

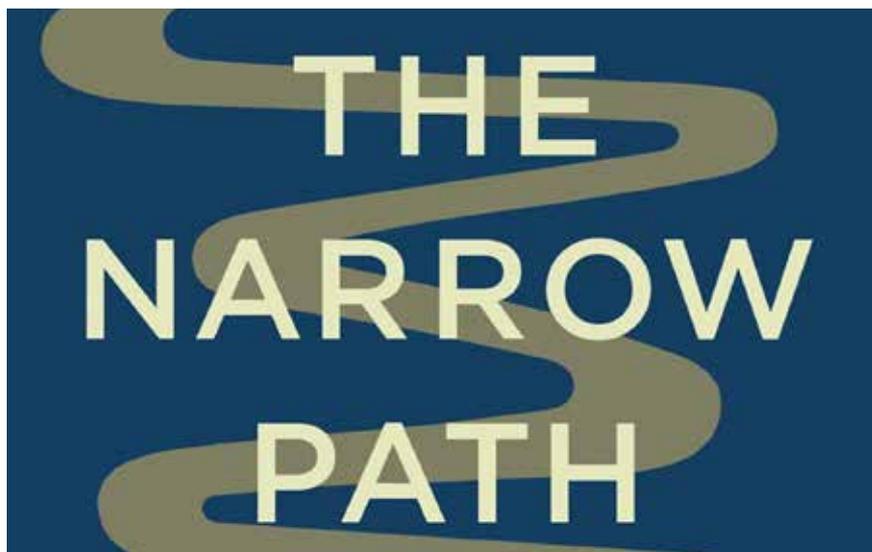


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# THE NARROW PATH

HOW THE  
SUBVERSIVE WAY OF JESUS  
SATISFIES OUR SOULS

**Group Study Guide**  
by Rich Villodas



## **You're Already on a Path—Where Is It Taking You?**

Life is shaped by what we choose—and most of us are choosing more than we realize.

In this five-session series, Rich Villodas invites us to take an honest look at the two paths Jesus describes: the broad path that slowly drains us, and the narrow path that leads to real life.

### **To access videos that go along with this study:**

Sign into **RightNow Media**.

(You can sign up for a free account through The Bridge at [www.thebridge.me/rnmedia](http://www.thebridge.me/rnmedia).)

Then search for The Narrow Path by Rich Villodas

# SMALL GROUP GROUND RULES

**This should be a safe place.**

## **PLEASE:**

- Keep things that are shared confidential.
- Respect those with different backgrounds, thoughts, and beliefs. We are not all the same, and that is a good thing.
- Discussion involves everyone. Be ready to participate as a listener and as a speaker.
- Let opinions submit to what the Bible has to say.

# THE NARROW PATH

## WEEK ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE NARROW PATH



### Let's Get Started

Share about a time you faced a "fork-in-the-road" decision in life.

What made the decision hard? What helped you choose your path?



### Read Aloud

**Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)**

*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*



### Watch

Session 1: Understanding the Narrow Path  
(12 minutes)

As you watch, look for:

- How Rich Villodas describes Christians' relationship with the "broad path."
- What four truths we can learn from the Sermon on the Mount.
- What three beliefs mark the "broad path."





## Discuss

1. When you think about Jesus' "narrow path," what comes to mind?  
Have you ever assumed this passage was only about believers vs. nonbelievers?
2. Rich said even Christians can drift toward the "broad path." What are some subtle ways followers of Jesus might do this in today's culture?
3. The broad path is oriented around the value system of the world—success, self-focus, and control. The narrow path is oriented around the wisdom and way of Jesus—surrender, trust, and love. Where do you see this contrast show up in your own life?
4. Rich said that the narrow path, though challenging, leads to "spaciousness of life." Have you experienced that kind of freedom and peace following Jesus? When does following Him feel restrictive or costly?



## Read Aloud

### Proverbs 4:18-19 (NIV)

*The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.*

*<sup>19</sup>But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.*



## Discuss

5. According to this passage, what happens when we walk in the light of wisdom? How have you experienced “clarity” or “darkness” in your decision-making?
6. The Bible often uses “path” or “walk” to describe a lifestyle or pattern of choices.  
What habits or rhythms are helping you stay on the narrow path right now?  
What habits or influences might be slowly pulling you toward the broad one?

### DEEPER INSIGHT

Rich described three distorted beliefs found on the broad path:

- **Moralism** - believing God cares more about your behavior than your heart
- **Successism** - chasing a shallow version of “the good life”
- **Individualism** - living as though faith is just “me and God”



## Discuss

7. Which of these three do you tend to lean toward—and how do you see it show up?
8. What helps re-center you on the truth of Jesus when you drift toward these patterns?



# Read Aloud

Proverbs 4:25-27 (NIV)

*Let your eyes look straight ahead;  
fix your gaze directly before you.*

*<sup>26</sup>Give careful thought to the paths for your feet  
and be steadfast in all your ways.*

*<sup>27</sup>Do not turn to the right or the left;  
keep your foot from evil.*



## Discuss

9. What are some “distractions” that pull your focus away from walking closely with Jesus? What practical step could you take this week to refocus your eyes on Him?



## Prayer & Reflection

Rich reminded us that prayer is how we stay connected to the narrow path.

We can't walk this road in our own strength.

10. When do you find it easiest to approach Jesus honestly?  
When is it hardest—and why?
11. Take a few moments to pray silently for **clarity** and **direction** about one area of your life where you want to walk the narrow path more intentionally.

## Last Word

The narrow path isn't about restriction—it's about freedom. As we walk with Jesus, we discover a life that's wider, richer, and more spacious than anything the world offers.

# THE NARROW PATH

## WEEK TWO: RELATIONSHIPS ON THE NARROW PATH



### Let's Get Started

Share about a time when someone responded to you in a way you didn't expect—especially with kindness, grace, or humility.



### Read Aloud

**Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)**

*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. <sup>14</sup>You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

- What stands out to you the most in this passage?
- What surprises you about Jesus saying "you are" instead of "you should be" or "you will be"?





## Discuss

1. Rich pointed out that Jesus names who we are before He tells us how to live. **Have you ever had someone speak potential or truth over you that you didn't yet see in yourself? How did that shape your confidence or direction?**
2. Jesus calls His followers salt—something that seasons and preserves. **Where do you see Christians adding “flavor” or goodness to the world today?**
3. In your everyday life (work, home, friendships), what might it look like to add value rather than just voice opinions?
4. Jesus also says we are the light of the world—reflecting His goodness so others glorify God. **How visible is your faith right now?**
5. Are there environments where you tend to downplay your relationship with Jesus? **Why?**



## Read Aloud

### Matthew 5:21-26 (NIV)

*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.’ <sup>22</sup>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.*

*<sup>23</sup>Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has*

*something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*



## Discuss

Jesus connects anger not just to explosive behavior, but to resentment and unresolved relational tension.

6. What feels most challenging or uncomfortable about Jesus' words here?
7. Would you describe yourself as someone who holds onto resentment—or someone who avoids conflict?
8. How does our culture typically encourage us to deal with anger? How is Jesus' way different?

Jesus doesn't just tell us what not to do—He calls us to love in unexpected ways.



## Read Aloud

**Matthew 5:43-45 (NIV)**

*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup>But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>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.*



## Discuss

9. Who comes to mind when you hear the phrase “love your enemies”?
10. What usually keeps you from responding with kindness toward people you disagree with?
11. Why do you think praying for our enemies is so difficult—and yet so powerful?



## Bible Exploration

Look up and read Acts 6:11-12

*Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.*

- If you were falsely accused like Stephen, how would you be tempted to respond?
- What do you think is the wise response when your character or faith is attacked?

Look up and read Acts 7:54–60 (NIV)

Stephen’s final prayer mirrors Jesus’ prayer on the cross.

- What is your first instinct when you feel threatened, misunderstood, or attacked?
- What would it take for prayer to become your first response instead of your last resort?

## DEEPER INSIGHT

Praying for our enemies can feel fake or impossible—but compassion grows through proximity and perspective.

- How might empathy change the way you pray for someone you disagree with?
- What practices help soften your heart when resentment starts to grow?
- How could praying for someone reshape how you see them over time?



## **Practice - A Personal Step**

Think of one person:

- You avoid
- You resent
- Or you strongly disagree with

**What do you think God sees in them?**

**What would it look like to pray for their good—not just their change?**

If appropriate, consider:

- Asking how you can pray for them
- Initiating a respectful conversation
- Showing kindness in a tangible way



# Prayer & Reflection

Take a few moments of silence.

Ask God:

- To reveal any resentment you've normalized
- To give you compassion where love feels costly
- To help you live as the salt and light He already says you are

Pray quietly for one person God brings to mind.

## Last Word

Before Jesus ever asks us to love our enemies, He reminds us of who we are.

We are **salt**—meant to preserve and bring goodness.

We are **light**—meant to reflect God's grace to the world.

Walking the narrow path means choosing love when the world chooses retaliation.

It's costly—but it's how God's goodness becomes visible through us.

# THE NARROW PATH

## WEEK THREE: PRIORITIES ON THE NARROW PATH



### Let's Get Started

Are you more naturally a spender or a saver?

- Why do you think that is?
- How has that tendency helped you?
- How has it created tension or stress in your life?

### SETTING THE STAGE

Money touches nearly every part of our lives—housing, food, vacations, retirement, generosity, stress, and security. Whether we think about it often or try to avoid thinking about it altogether, money quietly shapes our priorities.

In this session, Rich invites us to examine how walking the narrow path with Jesus reshapes our relationship with wealth. Jesus' teaching on money was controversial in the first century—and it remains challenging today. As you engage this conversation, notice where resistance, discomfort, or clarity shows up in you.





## Discuss

Rich said, "A life oriented around money and possessions is a life of anxiety."

1. How would you describe your current relationship with money?
2. What does money most often give you—or promise to give you? (Security, freedom, comfort, control, status, peace?)
3. When do you notice money increasing anxiety rather than reducing it?



## Read Aloud

**Matthew 6:24 (NIV)**

*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.*



## Discuss

Jesus uses the word mammon to describe money—not as a neutral resource, but as a rival master.

4. When do you feel most controlled or influenced by money?
5. What behaviors reveal that money has more attention or affection than it should?
6. How can money subtly shape our decisions without us realizing it?

## DEEPER INSIGHT

# THREE TRUTHS ABOUT MONEY

### 1. Money Wants to Be Obeyed

Rich explained that money seeks obedience, not just usage.

- When does following Jesus most often conflict with financial logic or pressure?
- Where do you notice inconsistencies between what you say you trust and how you spend or save?

### 2. Money Absorbs Our Lives

Rich said, "If we give the best of our energy and passion to gaining wealth, it ends up owning us."

- When have you believed that just a little more money would bring peace—only to feel disappointed?
- Why does money so often fail to satisfy what it promises?
- What areas of your life feel least affected by money?

### 3. Money Clouds Moral Judgment

Read Matthew 6:22-23

*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!*

Jesus connects money to spiritual vision and moral clarity.

- How much weight does money carry when you make major life choices?
- What signs help you recognize when money is influencing your decisions more than Jesus' teachings?



# Trust & Security

Ultimately, how we handle money reveals what we trust.

7. Do you live as though God genuinely has your best interests in mind? Why or why not?
8. How would your financial decisions change if you truly believed God is in control?



## Bible Exploration

### MONEY & FOCUS

#### Seeking First the Kingdom

Read Matthew 6:33-34

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

- What does it mean to seek God's kingdom with your finances?  
(Think beyond giving—consider spending, saving, lifestyle, margin, generosity, and contentment.)
- What would it look like to live with less anxiety around money?
- What habits would need to change for that to become true?



## Practice - A Next Step

Growth requires honesty and action.

- What is one tangible change you sense God inviting you to make in your relationship with money?



## Prayer & Reflection

Take a few quiet moments.

Ask God:

- To reveal where money has taken on too much influence
- To replace anxiety with trust
- To help you see money clearly—as a tool, not a master

Pray for wisdom and courage to take one faithful step this week.

## Last Word

Following Jesus inevitably reshapes our priorities—including our financial ones. While wealth can promise freedom, security, and peace, it can never deliver what only God can give.

Money is not just a neutral tool—it's a rival for our hearts. But grace meets us wherever we are. Small changes in how we relate to money can lead to deep transformation as we learn to trust God more fully and walk the narrow path.

# THE NARROW PATH

## WEEK FOUR: INTEGRITY ON THE NARROW PATH



### Let's Get Started

How do you feel about canceling plans?

- How do you feel when *you* cancel?
- How do you feel when *others* cancel on you?
- What does someone canceling plans communicate—intentionally or unintentionally?

### SETTING THE STAGE

Some of us love canceling plans—it relieves pressure and gives us control over our time. Others feel a strong responsibility to keep their word no matter what.

In this session, Rich challenges the idea that integrity is a “small” issue. Jesus presents integrity as a deeply spiritual matter—one that reveals whether our inner life matches our outer life. As you engage this conversation, notice where your words, desires, and actions may be slightly—or significantly—out of sync.





## Discuss

### What Integrity Really Is

Rich described integrity as congruence—when our inner life and outer life match.

1. Who do you know that lives with this kind of integrity?
2. What makes their life feel trustworthy or consistent?
3. Why do you think integrity is so compelling—even to people who don't share their faith?

### INTEGRITY WITH OUR WORDS



## Read Aloud

### Matthew 5:33-37 (NIV)

*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.'* <sup>34</sup>*But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;* <sup>35</sup>*or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.* <sup>36</sup>*And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.* <sup>37</sup>*All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*



## Discuss

Jesus calls His followers to be people whose "yes" actually means yes.

4. Do you think others would describe you as someone who keeps their word? Why or why not?

5. Where is it hardest for you to follow through on what you say?
6. What pressures or fears tempt us to overpromise or be vague with our words?

Jesus connects dishonest speech to something far more serious than social inconvenience.

7. Why do you think Jesus links deception in our words to spiritual danger?
8. How can small patterns of dishonesty slowly erode trust—with God and with others?
9. What practices could help you take your words more seriously?

## **LUST VS. LOVE**

Rich made a clear contrast:

- Lust consumes; love communes
- Lust takes; love gives
- Lust uses; love honors
- Lust diminishes; love cherishes

10. Which of these differences challenges you the most?
11. Where do you find it hardest to treat others with honor and care rather than consumption?
12. What is one small, intentional step you could take toward loving others more fully this week?



# Bible Exploration

## WHEN INNER AND OUTER LIVES DON'T MATCH

Look up and read **Matthew 23:16–28 (NIV)**.

Jesus confronts the Pharisees for selectively keeping their word and focusing on appearances.

- When are you most tempted to keep your word only when it benefits you?
- What reasons most often lead you to back out of a commitment?
- Why do you think Jesus values reliability so highly?

Jesus also calls out neglecting “the more important matters”—justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

- Where do you tend to focus on “smaller” expressions of faith while missing bigger ones?
- What good religious habits can sometimes distract from loving people well?

### **Paying Attention to the Inner Life**

Read **Matthew 23:25–26 (NIV)**.

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup>Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.*

Jesus says inner transformation must come before outer change.

- How often do you reflect on your inner life—your thoughts, motives, and desires?
- What helps you slow down enough to notice what’s really going on inside?

Jesus later says the Pharisees appeared righteous outwardly but were misaligned internally.

- In what areas do you feel most pressure to look “put together”?
- How much does approval—or fear of rejection—shape your behavior?
- Where do you think that desire comes from?



## Practice - A Step Toward Alignment

Integrity grows through honesty and accountability.

- Where is your inner life most out of alignment with your outer life right now?
- What is one specific area God may be inviting you to bring into greater integrity?
- Who could help you walk faithfully in this—through prayer, encouragement, or accountability?



## Prayer & Reflection

Take a few quiet moments.

Ask God:

- To reveal areas of hidden inconsistency
- To soften your heart toward repentance, not shame
- To help you live with greater wholeness and honesty

Thank Him that He is completely trustworthy and full of grace.

# Last Word

God never hides who He is. His words, actions, and heart are perfectly aligned. As we follow Him, integrity becomes not a burden—but a reflection of His character in us.

We will stumble. We will fall short. But God meets us with grace and invites us to keep growing. As people of the narrow path, we don't leave others guessing about our intentions or reliability. We strive to be people whose lives match their words—because we follow a God who always keeps His.

# THE NARROW PATH

## WEEK FIVE: DISCERNMENT ON THE NARROW PATH



### Let's Get Started

What are some pet peeves?

- Why do you think those things bother you so much?
- What usually happens inside you when you encounter one of them?

### SETTING THE STAGE

We all make judgments every day—what's wise, what's unwise, what's helpful, what's harmful. But there's a difference between **exercising discernment** and **passing judgment on people**.

In this final session, Rich helps us see how walking the narrow path means learning to discern God's will and learning how to relate to others with humility and grace. Jesus doesn't call us to be naïve or passive—but He also warns us against becoming harsh, critical, or self-righteous.





# Discuss

## Our Tendency to Judge

Rich noted how easily judgment comes to most of us.

1. What is something you regularly catch yourself being judgmental about?
2. Why do you think that particular issue triggers criticism in you?
3. What usually lies underneath judgment—fear, frustration, insecurity, control?

## DISCERNMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS VS. DISCERNMENT OF GOD'S WILL

Rich defined discernment as:

- Exercising wisdom in relationships
  - Seeking and responding to God's will
4. Which comes more naturally to you—navigating relationships wisely or seeking God's direction? Which feels harder right now?
  5. What practices or people help you most when you're trying to discern?

## DISCERNMENT WITHOUT CONDEMNATION



# Read Aloud

## Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

<sup>3</sup>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? <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>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.



## Discuss

Jesus teaches that we must exercise judgment—but only alongside self-examination.

6. How do you personally tell the difference between making a wise judgment and passing judgment on someone?
7. Who do you know that does this well-speaking truth without condemnation?
8. Why do you think self-judgment must come before evaluating others?

### TWO WARNINGS FOR EXERCISING JUDGMENT

Rich identified two things we must avoid:

- **Giving the final word over someone's life**
  - **Assuming we know someone's heart or motives**
9. Which of these do you struggle with more? Why?
  10. How does remembering God as the ultimate judge change how you relate to others?
  11. What does humility look like when you strongly disagree with someone?

## DISCERNING GOD'S WILL

Rich shared four practices that help us discern God's will:

1. Desire God's will
  2. Search the Scriptures
  3. Pay attention to our hearts
  4. Live in community
- Which of these comes most naturally to you?
  - Which is the most challenging?



## **Bible Exploration**

### **JESUS MODELS DISCERNMENT**

Read Luke 22:39-46 (NIV).

*Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup>On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." <sup>41</sup>He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup>"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup>An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. <sup>45</sup>When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup>"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*

Jesus seeks God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- How distracted does your spiritual life feel right now?
- What rhythms or habits could help you create space to be alone with God?

- Why do you think solitude is so important for discernment?

**Jesus also invited others into His struggle.**

- Who helps you discern God's will?
- How often do you invite trusted people into your decision-making? What makes that difficult?

**Jesus named what was happening inside Him.**

- How regularly do you reflect on your emotions and inner life?
- What helps you identify what you're feeling?

**Prayer was central to Jesus discerning the Father's will.**

- What does your prayer life reveal about how you view prayer?
- When has prayer helped bring clarity rather than immediate answers?

**Jesus honestly shared His desire—but submitted to God's will.**

- How might greater honesty with God help you trust Him more?
- What would it look like to say, "Not my will, but Yours," in your current season?



## **Practice - A Step Toward Greater Discernment**

Discernment grows through intentional habits.

- What is one habit you could build that would help you become more attentive to God's will?
- Which of the four practices could you focus on this week?
- Who could help hold you accountable as you practice this?



# Prayer & Reflection

Take a few quiet moments.

Ask God:

- To help you judge wisely without condemning
- To increase humility in your relationships
- To give clarity and peace as you seek His will

Invite God to shape both your decisions and your posture toward others.

## Last Word

Discerning God's will isn't meant to feel mysterious or overwhelming. At its core, God's will is that we become more like Jesus—walking the narrow path that leads to life.

This journey isn't about perfection or pressure. It's about trust. God desires our good, meets us with grace, and patiently forms us over time. As we learn to discern wisely and love humbly, we discover that the narrow path is not restrictive—but deeply life-giving.



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