

“The Path - Making a Course Correction”

Scripture: Proverbs 27:12

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: The primary difference between the prudent and the simple is not what they see but how they respond to what they see.

1. Introduction

- A. [OPENING VIDEO - no introduction of video]
- B. We’re getting wisdom...for life...from the book of Proverbs.
- C. Last week we started this sermon series called *The Path*. In last week’s message, we learned that there’s a principle that, if you try to break it, will break YOU. The principal says: **Your direction determines your destination.**
- D. We went a little further to say that it really doesn’t matter what you hoped would happen for you in life, or what you wanted to have happen to you—Your direction, **not your intention**, determines your destination. It doesn’t matter how smart, how good-looking, or how rich you are, if you travel north, you’ll eventually end up in Canada, so to speak.
- E. We all know this when it comes to geography. Yet, for some reason, when it comes to other areas of life - our faith, our relationships, our finances, morality, eating habits, exercise, and developing skills that make us more competent and valuable - we often **walk one way and hope to wind up somewhere in the other direction.**
- F. Your direction, not your intention, not your hopes, not your dreams, determines your destination. This is the hinge on which everything we’re going to learn today swings.
- G. Our second message comes from **Proverbs 27:12**...just one verse today! Now, that doesn’t mean that the message will be shorter...it just means we’ll dive a little deeper!
- H. The title of this message is *Making Course Corrections*. If your direction determines your destination, what if you find yourself on a the wrong track... the wrong road? Do you just keep going? Or, with God’s help, do you make a course correction?
- I. A Spanish proverb says, “That which the fool does in the end, the wise man does at the beginning.”

- J. A Cornish proverb runs, “He who will not be ruled by the rudder must be ruled by the rock.”
- K. I know I keep bringing this simple example up, but when I took a wrong turn on our family trip out West in 2012, I needed to make a course correction. Now, I could’ve pretended like nothing was wrong. I could’ve stubbornly kept going east, insisting that I was right, and then, after everyone fell asleep, turned the car around and headed back west. I would’ve burned a lot of gas and lost a lot of time, but I wouldn’t have to admit my mistake.
- L. But, that’s not what I did, of course. I quickly realized my mistake, sheepishly announced to the family that I made a mistake - even though they’d already figured it out - and we turned around. I had to swallow some pride! But, the course correction put us back on the right track.
- M. Today is all about finding wisdom to make course corrections.
- N. Let’s pray and then we can get some more background before we dive in deep!

O. PRAY!

2. Scripture

- A. Before we get to our ONE verse today, I want to give us a run-up to it.
- B. Turn in your bibles to its Table of Contents. I’d like to show us something that I think will help us navigate this here in worship and at home.
 - i. The Old Testament is divided into 3 main sections.
 - a. The first 17 books are mostly historical books...they tell the history of the people of Israel and God’s preparation for the coming of his Son Jesus. These books are Genesis to Esther.
 - b. The next 5 books are poetic books. They teach us the wisdom of Israel.
 - i) **Job** answers the question, “Why is there so much pain in this life, and how do I deal with it?”
 - ii) **Psalms** point heavenward and teach us how to walk with God.
 - iii) **Proverbs** are aimed earthward and teach us to walk with people.
 - iv) **Ecclesiastes** is a treatise on the nature of life.
 - v) And **Song of Songs** is an ode to romantic love.
 - c. The final 17 books of the Bible are the prophetic books, which we won’t be studying in this series.
 - ii. Now turn with me to Proverbs 1:2-4.
 - a. Solomon, the primary author of Proverbs, told us that Proverbs was written (NIV): “..for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; for receiving instruction in prudent

behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young...” (Proverbs 1:2-4 NIV)

- i) Who doesn't want that? God's Spirit inspired the composition of this book we call Proverbs so that we could become **wise**, so that we would know how to **live life well**.
 - ii) In this section, a word appears twice that we don't use very often. But it's a great word, because if you can master the skill it implies, your life will work much better.
 - iii) The word is **“Prudent”** or, as an adjective, **“prudence.”**
 - iv) To be prudent means “to know what to do,” “to exercise good judgment,” or “having common sense.” Prudent = Knowing what to do. Exercising good judgment. Having common sense.
 - v) We don't use this word very much, but the book of Proverbs uses it a **lot**. In fact, Solomon compares and contrasts prudent people with a second kind of people, “simple people.” Whatever you are, you don't want to be a simple person.
- iii. Later in Proverbs, Solomon says, **“Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge.”** (Proverbs 19:25 NIV) In other words, some people learn by verbal instruction: A friend points out something they're doing wrong, and they learn from it. Other people, “simple people,” have to be whipped or beaten to learn a lesson.
 - iv. In another place in Proverbs, Solomon says, **“Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.”** (Proverbs 12:16 NIV) Simple people let their emotions get the best of them. They get mad and go into a rage; they spout off and complain when things don't go their way, but prudent people know how to control themselves and take things in stride.
 - v. Here's another one: **“The simple believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps.”** (Proverbs 14:15 NIV) Simple people get fooled easily. Prudent people use their brains. Can you imagine if we mastered prudence as humans? Life would be a lot easier, wouldn't it?
 - vi. One more, Proverbs 22:3: **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”** (Proverbs 22:3)
 - vii. Say that one out loud with me. **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”**
- C. Now look at this one in Proverbs 27:12: **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”** (Proverbs 27:12 NIV)

- i. **It's the exact same proverb**, just recorded in two different places. Why would God do that? Why would the compilers record this proverb twice?
 - ii. I don't know what they were thinking, but here's what I think: God put Proverbs in the Bible to make us smarter at living His best life for us. God put this Proverb in the Bible twice because He thinks it's **doubly important** that we learn its lesson.
 - iii. Simple people need to be flogged to learn lessons, while prudent people just need a word. So let me give you some words today about prudence. They are: "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."
- D. If last week we learned that our Path is of paramount importance, then the logical questions are:
- i. How do you choose the right path?
 - ii. How do you figure out what path you should be on?
 - iii. Or, in some cases, how do you figure out what path to get off?
- E. This proverb is telling us this: (write this down) **The primary difference between the prudent and the simple is not what they see but how they respond to what they see.**
- F. This Proverb is broken into 4 sections.
- i. The first section says, "The prudent see danger..."
 - a. In other translations, the word danger is actually evil. "The prudent see evil..."
 - b. In our Proverb from last week, the young man in Solomon's story saw the danger - the evil - the woman - ahead, yet did nothing about it. Yet, the Parent at the window could see it all. The Parent saw the evil coming down the road.
 - c. Evil is anything that goes against the best intentions of God...against God's best plan for your life - Morally. Relationally. Financially.
 - d. **Evil's endgame sin and leads us to sin.**
 - e. In order to see evil, or danger, we need to know and see that which is GOOD. If we don't know what's GOOD - what God desires - then we won't be able to identify dangerous evil when we see it?
 - f. Not only does the prudent person see evil, but sees the WORK of evil in the world...and in him or herself. It's a matter of plain fact in our lives.
 - g. AND...AND...the knowledge of that evil and the work it does creates shame and guilt in the prudent person's mind and heart. I've said before that guilt is a gift from God to steer us back to the right path.

- h. Ultimately, the prudent person sees the ultimate cost of evil - of danger - as being separation from God for eternity.
- i. That's what the prudent SEES when looking at danger, evil.
- ii. SO...given that, what do the Prudent do? The prudent take refuge!
 - a. Takes refuge where? When they see danger, do they hide in a hole in the sand, like an ostrich? Is it in a secret place where no one else can find them? Is it somehow away from God, if that were even possible?
 - b. NO! The prudent take refuge IN GOD! In Christ!
 - c. The prudent followers of Jesus see the evil ahead, and take refuge IN JESUS. 2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
 - d. Jesus is the Rock. Jesus is the mighty fortress. Jesus is our hiding place. Jesus is our strong tower. Jesus' wings cover us like a mother hen.
 - e. Jesus IS ALL THOSE THINGS - our refuge - BECAUSE of the power in His blood for salvation, and His victory over death on Easter!
 - f. That's where the prudent RUN for refuge when danger is ahead.
- iii. Parts 3 and 4 are a CONTRAST to the first two sections: "...but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."
 - a. The simple see the danger (just like the prudent - same danger, same evil), HOWEVER, the simple JUST. KEEP. GOING. TOWARD. IT!
 - b. And when they get to the danger - get to the evil - they pay the penalty...they suffer (it says in other translations).
 - c. It's thoughtless and foolish. The simple have no good sense of sins demise or danger. It causes feet to stumble and people to fall.
 - d. Ultimately, the danger and evil - to which the simple run to - will cut them off from God's best plan for their lives.

3. Application

- A. The prudent see danger and take refuge. The simple see danger and keep going. Both of them *see* the danger. One responds by changing course, the other keeps going and hopes that the danger will never arrive.
- B. You can see why Solomon calls people like this "simple."
- C. WE are not simple! (most of the time. sometimes?)
- D. We want to be on the right path.
- E. So, even before the danger comes, or when you see it ahead and have to take refuge, how do you choose the right path?

F. First, **The prudent make course corrections.**

- i. Sometimes, when hiking, you can get onto the wrong trail. Once you realize you're on the wrong trail, you either have to backtrack or go cross-country to get to the right trail. Either way, you **MUST** make a course correction or you'll end up in the wrong place.
- ii. Life is more complicated than that, but part of choosing the right path is getting **OFF** the wrong path. It's saying, "This behavior, this habit, this relationship, this... you name it, is leading me somewhere that's going to hurt, so I'm going to get off of this path and get on a better one."
- iii. God will call your name. God will give you a beacon to follow. God will send the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- iv. We can learn from the prudent...but we **ALSO** can learn from the simple (maybe even more!)

G. (Second) **The simple keep right on going.**

- i. When a prudent person senses that a relationship is moving in an unhealthy direction, they do something. The simple keep going.
- ii. When a prudent person sees trouble on their financial horizon, they do something. The simple keep spending.
- iii. When a prudent person realizes that God is the most important person in the universe, and their relationship with Him isn't growing, they do something about it. The simple keep spending time doing that which took their time away from God.
- iv. Just so we're clear, the second half of the proverb says, "the simple keep going *and pay the penalty*." The penalty for what? – For refusing to act on what they see. They pay the penalty because they see no connection between the choices of today and the experiences of tomorrow. They overlook the fact that every path has a destination.
- v. To choose the right path, be sure to not follow the simple person.

H. #3 - Prudent people know that it's not what they see that makes a difference, **it's what they do.**

- i. So they do things. They pray. They talk to others they trust. They spend time planning to choose the right path. **AND...**if they find themselves on the wrong path, **they make course corrections.**
- ii. Choosing the right path is an active, intentional act of trusting God's will.

I. So, what happens if you find yourself on the wrong path? How **DO** you make a course correction?

J. Well, the first thing is obvious based on what I just said: **You do something.**

- i. You take action. You step off a path and get on another one.
- ii. This is always hard because we're creatures of habit, creatures of momentum. We naturally continue to do what we're used to doing. If we're used to overeating, overeating feels natural to us. If we're used to losing our temper, losing our temper is natural to us. If we're used to online chat rooms or indiscrete pictures, that's what we're used to.
- iii. Momentum carries us in the same direction, so to change directions means...

K. #2 - You have to give up something.

- i. Here's a corollary to what we're saying: To avoid danger and change course, it almost always requires sacrifice, which is why we don't do it.
- ii. And this is where it gets ironic. When prudent people act, they often look foolish. They do things that others aren't doing; they swim against the stream. They act as if then is now and change course before the wall ever hits them or they ever hit the wall.
- iii. Sometimes, you have to give up pride because you were so sure the path you took was the right one. Now, you see the danger coming...and have to admit you were wrong.
- iv. That leads to #3...

L. #3 - You usually suffer embarrassment.

- i. Because nobody else is doing it.
- ii. And it will require you, at the very least, to admit that you didn't see it coming...but now you do. You may have to endure an, "I told you so..." from a friend or spouse or parent.
- iii. But, when you get through that...

M. #4 - You (someday) breathe a sigh of relief.

- i. You were prudent. You saw the danger - the evil - and took refuge in Jesus.
- ii. Down the road, you'll look back and say, "I'm SO glad I made that decision, even though it was hard, and embarrassing, and I had to give up things at the time."
- iii. The ultimate sigh of relief, church, is when you and I will stand before Jesus on the day He returns and we RUN - not walk, not crawl - RUN into his arms of mercy and grace.
- iv. And on that day, we will enter into His kingdom fully!

N. The prudent see the danger ahead, and do something. They give up what needs to be released, they endure the embarrassment, and they breathe a sigh of relief! Sounds pretty good to me. You?

4. Conclusion

- A. You know what's kind of funny about this proverb? It's the exact story mom told us when we were kids: The Three Little Pigs?
- B. One builds his house out of straw; one builds his house out of sticks. When the big bad wolf comes along, he huffs, and he puffs, and he blows their houses down. Solomon would call those two "simple pigs."
- C. The third little pig was a prudent pig. He built a house out of bricks. Why? Because he saw danger coming and built a refuge!
- D. Church, we all know that life is going to bring us challenges, don't we? When we recover from this pandemic and the implications of it, there will be some up years, but eventually, there will be another crises. Prudent people plan for it.
- E. We may not be able to monitor every aspect of our lives fully, but the top five areas to monitor are: Spiritual, Relational, Moral, Physical, and Financial.
- F. I think they're in that order too. The most important being in the world is God. The most important thing on earth is relationships. Nobody gets to their deathbed wishing they had more money. They might wish they had a better body so they could live longer; they might wish they'd lived better morally so people would think better of them, almost everyone on their deathbed wishes they had more time with family and friends, and EVERYONE on their deathbed wants to be right with God.
- G. Don't waste another minute on a path that leads somewhere God doesn't want you to go. Take some time this week to reflect and redirect - to make some course corrections. It's our direction determines our destination.
- H. The prudent see danger and take refuge. They get off the wrong path and get on the right path. They make course corrections. They don't just think about it or worry about it—they DO it.
- I. Let's pray...