



SESSION 6

TRANSFORMED BY MY CHOICES

► ***The Point***

Choose to follow Jesus.

► ***The Passage***

Matthew 7:13-27

► ***The Bible Meets Life***

If you've ever tried to add oil or transmission fluid to your car without a funnel, you know the value of this little utensil. Funnels have the unique ability to gather material from a wide space and condense them into a specific, narrow location.

Life can be like a funnel at times, and not in a good way. Our culture offers a huge amount of choices and opportunities that seem to provide fulfillment. Yet when we follow that path, we quickly find ourselves squeezed into a narrow, unfulfilling existence.

As we'll see in Matthew 7, Jesus taught that the way to true fulfillment is like an upside-down funnel. If we begin on a narrow path—His path—we'll soon discover a spacious life overflowing with joy, purpose, and peace. One path comes with many easy options, but it quickly closes on us. The other path is narrow and well-defined, but it opens to a full and joyful life. The choice is ours.

► ***The Setting***

Jesus met His followers on a mountainside and taught them about growing as disciples. His instruction has come to be called the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5–7). Later, as these same disciples lived out what Jesus taught, they displayed a notable and powerful transformation in their lives. Jesus brought His instruction to a close with a series of comparisons. Each comparison challenged His listeners to make the wise choice of devoting themselves to Him completely.

What does the Bible say?

Matthew 7:13-27

That day (v. 22)—Refers to the day of judgment at the end of human history, also called “the Day of the Lord,” when God will intervene in our world to judge humanity.

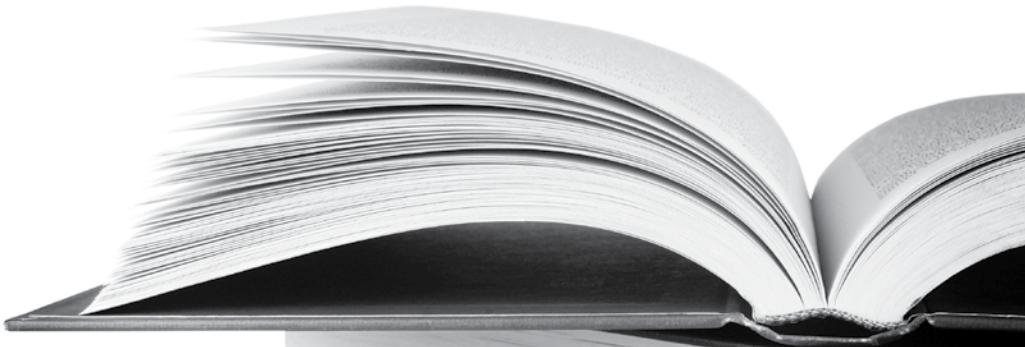
Lawbreakers (v. 23)—Those who have not experienced salvation through the forgiveness offered by Jesus will be judged according to God’s law.

13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. **14** How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

15 “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. **16** You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? **17** In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. **18** A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** So you’ll recognize them by their fruit.

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?’ **23** Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!’

24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. **25** The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn’t act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. **27** The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!”



GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 53 of the PSG: **“What are some of the best choices you’ve made?”**

Notes

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use snacks to create an object lesson centered on the theme of “choices.” Bring two (or more) kinds of snacks to the group gathering and display both in covered dishes at the front of the room. Once your group members arrive, encourage them to choose one of the covered dishes and

stand in front of it. When everyone has made their choice, open the lids to both dishes and reveal what’s inside.

Note: Making sure that both food options are appealing to your group will create a smooth transition to Question #1, above. Deciding between two appealing snacks is always a great choice!

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 54 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of choosing to follow Jesus by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 54 of the PSG: **“Choose to follow Jesus.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by declaring that all people will make a choice whether to follow Christ with their lives. Ask for wisdom as you finish this study of the Sermon on the Mount—pray that God would grant you a fresh perspective on the incredible importance of that choice.

TIP: Grow with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog. Visit lifeway.com/groupministry.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ “Enter through the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who go through it. ¹⁴ How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it.

READ: Matthew 7:13-14 on page 55 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

+ SUMMARIZE: Help group members walk through the major points on page 56 of the PSG:

1. “Jesus told us to ‘Enter through the narrow gate’ (v. 13). Jesus Himself is that Gate, which He made clear in John’s Gospel: ‘I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn’t listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.’ (John 10:7-9).”
2. “The path that leads to God is narrow not because it’s difficult to become a Christian, but because you can get to Him only one way—through faith in Jesus.”
3. “Seeking this narrow gate—Jesus—is the most liberating choice we will ever make. The narrow gate opens wide to reveal a joyful and fulfilling life, but that door won’t stay open forever.”

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 56 of the PSG: **“How have you experienced the truth of these verses?”**

Note: This is an opportunity for group members to reveal their stories—specifically their salvation stories. Therefore, allow extra time for people to determine what they want to say and work up the nerve to say it.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What have you found difficult about the road that leads to life?

TRANSITION: We’ve seen that following Jesus involves a specific choice. As we move to verses 15-23, we’ll see that our choice is always accompanied by specific fruit in our lives—or by the lack of such fruit.

Matthew 7:13-14

[Verse 13] Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged His disciples to make wise choices with their lives. Their choices would determine whether or not they would have fulfillment in their walk with Him. We have the same challenge. The good news of Christ does nothing for a lost person until he or she personally decides to receive His free gift of salvation.

For Christians, the challenge of discipleship requires a choice, too. Jesus couched the choice in a simple but striking way, described first as gates and then as paths. Each gate offers a completely different life path. Entering the **narrow gate** leads to a life of restraint and discipline. In fact, the word for *narrow* carries the idea of restrictions or obstacles. By contrast, entering the **wide gate** requires no restraints. A person who chooses that gate will feel no pressure to live according to God's spiritual standard. The word for **broad** alludes to a picture of prosperity. With plenty of resources to indulge themselves, people who take the broad road simply meander through life without thought of spiritual concerns.

The wide gate and the broad road can appear attractive at first. But in the end, it's a foolish choice that **leads to destruction**. Those who reject the gospel because they find it restrictive will eventually regret their choice. In due time, they will see they have set themselves up for destruction now and in eternity. Believers who choose the wide gate and broad road of self-indulgence will come to regret their choice as well. They will eventually realize they've taken a path leading directly toward regret.

[Verse 14] For nonbelievers, entering the narrow gate implies responding to a message they might want to reject at first. They must repent of their sins and trust Christ alone in order to be saved. Repentance can be a repulsive notion. Since confessing sin honestly requires a heart of humility, an unsaved individual may consider repentance too restraining or confining. Consequently, the gate to new life in Christ may appear too restrictive. The narrow gate for believers also signifies restrictions. It means embracing Jesus' instruction and the accompanying restraints. It means devotion to the spiritual disciplines of praying, giving, and fasting (see 6:1-18). It means turning our backs on worry and entrusting our lives into His care (see vv. 19-34). It means we refuse to be critical of people, instead of treating them in a way that reflects God's treatment of us (see 7:1-12).

Jesus said entering the narrow gate of discipleship leads down a **difficult** path. The original word brings opposition and persecution to mind. Believers who choose the path of discipleship can count on opposition to their choice because they have chosen devotion to Christ.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

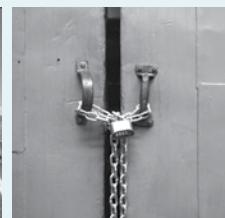
Matthew 7:15-23

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. ¹⁶ You’ll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can’t produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So you’ll recognize them by their fruit. ²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?’ ²³ Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!’



DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “The Hope of Heaven” on page 57 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their response.

Which of the following images best illustrates your understanding of what it means to approach Jesus as the “narrow gate”? Use the space below the images to explain.



Why do many in our culture find it difficult to believe Jesus is the only way to salvation?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some practical examples of good and bad fruit?

READ: Matthew 7:15-23 on page 55 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 58 of the PSG: **“What is our role in producing fruit as we are transformed by God’s Spirit?”**

GUIDE: Read the second and third paragraphs on page 58 of the PSG (including the bullet list) to introduce the concept of living as “fruit inspectors” within the church.

Matthew 7:15-23

[Verse 15] Jesus moved from wise decisions about following Him to warning about **false prophets**. He identified these as dangerous deceivers who take on the appearance of loyal disciples. They appear to be sincere and authentic, but they're not. Jesus' image of **wolves in sheep's clothing** works well to describe their ability to shroud their true identity.

[Verses 16-20] Jesus shifted to another word picture: **fruit**. This allowed Him to nail down a critical point about false prophets. Namely, the only way to expose them is time. Disciples have to observe what false prophets actually produce. Kingdom citizens produce fruit in the shape of attitudes and behaviors that verify they belong to Jesus—fruit plainly seen in their eagerness to surrender to His leadership, their initiative to live according to His ways, and their determination to trust Him completely. Jesus called those attitudes and behaviors **good fruit**. Nothing but Christ-like character traits can come from a relationship with Jesus, just as a **good tree produces good fruit**.

The image of **bad fruit** calls to mind the attitudes and behaviors that certify the absence of a personal walk with the Lord. The problem comes in identifying bad fruit at first. Over time, however, such fruit will show itself as bad, and the tree from which it came can be identified. When we notice people habitually behaving in ways that don't reflect an intimate walk of obedience and trust in the Lord, then we must be ready to conclude they don't belong to Him. They have not taken root in the Lord.

Like trees that produce bad fruit, false prophets have no value in the kingdom of God. He casts them aside like a farmer would get rid of a bad tree.

[Verses 21-23] Jesus described the day false prophets would be held accountable for their deception. Kingdom citizens would be characterized by their eagerness to do **the will of My Father in heaven**. But people who pretended to be His disciples would face Him in judgment. They would refer to Him as **Lord, Lord**. Although false prophets used a term that reflected complete submission, their lives said something entirely different about their walk with Him. Jesus also noted that they would try to remind Him of their prophecies and miracles—but their reminders wouldn't change Jesus' verdict.

Pay attention to the way Jesus brought the conversation with false prophets to a close. He announced that they didn't have a personal relationship with Him. He couldn't do anything through them because He didn't live in Him. And He didn't live in them because they never surrendered their lives to Him. In the end, Christ will remove them from His sight. They will suffer the fate of anyone else who refuses to submit themselves to Him.



15 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!

READ: Matthew 7:24-27 on page 55 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to skim the first three paragraphs on page 59 of the PSG. Ask them to consider the shaky foundation of what we are typically promised with the "American dream."

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 59 of the PSG: "**What are some difficult choices you are facing right now?**"

Note: This is a personal question, which means it's an opportunity for your group members to be vulnerable about their lives—perhaps even to confess their sin. Embrace the opportunity, but don't force anything.

 **DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 59 of the PSG: "**How can we help one another continue to build on the right foundation?**"

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 59 of the PSG:

Building on sand is easy. Building a life on the solid rock of Jesus and His teachings often calls for hard choices—but it's worth it. Every time. When you've tasted the goodness of God (see Ps. 34:8), you'll want to leave the beach and dig deep into the rock.

GUIDE: Refer back to "The Point" for this session: "**Choose to follow Jesus.**" If time permits, encourage group members to share any final thoughts and ask any final questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
When has your foundation in Christ helped you through a major storm?

Matthew 7:24-27

[Verse 24] Jesus brought His instruction to a close with yet another comparison—this time between two foundations. Building on a solid foundation required taking His instruction seriously. Listeners weren't merely to hear His words with no intention of acting on them. On the contrary, He expected them to build their lives on a relationship with Him and to practice the principles He taught. In the parable, a **sensible** builder constructed his house **on the rock**. Wise builders would take that critical step because they knew floods would come along and destroy a house built elsewhere. Likewise, we make a wise decision when we build our lives on Jesus Christ.

[Verse 25] The wisdom of giving our lives to Him might not be evident at first. But one day the storm will come. In fact, when one storm comes, sometimes another follows almost immediately with hurricane-force winds of stress and strain. The heavy rain of pain and misery seems relentless, and the flood waters of despair and hopelessness constantly rise. When the storm finally ends, the wisdom of the builder will be evident. The house built **on the rock** endures the calamity. Similarly, a person who surrenders his or her life to Christ will find a solid foundation in the tough times.

[Verses 26-27] The outcome will be radically different for those who ignore Jesus. Having rejected Him, they must choose another life foundation. They may choose to stake their lives on making money, earning prestige, gaining power, relationships, and so on.

But when storms come along, the **foolish** person's foundation for living will collapse in a terrible torrent of trouble washing over it. Houses built near water could have foundations of nothing more than sand. With a weak, sandy foundation, the house would never survive heavy rain, relentless wind, and powerful flood waters. Jesus emphasized the devastating outcome of the poor foundation by referring to it as a gigantic **collapse**.

Lost people who refuse to give their lives to Christ will regret their foolish choice. Jesus offers the only foundation that will endure life's challenges. Eventually the storm of judgment will come. If not before, that's when they will see for themselves their foolishness in rejecting Christ.

Believers do well to heed the warning in Jesus' parable, too. When we decide to nurture our relationship with Him as His disciple, we make a wise choice. When we take His instruction seriously, center our lives in Him, and consistently live according to His ways, we are transformed. We'll face the storms of life with spiritual strength that comes from our intimate walk with Him.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 60 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider how their lives will reflect Jesus' teachings in the week to come, including the following suggestions:



- ▶ **Enter the narrow gate.** If you haven't experienced the salvation offered by Jesus Christ, now is the time. Speak with your pastor or a fellow group member about what it means to choose the narrow path that opens up to a full and abundant life. (*Note: see the inside cover of this Leader Guide for more information on leading others to follow Christ.*)
- ▶ **Move toward community.** Take a step to become more involved in your church community. This could include taking on a leadership role, volunteering for a new ministry, becoming more engaged in your group, and so on.
- ▶ **Spread the Word.** Sharing the message of the gospel is an important part of following Jesus. This week, make a commitment to speak with at least one person about what God has done in your life.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 60 of the PSG:

If you're not careful, this world will funnel your days into a crass and cramped version of the American Dream. Don't let it happen. Choose the narrow gate offered by Jesus, and find life.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking God for the wisdom you've had the privilege to study in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you internalize that wisdom as you continue to be transformed into the image of Christ.