

Read also Daniel 3:1-18. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Have you ever been on a treasure hunt?

There is an art dealer in New Mexico named Forrest Fenn. He put together a treasure chest which contains hundreds of rare gold coins, gold nuggets, antique animal figurines, rubies, emeralds, and turquoise, probably worth \$1,000,000. He hid the chest somewhere in the mountains north of Santa Fe and began advertising it and giving clues as to its location.

Tourism has been reinvigorated in the Santa Fe area.

Mr. Fenn says his main goal is to get people, particularly children, away from their texting devices and looking for adventure outdoors. Wow.

You may not have gone on a treasure hunt, but you might have participated in a scavenger hunt with your friends. Your team is motivated by reward so you might go to great extent to win, like pushing down others or doing whatever it takes.

Perhaps it is the thrill of winning or the anticipation of a reward. I don't know what is important to you, but most people are motivated by something.

Jesus has been talking about the Kingdom of God extensively in this Sermon on the Mount. He has reached the end of His commentary. He says to His audience, whom He sees as poised to begin the journey:

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Picture yourself standing at the entrance of Yosemite Valley. Before you lays mountains and valleys, streams and waterfalls; meadows and wilderness—750 miles of trails. You pick up a brochure. You notice those trails designated “easy.” They are described as more of a stroll than a hike. You see them. They are paved, gently curving; and you can see the falls and the mountains far in the distance.

You turn to the side and look up. Your neck gets a cramp in it as you gaze higher and higher at the magnificent cliff above you. You check the brochure for the trail that leads up there. It says “strenuous.” You read a sign that says “steep and icy conditions.” The first part is paved, but then goes into steep and rugged granite steps and eventually a dirt path. As you walk you experience a huge amount of water spray. Portions are closed due to storms, requiring that you wait. As you get a few miles higher, you pass magnificent falls. The trail, at times, has a gentle, downhill slope. But not all of it is downhill; mostly you can expect an uphill climb.

You hit the wilderness where you are far from roads and human activity. This is a time to savor. You come to a fork. One way is a mist trail, close to the water, but steeper. The other has many switchbacks; it is easier but longer, away from the water. Both have stunning views of glacial

mountains which are now near. You must stay on the trail, though, to avoid unstable ground. Your guide will help you. He knows the way forwards and backwards.

When you reach the top, the view is breathtaking; one that there is no other way to experience than by being there.

Jesus says, *Enter through the narrow gate, take the road that is hard. It leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

Wow, Jesus is not that great of a salesman! Narrow, hard road; few find it. Narrow, as opposed to wide; easy, as opposed to hard. What's the difference?

You might think of some wide roads you like. Broadway in New York City. The Magnificent Mile in Chicago. The Mall to Buckingham Palace. Champs-Élysées in Paris.

Many take these roads, seeking satisfaction. But making that your life is a problem.

There are many such wide roads. Did you watch the story of Amanda Knox? As an exchange student in Italy, trying to find herself, she described it as a campaign of casual sex, "an adventure of self-hood." Isn't that what all self-confident free-spirited women do? But she told Diane Sawyer that was naïve immaturity.

Her quest for personhood turned into a nightmare when she was convicted, and jailed for murdering her roommate, a process she described as like "crawling through a field of barbed wire," again and again.¹

While in jail she found help from the chaplain who urged her to trust God and pray for help. She hesitated, not knowing if she had the faith, but then she did pray that prayer. God indeed reached down to her and she is out today on appeal.

She thought she was doing what was normal, but now describes this road as one of sad destruction, although she never imagined it would go this way. But if you find yourself on such a road, you can get off at any time and take another path.

Most "easy roads" are not so obvious. They are really just little daily decisions – focusing on the here and now, not taking the time to gain perspective; trying to find satisfaction in everything but God; thinking one more shopping trip or Sunday morning brunch will do it. Or, letting pride, ambition, and such replace that deeper need, instead of seeking Jesus.

At times, Jesus can seem so narrow.

So we all ask at times, *how can Jesus be enough?* Why is the narrow way better than a treasure chest? The narrow way seems so sparse, compared to the big wide road of treasure.

¹All comments taken from ABC interview with Diane Sawyer, shown April 30, 2013.

Jesus, however, invites us, as if it is an adventure. “Take this way . . .” It seems like it’s sort of hidden, too . . . “enter through here.”

A man on a path sees a mountain and longs to climb it. He follows a path and it rounds a corner. Before him lies a huge field of brambles. Beyond that is a river. He says to himself, *I can’t do it. I must turn around. The accident prevents me.* Thirteen years before he had a car wreck and received serious injuries. That event compromised his abilities. But that day something beckoned him on. He moved forward and as he did, began to see a way through the briars. He saw openings here and there. Before you know it he was at the waters’ edge. What had looked like an insurmountable river from a distance was really a rather shallow creek. He saw a large log which he thought he might walk. Then some stones placed here and there, as if just for his feet.

At times he would collapse, exhausted, wanting to quit, to turn back, to be relieved of this journey. He wanted his air-conditioned car and a nice motel, rather than the backpack on his back. But, as he traveled, the old injury wasn’t so noticeable anymore. He felt stronger, more hopeful. Each time he came to an obstacle—a large boulder in the path, or when the path seemed to just disappear and he did not know which way to go, or a fierce rainstorm filled his shoes with mud—he would wait and then the call would come and he would see the way. He began to define it as miraculous; and his courage grew.

He forgot all about the injury, the past, the cares that he once had. By the time he reached the top of the mountain, he truly felt that he could soar with the eagles; run and not get weary; walk and not faint. It was exhilarating and he was so glad he did it. It was so much better than one more drink at the bar; another one-night stand; the latest new toy.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were exiled with the Jews into a land where the world did not think like them. When the call came to bow before the idol, it would have been so easy to just do it. Who would ever know?

But they had lived in service to God in Israel, so would they now serve the golden idol? Would they take the wide road? Go along with the crowd? Save their lives?

They decided no. I’m sure it was an agonizing decision. And they were thrown into the furnace. The king watched. Suddenly he leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers “weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw in the fire? Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” So he brought them out and the fire had not even singed a hair of their heads or scorched their clothes. And there was no smell of fire on them. (See Daniel 3:22-27) It was a miracle that turned the king to God.

What is the narrow way? It’s where you wait on God, pray, and expect God to come through. It’s a road of forgiveness and looking forward. It’s where you are called to persevere through trials, depend on God, and lean on Jesus. It’s an adventure.

It’s a road that makes you “perfect.”

“Be perfect,” Jesus says, “as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That means complete, whole, mature; fully who you are meant to be. You move in that direction when you live close to Jesus.

Which way do you want to walk—the broad way or the narrow way? What is more important to you? The narrow way is sort of hidden; it looks much less glamorous, but I promise you, it’s a life that develops your courage and strength. What’s on the narrow way? The greatest hope.

AMEN