throughout the New Testament. With just a quick survey, we’ll see that this thing, at the very core of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, is to become a person of love that both loves God and is learning to love others. Think of James 2:8. “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.” Paul in Romans 13:9-10 says

**The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Romans 13:9-10**

Galatians 5:14 *“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”* I don’t know what measure you use to measure your spiritual maturity or vitality, but don’t be mistaken. We all have one. We all have some measure by which we gauge where we’re at with the Lord. But it seems that Jesus and the New Testament writers are quite clear that the measure that Jesus uses is love. Love is the measure. Love is the measure of maturity. You can know a whole lot of things and still not have love.

Paul riffed on that in Corinthians a lot. You can sound like a resounding gong. Knowledge puffs up. You can know everything about God, but if you do not have love, you’ve missed the point. This whole thing, the whole way of Jesus, this whole path is about understanding and becoming a person of love.

Now I’ve preached multiple times, and it is worthy of another sermon on another day to talk about the difference between the way the world views love and the way Jesus sees love. That’s important, and we’ll get to that a little bit at the end. But of course, this is love in the way of Jesus, which at its core is exemplified by the cross, which is the laying down of your life for the sake of others. It’s never coercive, it never manipulates, it never forces, but rather it lays itself down for the sake of the other. It wills the good of the other. That’s what love is.

This whole story is moving in that direction. What is the measure to use to check our spiritual vitality? Are you becoming more of a person of love that loves God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loves your neighbor as yourself? That’s the measure.

That’s the answer to that question. But Jesus now shifts in verses 13 and 14 to an invitation, and this is where he shifts towards the conclusion of the entire sermon. He’ll give four different parables. We’re going to look at one today, but each of them lays out an invitation before all of us:

It says there are two ways to live, and each of these will have two different options. There is the narrow gate and the wide gate, the narrow path and the wide path. It’s the true disciple and the false disciple. Then it’s the house built on the sand versus that which is built on a firm foundation.

And Jesus, with all the practicality in the world, is just saying, here’s the choice before you. He says that this is the option. Which way would you

like to live? So let's take a look at Matthew 7:13-14. After summarizing all that has been said, Jesus says.

**“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:13-14**

We've got a few words here that I think are worth showing you, and it does support the point we're making. But this first is the word road or way. It's the word *hodos*, which in Greek means exactly that way, road, path, or progress (*hodos* = way, road, path, progress). But in a few moments, we're going to look at where Jesus identifies himself as the way, the *hodos*. So it seems obvious, but it's worth naming that. It doesn't mean it's a metaphor, and it doesn't mean exactly what it shows.

Jesus is not saying that he is a street. He's showing that he may weigh a path, a way of life, which holds the context of what we just talked about—that golden rule—that the measure is that we become people of love. That's the way, the path of Jesus, that's what he's laying out in this invitation. So this concept of *hodos*, the way or the road, is so prominent throughout scripture that in the book of Acts and throughout, you will find that Christians were not called Christians, they were in the first century called “followers of the way.” This is exactly the reference to this very thing, that there was something so distinct and so unique about the way of Jesus that his followers became known as followers of the way.

But Jesus will contrast it with this other wide and broad way. He says that this wide and broad path leads to destruction. He uses two words to describe it. The first is *platus*, which means wide, spread out, or broad. This would've been familiar in the first century and would've been used to describe the roads and the avenues that were designated for public assemblies. So when he uses this, they could, in their minds, envision a large group of people. It was familiar language. There was freedom of movement within that road. It's an image that Jesus' listeners would've recollected.

The second word is *euruchos*, and it means broad and spacious. I like that idea of the spaciousness. It's an easy and open path. It was a familiar term that would've conjured up images of security or prosperity. At the outset, it looks big. It looks easy. Jesus uses this to say that this road, which looks very simple at the beginning, leads to destruction.

Now draw all the Sermon on the Mount with you into this moment. Let's take the teaching on anger. In the moment in which someone transgresses your will and that flood of anger floods your system, you are given options. The easy option is to give in to it. The broad, wide open, spacious thing is that I'm going to lash out and attack that person. It feels easy. It is easy. It's exactly where your heart is set.

Jesus contrasts the easy one with the small and narrow road that leads to life. Because in that teaching on anger, the harder decision was to somehow take control of your nervous system in such a way that you can withhold that flash flood of anger and not give in. The option to not

nurse that grudge, but rather do the hard work of being free from anger. That is a narrow, small, and constricting road.

The first Greek word for this is *stenos*. It means narrow, small, or strait, but not straight as in, not crooked. I thought this was interesting. It's more like dire straits. It's a different word. If someone is in dire straits, what are they facing but a lot of opposition, a lot of challenge. Transport yourself back into that moment of anger. To go the straight path, as you will face a lot of opposition, which is mostly internal. I want everything in me to give in to that urge of anger, but Jesus says there's a different way. There's a straight way, which is constricting.

The second word is *thlibo*, which means constricted, compressed, narrow, or to experience trouble. The imagery that both of these conjure up is almost like being strangled. This is difficult. It is hard. The road is narrowed because Jesus will demand much of you. He will, in fact, demand all of you, which is why Bonhoeffer, at one point, would say that when Jesus calls someone, he bids them to come and die, echoing Jesus' words. Everyone must take up their cross and die to the self.

The narrow road is narrow because you will have to fight all the shadow side and the things inside you that want to give in to the ways you've been discipled, that are just to give in to the anger, let it flow, give in to the lust, let it happen. With your money and resources, take everything you can. It's all about you. That's the easy, the broad road; it will open up. It'll feel very easy, and at the beginning it'll seem spacious. You may feel that if you just give in to the anger, everything would be made right if you could just get back at that person.

However, Jesus says that this is no way to live. Rather walk through the narrow gate. It's constrictive, it's straight. It feels oppressive at times. And when you look at that narrow gate, it will seem like that is not the right option. You may feel like that is not what you are supposed to do. You may say to Jesus, “I know better than you. It's 2025. Those ways just don't work.” But Jesus says narrow is the gate that leads to life.

Now here's the problem. In the modern world, when we talk about this idea of narrow-mindedness, that's one of the highest insults you can give in our tolerant, pluralistic age. It's one of the reasons we have trouble with this narrow way. Jesus's claim that we are the ones who hold the one path, and that this narrow thinking means everything else is wrong. That's a question you're probably asking. It's a question I often get when I talk with people because they feel, and they have some sentiment, such as “Don't all religions just move in that same direction?”

Certainly, in 2025, we've come to the place to believe that you don't hold the only words of truth, that can't be what the problem is. I want to point out that making that statement, that all roads lead to the same place, is making what seems like an inclusive claim, which is quite inclusive or exclusive. It's a meta statement about all beliefs in all directions. In all ways. But the problem is the internal logic begins to collapse in on itself because when you make a meta statement about all things, you immediately reject, and it's quite exclusive, to any individual claim.

You can see the way that logic falls in on itself. You are making a grand statement against grand statements. It doesn't work that way. The

language of total inclusivity, which again, I believe there's a cultural understanding of that in which we allow people in a plural society to live their own ways, to not impose and force on others, and I'm all for that. Because you cannot coerce or force someone into the kingdom of God. Once you've done that, you've lost the plot. It is always invitational. It's Jesus saying, "Come follow me."

But the logic that says all paths lead to the same place collapses in on itself. There has to be some sense of objective truth, which is why Jesus just spent two chapters teaching a way. Because if all ways are good, then why not just give in to the murderous thought? That is a path. So my invitation is to try the way of Jesus. Willard would say that Jesus would be the first to follow truth wherever he found it, because he was the truth. So anywhere you find truth, you find Jesus. So just try the way of Jesus. I believe it does, in fact, lead to life. The thought that the narrow way is constricting

, in some ways, we get it because here's the reality: the whole world works that way. Think of this in terms of you set out to become a doctor, there is a narrow way of life you will have to enter into to become a doctor. You'll have to separate for many years and immerse yourself in study. You'll have to say no to a lot of things because you've got to study, you've got to memorize, you've got to do whatever it is to walk that narrow path to become a doctor. That is a narrowing that eventually leads to a spacious life, but it's a narrow path.

Think of a professional athlete. If you want to become a professional athlete, there's a very narrow path. You'll have to have a diet and a workout schedule. You'll have to put in hours upon hours upon hours to develop that skill. A skill that is quite narrow, but it opens up to someone like Steph Curry being able to do whatever he can do on the court. It's a spacious life. It's a doctor who can encounter any illness and begin to understand it, who can work in a spacious way. The narrow path is the way the whole world works.

If you want to become an apprentice of Jesus, there is a narrow path. Jesus will say, I am the way, the truth, and the life. If you want to experience life in the kingdom of God, it is quite narrow, but Jesus says over and over that it leads to a spacious life. John 10:10, "I've come to bring life and life to the fullest." If you want to experience all that is available to us in the kingdom of God, that's breaking into the here and now; you can do so, but it will feel constrictive because that's the old self dying off. You've been trained and disciplined in the world in a way where it's look out for number one, so the path, that narrow gate, that feels constrictive.

Jesus is saying that the things that we are so familiar with in operating within the world have to die off so we can experience life in the kingdom. When we look at the path, it will look narrow. It will look like something we can't get through. But here's where we really have to understand something. The narrow gate and the narrow road that lead to life are not doctrinal correctness.

Often, we look at this and think that we have to believe the right things. And hear me, I spent way more years than I should have studying

doctrine. Doctrine is unbelievably important, but the narrow gap path that Jesus is talking about is not doctrinal correctness; it's obedience. It's learning to follow Jesus.

There were many people who seemed to have correct doctrine, but their hearts were full of hatred, unforgiveness, and anger. That's not the path to freedom. It's not the path to the life that Jesus has on offer. Doctrine is important. It's what helps us understand, and that's why, in a moment, we will wed the Jesus way and the truth together. Those two things go hand in hand.

But the narrow path that Jesus is talking about is summarizing and bringing to a conclusion all that he's preached in Matthew 5 and 6, which is about a way of living. He invites us into this. The narrow path is not about your entrance into heaven or into eternal life; that's already been established through the work of Jesus and only through the work of Jesus. You cannot earn that. That is through the work of Jesus on the cross alone, and that is how you experience the reconciliation to God. But the narrow gate is how Paul in the New Testament would say, you are working out your salvation. It's how you begin to live into that new identity, live into that new reality of the kingdom of God.

To summarize it, Jesus' invitation is to a narrow way and a spacious life. It's to a narrow way of following him, but the life on the other side of that is quite spacious, similar to that doctor and that athlete. So let's get to the text that I've alluded to a few times.

This is John 14:6, one of Jesus's great teachings on this concept. *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"* Jesus is picking up that metaphor, that *hodos* the way. That's what's right there at the beginning. And he's saying, "I am the way, the truth." It's not saying he's a path or road, but a way of being, a way of existing in the world. And Jesus identifies it with himself.

Then notice that he weds it to the truth, and then that is what leads to the life. Jesus comes along, offers a way of being designed to achieve a life, and that life is living into the reality of the kingdom of God.

If you desire to live out that identity as the reconciled child of God and experience that life here and now that is possible through apprenticeship to Jesus. In the opening sermon of this sermon series, I reminded us that one of the things we had to do was believe that transformation is possible. We will not perfect that, of course. Our hearts will lead us astray all the time, but we have to come to believe that what Jesus is instructing us is possible.

That as we slowly apprentice under Jesus, laying down our old life, walking with him, learning from him, being present to his teachings, being present to his leadings, we can take up a way of life that will nudge us in the direction of maturity in Christ.

## Love is the Measure

Love is the measure, which means if you want to assess spiritual maturity, which is always a dangerous thing, and never one that you should take with a lot of pride and arrogance, love is the measure. Are you a more loving person than you were a year ago, five years ago? Never



perfect. We can't accomplish that, but you can grow in that. You can grow and develop into the way of Jesus. Eugene Peterson wrote a great book called *The Jesus Way*. This is a long quote, but it's worth our time.

**The Jesus way wedded to the Jesus truth brings about the Jesus life. We can't proclaim the Jesus truth but then do it any old way we like. Nor can we follow the Jesus way without speaking the Jesus truth. But Jesus as the truth gets far more attention than Jesus as the way. Jesus as the way is the most frequently evaded metaphor among the Christians with whom I have worked for fifty years as a North American pastor. In the text that Jesus sets before us so clearly and definitively, way comes first. We cannot skip the way of Jesus in our hurry to get the truth of Jesus as he is worshiped and proclaimed. The way of Jesus is the way that we practice and come to understand the truth of Jesus, living Jesus in our homes and workplaces, with our friends and family...The North American church at present is conspicuous for replacing the Jesus way with the American way...We can't suppress the Jesus way in order to sell the Jesus truth. The Jesus way and the Jesus truth must be congruent. Only when the Jesus way is organically joined with the Jesus truth do we get the Jesus life. Peterson, *The Jesus Way***

What Peterson just described in a lot of different words is the work of discipleship. That says, I have been formed in such a way to exist in this world by the ways and means of the world, and as I apprentice under Jesus. I'm learning to discard those ways and take up the way of Jesus, which requires a fundamental reorientation of all that we view of the world.

It was Jesus' opening statement leading to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 4:17, "*Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" Meaning the first thing we do is we enter into repentance, which evokes in us some emotion to say, "Lord, we've been living in the wrong direction."

But it's more than that. Repentance at its core is this word that means rethink, reorient. There's a new reality that requires you to rethink everything you know about the world. Confess the ways you've been tied to something other than Jesus, and begin to re-imagine what it means to declare as in the song "All Hail King Jesus."

If Jesus is king, which he is, over all creation, over all the earth right now at this exact moment, then one of our fundamental tasks is re-imagining everything we know about life. Because if that fact is true, if that grave was empty, there's a new reality that we have to learn to bring our life into its congruence.

How do we live in light of that? Well, that's where Jesus begins. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who weep and mourn. Blessed are those who seek righteousness and justice. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with that opening to say the whole world is now different. Those who the world would not typically see as blessed are the ones who are blessed.

And then he moves forward to say that he didn't come to abolish that law, but rather to present something deeper. He then teaches us what it means to live in light of that reality. Because if Jesus is resurrected, if he is king, then loving your enemies is the actual way to life. Even if it means it seems impractical and not efficient in this world.

Sometimes when we look at the teachings of Jesus, we get caught on this question of will it work. But that's the wrong question. The question is not will the teachings of Jesus work because that's dependent on what view we are seeing as success. But if success is at its core, a cross in someone who's crucified and then resurrected to new life, into the new age, well then, whether it works doesn't matter in terms of the way this world operates.

It's one of the things against the idea of non-violence is it's not effective. But that's not the question. The question we need to ask is that is it faithful to Jesus who is king? And if he's king, faithfulness is what we're after. That's what we're trying to accomplish, because we believe and hold the conviction that what we do in this life will advance all through eternity, because that new creation is coming. That means even if it goes through the path of death, that is not our final enemy. We are resurrected to new life, and our life must be in alignment with that.

I want to offer three reflections on some of the obstacles that we run into in the modern world when trying to follow the narrow path. These were largely taken from Rich Villodas. It's a book I've referenced a few times called *The Narrow Path*. It's one I've been reading along through this series. In his chapter on this text, he talks about three obstacles that help us know when we're on the broad path that leads to destruction.

He says that the first obstacle we experience is that of moralism. What he means by moralism is that there's a way of being that believes God only cares for the external outward behavior. Which, just to be clear, Jesus wants to modify; he wants to change your behavior, but he doesn't want to do it from an external in, but rather from an internal renovation out, which makes all the difference on how we understand following Jesus if it's external in, that descends into legalism. Where now you're trying so hard to achieve something, but that's not the road that leads to life, that leads to destruction, because you can't hold up all the rules.

But the easy yoke that Jesus teaches is against this concept of moralism; it lets me transform our inward being. Let me work with the Spirit in partnership with me to change my heart so that anger isn't the easy path that it flows out, but rather choosing forgiveness becomes the easier option. Jesus wants to transform us so much. On giving, for example, give so that your right hand doesn't know what your left hand is giving. The only way you can do that is if you're a person of generosity, and you're giving without realizing it.

Think about the way of Jesus in the same way that your brain has accessed a mode of being to where you will leave this church, drive home, and not even think about which turns to take. That's what Jesus wants to do with our inward being. He wants us to exist in this world in such a way that the kingdom of God is so renewed in our minds that love of the enemy becomes the natural response.

It is not mustering willpower, and how do we do all that? There are all sorts of stuff around how we get to that point. Moralism says, I'm going to grit and bear it in the moment. The narrow path of Jesus is the slow internal work to uproot the anger that's so deeply seated, probably from some trauma, probably from some hurt and pain. But there is a path where you can experience the emotional healing to where you are not ruled by anger.

It will be hard, but when Jesus was on the cross and asked the Father to forgive them because they knew not what they were doing, I believe that was easier for Jesus than to hate his enemies because he was the person for whom love was at the core of his being. Don't hear me, and think that diminishes the challenge of that moment and what Jesus did on the cross. But I believe he was the person for whom love so resided at the center of his being that this was his natural disposition.

You can read the Sermon on the Mount and hear a list of rules and wonder how you will uphold all those things, or you can go back to chapter 7:12. You can summarize the whole thing as the act of love in regularity and overtime, showing up and saying, "Jesus, would you transform me into a person of love?" Spending a lot of time with our Rabbi Jesus, teaching us how to become a person of love.

Rich Villodas wrote, "Behavior modification without interior examination eventually leads to spiritual desolation." If you try to obey all these things without looking inside and laying your heart before the Lord, that is a path that leads to destruction. Don't descend into that legalism.

The second obstacle is success-ism. What he means by this is we abandon the idea and the vision of the kingdom of God and simply just say, "I'll figure out the good life on my own." Rather than trying to do it outside in, you simply say that the meaning of life, the goodness of life, comes from within me, and I can be successful in accomplishing it. This is the idols of the heart. This is where you begin to just assume that even though you understand Jesus' teaching on money, you decide that the actual good life is having a lot and hoarding all the accomplishments and accumulation. You say that you know what the right thing is. You know what the vision of the good life is. It is dismissing the measurement of love.

What do you consider the good life? Answering that question will set the trajectory of your life. And it's a good exercise. Something that is worth your time. What does that description look like for you? Think about if it has this measure of love, of loving God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself. We have to come to the place where we seek first the kingdom of God and recognize that all those other things will be added to us. What is the vision of the good life you have in an area like ours? We're surrounded with this idea of successes that we can achieve the good life, and so we set out

these visions of what it looked like, but is that vision congruent with the kingdom of God?

The third obstacle is individualism. This is the philosophy of the day that simply says, you do you. You just be yourself. That maybe it's not a vision of the good life, but it's rather I know I am the source of my own morality and my own ethical decisions. So all of that meaning is carried within the individual. But I would just like to warn you that this is far too great a weight to carry.

If you have to be the arbiter of not only the vision of the good life, but also every ethical, moral decision, and you have to wear all of that, you will be crushed under that weight. That is not the way of Jesus. There is a way, a body of moral knowledge that Jesus offers to us in the world where you don't have to make it up every time, but you can come to Jesus and acknowledge that he knows a thing or two. He is our savior, and he's also wise. He understands the human condition.

We are constantly bombarded with philosophies that say truth resides inside the self. Every time, I just want to say it's too much. I am not smart enough to know how to handle the whole of created order and interpret it. We have a history of following Jesus. There is a long tradition of the church working these teachings out. We need to live into that. It is not within the individual. Moralism, successes, and individualism are three obstacles to the challenge of following Jesus.

G.K. Chesterton once said, "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." There's truth to that because if we take following Jesus seriously enough, it will demand so much of us.

That narrow way is constrictive. It will feel like we're strangling underneath it, as Jesus is working out the old self. But I promise you on the other side of that, Jesus graciously walks us into a spacious life of living in the kingdom of God. We have to think of the cost of discipleship and the cost of non-discipleship. If the broad road leads to destruction, then when we choose not to apprentice under Jesus, we open ourselves up to the crushing weight of life away from Jesus.

This brings us back to John 10:10-11.

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

We don't have to walk that narrow path alone. Jesus has gone before us and is with us and alongside us. Do we trust that the life Jesus has on offer is life to the full?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2025 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA  
Catalog No.1492-14FC