

The Narrow Gate— Part 3: Focused Pursuit

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus defined two contrasting messages (gates or paths) and lifestyles in the Sermon on the Mount: the broad way and the narrow way.

The broad way has disastrous consequences in giving people confidence to live a life of sinful compromise rather than repenting.

The narrow way is difficult on our human sin nature and requires self-denial but leads to life. To walk on this path we must leave behind many things that are not in God's will—lust, pride, covetousness, etc. and embrace a life of focused pursuit of God.

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Matthew 16:24

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33

Matthew 6 teaches a lifestyle of how to be focused in our pursuit of God. This narrow path will produce tender hearts towards Jesus, clear minds to know the will of God and impact to those around us.

How does it do that? Humility. When we give ourselves to this focused pursuit we're constantly reminded of weakness (like going to the gym). This weakness produces humility and reliance on God. That's what He's after. Paul learned it like this:

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." ...For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

As we do our part and voluntarily do the things that cause weakness and humility in us God gives spiritual power and authority to be who we're called to be and do what we're called to do.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. So humble yourselves before God...Come close to God, and God will come close to you. James 4:6-8

This path that Jesus lays out in Matthew 6 marks us with humility because our attempt at them is usually very small and weak. We find out quickly we're prone to be distracted, we don't stay with it and our heart's lack of passion is exposed. This very weakness and humility, if embraced with endurance is the KEY TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH that will lead to being more Christ-like in our attitude and actions. DON'T QUIT!

One phrase in Matthew 6 that is repeated often is this: "My Father will reward you". This spiritual growth, this growing of a tender heart and a clear mind to know His will is part of this reward.

without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6

The Focused Pursuit: Be charitable (give generously), Be prayerful (pray constantly) and Be forgiving (be unoffendable)

1- Be charitable. This includes giving of our time, talents and money.

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. Matthew 6:1-4

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share...1 Timothy 6:18-19

I want you to know what God in his kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more...They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

In Caesarea there lived a Roman army officer named Cornelius...He was a devout, God-fearing man. He gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God. One afternoon about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he saw an angel of God coming toward him. "Cornelius!" the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. "What is it, sir?" he asked the angel. And the angel replied, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!" Acts 10:1-4

Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. Luke 6:38

He's inviting us to be instruments of His generosity that He might in turn wow our hearts with His generosity towards us.

In our GRACE mission the A represents Act out our faith. Giving our tithes, offerings and talents is how we do that.

2- Be prayerful. This includes reading the Scriptures, praying about everything, worship and fasting.

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Matthew 6:5-8

When we commit to this narrow path of prayer and Bible devotion we are acknowledging that man does not survive by his own natural strengths but by genuine relationship with God and His Word; that true life is experienced with God.

Again our GRACE mission the E stands for Exalt. We're committing to be a church that exalts the name of Jesus in our worship, prayer and pursuit of Him in the Word.

We have another Prayer Sprint the last week of this month as well as our ongoing weekly prayer meetings.

"We are to pray in times of adversity, lest we become faithless and unbelieving. We are to pray in times of prosperity, lest we become boastful and proud. We are to pray in times of danger, lest we become fearful and doubting. We are to pray in times of security, lest we become self-sufficient." – Billy Graham

Every year we read through the Bible together. Join us. Get the plan at any of our info booths, online or get the YouVersion Bible app.

Listen to this Psalm:

Give me understanding and I shall keep Your law...I shall observe it with my whole heart 38 Establish Your word to Your servant who is devoted to fearing you...50 This is my comfort in my affliction, Your word has given me life...114 You are my shield and my hiding place, I hope in Your word Psalms 119: 38, 50, 114

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals and to prayer. Acts 2:42

3- Be forgiving. This includes being forgiving and gracious to our enemies.

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15

Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" Matthew 18:21-22

Forgiving others guards our hearts from offense and bitterness.

Don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27

Our lack of quickly forgiving others shows our lack of receiving God's forgiveness in our own lives.

The power to forgive from our heart is easier when we open our mouths and speak blessing.

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you Matthew 5:44

We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who persecute us. 1 Corinthians 4:12