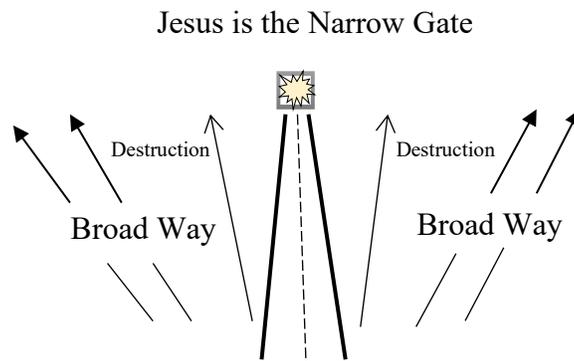


~ Part One ~

**Side Roads that Miss the Mark**



Jesus poignantly described the way to the Father, stating in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Later, Jesus illustrated His statement using a word picture in Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus is the narrow gate. "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell<sup>1</sup> is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." (NLT)

According to these scriptures and others, Jesus is the narrow gate. Entering by the narrow gate represents the way to know God and to experience His infinite love. The invitation to enter by the narrow gate is extended to every person. *Every person is invited* to enter God's kingdom through the narrow gate; no one needs to miss heaven. God wants us to experience His love, so that is why He has given us a clear and precise way to know Him.

So, is it paradoxical to say that everyone is invited to enter God's kingdom by the narrow gate, yet also state that most people will refuse to go in by it? This question is not as perplexing if you consider that every person on the planet is invited to attend a Super Bowl game, but most will not attend. There are a myriad of reasons "*the many*" choose to deny God His proper place.

Consider that side roads are alternate roads taken in hopes of reaching the same destination. The question to ask is, "Why would anyone want to deviate from the prescribed road?" Let's rephrase that question to illustrate. Why does a young child refuse to follow (deviate from) his parent's instruction and plot his own way? The answer to both questions is: most of us come into this world with an independent and, to some degree, a rebellious<sup>2</sup> nature. So why is an independent spirit or rebellious nature so damning? An independent spirit avoids being accountable, responsible to God. And similarly, a rebellious nature has difficulty submitting to His authority.

**Alternate Paths and Detours that miss the Mark**  
**Side Road #1 — An Independent Spirit**

I can understand why a person might consider a side-path to know God. Why? Because genuine, *personal faith* requires accountability at the highest level. To many people, being personally responsible to God is off-putting and even scary. For instance, if I personally knew the CEO of my company, I would have a greater level of accountability to him when conducting company business, *especially if I say or do something in his name*. In the same way, God made us in His image, which means that we are designed to reflect His character, radiate His glory, and

<sup>1</sup> The NKJ translation says, "...the way that leads to destruction."

<sup>2</sup> Rebellious: opposition to or defiance of: authority, accepted moral codes, or social conventions

imitate His loving nature. If we are indeed God’s children, the people we know should see that we are unashamedly His. This is true accountability.

Additionally, it seems that most people, especially in western cultures, are fiercely independent, which means that we often sidestep the very means that God has established to bring peace and security to us. Much as a young child will do the opposite of what you tell him to do, many adults will shun the narrow gate on “principle,” for no other reason than to exercise independent thought and expression. Independent thought merely says, “I can find my own way, thank you.” Independence is an admirable quality in many instances, but denying God His proper place is not one of them.

God knows how we think. He also knows that we are naturally rebellious and self-serving. Despite these shortcomings, God loves us. He loved us first so that we would respond to His love despite our waywardness. The Bible tells us that God desires that we prosper and be in good health. And who better to provide for our needs than God? God knows that if He can draw us out of our independence and into a dependent relationship with Him, He can give us everything we need to thrive and prosper. Deuteronomy 8:18 says it this way, “*Remember the Lord your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful...*” God empowers us to live a resurrected, overcoming life. Beyond our temporal needs, He also provides for our primary need to feel eternally secure. These “workings” by God in our life are dependent upon our relationship with Him through Jesus, who is the narrow gate.

These are benefits that God delightfully provides to us as we partner with Him. What is our responsibility in this partnership? *God searches our hearts for willing **obedience, submission, and surrender.*** If you look closely at Scripture as a whole, you will repeatedly find these dynamics conveyed—our obedience yields God’s provision, our submission yields God’s protection, and our surrender yields God’s power.

Moreover, please know that God is quite aware if you are on a side road to destruction; He also knows why you are there. He knows that a defiant heart is often a wounded heart, crying out for His genuine love. God wants us to come to Him through the narrow gate so that we can abide safely and securely in His arms.

Knowing that God initiates and completes our restoration with Him, it is important to understand two immutable attributes of God’s character. God is **perfect love**, but He is also a God of **perfect justice**. When God works in our lives, whether salvation, healing, or restoration, He will not compromise His perfect love toward us to mete out His demand for perfect justice and vice versa. That is why His perfect and complete love alongside His perfect and complete justice brings us to Jesus, who is the narrow gate. —Ω

 Information and Revelation
 Application and Transformation

*Heavenly Father, thank You for providing the Way to know You. By entering the narrow gate, I can know You and experience Your infinite love, giving me the full life You have for me. Thank You for loving me into a relationship with You by conquering my fears and drawing me out of my rebellion. Thank You for empowering me to live a resurrected, overcoming life. LORD help me better submit to You and surrender my right to know better than You. Help me better understand what it means to be accountable, so I can represent You by reflecting Your character, radiate Your glory, and imitate Your loving nature. LORD, I ask You to impart to me a spirit of obedience, submission, and surrender, so I can powerfully reach others as Your ambassador. I ask You to search each room in my heart and heal those hidden places that cry out for Your genuine love. Help me stay on the narrow way so that there is no doubt that I will remain in Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. I receive Your peace that You provided for me in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

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