

The background of the cover is a light gray topographic map with thin, wavy contour lines. A thick, dark gray path winds through the map, starting from the top center, curving left, then right, then left again, and finally curving right towards the bottom center. The path is slightly wider and darker than the surrounding map lines.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Narrow Path

by Rich Villodas

HOW TO USE THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE

The goal of this discussion guide is to help you process—in community—the material from *The Narrow Path*. The hope is that this resource will ground you deeper in Holy Scripture, while helping you give careful reflection to five critical areas of our life in Christ.

Before each group discussion, read the chapter from *The Narrow Path* that corresponds with the session.

Forming Connection

At the start of each discussion, take a few minutes to form connection with each other. More than just responding to questions, the hope is that this guide will be a resource to deepen relationship with those in your group.

Bible Study

Each chapter will have a passage of scripture to read and discuss. To grow in our life with God, reflecting on Holy Scripture is an indispensable practice.

Personal Reflection

Personal reflection is indispensable. At some point in each discussion, pause for 4-5 minutes to pay attention to what God is doing in your life. It might be helpful to capture particular words, feelings, or prompts from the Spirit in a journal, and as fitting, to share with the group.

Closing Prayer

As you close each discussion, spend a few minutes praying for one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

01

The Sermon on the Mount is regarded by many as the most important set of teachings in the Bible. How has this sermon (Matthew 5-7) shaped your spiritual journey?

02

Jesus says that the narrow road leads to life, but few find it. How does walking Jesus's narrow road impact life here and now, in your everyday life?

03

Take a look at the chapter breakdown in this book. Which of the topics are you most eager to grow in? Why?

CHAPTER 1- UNEXPECTED DISASTER

“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.”
(Matthew 7:13-14)

Discussion Questions

Rich named three dangers of the broad path (moralism, successism, individualism). Which one do you struggle with the most, and how does it show up in your life?

What is your vision of “the good life?” How might this vision impact the way you follow Jesus and his teachings?

Jesus invites us to live our lives from the inside out, examining our motivations and the disordered desires that cause harm in our lives. Has interior examination been part of your discipleship? How so? If not, why do you think that is?

CHAPTER 2 - UNEXPECTED HAPPINESS

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of
me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your
reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted
the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:3-12)

Discussion Questions

How would the family you grew up in describe a happy life? Does that vision of happiness align with what Jesus says in the beatitudes?

Read each beatitude. Which one do you find most difficult to live out? Why might this be so?

Notice that Jesus offers blessings before he instructs his disciples on how they should live. Why is this order (blessing before instruction) important?

CHAPTER 3 - UNEXPECTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 6:1)

Discussion Questions

Take a moment to slowly read Matthew 6:1. To what extent does Jesus’s language of “reward” in heaven currently shape your life?

Rich mentioned that Jesus calls us to hiddenness, especially hiddenness from our own righteousness. How can we manage the great tension of doing good, without becoming self-congratulatory?

Jesus has strong words for those who live to be applauded by others. How does this teaching confront the world of social media?

CHAPTER 4 - OUR WITNESS

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”
(Matthew 5:13-16)

Discussion Questions

What does it say about Jesus (and his disciples) that he calls them the salt of the earth and the light of the world at the very beginning of their discipleship journey?

To be salt and light requires us to be engaged in the matters of the world. Rich noted that we can live against the world or apart from the world. Which of these two postures are you most drawn to?

Discussion Questions (continued)

In the previous chapter, Jesus calls us to hiddenness from our own righteousness. In this chapter he calls us to demonstrate our good deeds for the glory of the Father. How do these teachings go hand in hand?

CHAPTER 5 - OUR ANGER

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Discussion Questions

How did the family you grew up in express anger? How has this environment formed you in this area?

Rich named Cultural Anger and Interior Anger as two expressions we must be on guard against. In what ways has our angry culture contributed to the interior anger you might feel?

How has the practice of lament helped you engage and process the anger you feel?

CHAPTER 6 - OUR WORDS

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 5:33-37)

Discussion Questions

Read this portion slowly. What words or phrases that stand out to you. Why is your attention drawn to this part of Jesus’s teaching?

When was the last time you were able to offer a strong “Yes” or “No?” Why were you able to do so in that situation?

Rich noted three reasons why we don’t speak truthfully (we fear disappointing others, we live life on the go, a culture of superficiality). Which of these hinders your truthfulness?

CHAPTER 7 - OUR DESIRES

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-30)

Discussion Questions

Read this portion slowly. What words or phrases that stand out to you? What do you feel as you read Jesus’s extreme words in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount?

In what ways have you connected your desires and sexuality to your faith? Why do you think this is so?

What does Jesus mean when he says to “gouge out your eyes” or “cut off your hand?” Clearly, he’s not being literal, so practically, how can you live this out?

CHAPTER 8 - OUR MONEY

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6:19-24)

Discussion Questions

Carefully read this portion of scripture. What words or phrases stand out to you? Is there anything you sense God saying to you in these words?

Jesus tells us that money is not a neutral tool; it's a rival master. How might this truth shape the way you relate to money?

Discussion Questions (continued)

Rich mentioned three areas to resist the god of Mammon (Generosity, Simplicity, Sabbath economics). Which of these are you most eager to implement in your life, and what is your first step?

CHAPTER 9 - OUR ANXIETY

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matthew 6:25-27)

Discussion Questions

When anxiety or excessive worry visits you, how do you tend to express it?

Jesus connects our level of anxiety with our view of God’s goodness. While anxiousness stems from many complex causes, in what ways might your anxiety stem from your view of God?

Rich notes that “To seek God’s kingdom first” is to have our entire value system transformed, or at least questioned. How has God’s kingdom rearranged your values, and are there any convictions you carry that he might want to reshape?

CHAPTER 10 - OUR JUDGMENTS

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”
(Matthew 7:1-5)

Discussion Questions

Read this passage carefully. What do you think is beneath the judgments we pronounce on others?

How has our culture of swift judgment influenced the ways you judge others?

Are there any areas in your life where you need to examine the log in your own eye? How might you bring this before God and others?

CHAPTER 11 - OUR DECISIONS

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ (Matthew 7:21-23)

Discussion Questions

How have you have you been taught to discern the will of God?

What thoughts or feelings come to mind when you read Jesus’s stern words for those who do ministry in his name but don’t know him?

Rich mentioned a few ways to discern and do God’s will (search the scriptures, listen to your heart, pursue community wisdom). Which of these three has most helped you in your journey? Which of these three do you want to invest more in?

CHAPTER 12 - OUR ENEMIES

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor[i] and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48)

Discussion Questions

Read this passage aloud. Is there an enemy in your life who Jesus is calling you to love and pray for? Pause and do so right now, in this moment.

Jesus calls us to love enemies, not just tolerate them. How do you feel when you hear these words? What makes this kind of teaching possible?

Jesus connects God’s “perfection” with love for enemies. To what degree has this been your understanding of God’s character?

AFTERWORD



What truths from the Sermon on the Mount most grip your heart and mind? Why do they stand out to you?

After reading this book, where do you feel challenged? Are there places you feel more hopeful or expectant?



Rich Villodas

*To journey through a narrow path
requires you and I to slow down.*



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