

“The Path - Your Direction Determines Your Destination”

Scripture: Proverbs 7:6-27

Graphics: path, road, direction, obstacles

Big Truth: The people of the Panama UMC are called to stay on the path that leads our lives to a holy God who loves us and gives us grace and mercy. The Path is a metaphor for life, a process of progress from birth to death and everlasting life. Along the way, we must allow God to give us direction, correct our course, inform our hearts, give us help, keep our eyes on the road, and make us content when the destination is unreachable. The Path is God’s best plan for us and He will call us back to it every time.

Focus Phrase: Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination.

1. Introduction

A. [OPENING VIDEO if inside]

- B. In November 1975, 75 prison inmates started digging a secret tunnel designed to bring them up at the other side of the wall of Saltillo Prison in northern Mexico. On April 18, 1976, guided by pure genius, they tunneled up into the nearby courtroom in which many of them had been sentenced. The surprised judges promptly returned all 75 of the inmates to jail. (September, 1980, Campus Life)
- C. In 2012, when our family headed out for a 28-day trip out west, you may remember that, when we got to I-86, instead of turning left to head west toward the Pacific Ocean, in the excitement of the moment, I turned right onto the highway entrance ramp and we were confidently headed east toward the Atlantic Ocean.
- D. The road you’re on determines where you’ll end up. SO true, right?
- E. If I head east on the Thruway, eventually, I will end up in New York City. If I head west on the Thruway, I’ll end up in Seattle, Washington. I’ve done both and can verify that those are true statements.
- F. Whatever road, whatever highway, whatever PATH I’m on will determine where I end up.
- G. I can WANT to end up somewhere else. I can pack my beach towel, my sunscreen, and my big floppy hat with every hope of spending a week in Clearwater Beach. But if I head north instead of south, I’ll end up in Canada, not Florida. We all know that very well, don’t we?
- H. Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination.**
- I. This is the first message in a series of messages for this summer from the book of Proverbs. We’ve called this series **The Path**. The resource I’m using for this series is a book from Andy Stanley called *The Principle of the Path*.
- J. A path can be a well-worn trail in the wilderness or it can be a super-highway. For followers of Jesus, The Path is the place - the life - where we journey with

Jesus. The Path IS life. The Path is the road of God's best desire and plan for our lives. It's the place where we grow to be more like Jesus.

- K. Along the way, we must allow God to give us direction, correct our course, inform our hearts, give us help, keep our eyes on the road, and make us content when the destination we had in mind is unreachable.
- L. If we let Him, God will call us back to The Path every time.
- M. As we begin this series today, it's **all about the direction you're traveling to your destination**. As obvious as that is in the world of GPS technology, when it comes to the rest of our lives, whether it be family life, financial life, marriage or dating life, the way we raise our kids, our physical fitness, or our professional life, this same principle applies. **In every area of life, my direction, not my intention, determines my destination.**
- N. In our lives, we so often go in one direction with good intentions, thinking it will get to the destination we hope for. Only to find out that we should've actually studied for the test or not eaten that extra helping.
- O. It's so much a part of our lives, really, that you can have the best of intentions and end up in the worst of situations. It can happen to you even if you're the smartest person on the planet – or the best looking, or the biggest, or the strongest. This principle is true no matter how strong-willed you are, no matter how pleasant you are, no matter how much your mom loves you or how much your dad loves you in his will. When it comes to every area of life, your direction—not your intentions, not your strengths, not your weaknesses, not your hopes, not your dreams— your direction will determine your destination. The path you take will determine where you end up.
- P. Let's pray and dive into this first area of wisdom God gives to us in Proverbs.

Q. PRAY!

2. Scripture

- A. Before we get to our scripture for today, a little teaching time about Proverbs.
 - i. In ancient Israel, there were three groups of people who communicated on behalf of God:
 - a. The Priests – They gave The Law.
 - b. The Prophets – They gave direction and correction.
 - c. The Sages – they gave wise counsel.
 - ii. The books of Proverbs and its surrounding books—Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon—are books by the **sages**. Scholars called these books “Wisdom Literature.”
 - iii. Having **intelligence** means you know things. Having **wisdom** means you know what to do in various situations. So you can be smart without being

wise. Wisdom literature was written to make us wise – to help us know what to DO in specific situations.

- iv. The book of Proverbs was written primarily by King Solomon, who was purported to be one of the wisest men who ever lived. The Bible says of Solomon: ***“He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”*** 1 Kings 4:32-34
- v. Solomon died in 931 B.C., so most of Proverbs was written by then. But Solomon didn’t write all the proverbs. He wrote chapters 1-24, but chapters 25-29 were compiled 200 years later by men in the day of King Hezekiah.
- vi. Chapter 30 was written by a man named Agur son of Jakeh, and chapter 31 was written by King Lemuel. We have no idea who those two men were; we just know they were very wise as well.
- vii. SO, with that, let’s dive into our first lesson.
- viii. Now, let me warn us that Proverbs 7 - our text this morning - has two main characteristics. First, it’s fictional, although sometimes fiction speaks to reality better than reality itself does. And second, it’s more PG-13 than I’m usually comfortable reading during worship. So if I blush or fidget, you’ll help me out by not laughing and pointing, OK? This proverb includes some references to people and situations that may not quite be dinner table conversation, but God included it in His inspired word from which we can learn and grow.
- ix. So, with that, you’re all now VERY curious, so let’s go! Grab your bible and open to Proverbs 7.

B. The path you take will determine where you end up.

C. Solomon wanted his people - his audience - to know this, 3,000 years ago. In Proverbs 7:6, Solomon began his story. We think he made this story up to demonstrate this principle. As he tells the story, a Parent (could be him or a mother or father) is standing at a window, looking down at the street (NIV). Got the picture in your mind? Verse 6...

**D. ⁶ At the window of my house
I looked down through the lattice.
⁷ I saw among the simple,
I noticed among the young men,
a youth who had no sense.**

E. You can see that something’s coming, right? Verse 8...

**F. ⁸ He was going down the street near her corner,
walking along in the direction of her house**

**9 at twilight, as the day was fading,
as the dark of night set in.**

- G. You don't have to be a Bible scholar to anticipate where this story's heading, do you? A young guy cruising the streets at sunset, heading in the direction of a specific woman's home.
- H. As we'll see, he knew who this woman was. He knew she was married. And, apparently, he knew that her husband was out of town and that she would be prowling around the street corner. That alone should've stopped him in his tracks. But it didn't. In fact, that was the reason he was headed in her direction.
- I. Meanwhile, back at the window, the Parent (as we'll call him or her) was watching this young man, and you can just hear the *Jaws* soundtrack playing in his head (beh-neh. Beh-neh)
- J. Why? Because there was a huge contrast between what this young man was expecting to experience and what this Parent knew was in his future, if he stayed on this path.
- K. How did the Parent know that? Well, because the older, wiser person understood from experience where this path would lead. The adolescent was preoccupied with what he believed would be an exciting event - a night event disconnected from every other event in his life.
- L. But this Parent knew better. This wasn't an isolated event disconnected from all the other events in this young man's life. This night was a step down a path. A path, like all paths, that **leads** somewhere. This particular path had a predictable destination.
- M. The story continues: **Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. (She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.)** (vv. 10-12).
- N. Can you hear the music playing now? Now it's switched to Beethoven's 9th, with the impending sound of fate knocking at his door: *dun dun dun dun!*
- O. (verse 13...) **She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: "Today I fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!"** (vv. 13-15).
- P. What she was saying to the this young man was, "I have plenty of money at home. I'm not after your money." She was also implying that she had been to the temple and had everything squared away with God. Having already taken her sin-bucket and dumped it out at the altar, she was ready to fill it up again... with him! Not good! (I'm starting to blush a little)

- Q. Then she went on to say: **“I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let’s drink deeply of love till morning; let’s enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon.”** (vv. 16-20).
- R. From this fictional young man’s perceptive, her words just kept drawing him down this path and he was more than willing to follow them. Yet, the Parent, watching from the window, had a completely different perspective. Verse 21...
- S. **“With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.”** (vv. 21-23)
- T. Like an ox to slaughter! Like a deer stepping into a trap, until an arrow pierces its side! Like a bird darting into a snare, unaware that it’ll cost him his life!
- U. That graphic demise what this young man was choosing. This path simply won’t end well, and I suspect that there was no talking him out of it.
- V. At this point in Solomon’s narrative, he turned to address his readers - US! These next words are directed to you and me.
- W. **“Now then, my sons (and daughters, but mostly sons in this story), listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.”** (vv. 24-27).
- X. There’s our word. **Paths**. This was a path, not an event.
- Y. And, “Many are the victims she has brought down...” on this path.
- Z. Not, “a few.” Many. Solomon debunked the notion that there was anything unique about what this man was experiencing. It may’ve been unique for him, but this experience represents a well-worn path: a path that leads to death despite what the naïve kid may have wanted to argue.
- AA. If Solomon could’ve called a time-out in the story and gotten the young man’s undivided attention, he might’ve said something along the lines of, “Listen, buddy. I hate to break it to you, but there’s nothing unique or special or rare about this. You may have never felt this way before, but a lot of other people have. And if they were here to tell you their stories, you would think twice. You’re part of a crowd. A herd. A flock. There’s nothing new here. And the outcome is all too predictable. She’s done more than capture your imagination. **She’s writing a script for your future. You are a dead man walking!**”

BB. And you're walking a highway! A five-lane freeway with a diamond lane on the inside. Just another young man who's chosen a path that will take him precisely to where he doesn't want or plan to be.

3. Application

A. Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination.

B. And, like I said at the beginning, this story may be fictional, but it's a narrative of our lives and it's all too common for us, sometimes without even choosing to take the path in the wrong direction.

C. We all have a propensity for choosing paths that lead us where we don't want to go. In a few weeks, I'll give us the causes of this apparent lapse in reason. But for now, God is challenging you and me to not only get a sense of the destination, but to then walk on the path that leads TO the destination.

D. We all have legitimate goals and oftentimes every good intention of reaching them. But like the naïve young man in Solomon's story, the paths we choose eventually lead us to a destination that's entirely different from the one we intended or hoped for.

E. In what direction are you headed today? Morally? Relationally (with your family, with friendships)? Financially?

F. Those seem to be the biggies. We could probe into many more areas. I can't answer these for you. Only you can.

G. You might want to assess others as well. I encourage you to take some time before you go to bed tonight to think about this and talk with a trusted friend of your spouse, if you're married. Because there's a stark difference between the destinations of the world, and the destination where Jesus is Lord and Savior of your life...giving every decision to Him.

H. Let's finish with some practical application this morning. How DO you learn to choose God's path?

I. First - **Get wisdom.**

i. That's what we're going to be doing for the next several weeks. Getting wisdom from Solomon and wisdom from the book of Proverbs. Reading Proverbs will increase your wisdom-quotient. There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs. Read one chapter a day for the next 31 days. This is what Billy Graham did every day; he read a chapter of the book of Proverbs.

J. Second - **Share the Path with others.**

i. What if this guy in the story had a friend looking out the window after him, instead of a man he had no relationship with? What if his friend had run down the stairs and yelled, "STOP!!!" before he ever got to the woman's house? His whole life would've been different.

- ii. Who do you have in your life who warns you of danger? Would you be willing to give someone permission to do that?
 - iii. We have a men's group and a women's group. In a couple months, we'll have several groups that meet on Sunday mornings. We have 1-2 small groups and hoping to start new ones. These are all places to share The Path with others.
- K. And, Third - **Make choices based on the long-term, not the short-term.**
- i. See your life the way God sees your life - by thinking about it like a path, a series of steps, not a bunch of unrelated events.
 - ii. Think about what will happen if you eat a big brownie every day. What's the next step after you eat the brownie once?
 - iii. Think about what will happen if you balance your checkbook and save and tithe every month. What does your life look like, step-by-step, if you do that every month? – Looks pretty good, doesn't it?
 - iv. Think about what will happen if you pray each morning and say nice things to your spouse or co-workers every day.
 - v. Make choices based on what will develop if you do something over a long period of time. That's the path you're on every time you make a one-time decision.
- L. (IF INSIDE) The reason I gave you the fork is because every decision is a fork that will lead you down one path or another. Which fork will you take? For the next several weeks of this series, I hope you'll use this fork to remind you of that. Put it somewhere you'll see it every day for the next 5 weeks...you can even use it and wash it and keep using it for every meal.

4. Conclusion

- A. Pick up the fork and say this with me (repeat after me):
 - i. **Every decision I make is a new fork in the road.**
 - ii. **Every decision I make takes me down a new path.**
 - iii. **Lord, help me to choose the right path.**
- B. Next week we'll talk about what to do if you find yourself on a wrong path. I'll also give us a prayer that will help us head in the right direction.
- C. As we go from this place today, know that I am praying for you. Our prayer team is praying for you. Jesus is praying for us!
- D. Head in the direction that God is leading - on The Path He gives you...and your destination will be God's best for you.
- E. Let's pray...