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The Narrow Road

by Aric Russell

Life is full of choices. There are things that everyone must choose to do or not do, places to decide to go or not to go, and people to become friends with or to ignore. We have many choices to make, and many of them are difficult. The Lord spoke of a choice man has to make in Matthew 7:13-14. It says there, "Enter in 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 that find it."

Picture, if you will, that you are standing at an intersection of two roads. The first road is well-paved, easy to navigate, and mostly straight, with very few hills to climb and several lanes for driving. The other road is a two-lane road with potholes, no shoulders, curvy, and very hilly. Which road would you choose to travel? Most people will take the first road because of the ease of navigation. Why would anyone willingly go down the second road with all of its difficulties?

We face the same two choices in our spiritual lives. It is easy to do the things of this world and go down that "easy road." We will meet little or no resistance if we choose to go along with what everyone else is doing. The cruise control can be set, the seat leaned back, the air conditioner cranked up, the stereo on our favorite radio station, and no cares or anything getting in our way. There is no such thing as peer pressure on this road because everyone does whatever is pleasing at the time.

The other choice, however, is not as easy. It is a difficult road. It is indeed the road less traveled (Matt. 7:14). For the most part, people do not wish to be different from the rest of the world. It is difficult to be different from the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Finally, notice also that these two roads have crossovers. There is tremendous pressure on those who take the difficult road or way to leave it and cross over to the easier route. One can go from the easy road to the difficult road through obedience to God's will (Matt. 7:21) and living a life faithful to Him (Rev. 2:10). However, most do not cross over to this way. In fact, many cross over from the difficult road to the easy road. Perhaps the road less traveled gets too difficult for them, or like Demas, they "love this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). They see that it is much easier to "go with the flow of traffic" on the easier road and choose to take it. What we must do then is consider the **end** of the two roads. The narrow road leads to the right destination, which is eternal life (Matt. 7:14). The well-traveled road leads to a dead-end, a destination of destruction (Matt. 7:13). Which road are you choosing?

Obstacles To Our Growth

Jason Moore

The growth of the Christian's character is essential to acceptable service. "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). The disciple is either in a state of growth or decline. There is no in-between. The difference between growing and declining is the will of the Christian. Physical growth is not entirely up to you. Spiritual growth is. The desire to be taller does not make it so. But the desire to increase your spiritual stature can be fulfilled no matter your age, your medical record, or your family history. That's why it can be commanded. Hear the passage again, "long., that by it you may grow." Growth is a matter of choice. Your choice. Observe then the obstacles to growth that you must choose to remove if growth is to be realized.

Busyness. Over commitment to worldly aims at the expense of spiritual pursuits is the bane of the modern Christian. The

devil need not involve you in wicked things to stunt your growth. He need only to fill your plate with a little of this-and-that so that you never have room for things of substance. Children spoil their appetites with cakes and snacks and in-between meals. You ruin your appetite for the word of God and for spiritual activity when you don't save room for the Lord's things. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is the motivation of the growing Christian with the Lord's promise of fulfillment (Matthew 5:6). That incentive is missing in the heart of the Christian who is too busy.

Hypocrisy. Secret sin is a cancer. It's presence is not readily apparent, but it's there nonetheless--growing. From the outside, a man may seem sound and godly, but inside he is "full of dead man's bones" (Matthew 23:27). Hypocrisy is a cancer of the heart. It eats at your character from the inside out, so that you fall before anybody diagnoses your problem. Nobody sees it coming. You appear to leave the faith all at once when, in reality, you died long ago. Hypocrisy destroys the core of your character, and renders the entirety of your life and religion a mere shell. The hypocrite is a walking corpse, a living tomb. There can be no growth when you nurture secret sin. It will eat you alive. You will look to be growing, when in fact you're dying. Be sure of one thing—"your sins will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

Performance. Mistaking public performance for growth is a subtle and far too common variety of hypocrisy. Preachers beware. A man can suppose that as goes his preaching, so goes his spirituality. Not so. All of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah (3:5), while the prophet himself was eaten up with bitterness (4:1). Teachers beware. "Thou that teachest another, teachest not thyself" (Romans 2:2 1)? Don't mistake your skills and successes in distributing and illustrating the word of God, as the end of your service. "Be ye doers of the word" (James 1:22) and not teachers only who delude themselves. Worshipers beware. The Pharisees led fine public prayers and wore their best "Sunday dress" but neglected mercy and holiness (Luke 20:47). You can suppose that occupying a pew or even participating in the public assembly is sufficient exercise for spiritual growth. It's an exercise in futility, if day-to-day righteousness, week-in and week-out cross-bearing, and seventy-times-seven forgiveness are not habits of character for you.

Watch out for these enemies to your growth. There are others. But these, particularly, are common and doubly dangerous because of their familiarity. What you do about them is up to you, because growth is a choice. Your choice. Nobody can do it for you. Nobody will. It's up to you. "Choose you this day..." You can either stay where you are, or you can grow.

The Average

by Forrest Moyer

"If a man stand with one foot on a hot stove and one foot in a freezer, some statisticians would assert that, on the average, he's comfortable."

Which reminds me of some who seem to feel that they can come to church on Sunday and yet live like the devil during the week. They say that they are, on the average, pretty good people. Yet he cannot be "comfortable" any more than the man with his foot on the stove and the other in a freezer. He is the double-minded man who is unstable in all his ways. He has only enough religion to be miserable, but not enough to go to heaven.

Our Lord does not prefer an "average." He wants His people to be either "cold or hot." The "average" (in this case, lukewarmness) nauseates Him, and He will spew out of His mouth those who are lukewarm (Rev. 3:15,16). Brother, you had better get all the way on the Lord's side now lest you spend eternity with the Devil.