

Chapter 12

SERMON ON THE MOUNT 7

MATTHEW 7 - PART 2

SECTION 1: THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES (Matthew 7:13-14) Scripture List: Matthew 11:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:19-21; Hebrews 12:1-2

- I. Jesus spoke to His disciples about a decision they would have to make between going through the narrow gate along the narrow road that leads to life and the wide gate along the broad path that leads to destruction. He points out that there are many choices that lead to destruction, but only one choice that leads to life.
 - A. The Wide Gate leads to the path of least resistance. One can choose this gate and the path it leads to by taking the easy way. In fact one can choose this gate by doing nothing.
 1. The broad path can be laziness, drifting, letting circumstances or others plan your life.
 2. The broad path can be just being part of the herd, conformism, peer pressure, doing that which is popular.
 3. The broad path can be self-determination, each person just “doing his own thing.” No standards, no absolutes, anything goes. “Everyone did as he saw fit.” (Judges 21:25)
 - B. The Narrow Gate requires a difficult choice. There are not many options and one will not simply drift through the narrow gate and along the narrow path that leads to life. This is a quality decision.
 1. The narrow path is the path that leads to life, both eternal life and a divine quality of life.
 2. The narrow path requires leaving the herd and making choices which may be unpopular. This requires focus, vision, singleness of purpose. It takes self-discipline to stay on the narrow path that leads to life.
 3. The narrow path has standards, absolutes, and structure. God marks out the way in His word and leads us along the narrow path by His Holy Spirit.
- II. The wide gate and the narrow gate lead to different levels of living.
 - A. Many believers are in the Kingdom but not inheriting the Kingdom. They have asked Jesus to forgive their sins and have declared their faith in Christ, but they are not making the choices that lead them along the path of Kingdom Life.
 1. They are not enjoying a God-quality of life. They are discouraged, lacking peace

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and joy. They have little more than those who are not believers in Christ.

2. They are not entering into God's purpose for their lives. There is no progressive maturity, no sense of growth and development. They lack the hunger and thirst for righteousness.
3. They are not realizing their potential in God. They have not discovered their spiritual gifts and are not working to develop effective ways of serving in the Body of Christ.

B. Here are some of the possible levels of living. This determines or is determined by one's choice of the narrow or wide gate.

1. Living that is governed by the flesh. Satisfying the desires of the body, sensuality. This leads to carnality, self-gratification, wrong values.
2. Living that is governed by the soul. This can be intellectualism, will-power, or emotionalism. It is humanistic, and leads to pride and self-exaltation.
3. Living that is governed by the spirit. Walking in the spirit, in relationship and fellowship with God and with others. In touch and in tune with God. Learning to hear, see, speak, decide, and act in the Spirit.

III. The narrow gate, the narrow way, leading to life.

A. Every step in God is a step of faith.

1. A narrow gate to pass through narrows down to a choice, "will you or won't you?" Often the most important decisions in life are a simple yes or no choice.
2. There is a high price to pay for the pearl of great price. One must value the pearl to be willing to sell everything to possess it. So many only see the price, not the reward. (Matthew 13:45-46)
3. When we pay the price, we pass through the gate. We receive a reward. We enter a large place. The narrow gate leads to a larger life, an abundant life.

B. In the military there are increasing levels of training that lead to increasing levels of promotion, privilege, and authority.

1. Basic military training, about eight weeks, is entry-level. Just gets one in the door, so to speak. The individual has an identity as a soldier, but very little privilege and authority.
2. The next level is specialized training for one's military occupation. This is at least another eight weeks and carries with it the possibility of promotion and specialized service.
3. Then one can apply for Officer Candidate School. This is six months or more of very intensive training and discipline, but one comes out as a junior officer and is

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on a completely different level than when he began.

4. Each level of training is more severe and requires more effort and commitment than the previous level but opens up more possibilities of promotion, authority, and reward.
- C. Discipline is not punishment. Punishment is suffering for doing wrong, discipline is suffering for the privilege of promotion or reward. (Hebrews 12:6-8)
1. Love is the motive for discipline and indicates acceptance, all sons are disciplined. No discipline, no relationship.
 2. Reward for accepting the discipline is fellowship, achievement, promotion, new level of responsibility and authority.
- D. Dying to self, self-will, self-achievement: passing through the narrow gate.
1. Initial step: A solid experience of repentance, faith, baptism, "entering the Kingdom."
 2. Progressive steps: The discipline of progressive death to self, to the sin nature. (1 Corinthians 15:31)
 - a. Discipline: acts and deeds, changing behavior, breaking old habit patterns.
 - b. Discipline: attitudes, thoughts and motives. Changed feelings toward people, attitudes about commitment, submission, giving.
 - c. God's Word becomes for us an instrument of discipline. (Hebrews 4:12)
- E. Discipline as a way of life.
1. Understand the training principle. "It won't always be this bad!" There will be seasons of training and preparation. "This too shall pass!" These will be followed by seasons of joy and fulfillment.
 2. The discipline learned is not to be cast aside. We must continue in what we have learned. Each level of discipline and maturity must be built on the practice of the previous level. (Philippians 3:16)
- V. The gate leading to life is small, the road is narrow, and only a few find it.
- A. Choosing the narrow way will bring separations from things, values, places, and people.
 - B. We cannot determine the right way to go by following the majority. Sometimes the majority is wrong.
 - C. As we progress toward the goal God has set for us, we may find that we are more and more often required to stand, even to stand alone for what we believe.

SECTION 2: THE TREE AND ITS FRUIT (Matthew 7:15-20) Scripture List: Judges 9; Ecclesiastes 2:5; Isaiah 61:3; Ezekiel 47:7-12; Matthew 12:33; John 15:1-16; James 3:11-13; Revelation 22:2

- I. When Jesus spoke to His disciples and the crowds about the tree and its fruit, they understood that He was talking about being productive. Just as a healthy tree bears the appropriate fruit in season, a healthy Christian is expected and destined to bear the appropriate fruit.
 - A. Fruit bearing is purposed for every believer. Jesus' teaching in John chapter 15, verses 1 through 8 and verse 16 is the headquarters passage in the New Testament on the subject of bearing fruit. This passage tells us of the essential conditions for fruitfulness, the kind and quality of fruit we are to bear, and the dangerous consequences of unfruitfulness.
 - B. There are three possible states or types of fruitfulness: Good fruit, Bad fruit, No fruit.
 - C. It is the desire and purpose of the Lord that every believer will produce much fruit (John 15:8) and that it be good fruit (Matthew 12:33).

- II. There are several things that are referred to in scripture as fruit, the visible qualities and attitudes and deeds that are produced in a Christian's life:
 - A. Fruit of the spirit, the character of Christ in us. These qualities are produced by the working of the Holy Spirit, in our lives, with our co-operation. (Galatians 5:22-23)
 - B. The fruit of good works or acts of faith. (Matthew 7:15-20, 12:23; John 2:18b; James 2:18)
 - C. The fruit of reproduction: reproducing our faith in others through leading them to Christ, and reproducing the truths and graces we have received in others through discipling them to Christ.
 1. The fruit contains the seed of reproduction.
 2. Seed cannot reproduce, is not fully formed, until the fruit has reached maturity.
 3. The fruit of a Christian in the reproductive sense, is another Christian, brought to the same level of maturity as the reproducer.
 4. Jesus said that He is the good shepherd and we are His sheep. Sheep produce wool, (works, character, results); but they also bear lambs (reproduce themselves).
 - D. Fruit can be results of our labor, efforts, acts of faith, use of our spiritual gifts. Is it working, what is it producing, what are the results? (Matthew 7:20; John 15:1-8)
 1. Teaching has to work when applied to life. Teaching that is only intellectual and informational is not life-transforming, does not bear lasting fruit.
 2. Our spirituality must hold up under the pressure of everyday living.

3. It's not what you know, it's what you do with what you know.

E. Fruit can be the words we speak and the prayers and praise we offer to God. Hebrews refers to praise as the "*fruit of our lips.*" (Hebrews 13:15)

F. There may be a complete lack of fruit. What about the tree that bears no fruit? Jesus said that every branch that bears no fruit will eventually be cut off and every tree that bears no fruit will eventually be cut down. (Matthew 21:18-20; Luke 13:6-9; John 15:2)

III. Insights on fruitfulness.

A. Fruit is a natural product of a healthy plant.

1. It is not necessary to strive or strain to bear fruit. The tree simply puts down roots, draws life, stays healthy, and the fruit will come forth in its season.

2. Productivity is related to planting - location and length of time. We must be sure we are planted in the good soil of a local church where we will be properly nourished, protected, and pruned (disciplined). We must not be frequently transplanting ourselves from one church to another or we will never reach our fruitfulness potential. (Psalm 92:12-14)

B. Fruit bearing is related to maturity. Maturity takes time and cannot be rushed. Ideal conditions allow for maturity to develop at the best rate. You cannot make maturity happen faster by striving for it.

1. An immature tree cannot be fully fruitful. An immature Christian will not be fully fruitful. There is a level of fruitfulness at each level of maturity. Don't settle for less than your best potential.

2. The fruit contains the seed of reproduction and the seed of reproduction must mature in order to produce another tree. Don't expect too much too soon. Be careful about allowing someone to put you in a place of prominence before you are mature enough to stand the strain of it.

C. For maximum fruitfulness a tree must be cared for by a husbandman or orchard keeper. Jesus tell us in John 15 that He is the vine, we are the branches, and His Father is the gardener or vine-dresser. We must be planted in a place where we will be looked after spiritually so that we experience healthy growth and maximum fruitfulness. In a very practical sense, we are to be planted in a local church and the leaders of that church are to look after us spiritually. We must be:

1. Watered - there must be a continual watering cycle - not constant water or it will drown. This has to do with the experience of God's presence in worship, personal devotion, and fellowship.

2. Cultivated and fertilized. This has to do with hearing and responding to God's word, our nourishment, and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit to apply God's Word to our lives. This involves conviction, repentance, and cleansing. (Luke 13:8)

3. Protected at special times from cold, wind, etc. All care of trees must be done at a specific time, season. This involves care from God and others when we are going through difficult times in our lives; times of testing, trials, and temptation.
 4. Kept free from pests that will sap strength or bring disease. This involves being protected from false teachers, wrong doctrine, and wrong-spirited ministries and influences
 5. Pruned - removing that which is unproductive, superfluous, and aimed in the wrong direction. Also that which is used up, has borne its fruit, or is broken. This involves help in removing unproductive activities, attitudes, and practices from our lives. It also involves stopping things which were good and productive at one time but have now run their course. It involves being able to let go of once-productive things so we can move on to the next thing God has for us to be fruitful in.
- D. The fruit of a changed life, a right attitude, and good works is to be a testimony to other believers and to the world of the reality of our relationship with the Lord. If Jesus is the vine and we are branches attached to Him, then the fruit formed in and on us will be a testimony to that. (John 10:37-38; John 15:1-16).
- E. Bearing much fruit brings glory to God. We are designed and destined for maximum fruit bearing. We are not measured by the standards of others or compared to others to determine our fruitfulness. God has a fruit bearing plan and schedule that is uniquely designed for each of us. God is glorified when each of us bears fruit in keeping with our divine potential. (John 15:8)
- IV. Fruit inspection. We are not to be judgmental and critical of others but we are to be Fruit Inspectors. We must wisely check the quality of fruit of ministries, doctrines, methods, and movements. We also must be willing for our fruit to be inspected. Jesus made it clear that good trees are recognized by their good fruit and likewise bad trees are recognized by bad fruit. (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:8)
- A. Good fruit is the fruit of souls saved, people brought to Christ. The tree yields fruit after its kind.
 - B. Good fruit is lasting fruit, fruit that remains. That which stands the test of time and circumstance.
 - C. Good fruit is the fruit of the Spirit, the character qualities produced in us by the work of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
 - D. Good fruit is fruit that is in season. We must not only bear last year's or last season's fruit, but we must be fruitful in whatever season we find ourselves in.

SECTION 3: OBEDIENCE (Matthew 7:21-23) Scripture List: Exodus 19:5; Numbers 9:23; Psalm 143:10; Isaiah 1:19; Mark 3:35; Luke 9:23-26, 11:28; John 13:17, 14:15, 15:10

- I. God requires obedience from us and rewards obedience in us. In Exodus chapter 19, verse 5, He relates obedience to enjoying the blessings of covenant relationship, and in Isaiah chapter 1,

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verse 19 He relates obedience to enjoying the prosperity He wants us to have. (Exodus 19:5; Isaiah 1:19)

- II. Obedience is not an optional extra for the Christian believer. He is our Father and we are His children, He is Lord and we are his subjects, He is the Master and we are His disciples.
 - A. Kingdom of God relationships are built on the basis of authority and submission, command and obedience. Jesus is Lord.
 - B. Victory in spiritual warfare is impossible without obedience. Disobedience removes us from our proper place in the authority structure. When we attempt to deal with spiritual conflicts from a position of disobedience we find ourselves powerless.

- III. The pattern of obedience must be established from the beginning. Obedience is to be our response to the gospel. We are not only to believe the gospel, but we are to obey the gospel. (Romans 6:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17)
 - A. The relationship established through our birth into the Kingdom of God is: King-subject, Master-disciple, Father-child. Obedience is a key to fellowship in any of these relationships.
 - B. Blessing and fulfillment are to accompany obedience. (Isaiah 1:19)
 - 1. What about the anointing and blessing of God on those who are disobedient and rebellious?
 - a. Anointing is not proof of maturity. Samuel anointed David as the next king when David was a boy. It was twenty years until David reached maturity as King of Israel.
 - b. Anointing is not proof of divine approval. God blesses wherever and whenever He can. We are all imperfect, but God uses and blesses as and when He can. But greater obedience allows for greater blessing.
 - c. There is spiritual aggressiveness in faith that can appropriate kingdom power and blessing, but this does not indicate full approval. (Matthew 11:12)
 - 2. The Lord purposes to do a solid, stable work of character development. Many times the fruit of “anointing without obedience” does not last. God is the one who sees if the fruit or results are real and lasting.
 - a. Often those who have “anointing without obedience” eventually fall through sin and cause a great deal of hurt, disillusionment, and disgrace.
 - b. Those who are a product of the ministry of those who have “anointing without obedience” often manifest the same characteristics and the fault is passed on to another spiritual generation.

- IV. Obedience is to be willingly offered, not forced.

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- A. The thing that makes obedience real is the possibility of disobedience, choice. Just as Jesus was genuinely tempted to avoid the difficult and painful task before Him, but chose instead to obey His Father's will, we are free to choose. When we freely choose to obey our Father's will He delights in us and we are blessed.
 - B. Does God have to coax and pamper you to keep you in the kingdom? When God deals with you through parents, employers, or church leaders, do they have to hint and suggest or are you open and responsive to clear speech? (Your attitude speaks louder than your mouth).
 - C. *If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land.* Some are "in the land" but not "eating the best from the land." Some are dwelling in a sun-scorched land through rebellion. (Psalm 68:6; Isaiah 1:19)
- V. Areas of life where obedience must function.
- A. Obedience to the will of God. (Obeying His purpose brings fulfillment - obeying His desires and wishes brings joy.)
 - B. Obedience to the word of God: Its principles, its promises, the Spirit-quickened truths. Hearing and doing establishes foundation, hearing and doing releases faith, hearing and doing validates our confession. (Luke 6:46-49; James 1:22)
 - C. Obedience to the authority of God is a key to fellowship with God and with those He sets in authority over us. Obedience to parents, to employers, to civil laws, to church leaders. (Hebrews 13:7, 17)
 - D. Walking in the direction of the Holy Spirit. Learn the voice (not voices) of God. Learn quick and proper response in faith and wisdom. When the attitude is right it is safe to respond to "God's voice." Jesus is the Good Shepherd and His sheep hear and know His voice. Knowing His voice brings confidence, "hearing voices" brings confusion. (John 10:27)
- VI. The kind of obedience God wants is simple, whole-hearted obedience to His will and His word as He has revealed it to us. (1 Samuel 15:22)
- A. Not doing one's own will in the name of the Lord. Don't use "God told me..." to justify doing your own thing.
 - B. Not rebelling then grudgingly obeying. Don't waste God's time, your time, and miss opportunities by being slow to respond or grudging in your response.
 - C. We must obey simply and quickly, hearing and doing, a willing response from a willing heart.

SECTION 4: FOUNDATIONS - TESTING (Matthew 7:24-27) Scripture List: Luke 6:46-49; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; Hebrews 12:26-29; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:12-13

- I. Jesus taught that a proper foundation is important because the storm will come. (See the account of the wise and foolish builders, Luke 6:46-49).

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- A. The same storm came to both houses but the outcome was dramatically different. The foundation made all the difference.
- B. Jesus makes it very clear that foundation is not laid through knowledge of truth (merely hearing His words) but through response to truth (hearing and doing - obeying His words).
- C. A proper foundation is important because there will be a shaking of all things. The result of the shaking is that the shakable is removed and the unshakable remains. The shaking tests the foundation. The shaking exposes the faulty foundation and confirms the proper foundation. (Hebrews 12:26-29)
- D. A proper foundation is absolutely important to withstand the storms and shakings of life.
 - 1. Foundation is important because everyone will at some time experience the storms of life and everyone will experience some kind of personal earthquake, a shaking.
 - 2. The survival and endurance of the structure is determined by having laid a proper foundation. Tall buildings require deep foundations. Long-term structures require solid foundations.
 - 3. Foundation is laid by doing the Word, not merely by hearing the Word. It is our response to God's Word (hear, believe, and obey) that gives us a foundation for life; a foundation that will face the storm and endure... James 1:22 "*Do what it says.*" James 2:20 "*faith without works is dead.*"

II. What is the purpose of testing and trials in the life of a Christian believer?

- A. Test: an examination or trial to prove the value or ascertain the nature of something. An event or set of circumstances that proves or tries qualities.
- B. The great question addressed in the story of Job, "Why do the righteous suffer?"
Conclusions:
 - 1. The cause and purpose of suffering is not always clear upon examination.
 - 2. Suffering may be beneficial; strengthens character, enriches personality.
 - 3. Man cannot fully understand the justice of God: God deals in eternity, we perceive only a small part of the picture.
 - 4. The righteous who suffer may be misunderstood by others, never by God.
 - 5. God provides grace for times of trouble. When you cannot understand, trust.

III. Scriptures on Testing and Trials

- A. **Shaking** - Removing that which is not solid, confirming that which is solid. (Hebrews 12:26-27)

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- B. **Fire** - To consume flammable material and to purify and confirm that which cannot be consumed. The fire reveals quality. The fire removes sin from the person (God's judgment is declared against sin: "Remove sin, remove the judgment; Cling to sin, receive judgment." (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)
 - C. **Proving by experience** - Deacons, elders must first be proved, tested, found acceptable by observing their conduct and lifestyle, then recognized. (1 Timothy 3:10)
 - D. **Trials** - The testing of faith, character, and attitude by difficult circumstances, unfair treatment, persecution, and opposition. Trials are a part of the normal Christian life. There are seasons of blessing and seasons of testing. We can confidently rejoice in the results. (1 Peter 1:6-7; 1 Peter 4:12-13)
- IV. When we experience trials our faith is being tested. *"These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine."*
- A. When faith is being tested, we must not panic and throw away our confidence in God, His Word, and His purpose for our lives. (Romans 10:8, 17; 2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 10:35-39)
 - B. Testing shows us our needs, our strengths, where our dependency is, and God's faithfulness. Whether it is the storm, the fire, or the shaking, each trial has something to teach us.
 - C. All testing is for a purpose and for a season: weeping may endure for the night, there is light at the end of the tunnel. (Psalm 30:5)
 - D. The testing of our faith produces a result more precious than gold: the manifestation of His glory in us and through us. (1 Peter 1:6-7)
- V. The Believer's response to testing:
- Respond with rejoicing, not resentment. Believing, not discouragement. Obedience, not rebellion. Testing, storms, and trouble, are not proof of sin in your life. When trouble comes, don't allow condemnation to come with it. When trials and testings come, say "Yes, Lord", and run to Him, not from Him. (Romans 8:1)

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

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1. When Jesus taught about the wide and narrow gates, do you feel He was telling us to avoid contact with people who are not Christians and to avoid all activities that are not "Christian" activities? What do you feel are the keys to choosing the narrow gate and staying on the narrow path that leads to life?

2. Jesus strongly emphasized the importance of obedience to the will of the Father and to Jesus' commands to us. But He also made it clear that we don't become a child of God through obedience or the keeping of the law. How can we practically understand the balance between obedience and freedom, between law and grace?