

7/20/25 - Order of Worship

Red = Slide Change

Purple = Sound Person Note

Green = PC Person Note

Blue = Note for Speaker

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Welcome!**
- **Today's Sermon**
 - SOTM Part 25 - The Narrowing Road - We've finally reached the conclusion of The Sermon on the Mount. This is where Jesus presents His listeners with a choice: Will they respond to Him by choosing the way that leads to life? Or will they choose the easy way that leads to ruin?
 - Sermon notes available
- **SOTM Reflection** - This is in the church newsletter, but I thought I'd mention it here as well... As we near the end of our Sermon on the Mount series, I'd love to hear from you—because Jesus' words aren't just meant to be *heard*... they're meant to be *lived*.

So I invite you to reflect: How has the Sermon on the Mount been shaping your heart? What questions are still stirring in you? What practical steps have you taken in response to Jesus' teaching?

Feel free to email me your thoughts, questions, or even small changes you've made in daily life. If I receive enough responses, I'll share some (anonymously or with permission) as part of the final message in the series.

Sharing what God is doing in us is one way we build each other up in faith—it's one way we celebrate how He's *shaping us together* as His church family. And as I said, all these details are in the Church Newsletter...

- **Church Newsletter** - This is the best way to find out what's going on at Refton. We send it through email every week, but we also have several printed copies on the welcome desk in the church lobby for those that don't do email. Feel free to take one if you need it.
- **Connect Cards** - place them in the offering boxes

PRAYER

WORSHIP (3 Songs)

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

SCRIPTURE READING - Josie Esbin - **check livestream audio - handheld mic**

MESSAGE - The Sermon on the Mount - Part 25

PRAYER

RESPONSE SONG

MESSAGE - SOTM - Part 25 - The Narrowing Road - 7.20.25

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” (Mat. 7:13)

This reminds me of a trip I took to Israel while I was in seminary. I wasn't thinking about gates at the time, but we saw a lot of them. I think my favorite was “Abraham's Gate.”

[SLIDE 1] Abraham's Gate (Full Site Picture)

This is at the ancient site of Dan. And one of the cool things about Abraham's Gate is that it's considered the oldest standing arched gateway *on the planet!* It's about 4000 years old and stands about 23 feet tall.

But what's *really cool* about this site is that Abraham would have walked through this exact gate when he was looking for his nephew, Lot.¹

Here's a closeup...

[SLIDE 2] Abraham's Gate (Close Up Picture)

I outlined the archway for you... archeologists left the backfill to help preserve it.

But if we entered in Abraham's day, we'd see three gates - the outer, middle, and inner that led to the city streets. What we're looking at is the outer gate.

I remember that it didn't *feel* like a “narrow” gate. But it was the only way to get inside—which was perfect for protection. And so, in that way, city gates were a symbol of strength and safety.

[SLIDE 3] (don't read) Matthew 7:13-14 - Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

¹ Genesis 14:14

But gates were more than just entrances. In Old Testament times, they were public spaces that served multiple purposes—things like marketplace deals, legal cases, contracts and official announcements all took place at the city gate.

By New Testament times, a lot of the judicial and political functions moved somewhere else. But gates still served as public places of trade, teaching, official announcements, and even rest stops after a long journey.

So when Jesus said, ‘*Enter through the narrow gate,*’ He wasn’t just being poetic. Gates meant something to ancient people. They were places of decision and direction.

In fact, ancient cities often had more than one gate—and choosing to walk through one meant intentionally committing to a specific path.

[SLIDE 3.1] (Jerusalem Gates Picture²)

For example, Jerusalem had several gates during the time of Jesus—each with a different purpose. There was the Golden Gate where Jesus entered on Palm Sunday... the Sheep Gate, used to bring in animals for sacrifices... the Fountain Gate where people would get fresh water... the Essene Gate, Jaffa Gate, Damascus Gate... there were a lot of gates! (I didn’t bother to list them all)

But the gate you chose to walk through said something about your purpose—and your priorities.

[SLIDE 3.2] (Blank Slide)

That’s why gates became powerful metaphors for the biblical writers—they symbolized moments when a decision had to be made. When faced with multiple gates, the question is: *which one do we choose?* Because the path we take shapes our future—and how we live our lives.

² This is a visual approximation—city limits and exact gate locations are difficult since it was destroyed in 70AD and later rebuilt.

For example, in Proverbs 8–9, Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly each stand at their own gate, calling out to those passing by—both promising a way forward, but leading to very different destinations. One path leads to life. The other, to ruin.

So, like many themes in the Bible, this idea of *choosing a path* goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve chose to disobey, the LORD said...

[SLIDE 4] Genesis 3:22-23 - “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

[SLIDE 5] Genesis 3:24 - After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

So in the Garden of Eden we’ve got a lot of trees. But two trees stood out: The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the one of knowing good and bad was off limits.

Adam and Eve were allowed to eat from *any* other tree—including the tree of life! But instead, they reached for the wrong tree—and lost access to the right one.

Rather than continuing to live in dependent trust, they chose the path of independence. That choice led them to death instead of life.

Now they find themselves outside the Garden of Eden. They’re cut off from the tree of life and the sanctuary that God made for them.

In fact, Genesis tells us that God placed cherubim at the Gate of Eden. If you were around for our series in Revelation, you might remember that cherubim are powerful 6-winged, multi-faced, intelligent creatures that serve God by guarding His throne.

And now some of them have been dispatched to Eden's Gate—there's even a flaming sword flashing back and forth at the entrance, guarding the path that leads to the tree of life.

The picture here is this: If you want to get back into Eden, you've got to go through the fire. But Adam and Eve couldn't do it—in fact, no one could. And ever since they made their choice, humanity has been trying to find a way back to the tree of life. But our efforts always fall short.

The only way back to the tree of life is by following Jesus. That's the overarching story that would have echoed in the hearts and minds of His Jewish listeners when He said...

[SLIDE 6] Matthew 7:13-14 - Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus is saying we've got two choices: The wide gate or the narrow one.

Enter through the wide gate, and you'll find a spacious road—plenty of room for everyone. It *seems* right—because everyone else is going that way. But the truth is, it leads to ruin.

But those who enter through the narrow gate and walk its path—they find *real* life. Because that's the path Jesus walked.

But here's the thing—Jesus isn't just describing where these roads take us. He's describing *the kind of journey* they lead us into.

And honestly, that insight has changed the way I've typically read these verses. I've always assumed they were only about the choice between heaven and hell—and that's *partly* true, but...

[SLIDE 7] These verses are more about *the direction we travel* than the destination.

You've probably heard the saying, "*It's not about the destination, it's about the journey.*" That's the idea here. Jesus is talking about our path of life and how we choose to walk on it. Because the path we're on, actually matters.

As John 3:18 says, those who don't know Jesus are already condemned as they walk the wide path. And the longer they remain on it, the more infected with sin they become. Their journey isn't just headed toward destruction—their journey is *shaping* them for it.

It's a progression of corruption.
Like the walking dead—
marching toward their own funeral,
and they don't even realize it.

That's how spiritual death works in the background...

It's the white noise that lulls us to sleep.

It's quiet, gradual, and goes unnoticed.

And yet...

Like Lady Wisdom, I imagine Jesus standing at the Father's doorstep, inviting people to ask, seek and knock... saying, "*Come this way. Follow Me. This is where life is found... Enter through the narrow gate.*" Because...

[SLIDE 8] The narrow road not only leads to life, but it forms and shapes us along the way to reflect the heart of God.

Here's why I say that - Check out Matthew 7:13-14 again...

[SLIDE 9] (don't read) Matthew 7:13-14 - Enter through the narrow [stenos] gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small [stenos] is the gate and narrow [thlibo] the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

There's something here that's subtle—but important. There are two different Greek words translated as *narrow* or *small*: **stenos** and **thlibo**.

stenos literally means narrow—like a tight entrance or small doorway. That's how Jesus uses it here: it's a *small* gate.

But when He talks about the road, the journey that leads to life, He uses the word: **thlibo**.

thlibo means to press in on, to afflict, to compress or even, oppress. It's a word that describes something being squeezed from all sides...

[SLIDE 9.1] (Watermelon Challenge Video)

It's like Larry Wheels squeezing a watermelon with his bare hands. He's a famous powerlifter I follow on Youtube. The idea here is that it's all about applying intense pressure.

That's thlibo! Except this probably represents the wide road better!

Either way, that intense pressure is what Jesus says we'll face on the narrow road. Not because God is trying to destroy us—but because **He's forming something in us that we could never produce on our own.**

It's the same word used in Acts 14, when Paul and Barnabas were encouraging new believers...

[SLIDE 10] Acts 14:21-22 - They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships [thlibo] to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

In other words, walking the narrow path isn't easy. It comes with affliction. Choosing this road means choosing a road that **presses in**.

Here's another example...

[SLIDE 11] 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 - But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed [*thlibo*] on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

That's thlibo. That's what it means to be *compressed*—pressed in on every side. And yet—not crushed!

Let's keep that in mind as we go back to Matthew 7...

[SLIDE 12] (don't read) Matthew 7:13-14 - Enter through the narrow [*stenos*] gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small [*stenos*] is the gate and narrow [*thlibo*] the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Jesus is saying that when we choose the small gate, we choose a path that presses in on us. The road is hard. It's marked by intense pressure, affliction, and hardship.

But like Paul said: *We may be hard pressed—but we're not crushed!*

And maybe that's the best way to describe what it means to walk the narrowing road. It will *press* us. It will even *test* us. But under all that pressure, something begins to take shape...

[SLIDE 12.1] We're being formed into the very people Jesus described at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount. We're becoming a "beatitude" kind of people.

We're being pressed into shape—formed to look like those who are poor in spirit.
Those who mourn.
Who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
Who show mercy.
Who walk in purity.
Who pursue peace.
And who endure persecution.

That's what it means to be “*narrowed*” by the narrow road—pressed and shaped into a people that reflect the heart and wisdom of God.

It's like what James says—trials produce perseverance. But perseverance must finish its work, so that we become mature and complete, not lacking anything.

But here's the thing...

[SLIDE 13] The wisdom of God often looks like foolishness to the world. His ways seem upside-down. Backward. Even wasteful.

For example...

There's a moment in the Gospels when Jesus was in Bethany, sitting at a table in the home of a man named Simon. And while He reclined there, a woman came in holding an alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume.

She broke the jar and poured the perfume on His head—it was a symbolic gesture—a fragrant offering.³ Jesus thought it was beautiful, but look at how the disciples responded...

[SLIDE 14] Matthew 26:8-9 - When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

So, they're angry!

To them, she was being foolish! Her act was too extravagant—it was unnecessary, and even *wasteful*.

But Jesus said...

[SLIDE 15] Matthew 26:10 - Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

³ Mark 14:3

From Jesus' perspective, the jar wasn't wasted. Sure, it was costly! But it was broken and poured out as an act of love and worship—meant to prepare Him for His burial.

[SLIDE 16] (picture of broken perfume jar) And so, in that moment, the broken jar became a picture of what Jesus was about to do for us...

His body would be broken.
His blood would be poured out.
And He would be crushed for our sins.

Later that week—after the jar was broken—Jesus walked from Bethany, down through the valley, and through Jerusalem's gates, knowing full well He was walking a path where a different kind of "flaming sword" was already beginning to fall...

It was a sword of affliction—one that cut with betrayal, injustice and brutality. With each swing, He was...

Arrested.
Wrongly convicted.
Beaten.
Mocked.
Humiliated.
Whipped.

[SLIDE 16.1] (picture of Jesus) And then—He was led outside the city gates, carrying His cross on that narrow road, staining it red with His blood.

And when He came to the end of the road,
He was lifted up—on a cross.
And then He was pressed down—crushed through crucifixion.

But He chose that path in obedience to His Father. *He chose it* knowing that He was sacrificing Himself for the sins of the world. *He chose it* knowing that it would end in victory!

[SLIDE 17] He chose to walk that narrow road *first*, so that we could walk it with Him.

So that we could follow Him without fear—trusting that He will give us the strength to endure the pressures of the road. Because unlike the alabaster jar, we will *NOT* be crushed! His strength empowers us to keep going—and it's His suffering that makes our journey on the narrow road possible.

And as we follow Him down that red-stained road,
we're continually being formed to follow—
pressed into a people that look more like Him.

And so I was thinking about that this week, and it reminded me of moments that I've felt the pressure of the narrow road—moments God has been using to press into me.

And honestly, I hesitated to share this—but ultimately I felt led to invite you into what I've been learning...

Most of you know my family and I spend a lot of time at CHOP—Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. And if you've ever been there, you know—it's a big place. You walk a lot. And in that walking, you see a lot.

In the elevators, I often find myself standing next to parents who are going through some of the same things.

And in the hallways, I see kids facing unimaginable circumstances. And sometimes—I find myself walking those halls fighting back tears.

Well, as I wrote this sermon, the Lord reminded me of a little girl I saw this past week. She was being pushed in a wheelchair by her mom. She must have had surgery, because attached to her chair was a tall pole. And hanging from that pole was a chain with a metal ring—one that fastened to her head—a nurse told me this is how they keep their spine aligned.

And it just hit me—It's one thing to see images like that on TV. But it's another thing entirely to see it in real life.

It's heartbreaking. It feels like a kind of *spiritual pressure*—like something pressing down on your heart.

And I've walked the road that asks: "*Why, God? Why would you let these kids suffer?*" But I've learned that if I stay on that road, forgetting God's faithfulness, that road doesn't lead anywhere helpful.

Because the reality is, we live in a fallen world. It's not God's fault that people suffer. It's not His fault we're no longer in the Garden.

So, in those moments, I pray. Not out of obligation. Not as their pastor. I pray as someone walking the narrow road—knowing I'm being shaped by Jesus.

And so I'll ask the Lord to give these kids what they need today—their daily bread. I ask Him to heal them. And I ask Him to reveal Himself to the kids and their families.

Because the thing is, Jesus knows what they're going through. As the writer of Hebrews says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses."⁴

**Jesus knows our pain—He's experienced it.
He was pressed. He was pierced. He wept.**

In fact...

[SLIDE 18] His suffering is what makes our journey with Him possible. We enter the small gate, and He walks the narrow road with us... as one who understands.

And as hard as it is to walk the narrow road—
It's worth it.
It's *not* a waste.

Jesus *invests* in us, during those moments that press us.
He *strengthens* us as we walk that road.

⁴ Hebrews 4:15

He *enables* us to persevere,
As we walk through the fire toward the tree of life.

The truth is—
we can't walk this road alone.
But thanks to Jesus—
we don't have to.

Let's Pray

Let's pray together as the Lord taught us to pray...

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.