

Keep your eyes on the road



Ever get lost driving to your summer vacation spot? How about missing your exit—and the next exit is 30 miles away? Frustration mounts, tempers flare—no one enjoys the ride.

Ever feel like the same thing happens in life? Not having a clear destination, taking wrong roads or missing your exits can rival the worst summer vacation story—except the stakes are much higher.

Jesus speaks of our “route” in a general sense in many verses. Proverbs 4:11 says, *“I have taught you the way of wisdom, I have led you in right paths.”* Proverbs 6:23 says his commandment is a lamp, the law, light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life. Proverbs 16:17 says *“The way of the upright is to turn from evil; he who keeps his way guards his way.”*

The Bible is our AAA—the Almighty’s Adventure Atlas! It contains a wealth of travel information, but there don’t book the trip—God does. says, *“A man’s heart plans his way, his steps.”*



is a catch—we Proverbs 16:9 *but God directs*

I gained a deeper perspective of this concept a few weeks ago while listening to Dr. Judy Leonard, an 18-year missionary veteran to Calcutta, India. Calcutta is not exactly a resort area, but Judy found sweet contentment amidst the squalor and heartache – she has lived and learned what she shared with us.

She spoke of the specific destination God has for us as outlined in Matthew 7:13–14: *Go in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in through it.*

Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (How would you like to see that in a travel brochure?)

Following God on this road of life means our options are limited—some routes have a permanent detour—like the paths of destruction. Because the gate to destruction is wide and broad, it's easy to stray there. It's also tempting to stray to the broad gate because it looks easier. How does God help us?

As we explore the deeper meanings of the words in Matthew 7, apply them to your life – and specifically as they may apply to your call to homeschool.

The “straight” gate in Matt.7:13 is actually the Greek word “stenos” which means narrow or small. As the missionary meditated on why the gate would be narrow and small, she believes it is because we can not fit through dragging encumbrances with us. To enter into the narrow gate, we might have to leave our ambitions, plans for ourselves, plans for our kids, and any other distractions behind. “Ultimately, God knows what is best for us and we must trust that completely,” she said.

The “gate” speaks of God’s call on my life. As a Christian, God’s call on my life will always involve a cross—as He seeks to mold me into His image. It is always death to the natural man that brings more life to the spiritual man. My call will do that in whatever way God deems right.

Once we get through the narrow gate, we are told that the way that leads to life is narrow. The “straight” gate means “narrow”, so is the “narrow” way any different? Judy warned that we would not like the answer. The word “narrow” is “thlibo” which means “afflict, narrow, throng, suffer tribulation, trouble.” You might ask, “Why did I give so much up to fit through the narrow gate for this?” Let me remind you of the other option: the way of destruction. To put it bluntly—you pay now, or you pay later.



The word for narrow means that we are pressed by difficulties to stay on the narrow road, we are crowded with obstacles. Just as pain removes a child's hand from a hot iron, our suffering can get us back on the narrow road to life – if we let it. David had been through a few trials...sin, kids killing each other, one (Absalom) leading a revolt to take the throne, wife problems, enemies, living in caves, running for his life... I love his afterthoughts in Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey thy word." In verse 71, he adds, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." He admits in verse 92 that he would have perished in his affliction if he had not found his delight in the law of the Lord.

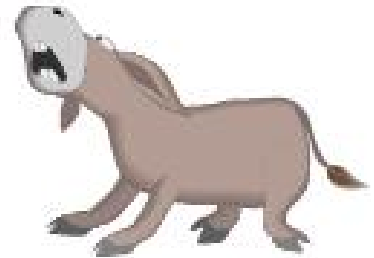
When tribulation hits us hard, we become like a child in the dark. We can no longer see where we're going in the darkness of trials, so we are more apt to grasp for God and follow closely after Christ. II Chronicles 6:1 says that God dwells in thick darkness."

"He alone knows how to maximize our fruit—and our joy." Judy said. She humbly shared the "darkness" of her family's trials: loneliness, malaria, typhoid, poverty, the blindness of the Muslims and Hindis—but she also acknowledged the joy God consistently gives. "Sometimes God has to hem us in with difficulty so we will discover Him in new ways," she said.

She quoted Proverbs 3: 5-6 and encouraged us not to lean on our own understanding—but to acknowledge Him—and "He shall direct your paths." She suggested that—as God directs our paths—He will also remove the obstacles. "The narrow road leads to joy. Prove Him," Judy dared.

She used Joseph as an example of obstacles and fruit. Joseph's situation looked dismal – sold into slavery and later jailed even though he had done nothing wrong— alone in a strange land... Joseph experienced the "but, God..." He didn't ask for the circumstances, but God added favor to fulfill His purposes for Joseph – above and beyond what Joseph could have possibly imagined.

Another illustration of staying on the narrow path is found in Numbers 22, the story of the prophet Balaam and his talking donkey. Long story, short: Balak, the king of Moab, wanted Balaam to curse his enemies, but God told Balaam, "Do not go with them." Balak's representatives up the ante and offer Balaam honor and rewards. Balaam compromises and goes with them to meet with Balak. Along the way, things get interesting. In his disobedience, Balaam's spiritual eyes are blind, but his donkey sees the angel of the Lord blocking the path toward Balak and turns into the field. Balaam beats the donkey and forces it back on the path. Passing by two vineyards, the donkey again sees the angel of the Lord blocking the path and he presses against the wall crushing Balaam's foot. Balaam again beats his donkey and saddles back up. This time they come to a narrow place with no space to turn left or right, and the angel again stands in the way. The donkey collapses under Balaam, who now furiously beats the beast. Imagine his surprise when the donkey speaks! God opens up Balaam's eyes and he sees the angel for himself. Balaam repents and says,



"I did not know you stood in the way against me."

How often does God block our way through people or circumstances because we are no longer seeking the Lord's will in complete obedience? How often do we curse them and stubbornly stay on our personal agenda? Proverbs 16:25 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death."*

Proverbs 22:6 says we are to train up a child in the way he should go—do we even know the way WE are going? Straight gate, narrow way, tribulations... Is it all about just avoiding the way of destruction, or is something at the end of the narrow way? Psalm 118:5 says, *"I called on the Lord in my distress and he answered me and set me in a large place."* God brings us out into a broad place, of understanding, wisdom and a deeper knowledge of the character of God. Psalm 119:45 says, *"I will always walk in a broad place because I seek your*

commandments.” This “broad space” means “roomy” and also means “liberty.” Isn’t that amazing?!

Real liberty comes within the confines of surrender and obedience to God. Having too many choices can be tiring. Watch any child trying to decide on an ice cream flavor out of 50 choices. Back to our vacation analogy: one of the things that makes vacation so “liberating” is that our choices are pared down. We bring a limited amount of clothing so life is simpler. The same is true with the straight gate and the narrow road to life.



Let’s bring this full circle as it applies to homeschooling. If homeschooling is a call on your life, then it is your straight gate. It is narrow and may mean that you have to give up career ambitions and other plans for your life, and give God the plans for your children’s lives.

You can’t drag everything through the straight gate. It may mean leaving behind people’s expectations—maybe even yours!

Once through the gate (as most of you are), we come to the narrow way. Scripture is clear that the narrow way is hemmed in by suffering and tribulation—but we have seen it as God’s path to joy as well. I’ve heard a lot of families decide homeschooling can’t be God’s will because it’s too hard. Or, they stray into the broad way of destruction because it seems to free them in some way. A fruitful work of God will always be opposed by the enemy of our souls—another reason God’s will may be painful.

As we begin a new school year, I plead with you to set aside time to spend with God. Ask Him to show you the narrow way that leads to life. Don’t be fooled by the counterfeit that leads to destruction—no matter how good it may look. God rewards obedience—full obedience though, not partial. (I am often saddened to think of how many rewards God wanted to shower me with—but I missed them because I strayed into the broad way...through ignorance, rebellion, unbelief—or all of the above.

Frankly, I see many trends away from homeschooling. Options and additional resources are wonderful, but only within the confines of the “narrow way” as God defines it for your family. Please seek His face in this area—and then obey Him—so He can prosper you and lead you into the broad place of wisdom, understanding and liberty.

Don't forget your AAA card. *Don't stay home without it!*