

“The Path - Dealing with Unreachable Destinations”

Scripture: Proverbs 13:12

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: God is working in my life for good even when I can’t reach where I want to go.

1. Introduction

A. [OPENING VIDEO - no introduction of video]

B. This is the sixth and final message in our sermon series we’ve called The Path. This series has been based on a book by Andy Stanley called *The Principle of the Path*.

C. Let’s Pray and then we’ll recap where we’ve been...and then dive into our last bit of wisdom for this series.

D. PRAY!

E. So far in our series, we’ve learned that:

- i. 1. Your direction determines your destination. (Pr. 7:6-27)
- ii. 2. Life is a series of mid-course corrections. (Pr. 22:3)
- iii. 3. We shouldn’t trust our hearts but should trust our hearts to God. (Pr. 3:5)
- iv. 4. Wise people seek counsel. (Pr. 15:22)
- v. 5. Attention determines direction. (Pr. 4:25)

F. In life, look straight ahead and don’t get distracted by things that will lead you off The Path Jesus is on.

G. This final message from the wisdom of Solomon in the book of Proverbs answers this question: **What do you do when you realize that the destination you’re trying to reach is unreachable?** That the dream you had is not going to come true? That the hope you had isn’t going to be fulfilled?

H. What do you do when you find yourself trying to reach a destination that is unreachable?

I. It doesn’t take long for us to remember a time in life when this was true - maybe right now - but also to recall the feeling that situation produced.

J. Let’s hear from Andy Stanley again, “*Some destinations are unreachable. Some dreams won’t come true. Some dreams can’t come true. Some destinations become unreachable because of lifestyle choices. Some are*

unreachable because of a single decision. Some destinations are out of reach because of mistakes we've made. Some are out of reach because of decisions others have made. Sometimes we are to blame. Sometimes there is no one to blame. In time, the reason behind our inability to get where we want to be becomes irrelevant. We are where we are, we aren't where we want to be – and there is nothing that can be done to change that.

I believe everybody faces this kind of disappointment at some point. Time is often the culprit. Vince Lombardi, famed coach of the Green Bay Packers, said, 'We didn't lose; we just ran out of time.' Perhaps with unlimited time we could make more of our dreams come true. If we could stop the clock, we might be able to reach any destination we choose. But there aren't any time-outs in life. The clock is always running. At some point we wake to the realization that 'it' – whatever 'it' is – is not going to happen for us."

- K. Now, we could get really bummed by that, or we can seek out the wisdom of the Lord.
- L. This final message boils down to this: **God is at work in our lives, even when we can't see it...even when roadblocks and disappointments come. And YET, God's promises still hold true to us.**
- M. Are you ready to hear from Solomon? OK, let's go...

2. Scripture

- A. This final verse from Proverbs can help us when the destinations toward which we're heading are or seem unreachable.
- B. Let's read this together (on-screen): **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life"** (Proverbs 13:12).
- C. Let's take a look at the first part of that Proverb: **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick..."**
 - i. That's true, isn't it? When we realize our dreams are unrealizable, our hearts gets sick. It's the natural first reaction. We ache, we hurt, we wake up gasping in the middle of the night.
 - ii. Sometimes it's a big thing...but it can also be something smaller.
 - iii. A few weeks ago, I booked flights for Stacy and me to fly to Boston to spend some time with Abby and our son-in-law Andrew. We had round-trip direct flights from Buffalo to Boston and back. 90 minutes there. 90 minutes back. Great! Then, this week, I got an email from the airline that said, "Our schedule of flights has changed." (Oh no!) Now, we fly from Buffalo to NYC to Boston on the way there...and on the way back, from Boston to ATLANTA to Buffalo - making it an 8-hour trip that we could

drive in 7 hours. And, of course, changing is not an option. Heart sick!
We'll get back to that...

- iv. Solomon is identifying that the human emotion - the human reaction - when a destination is unreachable **in the way that we want** or expect is to have that heart-sinking ache in our chests. And we feel helpless to change it...
- D. The second half of his Proverbs, though, points to a better reality: **“...but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.”**
- i. When Solomon wrote this, he was recounting the time when the Israelites went from being wanderers in the desert, after being in slavery to Egypt, to people with a land to call their own...a Promised Land.
 - ii. The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. They disobeyed God and lost their chance to enter the Promised Land earlier. Their dream was dead. Then one day God said to Joshua, “Let’s resurrect that dream. Line the people up tomorrow and we’ll cross the Jordan.”
 - iii. Here’s how it went down: “So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.”
Joshua 3:14-17
 - iv. Can you imagine what that was like after 40 years in the desert, eating nothing but flakes of bread? Talk about a tree of life...talk about a new vision and a fresh start...something that gives new life!
 - v. Solomon knew from his own life - and we know from ours - that when a godly longing is fulfilled, especially after we practice delayed gratification, we find such joy and hope and motivation on The Path.
- E. **“Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life”** (Proverbs 13:12).

3. Application

- A. Let’s dive deeper into those two parts and get some practical application today.
- B. First, what happens when hope gets deferred and you begin to realize the destination you THOUGHT was the right one is unreachable?

- C. When that happens, you and I have a **choice** to make. We either ignore it and keep striving, allowing heartache to increase and **get bitter**... **OR** we work with God through the struggle and **get better**.
- D. Getting through it to get better starts with **acknowledging the heartsickness**.
- i. The OT tells us of a seventeen-year-old named Joseph. Joseph had all the dreams in the world. He had a literal dream that one day he would rule over his father and brothers. Then, one day, he found himself in slavery, and the dream died. His heart must have been beyond sick.
 - ii. The prophet Daniel, about the same age, found himself chained to other young Israelites and dragged hundreds of miles into exile in a foreign country. His heart must have been sick. Would he get bitter or get better?
 - iii. In the NT, we meet the Apostle Paul, who found himself with a physical disease of some kind. He called it a “thorn in his flesh.” We don’t know what that was exactly, but it was something that likely severely limited him. Can you imagine if it was poor eyesight, something that crippled him, or a disease of some kind. His main mission was to write and speak and travel. We don’t know what Paul had, but he despaired over it. His heart was sick.
 - iv. Then, there’s Jesus. The Bible says that on the night before He was crucified, He went to the Garden and prayed about the kind of death He was facing. He prayed, “Father, if there is any way we can do this without me having to die on the Cross, please take this fate away from me.” He was so anguished about it, he actually sweated drops of blood.
- E. What do you do when you’re heartsick? How can you avoid bitterness and work toward “betterness”?
- i. Andy Stanley asks, *“What do you do when your dream can’t come true?... You can get angry with God, angry with life. You can despair. You can try to make something happen anyway. You can try and live your dream through your kids. I’ve seen that plenty of times. But at the end of your striving and manipulating, nothing will have changed. You will be just as far away from whatever it is you desired. But now you will be far from God as well.”*
- F. A better option is to do what Paul did. He wrote this to his friends in Corinth: **“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.”** (2 Corinthians 12:7-8)
- i. Paul had had some amazing things happen to him in his life—his highs were really high. But now, he’s got a low. He’s got a physical ailment that he’d live with for the rest of his life. It was probably painful, and it certainly kept him from fulfilling his dreams.

- ii. But instead of getting bitter, he **prayed**. And God answered the prayer in a way that Paul didn't expect. Paul prayed fervently three times. And here was God's answer: **"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'"** (2 Corinthians 12:9)
 - iii. God didn't say to Paul, "I'll do the thing you hope for." He didn't say, "I'll take away your thorn." No! God said, "My grace is sufficient for you."
 - iv. "In this difficulty, when it seems like things are cut off from you, I've got you and, as you'll see, my power will be made perfect in your weakness."
 - v. Paul felt the heart sickness (he didn't ignore it) and it drove him to prayer... which God answered.
 - vi. Acknowledge the heart sickness and **begin praying**.
 - vii. But all the answered prayer in the world doesn't mean much if you're not listening to the answer.
- G. So, the next step in dealing with unreachable destinations is to **listen and learn from the disappointment**.
- i. This requires humility to listen for God's voice and look for the lesson. In the midst of prayer, it is possible to hear God's voice.
 - ii. If that doesn't bring a change, and you sense God saying, "This is going to stay with you," then find the good in the bad situation.
 - iii. Romans 8:28 says, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purposes..."
 - iv. Paul found a way to believe that God's grace was sufficient for him, that God's power would be even better displayed in his weakness - in his physical infirmity.
 - v. Accept the reality of whatever roadblocks are in front of you and find the good that God has for you in it.
 - vi. This is part of the path that leads toward betterness, and away from bitterness.
 - vii. Paul continued in 2 Corinthians 9: **"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."** (2 Cor. 9:7-10).
 - viii. Listen and learn what God is trying to teach you when the destination is unreachable.
- H. And once you begin to figure that out, it starts to get really good! **You can use your hardship for God's glory.**

- i. Whatever it was Paul had, he determined to use it for God’s glory.
 - ii. When Jesus was facing his darkest moment, wrestling with the unreachable destination of staying alive and avoiding the agony of the Cross, he chose this option. He prayed fervently, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39).
 - iii. The second time he prayed about not having to face his inevitable hardship, his prayer changed slightly: "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).
 - iv. He accepted reality, found the good in it, and determined to use his hardship for God’s glory. In this case, for the **saving of mankind**.
 - v. Can you imagine how sick Jesus’ heart must have been in those closing moments before his arrest? He was a man who knew everything, so he knew what was coming. He knew his hope was going to have to defer to another day, or, in his case, to another life. To his future life after the grave. Some of us must do that as well.
- I. Our hope is deferred because we realize that our dreams probably aren’t going to come true. Maybe it’s a marriage or house or job promotion we always wanted. Maybe it’s children or the kind of health that we assumed would be ours. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. This is a reality of life on earth, friends. Earth is earth—it is not heaven. Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble...”** (Matthew 16:33).
 - J. I don’t know a single person who has had all their dreams fulfilled. I suspect it wouldn’t even be healthy if they did. There’s something that softens us, something that enables us to admit we’re not all that, something humbling (in a positive way) about not having all our dreams fulfilled.
 - K. BUT! (You know that’s my favorite word in the Bible!) Listen to these buts:
 - i. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble, BUT take heart! I have overcome the world. (Matthew 16:33)
 - ii. Hope deferred makes the heart sick; BUT a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. (Proverbs 13:12)
 - L. Joseph’s heart was sick. He was a slave and then a prisoner. Then one day he was summoned before Pharaoh, and his dreams began to be fulfilled in ways he could never have imagined. He became Prime Minister and saved all of Egypt, and his own family, from starvation. He saw his brothers bow down before him and his father fall to his knees in gratitude to God that his treasured son was really alive and doing so well.
 - M. Most often, God leaves us with a thorn in the flesh, an obstacle or two that we have to learn to trust him with. That can be a good thing in itself. But

sometimes, sometimes he does a good thing that is more than exactly what we wanted—it's beyond what we could have asked or imagined.

- N. I believe that every dead and dying dream is in the hand of God today. He knows about your dream. He cares about your dream. **BUT** he cares about you more. So he may not restore the dream, but never believe that he can't, or he won't, if it is truly good for us.
- O. Which leads me to this...the wisdom to which this whole series has been leading: On the Path, **God will do outrageously good things in your life** despite the detours, roadblocks, and course corrections.
- i. As you focus on the Path, sometimes God buries your dreams because they wouldn't be good for you. Sometimes he asks you to bury your dreams so that he can resurrect them to better things.
 - ii. Jesus faced his worst nightmare in going to the Cross. There was no dream-fulfillment there. Only pain. **But God made good out of it: the salvation of mankind.**
 - iii. How many times in your life have you gotten to a destination, after having been prevented from getting to where **YOU WANTED** to go, only to realize, "I'm **SO** glad I didn't go there...**THIS** is **SO** much better."
 - iv. Were you aware in that moment that it was **GOD** at work in your life? Do you **NOW** know that it was God who helped you avoid the bigger heartache, even though you were experiencing some pain in being denied?
 - v. Don't for one minute think that God says **NO** and laughs to himself about it. God says **NO** because **HE** has something **BETTER**!
 - vi. God loves you and he wants to bless you. He wants you to experience joy – and he knows you need hope.
 - vii. Look for the outrageously good things He does in your life.
- P. And then **share your story**
- i. The second part of Proverbs 13:12 states, "but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." What do you do when your longing is fulfilled?
 - ii. Here's what the Israelites did: "When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the **LORD** said to Joshua, 'Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.' So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the **LORD** your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children

ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” Joshua 4:1-7

- iii. When your longing is fulfilled, make sure people **hear the story**.
- iv. The Israelites stacked up some rocks so that whenever anyone saw them they’d say, “What’s that about?” And they’d reply, “That’s about when God showed up, let me tell you my story...”
- v. Think for a minute. How many of you have a story of when God showed up and fulfilled the longing of your heart? Some of you are sitting next to him or her. Some of you live in it. Some of you bear the scars of it. Some of yours have died and are with God.
- vi. Look for those times when God has, is, and will be doing something outrageously good and gracious in your life, and then tell someone.
- vii. I’m praying that my change in flight schedule will have me looking back on the roadblock saying, “I’m so glad our flights got changed!”

4. Conclusion

- A. As we wrap up this series, I want to thank you for being on this Path. Each of you received a card this morning that you can take home and post on your fridge or mirror. It contains the 6 pieces of wisdom from Solomon on The Path of life. These are 6 principles that will lead you to the destination God has for you...with Him.
- B. Apply these to you life, every day.
 - i. choose God’s direction.
 - ii. allow God to correct your course.
 - iii. trust God with your whole heart.
 - iv. seek wise counsel and advice from the right people.
 - v. look where you’re going and fix your eyes on Jesus, and,
 - vi. even when it seems like all hope is lost, God is at work and will do outrageously good things in your life on The Path.
- C. Let’s Pray...