Better - Part 3

# Be Different

# (Matthew 7:13-14)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. I’m so glad to have you with us again for part three of our series entitled “Better”. We’ve been talking about choices in life and choosing that which is better. You could say, making decisions in a way that would honor God. Because it’s the choices that we’re making today that will determine who we become and what we can do tomorrow. As followers of Christ we want to rise up, we don’t want to be stuck in the same old rut when we could be doing so much better. And honestly, there is just so much that our friends, our families, and our neighbors are doing that really just isn’t working. We want to learn to make better choices, not repeating the same thing over and over and over again expecting a different result but choosing better because we realize that who we are today is a direct result of the choices that we made yesterday.

Yet, for most of us, we’re creatures of habit. We don’t like breaking away from the crowd, we don’t like choosing to be different. As a matter of fact, I would have to admit that for a significant portion of my life my goal was to fit in, to try to be like other people, doing what they do, living how they live, and so I ended up like so many people just empty and hurting. But when I personally encountered Jesus and began to study his teachings I found that what the Bible said, what Jesus taught was different, many times completely opposite of what I was used to. And there was this spiritual force, the Holy Spirit, that was drawing me to God. Suddenly for the first time in my life I really had courage to do something different and I told God that if what I’m reading is true I want to experience it, I want to live it, and so I repented of my sin and prayed that Jesus would change my life. It was amazing, it was a miracle, because overnight I was changed, I had a new life, I was born again, and God laid out before me a new path filled with hope and purpose.

Today, if you’ve been doing what everybody around you is doing, just going along living a normal life, I pray that the Spirit of God would capture your heart through these words recorded in Matthew chapter 7. You see, as you look at the teachings of Jesus he sets before us two different roads and I want to say this just as clearly as I can, if your life looks like everybody else’s life, if you’re doing what everyone else is doing, and you’re on that road that many people travel, it’s very likely that you’re on the wrong road. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus calls us to be different, to choose the path less traveled and in verse 13 he says,

"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).

This morning, I want to invite you into something different, because what everybody else is doing is rushed, stressed-out, and overwhelmed, with never enough time to do what really matters. But here in this passage, Jesus presents before us two ways, a small gate and a wide gate, a broad road and a narrow road, one road that leads to destruction and the other that leads to life. And so, Jesus invitation is to enter through the narrow gate, but the problem is few people have the courage to leave the broad road. If you find comfort in going along with the crowd, if that’s the way you’ve been living your life, I want to encourage you to be different; to choose better.

If you want what few people have, if you want purpose, joy, and confidence. If you want a sense of being called, knowing that your pleasing God, then you’ll want to do what few people do, you’ll have to be different, you’ll have to leave the broad road and get on the narrow path. And so, I hope that you will embrace the Word of God today, recognizing that not only is it okay to be different, but that when you’re led by the Spirit of God it’s way better to be different. And so, number one, we need to seek the wisdom of God.

# 1. Seek the Wisdom of God

If you recognize that what everybody else is doing just isn’t working, then maybe it’s time to be different. And so, when it comes to finances if normal is broke, if normal is living from paycheck to paycheck, if normal is always struggling with debt, we need the wisdom to choose the narrow road, to choose better. Or maybe in your professional life if you’re doing something you don’t like just to get by. You’re working for a paycheck, knowing that there’s got to be something more, but you just can’t quite put your finger on it. And so, if you’re looking for something different, you’re going to choose better, you’re going to seek the wisdom of God.

Now, you may remember the story of Solomon in the Old Testament. He’d just been anointed to be king over Israel; there was a great celebration, the people of God were worshiping, they were sacrificing animals, and it was the most extravagant celebration of God that they’d ever experienced. It was an amazing day in the history of Israel, and that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him,

"Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (2 Chronicles 1:7).

Now most of us at some point in our lives have dreamed that something like this would happen. You know, maybe you’ve even thought, “Well, I’d love to be famous. I’d like to be rich,” or maybe even something clever like, “Well, give me three more wishes.” But whatever it would be, this was an amazing offer, and that’s exactly what God said to Solomon. In the second Chronicles chapter 1, we find recorded Solomon’s answer. He said,

“Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people…” (2 Chronicles 1:10).

And so, God said, “Ask for whatever you want and I’ll give it to you.” And Solomon replied, “Give me wisdom and knowledge” which apparently was the right answer, because it so moved the heart of God that he said to Solomon,

“Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honor…" (2 Chronicles 1:11-12).

The Bible goes on to say that Solomon had more wisdom than any of the kings before him or after him. As a matter of fact, Solomon wrote and said more about wisdom than anybody else in all of Scripture. Over and over he said, “Wisdom is better” and in Proverbs chapter 16 he said,

“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver! (Proverbs 16:16, NIV).

Basically, he said, “To seek wisdom is better than that which everybody else wants,” because for centuries and centuries gold and silver has always been what everybody wanted, but Solomon said get wisdom and knowledge. And so, we want to seek the wisdom of God, being different, because if we get wisdom, not the wisdom of this world, but wisdom based on the heart of God, we can go from living a normal life, going along with the crowd, traveling on the broad road, struggling to find meaning and purpose in life, to someone who is impacting generations for the glory of God.

Today, there are some of you who are struggling and you need wisdom. You’re trying to make decisions, things aren’t going well, and you need to choose better. Solomon said it this way in Proverbs chapter 4, he said,

“Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Proverbs 4:7).

And so, what he’s saying is that you can get it; even though it may cost you everything you have, seek the wisdom of God. Get it because it will transform your life. Get it because it’s much better than any of the commodities this world pursues. And so, if you want what few have, if you’re going to choose better, if you’re going to be different, you’re going to have to do what few do. And therefore, number two, you practice self-discipline.

# 2. Practice Self-Discipline

Some of you are recognizing even now, that if you want to be different, if you want things to be different, then you’re going to have to do things differently. Maybe for you, you want to get closer to God and so it’s time to take the Word of God seriously. Or maybe it’s time to get in better shape, you want to quit smoking, or pay off your credit cards; if you’re recognizing that you’re going to have to change some things, you start with one, and you practice self-discipline.

Now, if you’ve been living life like everyone else on your street, you choose better, and you choose to be different. And so, if you’ve been living an undisciplined life, you just start with what you want most. You find victory in that one area, and then it will become easier to find victory in other areas. As you choose to be different, practicing self-discipline, there may be times when you don’t get it right because the Bible tells us, “All a man's ways seem right to him…” (Proverbs 21:2). But as we practice, as we exercise self-discipline, choosing to be different, we’ll get it right more and more.

I love the way the apostle Paul illustrates this principle. You see, it’s by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can choose better, it’s only by the Spirit of God that we can continually tap into the power of Christ to live a self-disciplined life. And in first Corinthians chapter 9, Paul gives us a picture of a race and runners like in the Olympics and he says,

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:24).

In other words, everyone wants to win and so when you’re running, you’re not running for second place. You’re running with every bit of effort, concentration, and speed that you have, because you’re running to win. And so, Paul says, therefore,

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The athletes are disciplined in their training, they’re choosing fitness over sleeping in, self-discipline over eating pizza. Why? Because they’re choosing what’s better. And in the same way we’re not doing it for a cheap plastic trophy, the Bible says that we’re doing it for a crown that will last forever. Therefore, we’re different from the world, we’re taking the narrow path, and we’re practicing self-discipline.

And so, you and I come to church every week with a prayerful expectation; not only expecting to hear from God, but we’re anticipating that God is going to use us to impact lives and make a difference in the world. And so, we’re running to win, coming to church with an expectation that we’re going to encounter God, that we’re going to be transformed by his power and his presence and that we’re here with a purpose. That we’re serving God, that through his power we’re going to be able to minister to somebody else. I assure you that you’ll be different if you come with that expectation.

In the same way, if you wanted to get in better shape, maybe you want to lose 20 pounds, you may get some kind of home workout plan. You should probably get some advice on your diet, talk to your doctor, lower the carbs and sugar, maybe increase the protein, and you’re going to start practicing self-discipline. You going to choose better, you’re not going to settle for what you want now, because there’s something up ahead that you’re looking forward to. You know it’s going to take some work and so you choose the pain of self-discipline, you choose better, because you don’t want to experience the pain of regret. Paul continues with this theme saying in verse 26,

“Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Corinthians 9:26-27).

Paul says, I’m going to be purposeful, I’m going to be self-disciplined, I’m going to run in such a way as to win the race. And so, you and I as followers of Jesus, we’re going to practice self-discipline, we’re going to choose better, we’re going to choose what we want most over what we want now. With purpose in every step, we’re training our bodies to be self-disciplined. It may take a little longer, it’s time-consuming, it’s more difficult, but we do it to win a prize.

We’re seeking the wisdom of God, we’re practicing self-discipline, we’re running the race, looking for a crown that will last forever. We want to be different, we’re choosing better, and so, number three, we’re growing in holiness.

## 3. Growing in Holiness

You see, when you’re serious about following Jesus, when you’re living for a crown lasts forever, you’ll want to run the race in such a way as to honor God. And so, when you follow his teachings, Jesus will lead you onto the narrow path and you’ll be different because your goal is to please God who said, in second Corinthians,

"Therefore, come out from them and be separate says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

When you’re living to please God, he’ll set you apart, you’ll be separate, you’ll be different; and the moment you leave the broad path there’s going to be some kickback, people are going to make fun of you, and you’ll be hit with this pressure to conform to the world. But as you seek the wisdom of God, as you practice self-discipline, and as you grow in holiness, you’ll want more than anything else to really please God; because he’s saved you, he’s set you apart, and his Word is making you different.

Now, it’s likely that there’s going to be a continual gravitational pull back to the culture, and you’ll have to resist and fight to be different, but when you’re led by the Spirit of God its way better to be different. In fact, you’ll see those who are still traveling on the broad road, you will encounter them in the workplace, you will see them at the grocery store, Walmart, Lowe’s, or wherever you go and it will be obvious that their way of life just isn’t working, and you will be encouraged to be different, because it’s not just okay, it’s way better. As a matter of fact, here’s what God said, God told us to be something, to be different, and here’s what he said in first Peter chapter 1, God said,

"Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

Now I know at first glance that’s rather intimidating and so I want to explain that to you so that it may become more meaningful for you. I think for many of us, when we think of holiness, we think of really religious people, we think of someone who has attained a level of spirituality far above our own. And that is a good application, but this Greek word also means to be pure, morally blameless, it means to be set apart, or consecrated, and it literally means to be different. And so, when God says to be holy because I am holy, he is saying that in this very impure world that we’re to be pure and blameless. He’s saying that we’re to be set apart, we’re not to be like everyone else, but we’re to be different. Jesus said in John chapter 15, that we don’t belong to the world, we’re not to be like the rest of the world, we’re to be different, because he says in verse 19,

"I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19).

And so, he’s called us out of the world, we are the called-out ones, and yet there’s something deep inside of us that wants the approval of other people. We want to identify with them, we want to be one with them, we don’t want them to think that we’re different. We want them to like us and honestly, it was one of the biggest obstacles in my own life when it came to surrendering to God. As a matter fact, Proverbs chapter 29 says this,

“Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (Proverbs 29:25).

And so, it’s that desire to fit in, to travel along that broad path that will become like a trap or a snare as God is trying to lead you to do something different. You see, all along that is exactly what God is calling you to do, he’s called you to be different, to be the light of the world, to stand out and represent him. And yet, so many of us are not doing what God has called us to do because we’re worried about what other people will think and we’re surrender to the opinions of others instead of surrendering to God. On the other hand, there is comfort when other people recognize that your different, when you’re on the narrow road and people criticize you for choosing better. You should rejoice in that, rejoice when they criticize you, rejoice when they persecute you, and worry when they don’t. Because if they don’t you’re probably just way to normal. If no one makes fun of you for the way you follow Christ, you’re just blending in and traveling along with the crowd. But when you’re led by the Spirit, different is just way better.

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