



SESSION 6

TRANSFORMED BY MY CHOICES

The Point

Choose to follow Jesus.

The Passage

Matthew 7:13-27

The Bible Meets Life

Our culture overwhelms us with choices. Even soft drink vending machines in restaurants are now offering up to 127 choices. Choices may encourage our individuality, but choices—especially too many choices—can be stressful. The biggest choice we must make, however, does not need to be hard. Life boils down to one choice with two options: take the road that leads to life in Christ or take the road that leads to destruction.

The Setting

Jesus met His followers on a mountainside and taught them about growing in discipleship. His instruction has come to be called the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). As His disciples lived out what He taught, their lives would outwardly display the inner transformation that had taken place. He brought His instruction to a close with a series of comparisons. Each comparison challenged them to make the wise choice of devoting themselves to Him completely.

What does the Bible say?

Matthew 7:13-27 (HCSB)

- 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



10 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question 1** on page 53 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What are some of the best choices you’ve made?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Display a funnel to illustrate the following introduction.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 54):

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 it 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.

SAY: “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.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Invite your group to brainstorm the following two questions and discuss the responses aloud: As young adults, which daily decisions are easy to make? Which decisions require more thought, time, and prayer? In reality, some of the choices we face as young adults will significantly influence the rest of our lives. Today, we’ll discuss our most significant choice in life: whether or not to follow Jesus.

GUIDE: Call the group’s attention to **The Point** on page 54 of the PSG: **“Choose to follow Jesus.”**

PRAY: Transition into the Bible study with prayer. Pray for your group members to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

TIP: This session is a great opportunity to talk about salvation with any group members who aren’t yet believers. Use the inside front cover of this Leader Guide for assistance.

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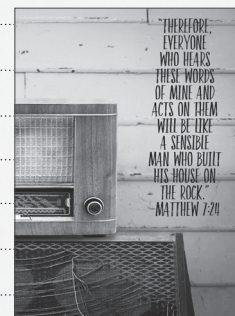
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Display Pack Item #6 for use with your discussion of Question 5.
PLAYLIST PICK:
 “Lord, I Believe”
 by LifeWay Worship



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 7:13-14

Notes

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: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 7:13-14.

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

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 56): In these verses, Jesus used the imagery of a narrow gate and a wide gate to describe following God.

ALTERNATE QUESTION: *When it comes to following Christ, what temptations and pitfalls do young adults face?*

- » Research indicates that 45 percent of Americans believe any “gate” will do; they believe many ways lead to God.² The major religions of the world—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity—all teach something different, even contradictory—about the nature of God and the way to salvation. However, the law of contradiction clearly states that two opposing things cannot both be true. So how can two opposing views both be right and both lead to God? They can’t.
- » Jesus told us to enter through “the narrow gate” (v. 13). As the one who makes it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins, Jesus Himself is the gate. His sacrifice on the cross allows us to be forgiven of sin and able to approach our holy God.
- » The path that leads to God is narrow, not because it is difficult to become a Christian, but because you can get to Him only one way—through faith in Jesus.
- » All other religious systems have at their core a works-based system; these religious systems believe you can only come to God by doing certain things. But in Christ, He has done all the “doing.”

TRANSITION: When we begin to follow Christ, our lives take on a new purpose. The next verses describe what our lives will look like when we follow Christ in obedience.

Matthew 7:13-14 Commentary

Choose the path that leads to life in Christ. Verse 13: 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. The same challenge faces us. 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 chooses 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. Jesus warned that it 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 too. The good life they think they’ll find will elude them. Eventually, they will see 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 (6:1-18). It means turning our backs on worry and entrusting our lives into His care (vv. 19-34). It means we refuse to be critical of people, treating them in a way that reflects God’s treatment of us (7:1-12).

The gate to new life in Christ appears narrow at first; the path of discipleship seems to be a tough road. But choosing them will render no regrets. It will garner gratitude. Taking that path leads to the life Jesus intends for us—eternal life filled with more joy than we can imagine.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 7:15-23

Notes

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!’”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 7:15-23.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 57): Warning about false prophets, Jesus said we would recognize them by their “fruit.”

- » Those who follow Christ will have attitudes and behaviors that will reveal a deep relationship with Him. Nothing but Christ-like character traits can come from a relationship with Jesus just as a “good tree produces good fruit” (v. 17).
- » Those who do not follow Christ will display habits and behaviors that don’t resemble Christ. Some may claim to be Christ-followers, but their lives will reveal the truth.

DISCUSS: Question 3 on page 57 of the PSG: **“What is our role in producing fruit?”**

SAY: “God, working through the Holy Spirit, produces spiritual fruit in our lives. Our role is to surrender to His leadership, to seek to live according to God’s commands and ways, and to determine to trust Him completely.”

TRANSITION: In the next verses, Jesus used a third image to describe the Christian life.

ALTERNATE QUESTION: *What are some practical examples of good and bad fruit?*

Matthew 7:15-23 Commentary

Choose to live in obedience and bear fruit for Christ. Verse 15: Jesus moved from wise decisions about following Him to warning about false prophets. He identified them as dangerous deceivers who take on the appearance of loyal disciples. They appear to be sincere and authentic, but they're not. The more we observe them, however, the easier we see them as phonies. Jesus' image of a wolf in sheep's clothing works extremely well to describe their ability to shroud their true identity. At the surface, they may appear to be calm little lambs, but underneath they're ransacking predators.

Verses 16-20: Jesus shifted to another word picture—fruit. This metaphor allowed Him to nail down a critical point about false prophets: The only way to expose them involved time. Disciples would have to observe what false prophets actually produced. Kingdom citizens produce fruit in the shape of attitudes and behaviors that verify they belong to Him, 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, it can be detected, 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. Their words might speak of their devotion to Him, but their lives say something entirely different. They've not taken root in the Lord.

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. Then He removed them from His sight. They suffered the fate of anyone else who refused to give themselves to Him.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Matthew 7:24-27

Notes

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: Ask a group member to read aloud Matthew 7:24-27.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 59): Without a solid foundation, our lives are at risk. Jesus has given us a steadfast foundation. He said, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock” (v. 24). Building a life on the solid rock of Jesus and His teachings often calls for hard choices—but it’s worth it. Every time.

DISCUSS: Question 4 on page 58 of the PSG: “What are some difficult choices you are facing right now?”

LEADER PACK: Bring your group’s attention to **Pack Item #6**, “Matthew 7:24” poster, and point out that we’re called to hear and act on Jesus’ teachings.

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

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

DO: Divide your members into subgroups of three or four people each. Within each subgroup, direct members to complete the activity on page 58 of the PSG together.

Shifting Sand or Solid ground?

John feels like his life is collapsing before his eyes. He’s been doing the “church thing” for a while now and trying to do everything right so God will like him more. Each time he fails, he wrestles with overwhelming guilt and fear.

» Based on today’s study, how would you encourage John with truth from God’s Word?

Matthew 7:24-27 Commentary

Choose to build your life on Christ and His teachings. Verse 24: Jesus brought His instruction to a close with yet another comparison. This time He compared two foundations to direct His disciples to take seriously His teaching. He urged them to build their lives on the right foundation for living, a relationship with Him. With a solid foundation in place, they could live out His instructions.

Verse 25: The wisdom of giving our lives to Him might not be evident at first. But one day the storm will come. Some storms may be literal, like tornadoes or hurricanes. Other storms take the shape of an awful tragedy in a family, the loss of a job, a bad biopsy report, or the destruction of a marriage. When one storm comes, sometimes another follows almost immediately with hurricane-force winds of stress and strain. 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. Making Him our first priority will always prove to be a wise decision.

Verse 26: 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, or gaining power. Or they may decide to bank on relationships with people, like their spouses or children.

Verse 27: But when storms come along, the foolish foundation for living will collapse in a terrible torrent of trouble washing over it. 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.

To learn more, check out the article "Wolves in Biblical Imagery" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "City Gates in Jesus' Day" (Fall 2003), "House Construction in Jesus' Time" (Winter 1996), and "Jesus' Use of Parables" (Winter 1992) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for *Biblical Illustrator* for Bible Studies for Life.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

SAY: "How will you live out your choice to follow Christ this week?"

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 60 of the PSG.

- » **Check your foundation.** Look back and evaluate the decisions you've made in the past week. Make sure you're making choices based on your relationship with Christ, not what feels right for the moment.
- » **Pray for spiritual fruit.** Ask God to develop in you spiritual fruit so that your life will point others to Jesus.
- » **Identify two or three people with whom you can share your faith in the next 60 days.** Be ready to share in your own words how Christ has been your foundation and our only Way to God.

Wrap It Up

SAY: "Jesus said that the road that leads to life is narrow and difficult. **Following Christ won't always be easy, but it will be a life marked with joy, purpose, and peace.**"



Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog** (lifeway.com/groupministry).

