



# Central Peninsula Church

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Matthew 7:13-14  
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## When It's Good To Be Narrow

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Those of us who grew up in the sixties and seventies will recall the name Monty Hall. Monty Hall was the host of a game show called, "Let's Make A Deal." The idea was that Monty would choose someone in the audience to make a deal with. They would have to hand over to him some goofy thing they brought and he would in turn give them the opportunity to win some big prize. Often, they would have to choose between three doors. Behind one of those doors was some grand prize like a trip to Jamaica or a new car. Behind another one might be something nice but not too fancy like a new freezer or a stereo. And behind a third door would be kind of a booby prize like a hundred pairs of old shoes. Monty would say, "What will it be: Door#1, Door#2, or Door#3?" The contestant would make her choice and that choice would make or break her day.

The show illustrates something of the power and significance of the choices we make. Our culture would have us think otherwise. It would have us see ourselves more as a product of our environment than of our choices. We spend a lot of money trying to figure out why we are the way we are. The Bible seems to say that we are in large part what we choose. We make choices and the choices we make turn around and make us.

When God created Adam he gave him a choice. He said, "I am giving you this wonderful garden to work in and enjoy. It's all yours. There is only one restriction. You are not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat from the tree, you will surely die." Adam had a choice. He could choose to obey God and live or disobey him and die. His choices made him.

God's leaders have always called God's people to choose. At the end of his life, Moses stood before the people of Israel and said, "**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God and listen to his voice, and hold fast to him**" (Dt. 30:19-20). Moses' successor, Joshua, did pretty much the same thing. He said, "**Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve**" (Joshua 24:15). The choices those people made turned around and made them.

Good preachers know about the importance of preaching for a verdict. They don't just stuff our heads with more knowledge; they press for a decision. Jesus understood this. We see this in the most famous of all his sermons, what we call the Sermon on the Mount. At the end of this sermon, Jesus wasn't looking for a pat on the back; he wanted people to make a choice, and he does this in a very ingenious way. Starting in the middle of chapter 7 he paints several word pictures. In each of these pictures there is a choice to make. And for Jesus, the choice is always the same; it's always between two possibilities. Jesus is not like Monty Hall. He doesn't place before us three doors to choose from. He gives us two doors to choose from. To Jesus life is not that complicated. Contrary to what we are sometimes told, there are not hundreds of different paths to choose from; there are just two. There are really only two ways to go in life.

In Matthew 7:13-14 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."**

Jesus says each of us have a choice to make. It's interesting it comes just after the Golden Rule.

**"Therefore, in everything do to others what you would have them do to you. Enter through the narrow gate..."**

It's a command. It's a command that was given in a very sudden, stark, and direct way. This is not a process thing. It's a decision.

### I. We make a choice between two gates

It's a choice, first of all, between two gates. Those who lived in Jesus' day would know exactly what he was talking about. Most cities in the ancient world had walls, and the walls of the cities had gates. Jerusalem had twelve gates wide enough for large groups of people to travel through in the daytime for business. At night those gates were always closed to protect the city from invaders. But there was still a need for certain individuals to pass

through at night, and so there was always a small door next to the wide gate to allow citizens to enter at nighttime.

That's the image Jesus had in mind. He says there are two gates in life. You can go through the wide gate or you can go through the narrow, small one. The wide gate allows you to bring along whatever you want. There is no limit to the carry-on luggage you can bring with you if you choose to go through this gate. You don't have to leave anything behind. You can bring all your opinions, all your beliefs, all your own thinking and learning about life and its meaning. You can bring whatever lifestyle you want through this gate. Things which the Bible calls sin can be carried along through this gate. You can even bring all your religion, all your so-called good works, all those things which you feel will work to your favor on judgment day. You can bring them right in with you through this wide gate. Those of you who have moved your family from one city to another know you have to decide what to take with you and what to leave behind. Those who enter through the wide gate leave nothing behind. Everything makes the cut. Everything gets to come with us.

But there is also a narrow gate, and this is the one Jesus tells us to choose. Most of us don't like the idea of being narrow. Narrow people are small-minded people who can't see beyond their own backyard. Many religious people are narrow. They judge everyone by their own limited experience. They think people who don't live by their rules are evil. I don't like narrow people, but some things need to be narrow. As a child I hated math. I wasn't very good at it. I always felt that my math teachers were so narrow. They said things like five times five equaled twenty-five. I had a more broad-minded view of math. I would settle for anything close to twenty-five. But we all know good math teachers are narrow about numbers. Good marriages are narrow too. When I perform a wedding ceremony I insist on narrowness. I ask the couple to "forsake all others." That's limiting. But a good marriage requires that we be narrow in our love.

Because it's narrow, only one person can get through this gate at a time. It requires an individual decision to enter. And since it's small it may be a little bit hard to find; you have to look for it; you have to seek it out with all your heart. And there are no carry-ons allowed. You have to leave everything behind. You have to leave behind your sinful habits. Maybe you think it's your right to express your sexuality whatever way you want. "What two

consenting adults do behind closed door is nobody's business. It doesn't matter if we are married. It doesn't matter if we never even see each other again." Jesus says it does matter. You have to leave that behind. Perhaps most of all you have to leave behind your dependence on your own goodness, maybe even your own religiosity. Paul was a Jewish Pharisee who lived his life by the letter of the law. When he entered the narrow gate he said he had to consider all of that as garbage in order to gain Christ (Phil. 3:8).

The Puritans understood all of this. When a person decided to follow Christ they had him write out a personal covenant with God. It was like a business contract. They swore allegiance to a new king. They renounced their right to live for themselves and committed themselves to work for Christ's kingdom. They viewed themselves as enlisted soldiers who were forever leaving civilian life. After they wrote it out, they signed it, sealed it, and that settled it. Their life was never the same. They entered the narrow gate.

## II. We make a choice between two roads

But that's not all. Jesus also says we have to make a choice between two roads. He says there is a broad road and there is a narrow road. Again, Jesus says take the narrow way. The word he uses here for the narrow road is different than the one he used for the narrow gate. The other means narrow in the sense of small; this one means narrow in the sense of being hard-pressed, even harassed. That's why some translations describe this as the "hard" road or the "difficult" road.

The broad road is the easy road; it's roomy. There is plenty of room for believing whatever you want to believe and doing whatever you want to do. There are no curbs or boundaries of thinking or behavior that you have to stay within. You can follow the desires of your heart; your own inclinations. It takes effort to curb those things. If someone hates you, you have the right to hate them back. If someone does you wrong, you have the right to pay them back. Your money is your own to do what you want with. You earned it, and you get to spend it on your needs and your wants. It takes effort to discipline yourself so you can be generous with those in need and to advance the cause of Christ. It's easy to let your sexual desires run wild before you are married. It's a battle to harness them. It's easy to give up on a bad marriage and walk away; it's hard to hang in there and take ownership for your own part and get the help you need to make it work. The broad road is easy, the narrow road is hard.

This summer I read Chaim Potak's book, *My Name Is Asher Lev*. It's a story about a boy who grows up in a family

of Hasidic Jews in New York City. He is nothing less than a child prodigy as an artist. As a young boy of four or five he draws wonderful sketches of his parents and his neighborhood. Soon his talent is discovered and he becomes the only student of a world famous artist named Jacob Kahn. Jacob saw Asher Lev's gift but he also saw that he needed training; he had much to learn. He didn't really know anything about line and color and shape and texture. To become a real artist, a master, took more than natural giftedness; it took the choice to attach himself to Jacob Kahn and it took hard work and discipline and study. It also took a willingness to disappoint his family. His family didn't understand art; they didn't like it. And they didn't like Jacob Kahn because he wasn't an orthodox Jew.

To get on the narrow, hard road requires a choice and it requires work and discipline to stay on it. It doesn't come naturally. You don't stumble onto this road by accident. You don't wake up one morning and discover you are a disciple of Jesus. You make the choice to get on that road and you keep making the choice to stay on it. When you make that choice you will disappoint a few people. The people you love most may not understand. They may pressure you and harass you.

This hard road is the road that is boundaried by the lines and textures of God's word. Your personal beliefs, convictions, and natural inclinations have to be left by the roadside. We live in a culture that says, "It doesn't matter what you believe or what you do; if it works for you and doesn't hurt anybody else, live the way you want." Jesus says it does matter. Jesus says how you respond to my word determines your destiny. You make that choice and that choice will turn around and make you.

### **III. We make a choice between two groups**

On this road, Jesus also tells us there are two groups of people. On the broad road there is a large crowd of people. On the narrow road there are just a few. This is part of what makes it difficult to choose the narrow path. There just aren't that many people around us to tell us we are going in the right direction.

It's like going to a new restaurant. Maybe you are in an unfamiliar city but you need to eat out and so you go out and look for a place to eat. You walk by a place; you read the menu posted at the front door. You decide to try it because the price is right and you like that kind of food. But then you walk in and discover you are the only ones there. What do you do? You probably go find another restaurant. No one likes to be the only ones in a restaurant. If the joint was any good, it would be full of people.

But Jesus says it doesn't work that way in life. He

says you can't find the right road by looking for a crowd. He says that there may be times when you are on this road and you look around and it seems like no one else is on that road. That's hard because we all gain confidence in our choices when there are others who have made the same choice with us.

When I was in my second year of college I had three buddies. We did almost everything together. We shared a commitment to Jesus Christ and encouraged each other to stay on the narrow path. The following year each of us ended up at a different school and eventually we lost touch. Over the years I have talked with each one of them about the fact that they have chosen to get off that path; they have decided to follow the crowd. I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that at times I've looked around and felt like the only one left, and wondered, "Where did everyone go?"

I don't like being the only Little League coach who had a problem with games and practices being scheduled on Sunday mornings. I don't like the weird looks. I want to be one of the boys. I don't like being the only one who chooses not to laugh at a joke that demeans women. I want to laugh with others. I like to be in on what's going on. I don't like being mocked for my narrow-mindedness when I tell someone that I believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

Our culture is ripping apart at the seams because we survey the majority to define what is right and wrong. Jesus says the majority is going in the wrong direction. And when you choose to depart from the majority, they will get upset. We can expect to be harassed on this road. People don't like it when we depart from the norm. They will call us fanatics. They will accuse us of self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Sometimes those people even attend the same church and call themselves Christians. But theirs is a religion of convenience, and they don't like the idea of being on a narrow road.

### **IV. We make a choice between two destinations**

If we don't like being unpopular and narrow, why would we choose the narrow road? We choose the narrow road for the same reason we would choose any road - because of where it leads us. Jesus says when it comes right down to it we make a choice between two destinations. The broad road leads to destruction; the narrow road leads to life.

I used to have to drive back and forth from the Bay Area to San Luis Obispo. It used to be that the only way to San Luis Obispo was through a stretch of

Highway 101 called "Blood Alley." Blood Alley was famous for accidents. It was a narrow stretch of two lane highway with vegetable stands strewn along the way. We hated driving through Blood Alley, but it was the only way to get to San Luis Obispo.

Jesus says the only way to Life; the only way to move from death to Life in a spiritual sense is to get on the narrow path that is every bit as treacherous as Blood Alley. It's all about where you want to end up. If you want to end up spending eternity with Jesus Christ and his people, choose the small gate; choose the narrow path; choose to walk with the few. If you want to spend eternity separated from Him and regretting what might have been, then choose the wide and easy way. But don't be fooled about where it leads. One road leads to life; the other to destruction.

A funny thing happens when we get on the narrow path that leads to life. We find that the few who are with us are not narrow people at all. Somehow this narrow path causes those who are on it to be broad people. We become broad in our concern. We are willing to do for others what we would want them to do for us. We pray and care about more than just our friends, but our enemies as well.

We also become broad in our purpose. Our purpose encompasses another king and another kingdom. We see beyond the back fence of our own concerns. We live for more than just what this world can provide. We live with a sense of the eternal. Our hopes encompass more than just eighty years, but billions and billions of years. That doesn't sound narrow to me. To choose the narrow gate and narrow path is to have a concern as broad as all mankind, a purpose as broad as heaven, and a hope as broad as eternity. There may be just a few, but it's good to be with people like that.

When we choose the narrow gate and narrow path we also find that there is One with us who makes the load lighter. Jesus said, **"Come to me all you are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble at heart, and you will find rest for your souls"** (Mt. 11:28-29). Somehow, Jesus makes the load lighter. Somehow as we walk with Jesus on this narrow way, we find rest.

We have to make a choice. We choose

between two gates, two roads, two groups, and two destinations. Whatever choice we make will turn around and make us.

Recently someone interviewed Larry King and he said this: "I can't make that leap that a lot of people around me have made into belief that there is some judge somewhere. I have a lot of respect for true people of faith.... I've done so many interviews on it. I've always searched. But as someone said, 'Did you ever sit down and read the Bible from cover to cover?' The answer's no, because I don't know who wrote it. I'm too in my head to be into faith. Faith is a wonderful thing. I envy people who have it. I just can't make that leap." Larry King has made a choice.

Charles Colson made a choice too. He opened C.S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*, and he said he found himself face to face with an intellect so disciplined, so lucid, so relentlessly logical that he could only be grateful that he never faced him in a court of law. The more he read the more he knew he had to choose. He said, "I knew the time had come for me. I could not sidestep the central question Lewis had placed before me. Would I accept without reservations Jesus Christ as Lord of my life? It was like a gate before me. There was no way to walk around it. I would step through, or I would remain outside."

Larry King made a choice. Charles Colson made a choice. We all make a choice. The choice is whether or not to accept without reservations that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior of your life. And in the end that choice will turn around and make us.

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