

## “The Path - Look Where You’re Going”

Scripture: Proverbs 4:25-27

Graphics: path, road, direction, obstacles, mules, heart

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: Fix your eyes on Jesus for life on the Path.

### 1. Introduction

#### A. [OPENING VIDEO - no introduction of video]

B. Welcome to Week 5 of “The Path.”

C. 29 times, the book of Proverbs mentions the path or paths we are on. Here are just a few:

- i. In Proverbs 1:15, Solomon is warning us about buddying up to people with questionable morals: **“My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths. That’s the path we don’t want to take.”**
- ii. In Proverbs 2:9, he talks about following the way of wisdom: **“Then you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path. Those are the paths we do want to take.”**
- iii. A few weeks ago, we studied Proverbs 3:6: **“In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.”**
- iv. In Proverbs 4:26, he adds a nuance or supplemental principle to the principle we’ve been learning so far: **“Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm.”**

D. If you’ve been with us for all or most of the series, you know that the principles that are true in geography are equally true in all of life.

E. The first principle is: **Your direction determines your destination.**

F. This morning, I’d like to add a **qualifier** to that statement from King Solomon. It’s one slight modification that I think you’ll agree is very true. Here it is: **What gets your attention determines your direction, and, ultimately, your destination.**

G. Or, the short version (which we’ll call the Principle of FOCUS) is: **Your attention determines your direction.**

H. Now, we know this to be true in almost every aspect of life from driving to hobbies to work. If you’re paying attention to what’s in front of you and where you want to go, you’ll get there with joy!

- I. Why is it that every state in the nation passed laws prohibiting people from talking on cellphones without some sort of hands-free device? Because they knew that if a person is staring at their phone, giving more attention to it than to the road, there's a good chance they'll steer themselves OFF the road, or maybe steer themselves into somebody else on the road.
- J. What you give your attention to will determine your direction. And your direction determines your destination.
- K. And this is certainly true for all aspects of life, but it's MOST true in our faith life...in our walk with Jesus on the Path. What you give your attention to will determine the direction of your walk with God.
- L. Let's PRAY and then we can read Solomon's wisdom for us today from the book of Proverbs. The series is called the Path. This message is called Look Where You're Going.

**M. Pray!**

**2. Scripture**

- A. **Your attention determines your direction.**
- B. We, as humans, and as followers of Jesus today have known this for thousands of years because Solomon taught it to us 3,000 years ago in the book of Proverbs.
- C. Here's his whole statement on attention. Read this out loud with me (on-screen) Proverbs 4:25-27:
  - <sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look straight ahead,  
fix your gaze directly before you.**
  - <sup>26</sup> Make level paths for your feet  
and take only ways that are firm.**
  - <sup>27</sup> Do not swerve to the right or the left;  
keep your foot from evil.**
- D. In other words, "Our destination is determined by our direction, and our direction is dictated by whatever holds our attention."
- E. The things that capture your attention will influence your direction.
- F. In 2002, when I was pretty content in my engineering job, the Holy Spirit grabbed my attention in a brand new way and opened the possibility of full-time ministry as a pastor. Once that door was opened, and God captured my attention, it was more and more difficult to keep going in the same direction. That season changed my life, and here I am 18 years later.
- G. A few years before that, while at a Christian camp, I met a girl who seemed pretty cool, even though we came from different backgrounds. After spending a few years as friends, there was one summer in 1991 during which she captured my attention in a dramatic new way. This girl, whose name was

Stacy, so captured my attention that I started spending my time dreaming up ways of capturing her attention. My attention was so diverted by her that there are now people in this world because of our mutual change in direction.

- H. Those are both positive examples of how attention influences direction, but I could give a few negative ones as well. Like every principle, the principle of attention can work FOR us or AGAINST us.
- I. If you think for a minute, you'll probably be able to drum up a half-dozen instances where your attention got diverted in ways you wish it never had.
- J. Author Andy Stanley writes: *“All of us have people or events or opportunities in our past that reflect the much-more-frequent flip side. Looking back, there are people you wish you had never met. Relationships you wish you'd never initiated. Numbers you wish you'd never called. Voicemails you wish you'd never acknowledged. Business “opportunities” you wish you had ignored. Life was better before these things grabbed your attention. In many cases, the path you were on before they came along was the path you should have adhered to. But you didn't. And what grabbed your attention altered your direction.*

*No doubt you had a mental conversation that went something like this:*

*‘Wow... would you look at that. I probably shouldn't go there...*

*But perhaps I should double-check to make sure I shouldn't go there... Yep, I shouldn't go there.*

*C'mon now, focus. Probably wouldn't hurt to go there for just a moment.’*

*Remember when common sense seemed to get railroaded by the emotion of whatever or whoever it was that grabbed your attention? Before you knew it, you were moving in an entirely different direction. Usually there is a strong emotional appeal to the things that grab our attention. We get sucked in to those detours because something emotionally engaging is on those paths. My observation is that the things that tend to grab my attention are often things I should avoid. Advertisers make a living trying to grab my attention. And that's okay. Everyone needs to eat and live indoors. Great advertisements appeal to our emotions. Let's face it: malls and car dealerships are not emotionally neutral environments. But often the things that grab our attention lead to regret.*

*What captures our attention influences our direction. Attention, direction, destination. That's the principle of the path in three words. As your attention goes, so goes your life.”*

- K. Or, as Solomon says it:  
**<sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look straight ahead,**

**fix your gaze directly before you.**

**26 Make level paths for your feet  
and take only ways that are firm.**

**27 Do not swerve to the right or the left;  
keep your foot from evil.**

- L. So far, we've placed two verbs in front of "attention." One is positive: something **captures our attention**. The other is negative: something **grabs our attention**.
- M. I want to give us two more verbs that may be more useful when it comes to our attention, but first, let me read to you a little more from Andy Stanley.
- N. He says, *"I have a black Lab whose attention seems to be genetically locked in on food. When it comes to food, I don't think Shadow really has a choice. It seems as if she can't help but follow a food-related scent. This has sent her in some not-so-pleasure directions. As you might be aware, people like to give their pastors food. Actually, food and ties. But I rarely wear a tie, so we get lots of food. Especially at Christmas. People are generous and gracious. They bring large quantities of food to our doorstep, but they don't want to bother us by ringing the doorbell or even knocking. So they just leave things by the front door. Or so they say. We don't know for sure because we don't get to see what they brought. We just see traces of what they brought. We know someone has brought us a perishable gift because there are usually bits of paper and ribbon scattered around the front lawn. When we are able to locate a card, we write a thank-you note. But we are always vague because we aren't ever sure what we are saying thank you for. Maybe we should ask Shadow to write the notes. If you are a dog person, you've probably heard that chocolate and caffeine will kill your dog. Not true. It will keep her up late into the night. But it won't kill 'er. At least that has been our experience."*
- O. According to Andy, Shadow doesn't seem to have a choice about where she focuses her attention. But unlike our friends in the animal kingdom, we do have a choice. You and I don't have to be ruled by things that **grab** OR **capture** our attention.
- P. That leads us to our **third principle**, The Principle of **Choice**: **You get to choose what you give your attention to.**
- Q. Two other verbs to put before attention, besides "grab attention" and "capture attention,"
- i. You can **choose** to give your attention.
  - ii. You can **choose** to pay attention.
- R. Here's the key:
- i. Emotions tend to fuel the things that **grab or capture** your attention.

- ii. **Intentionality** tends to fuel what you pay and give attention to.
- iii. On every path that leads to disaster or destruction, there's something powerful and emotionally engaging that summons us, that grabs or captures our attention. Which is why Solomon warns:
  - 25 Let your eyes look straight ahead,  
fix your gaze directly before you.**
  - 26 Make level paths for your feet  
and take only ways that are firm.**
  - 27 Do not swerve to the right or the left;  
keep your foot from evil.**

- S. So, make a choice. Choose which direction you will go, and then fix your gaze directly on it.
- T. What you give your attention to determines your direction. And the direction in which you head determines your destination.
- U. I want to ask you a sincere question: **what has your attention these days?**
  - i. Is it a relationship?
  - ii. A career?
  - iii. A house?
  - iv. An enjoyable hobby?
  - v. Is it a person who is leading you somewhere you don't really want to go?
  - vi. Or a person who is leading you towards where you DO want to go?
  - vii. Is it your marriage?
  - viii. Your children?
  - ix. Your faith?
  - x. Is it an achievement you're hoping to accomplish soon?
- V. What has your attention these days? Is it what captures or grabs your attention? Or is it what you choose to pay or give attention to?

### 3. Application

- A. Here's a follow-up question: **What do you WANT to have your attention?** If you could only fix your eyes on ONE THING, what would it be?
- B. Five weeks into this series, I want to make a suggestion to you for that. The Apostle Paul described his approach to life this way: **"Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 3:13-14).

- C. He follows that up by saying, **“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.”** (Philippians 3:15).
- D. Almost every book of the Bible describes this same focused life in some way.
- E. The author of the book of Hebrews says, **“We must pay more careful attention, therefore to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.”** (Hebrews 2:1).
- F. Some of you here today drifted away from the faith for awhile and you wondered how that happened. It tends to happen to all of us at times. It happens because of the principle of attention. Your eyes, your attention, followed something other than God and you wound up drifting away from God.
- G. So this same author of Hebrews says, “Here’s what you need to do to stay on the right path spiritually.” From Hebrews 12:2-3, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”** (Hebrews 12:2-3).
- H. I like that verb, “Fix.” “Fix your eyes on Jesus.” – Don’t swerve to the right or left. Don’t let your eyes wander. This is my suggestion for you: **Don’t let your heart or your attention be captured by lesser things, focus your attention on Jesus, on following Him, getting to know Him better, serving Him fully, becoming like Him more and more every day.**
- I. In the early days of Christianity, when persecutions were just beginning, an unknown saint wrote a song that described really well the path that Jesus took. The song went like this:  
**“Jesus, being in very nature God,  
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the form of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.**

**And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death –  
even death on a cross!**

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

**and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (Philippians 2:6-11)

- J. The Apostle Paul inscribed this song into his letter to the Philippians because he thought it was important that everyone know that one day every person, every knee, will bow before Jesus, no matter where their path has taken them.
- K. Remember a few weeks ago when we learned: **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.”** Proverbs 22:3
- L. Here’s a danger I hope you see: **If you pursue anything less than Jesus, you may end up bowing your knee before him from a destination you never wanted to arrive at.**
- M. Which is why Hebrews 12:2 says, **“Fix your eyes on Jesus.”** He’s the path to heaven, the path to fulfillment, the path to purpose, the path to where you want to go.
- N. Here’s the way Jesus said it: **“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6)
- O. Another word for “way,” is...? Path. “I am the way,” he said. “I am the path. Follow me. Follow me. Follow me.”
- P. Whatever you give your attention to will determine your direction and whatever direction you head will determine where you wind up.
- Q. **You have a choice.** You can follow Jesus, or you can follow something less. You can let your attention be grabbed by something that feels good for a moment, or you can give your attention to the One who will direct you all the days of your life and on into eternity.
- R. Which will you choose today?**
- S. Some of you have never chosen the Path of Jesus before. Maybe you’re feeling the pull to choose to fix your eyes on him today. In just a minute, I’ll lead you in a prayer that can change your eternity because it will change the path you’re on spiritually. I hope you’ll pray it with me.
- T. And some of you decided to follow Jesus a long time ago, and then you let your attention be grabbed or captured by something or someone else. Today is the day to correct that. Today is the day to say, “Jesus is my Savior and Lord. I will no longer have any other gods before Him.”
- U. For those coming to Jesus for the first time today (LET’S PRAY): “Jesus, I believe that you are the way, the truth, and the life, and I am choosing to follow you today. I admit that I am a sinner in need of a savior and I invite You to be my Savior and my Lord.”...
- V. For those who are believers and are feeling the pull back to the Path: “Jesus, I know that you are the way, the truth, and the life, but I haven’t been walking

your path recently. Today, I am choosing to put you first again. I choose today to fix my eyes on you and follow you. I will walk your path again, and I'm serious about it."

- W. Lord, for all who can hear my voice and have prayed in earnest this morning, may the words of our mouths and the thoughts of our heart be pleasing and acceptable in your sight. Amen!

#### 4. Conclusion

- A. Let Jesus have your attention...fix your eyes on HIM! Look where you're going...and see Jesus leading you.
- B. Here are some action steps for this week (homework):
- i. First, **Come back next week.** We have one more week, and it's an important one. I want to talk to you about what to do when you realize that there is a "Road Closed" sign on your path and you won't be able to reach the destination you were hoping to reach, martially, materially, physically, or in some other way.
  - ii. Second, **Fix your eyes on Jesus.** When you get up each day this week, talk to Him. Spend a few minutes alone with him, either in Proverbs or some other place in Scripture. Keep reading through Proverbs...
  - iii. Third, **Pray for a friend who is not on the Jesus Path.** We all have someone we love that doesn't know who Jesus wants to do in their lives. This week, pray for them. If you get a chance to reach out to them, just tell them that you've been praying for them.
- C. In faith, look where you're going and as you intently gaze at Jesus' footsteps ahead of you, keep walking with Him...no matter what.
- D. Let's pray!