

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 13 – Lies Christians Believe About The Narrow Road

As we've been discussing, God wants us to be people who are different than the world – people who are holy. That's what the word *holy* means; it means we are different and we are not like them. He wants us to not be influenced by the world – He wants us to not adopt their views, their lifestyle, and their values. Paul said we shouldn't be conformed to this world.¹

God wants us to be people who seek first the Kingdom – seeking it first means it's our biggest priority. It's what comes first in our decisions and how we choose to spend our time, money, and energy. Seeking first the Kingdom means it is what we live for – it's what our decisions are centered around, it's what our money is spent on, it's what our time is given to. We build our lives around the kingdom.

As I mentioned earlier, if you work a normal 9-5 job, Monday to Friday, and I call you up to see if you want to do something at noon on Wednesday, you will likely say no. Why? Because you prioritize work. Work is what pays your bills, it gives you food, it gives you a house, it gives you clothes – therefore, you won't jeopardize it. You're not going to risk losing your job – so your job is a higher priority than hanging out. Between those two things, you're seeking first your job. Your decisions about what you're going to do with your time show what your priority is. You might want to hang out and do something fun, but you choose your job because your job is the priority. Your actions – your priorities – show what you're seeking first.

We've talked about what this looks like on a small scale – what you do day-to-day. But it's important to recognize what this looks like on a bigger scale – what you're doing with your life – your whole life. What are you working towards? What are your goals? What are your big decisions based on?

In order to look at this, we need to look at what the average Christian life in America looks like. What does life typically look like for a Christian in America (or quite frankly, the entire Western world)?

This is what life currently looks like for most Christians:

CHILDHOOD. You grow up as a child under the authority of your parents. Usually you spend much of your time going to school, doing homework, and studying.

HIGH SCHOOL. As you get older, you start getting a little more freedom – you start dating, you start working a job, and you start planning for your future – where do you want to go to college, what do you want to be when you grow up, etc.?

YOUNG ADULT. After you graduate high school, you now have the freedom to start making some big decisions for yourself. You go to college. You get a degree. You get a job.

¹ Ref. Romans 12:1-2

Maybe you get married. You're starting to build your own life.

CAREER. Eventually you end up settling into a career. Your goal is to make what you need to provide for your family. You want to make sure you're giving your family the best life you can give them. You want to have a decent retirement package. You want that nice work-life balance so you can spend the right amount of time with your family, while still making sure the bills get paid. Primarily, your career is about providing for yourself and your family. Secondly, your career is about planning for retirement so you will have what you need once you stop working. Thirdly, your career might be about something you enjoy – it makes you feel fulfilled, and you feel like you're contributing to the world. Ideally, you want to enjoy your job, but this is not as high a priority as making sure your needs are met, so not everyone ends up in a career they enjoy.

FAMILY. As you work your career, you also raise your kids. Or, maybe, your spouse works while you raise the kids full-time. Raising kids has its difficulties – it's exhausting at times, it consumes a lot of time, kids are expensive, and you often worry about their safety or their futures. But, having kids is also very rewarding – you love watching them grow, you love watching them learn, you love watching them learn how to walk, how to talk, and how to think. You love spending time with them, and you love having them around.

RETIREMENT. After about thirty or so years in the workplace, you (or your spouse) retire. By now you've saved up enough in whatever retirement plan you chose; hopefully you'll have what you need for the rest of your life, and you can sit back and enjoy no longer having to work all day every day. Typically, you'll have grown kids who are starting to have their own families, and maybe you'll make sure you're living near them so you can see your grandkids and keep your family close together.

DEATH. Eventually, you die. You lived a long life. You provided a good life for your family. You had what you needed through retirement. You saw your grandkids get older and start making their own decisions. Life was good.

MINISTRY. Oh yeah, and also, throughout this whole time, you were reading your Bible, you went to Church, you prayed, you sang worship songs, you went on missions trips, you evangelized, and you faithfully gave ten percent of everything you made.

That's the average Christian life in America and in much of the Western world. It's the life almost all Christians plan. It's the life almost all Christians experience. Keep this in the back of your mind for a minute – we'll come back to it.

Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. The gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and many people enter through that gate. But the gate is small and the road is difficult that leads to true life. Only a few people find that road."²

Here, Jesus described two roads: One road is wide. It's easy. Many people choose that road because it's wide and easy. However, that road results in destruction. The second road is narrow. It's difficult. It's full of hardships and trials. The gate at the end of that road is small. But this road results in life, and only a few people find that road and travel down that road.

Which of these two roads are you on?

Most Christians are familiar with this passage. But most Christians make a mistake when they think about this passage. They make the mistake of thinking that the broad easy road is a road with no difficulties at all. They look at the difficulties in their own lives, and they assume they're on the narrow, difficult road.

I've heard many Christians talk about "trials" in their lives. They talk about raising kids, being

² Matthew 7:13-14

tired from raising kids, having to find a job, passing a test, getting good grades, getting a raise, being laid off, sickness, death, and many other similar things. They talk about how they're going through a trial. They talk about being tested.

But there's a problem. All of those "trials" are common to human life. Even unbelievers face all those same exact trials. So, are those the difficulties that Jesus was talking about when he said the way is narrow and difficult that leads to life?

Let me give you an analogy: I grew up in the Washington DC area. I lived about an hour north of DC. If I ever found myself wanting to leave DC at 5pm on a weekday... it was awful. Almost everyone in the city chooses the same road – it's a broad, four or five-lane highway called I-495. If you choose I-495 as your route to get home, you're choosing to sit in bumper-to-bumper traffic for what seems like an eternity. People cut in and out recklessly, lanes merge together, sometimes you have to get across all four lanes to get to your exit. There are often accidents, and when there are accidents, they often close one or two of the travel lanes, making traffic even worse. No one likes driving home on that road. No one thinks of it as an easy drive.

But now let's imagine there's another road – a second option. We'll call this other road *Forest Road 7*. This road also leaves Washington DC and heads north, and it is also a possible route to get home at 5pm. But this road is unpaved. In some places, it doesn't even have gravel – it's just dirt, or even grass. It's full of potholes and steep inclines. It's narrow – sometimes it's barely even wide enough for your car while it travels along a steep drop-off that would send you plummeting into the Potomac River – and there's no guard rail. At some points, the road is overgrown because it's so hardly used. You might have to get out occasionally with a machete to chop back some of the bushes that are growing out into your path. Sometimes you'll come across trees that have come down across the road, and you'll need to move them before you can keep going. Also, due to new environmental laws, you're not driving a Jeep or a pickup truck – you're driving a Prius with low clearance and thin tires that really weren't meant to roll over potholes and large rocks.

With these two roads as your only options, which road will most people choose? Which road is the broad and easy road, and which road is narrow and difficult?

Often Christians look at their lives and see difficulties and things that make their lives hard, and they assume they're on the narrow and difficult road because of those difficult things. But what they fail to recognize is that all those difficulties are things that any unbeliever might also face.

When Jesus said the road is broad and easy that leads to destruction, he wasn't saying it's a road with no difficulties at all; he was saying that when you compare the two roads, one of them is clearly broad and easy compared to the other. No one would ever say that I-495 is a fun road to go down at 5pm on a workday. In fact, it's awful. But it's much easier than trying to drive home on Forest Road 7.

If Christians think they're facing trials and difficulties, but those trials and difficulties are no different than what any unbeliever might also face, are they facing the same trials and difficulties that Jesus was talking about when he told us about the narrow and difficult road? Or are they merely facing trials and difficulties that are inherent in life simply because we live in a messed-up world, and life is hard? Which road are they really traveling on?

If Christians are convinced that I-495 is the difficult road, they might not even realize that Forest Road 7 exists. They might not even realize there's another way, a harder way.

Let's go back again to the average Christian life in America.

When a Christian goes through life, how are they making their major decisions? And other than the fact that they read their Bibles and went to Church throughout their whole life, how was their life any different than an unbeliever's life?

Based on what Jesus said about the narrow road and the broad road, the Christian life is supposed to be so different from an unbeliever's life that it makes the unbeliever's life look easy and

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trouble-free. So, then how is it that the Christian life and the non-Christian life look nearly identical?

An unbeliever is also brought up as a kid, goes to school, studies, starts dating, gets a job, plans their future, goes to college, gets a degree, starts a career, gets married, raises kids, pays the bills, saves up for retirement, tries to spend time with the family, retires, sees their grandkids, stays close to family, and eventually dies, having lived what is generally accepted as a good life.

The only thing that separates a Christian from an unbeliever is that they read their Bibles, went to Church, and did all those Christian things. But we've already seen in earlier videos that when Israel was apostate, and when the Pharisees lived in hypocrisy, they also did those same "Christian" things! So, clearly, that's not what God wants. Those things are not what's supposed to separate us and make us different. And honestly, those "Christian" things don't make our lives so hard that an unbeliever's life looks easy in comparison.

So, what makes the true Christian life so different? What makes us holy? How are we supposed to be completely different in how we live our entire lives and make all our major decisions?

To look at this, in the next few videos, we'll break up the average Christian life into three categories: Work, Family, and Ministry. We're going to look at what the Bible says we should be doing in each of these categories, and what it means to seek first the kingdom in everything we do. I can't cover every aspect of life, but these are three major areas that we build our lives around, and we need to see what the Bible says we should be doing when we make these kinds of major decisions. The same concept that I'm applying to these categories applies to every other category in life.