

The Way of Love

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Choice of the Heart

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Jesus placed before us two paths with a clarity that leaves no room for confusion: *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

There are two possible directions for the human heart. One curves inward, toward the self, toward my desires, my comfort, my glory. The other opens outward, toward God first and toward others second. One accumulates for itself; the other gives. One seeks to be served; the other seeks to serve. One asks "what do I gain?"; the other asks "how can I love?"

Jesus illustrated this with an unforgettable parable: the rich man who accumulated so many goods that he had to build bigger barns to store them. *"Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry,"* he said to himself. But God said to him: *"Fool! This night your soul is required of you."* He had lived curved toward himself, and in the end had nothing he could take with him.

In contrast, Jesus pointed to the poor widow who put two small copper coins into the offering box — everything she had to live on. *"Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them,"* he said. The amount didn't matter. What mattered was the direction of her heart. She lived open toward God, trusting him even when she had nothing.

This fundamental choice — inward or outward, for myself or for others, my will or God's — presents itself every day in a thousand small forms. In how you respond when someone offends you. In what you do with your free time. In how you treat someone who cannot return the favor. In the thoughts you allow when no one is watching.

Paul expressed it powerfully: *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."* And then he adds: *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."* The mind of Christ is a mind turned toward others.

Jesus himself modeled this perfectly: "*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" The Creator of the universe took the form of a servant. He who had every right to demand worship washed the feet of his disciples. He who could have called legions of angels allowed himself to be nailed to a cross for the sake of those who crucified him.

We are not asked for perfection. We are asked for direction. Where does your heart point? Toward self or toward love? Every small choice in the direction of love — every act of patience, every word of encouragement, every surrender of pride — is a step on the narrow path. And that path, though hard, leads to life.

The good news is that we do not walk alone. The Holy Spirit works in us "*both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*" We do not depend solely on our own willpower. We depend on the grace that transforms us from within, that inclines our heart toward where it would not naturally go.