Two Gates, Two Roads: The Narrow Way

MATTHEW 7:13-14 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

The crowd is not proof you're going the right way, because the road that feels easy and looks well-attended is exactly the one Jesus says ends in ruin, and the way to real life is a gate you have to choose to step through on purpose.

Opening Lines

Picture two gates in an old walled town. One is huge, thrown open all day, carts and crowds pouring through without a second thought. The other is a side door so narrow a man with a heavy pack has to set it down and stoop. Jesus says everyone's life is walking toward one of those two gates. Tonight we ask which one our feet are actually pointed at.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get every person to see that 'everybody's doing it' is not a map, and to name one place they've been drifting through the wide gate simply because it was easier. The win is a specific step toward the narrow door, not agreement that narrow doors exist.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the second and third discussion questions before you cut the moment where each person names their own easy drift. The naming is the whole point.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the honest gap between 'the crowd agrees' and 'Jesus disagrees' — the moment someone admits they've been following the traffic instead of the truth. Protect that moment with silence.
- Your prep: Walk your own week and find the one broad-road habit you've been drifting into because resisting is a hassle. If you can't name yours, you'll only teach this passage as an idea, and the room will smell it.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening with the two-gate drawing (5 min). Read 13-14 and teach the word thlibō with the shoulder-scraping doorway image (8 min). Questions 1-3, staying long on 3 with the drill (18 min). Two-texts-in-tension on question 4 (8 min). Commitments out loud and big idea verbatim (6 min). Transformation lives in question 3. If short, cut question 2 first.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening — 'what did you start doing because everyone else was' (8 min).

Read the passage, teach the word (10 min). Questions 1-3, drill hard on 3 until every person names a concrete action and a check-in name (25 min). Question 4 tension (8 min). Commitments and spontaneous prayer over named things (9 min). Transformation lives in the drill on question 3. Cut question 2 first, then 5.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening question about following the traffic (5 min). Read 13-14 aloud together (3 min). Straight to question 3 — where are you drifting through the wide gate — and stay there (15 min). One take-home action each, name a check-in (5 min). Short prayer over what they named (2 min). Transformation lives entirely in the honest drift confession. Cut nothing but keep it to one question.

One Thing Deeply

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Instead of racing through all four apply points, you pick ONE and stay with it until it costs somebody something. Remember week 3 and week 8, where you practiced going slow on a single idea? Level four asks a harder rep: don't just linger on one point, refuse to move on until at least one person has named a concrete, checkable action out loud with a name and a day attached. 'I'll turn off the show earlier' is not deep enough. 'I'm cutting the 10pm scroll Tuesday and Marcus is texting me Wednesday morning to check' is the rep. Your job is to keep gently returning to that one thing — 'okay, but what specifically, and who checks?' — while the room wants to escape into generalities.

Why This Passage Matters

This is one of the bluntest things Jesus ever said, and it lands on the exact fear most of us live by: the fear of being the odd one out. Every instinct we have treats the crowd as safety. If everyone's doing it, it must be fine. If most people I respect believe this, it can't be wrong. Jesus takes that instinct and calmly tells his listeners it will walk them straight to ruin. The wide gate isn't wide because it's evil-looking; it's wide because it's easy and everyone's already there. That's what makes teaching this passage so urgent right now. Your room lives in a culture that treats consensus as truth and awkwardness as sin, and Jesus quietly reverses both. But notice he doesn't leave them anxious. The narrow gate is narrow, but it's open, and elsewhere he says he himself is that gate — the One who came looking for the lost first. You get to hand people both the warning and the mercy in the same breath. Few passages let a teacher do that. You're not scaring anyone. You're pointing at a door that a nail-pierced hand is holding wide open, and telling them it's worth stooping to enter. That is a privilege to say out loud.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach this, do the exercise yourself, on paper, this week. Sit down and finish this sentence honestly: 'The place I've been walking the wide road lately, just because it's easier than resisting, is _____.' Not a churchy answer. The real one — the scroll, the

silence when you should've spoken, the show, the friendship you're coasting in. Then write the harder, better thing and a day you'll do it. If you walk into the room having already stooped through your own narrow gate this week, you'll teach with the quiet authority of someone who actually went through the door instead of pointing at it. If you skip this step, the room will hear a lecture. If you don't do the drill, you can't run the drill.

Bring Your Own Story

- PROMPT: A time you went along with a crowd on something you knew was wrong, just to avoid the awkward moment — and what it cost you later.
- PROMPT: A moment you took the harder, unpopular path with God or with people, and only afterward realized it was the way to life.
- PROMPT: A friend who assumed they were fine with God because everyone around them believed the same easy things — and the conversation you did or didn't have.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'I've always stood firm for truth in tough conversations.' Real — 'I laughed along at a joke I knew was cruel because everyone else was laughing, and I felt it in my chest for an hour after.'
- GUARDRAIL: Keep it raw and unresolved, not a tidy testimony with a bow on it — the full storytelling coaching is back in week 1's drill.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Draw two gates on the board — a huge open one with stick-figure crowds pouring through, and a tiny side door with one person stooping. Ask: 'Which one would you naturally walk toward on a normal day, no thinking required?' Let them answer honestly before you read the verses. The gap between their honest answer and Jesus' words is your whole lesson."

Concrete image before abstract claim — let them see it before they judge it.

SMALL GROUP: "Ask around the circle: 'Name one thing you started doing mostly because everyone else was doing it.' Keep it light — a show, a phone, a way of talking. Then read verses 13-14 and let the room sit with the fact that Jesus just called the crowd a bad map."

Start with a shared human instinct so no one feels singled out.

COFFEE: "'Jesus says few people find the way to life, and the crowd is no guide. Where in your life right now are you just following the traffic?' Then stop talking and let your friend actually answer."

One honest question over a table beats a prepared speech.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word behind 'narrow the way' in verse 14 — tethlimmenē, from thlibō, a word that means pressed, squeezed, hemmed in. It's the same family of word Paul uses for

tribulation, for being crushed on every side. The narrow way isn't just small; it's a squeeze. Here's the physical image: have the room imagine walking through a doorway so tight your shoulders scrape both sides and you have to drop whatever you're carrying to get through. The wide gate lets you keep your cart, your crowd, your comfortable pack of habits. The narrow gate makes you set it all down and turn sideways. That's not a threat. It's just the shape of the door. Then land here and go quiet: 'Small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life.' (Let the silence sit. Count to ten before you say another word.)

Discussion Questions

1. When you read 'many enter through it' — the wide gate — what's your gut reaction? Comfort or discomfort?

Coaching note: You want honesty, not the right answer. Most people are quietly comforted by crowds, and admitting that is the first crack of light. Don't correct the first honest answer; thank it.

If it stalls: Simple yes/no: 'When most people around you agree on something, does that make you feel safer about it? Just be honest.'

2. Jesus says the crowd is no proof of safety. Where do we actually treat 'everybody thinks this' as if it settled the question?

Coaching note: Push for real examples, not abstractions about 'the culture.' If someone only names other people's blind spots, gently turn it: 'Where do YOU do that?'

If it stalls: 'Name one opinion you hold mostly because the people you respect hold it — you've never really checked it yourself.'

3. The narrow gate is one you 'enter through' — a deliberate step, not a drift. Where in your life have you drifted through the wide gate lately just because it was easier?

Coaching note: This is the heart of the drill. Slow way down. Do not let anyone escape into generalities. Keep asking 'what specifically?' until it's concrete.

If it stalls: 'Think about last night. What's the one thing you did just because resisting it was too much effort?'

4. Let's hold two texts together. Jesus says 'few find it,' yet in Luke 19 he says he came 'to seek and to save the lost,' and he calls himself the open door. Both are true. What has to be true for both to stand at once?

Coaching note: This is the two-texts-in-tension move. Don't let them collapse it into one verse. The gate is genuinely narrow AND genuinely held open by a nail-pierced hand. Sit in the tension; the wrestling is the learning.

If it stalls: 'Is the narrow way narrow because God is stingy, or because it runs through one Person? What difference does that make?'

5. If you're honest, which gate are your feet actually pointed at this week — not in theory, but in how you're spending your evenings, your words, your money?

Coaching note: This is the commitment question. Let it be quiet and personal. You're not fishing for confessions out loud; you're setting up the take-home actions. Give them permission to answer only to God.

If it stalls: 'Pick one area — evenings, words, or money — and just say to yourself which road it's on. You don't have to say it out loud.'

Questions You May Hear

"Does 'few find it' mean most people go to hell?"

Jesus does say the wide road is crowded and leads to destruction, and he doesn't soften it. But hold it next to Luke 19:10 — he came to seek and save the lost, and holds the narrow gate wide open. He states the two roads bluntly and then stands in the fork as the door himself; our job is to point people to him, not to tally numbers.

"Isn't 'make every effort to enter' salvation by works?"

No. In Luke 13 'make every effort' means earnest effort, but the gate itself is a Person — Jesus says 'I am the gate.' The effort isn't earning your way in; it's the deliberate step of not just drifting with the crowd. You enter by trusting him, and that always costs the comfort of the wide road.

"What exactly were these narrow gates he's picturing?"

Every walled town had a huge main gate open all day for carts, animals, and crowds, and smaller side doors a single person passed through carefully, sometimes stooping. His hillside listeners had walked through both many times, so the picture landed instantly: easy-and-crowded versus cramped-and-noticed-by-few.

"Why would God make the way to life so hard to find?"

It's not narrow because God is stingy; it's narrow because salvation runs through one crucified and risen Person, and there's no wider path around him. Proverbs 14:12 warns the way that 'seems right' ends in death — the broad road feels reasonable, which is exactly what makes it dangerous.

For Experienced Leaders

- Don't let this become a rant about 'the culture out there.' The moment you point the wide gate at other people, the room relaxes and stops examining itself. Keep turning it inward.
- Resist the urge to soften 'destruction' with a quick joke. Say it plainly, then say the mercy just as plainly. The weight and the open door both matter, and rushing past the weight cheapens the door.
- When you land on 'narrow the way that leads to life' and go silent, someone will try to fill the silence with a comment. Hold up a gentle hand. The silence is doing the teaching.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person finish this out loud: 'The one place I've been walking the wide road is ___, and this week I'm going to ___.' Then attach a name — who checks in on them.

Close by praying out loud over the actual things people just named — the specific habit, the awkward conversation they're avoiding, the friend they're going to text. Don't

reach for a written prayer; saying their own words back to God, and thanking Jesus that the narrow gate is held open by his own hand, is the point.

If you run out of time: If you only get to question 3, you've done the real work. That's the drill and the heart of the passage. Don't rush to 4 and 5 just to finish the list.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, send the group one line: 'Did you set your pack down at the narrow gate yet, or are you still carrying it? One-word answer.' Then actually reply to whoever answers.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/7-13-14/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Two gates in your own life this week — the wide one you drifted through: _____
- 'The crowd said ___, but I knew Jesus said ___.' Fill in a recent moment:
- The one 'pack' you'd have to set down to go through the narrow gate (a habit, a comfort, a grudge):
- Hold both and write what you think: 'Few find it' AND 'he came to seek and save the lost.' Why are both true?
- Which gate are your feet actually pointed at this week? One honest word:

Take-home actions:

- Next time everyone agrees on something you know goes against Christ, don't nod along to keep the peace — say the true thing gently, even if the moment gets awkward. You'll know tonight which road you took.
- Pick one habit you've slid into just because it's easier than resisting — the show, the scrolling — and choose the harder, better thing today. Name it and turn from it while it's still light out.
- Think of a friend who's coasting, assuming they're fine with God because everyone around them believes the same easy things. Text them or ask them to coffee today and gently ask where they really stand with Jesus.

Christ walked the hard road to the cross first, so you never walk the narrow way alone.