

“Destinations—The Path Principle”

How many of you, like me, are really bad with directions? My wife can attest to this. You get lost a lot? People make fun of you? When it comes to couples, this is interesting, God pairs us with people who don't get lost. In fact, if you're dating and you want to know if that's your soul mate you need to find out, "Are you a lost or an unlost?" Because God wouldn't put you with somebody who gets lost too. At least I don't think so.

Janet is amazing with directions. She knows how to get places and then once she's been somewhere she never forgets how to get back there. I'm terrible about this right here in Joplin! I'll be heading to a restaurant and I'm sitting at the intersection of Main Street and Rangeline and I don't know whether to turn left or right to get where I want to go. OK. I'm not that bad! I know Rangeline and Main don't intersect!

Those of you who are not like me need to know that we do not get lost on purpose! You think we do! You think we don't pay attention. But we try, don't we? We try to pay attention, we're just not very good at it.

The second thing you need to know about us, and about being lost, is that you don't know you're lost when you're getting lost. You don't know where the line is. It's not like, "Oops, I just got lost, I'll back up 100 feet and be found and now I know where I am." By the time you realize you're lost, you've been lost a long time. I drive with confidence when I'm lost because I don't know that I'm lost yet.

The third thing about us, about lost people, is that whatever road you're on determines where you end up. Now I know that's deep and profound. Whatever path you're on, whether that's a path you're walking or a road you're driving on, whatever road you're on, you will end up where that path takes you. You don't end where you intend to go. The path determines the destination. It's the path principle.

The path principle is that your direction, not intention determines your destination. And in the world of driving, hiking, we know that absolutely. Like if you were to load up the family, and the sunscreen, and the beach chairs, and the floaties, and head north on highway 71, you will never get to Florida. You just won't. No matter how much you dream, and pack, and plan, and before you pull out of the drive way have a little prayer, "God we pray for traveling mercies, as we go to Florida..." It doesn't matter what you believe. If you get on 71 north you won't get to Florida, regardless of what your intention is.

Right now you're thinking, "Aaron, we know this!" And here's what's so interesting, we know it in the world of hiking and driving, but when it comes to the other arenas of life, there is total disconnect when it comes to this principle. The principle of the path applies to the path you've chosen for your marriage, it applies to your financial path, it applies to the path you've chosen for dating if you're in that phase of life, it's true in terms of your health. There is a path for all of these things and the principle of the path applies to every one of these things. Your direction--not your intentions, not your hopes, not your dreams, not your prayers, not even your beliefs--your direction ultimately determines your destination. We're all victims, or participants, in the principle of the path.

We're going to be talking about this because I continue to see such a big disconnect in people between where they want to end up and the path they've chosen. Over and over I talk to people whose lives have crashed and burned, or their marriage blew up, or their finances blew up. I listen to their story and they are crushed and broken-hearted over where they've ended up, but when you listen to them talk about the path they went down you think, "What did you expect?" People say things like, "These were my hopes and dreams, but I was on this path and ended up here, and I'm so angry at God because I'm not where I hoped I would be." Then why did you take that path?

It's because we think intention, we think hopes and dreams, somehow trump the decisions we make on a daily basis. But the truth is the path principle trumps our hopes and dreams and intentions every single time. The direction you choose determines your destination.

To make this a little clearer, let's go to a passage of scripture that tells an interesting story about a specific path. It's a very specific path but it illustrates the principle. If you want to follow along this is from Proverbs chapter 7. Here's what's going on. This is attributed to the wisest man in the world, Solomon, and the way he writes this is interesting. He's standing in a window looking down a street and he sees a young man walking along and he realizes that he knows the outcome of this young man's journey, but the young man doesn't.

So here's that story. **At the window of my house I looked down through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense" (Proverbs 7:6-7).** He's not picking on young people here, it's just that all youths lack judgment, because good judgment requires time and experience and young people don't have time or experience. None of us did. That's why if you're a teenager the reason your parents seem to overreact and come down on you so hard, is because they have a perspective you don't have. You may think, "I may lack judgment, but look what you're wearing! Don't tell me you have judgment, socks and sandals? Puh-lease!" But the truth is, as bad as your parents dress, they have time and experience which gives judgment.

Solomon looks at this young man and says, **"He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in" (Proverbs 7:8-9).** Now you don't have to be a Bible scholar to see where this story is going. You don't even have to have read this story before. Here's this young man, walking down the street, the sun is going down, he's headed toward this woman's house, and in the back of his mind there is a soundtrack playing. It's either Born to be Wild, or Party Like a Rock Star, or whatever generation you're from. And in his mind he's thinking, "This is going to be the greatest thing."

Meanwhile, up at the window, Solomon's watching this whole thing and there's this soundtrack in his mind too. It's the music to Jaws. There's this huge contrast between what this young man is experiencing and how this older, wiser man sees this. And the reason there's such a contrast is because the older, wiser, guy knows the path principle. The kid is thinking about an exciting event. The older wiser man says, "No, it's not an event, it's a path and every path has a destination. And this is a path with a very predictable destination."

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.) 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" (Proverbs 7:10-14).** She's not a prostitute, but she's dressed like one. She doesn't need his money. And that part about fulfilling her vows. She's saying, "I've been to the temple and I got everything squared away with God, I took my bucket of sin and dumped it out on the altar, I made a sacrifice for my sin, now my bucket is empty, I'm ready to fill it up again...with you."

Everyone of us in this room has done that in some capacity. We can think we've got a system with God. I come clean with God, confess my sins, dump out my bucket, God forgives my sins and remembers them no more. So I can live any way I want to. But that is such an insult to God. It's like saying, "God you are so stupid. I've got the system figured out." We all play that game from time to time. She was playing that game.

She says to this young man, "I am squared away with God and I'm ready to fill up my sin bucket again with you." Look what happens. She's not looking for just anybody. She says, **"So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!" (7:15).** And he's like, "She wants me! I am so special! I'm the man of her dreams! I'm unique! This is the stuff of legend. I can't wait to tell my friends! She came out looking for me!" The volume of the soundtrack in his head goes up a couple of notches.

She goes on and says to him, **"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" (7:16-20).** She's telling him, "The husband is gone for a long time; he took his purse [maybe that's why they're having problems! OK it was a manbag!]; he's gone for a long time so you don't have to hurry off. You can stay and have breakfast! You can come back tomorrow night."

Solomon now adds he commentary to what he's seeing, **"With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk" (7:21).** He's thinking, "I am a rock star. I'm the hottest! I'm like a professional athlete that women are clamoring to sleep with. I can just take my pick!" It's a like a dream come true to him. Solomon, the wiser, older man says this, **"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" (7:22-23).** "An ox to the slaughter? No, no, no. I'm a rock star

going to a club! Do you not hear the soundtrack of my life?" "No, I hear the Jaws music." "This woman wants me!" "No, you're like a deer that finds a nice little place of green grass and wanders in only to get caught in a trap, and held tight until hunters come fill you with arrows until one pierces your liver." "You're no rock star. You're like a quail flying into a snare and about to be beheaded, de-feathered, gutted, barbequed and eaten."

The young man is thinking, "You up in the window, you sound like my dad, like my mom. You are raining on my parade. And you've got it all wrong. This is just a date...a one night stand. It's just an event." No, it's a path. Solomon is like, "You're all focused on what you're doing. I'm focused on where you're heading. You're focused on the immediate. I'm focused on the ultimate." Two very different perspectives on the very same event.

In verse 24 Solomon pulls out of this story and he addresses you and me. **Now then, my sons, 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" (7:24-27).** In other words, "I hate to break it to you but you are not the first. Her house is four-lane highway traveled by so many people they're planning to widen it with stimulus money (no pun intended). You think you're unique, that this is experience is unique, you're one of a throng [how many is a throng anyway? A pair is two, a few is three or four, a score is 20, a throng is...too many to count]. her house is a highway leading down to the chambers of death."

Listen, we can't live with the disconnect that our culture so often hands us. The disconnect that says, "As long as my intentions are good, and as long as my intentions are positive, as long as I want to end up somewhere good, it doesn't matter what path I take." Don't buy that, because at the end of the day **the path you take trumps your good intentions.**

Here are some examples of the disconnect: "I want to end up with a great Christian guy...so I'm going to go out with whoever asks me if he's cute." That will not get you to your destination because the path trumps your intentions.

How about this one: "I want our family to be this amazingly loving cohesive unit where everybody is on the same page and we have fun on vacations and we're there for each other...so I'm going to work all the time." Not going to happen because the path trumps the intention.

"I want my kids to respect me and love me so that when they're grown up they come to me for advice. And when they have kids, they bring their kids to me just to be around me...so I'm going to fool around on their mom." People say, "I don't know why my kids don't respect me and they don't bring the grandkids around." It might be because your path trumped your intentions, and the path you chose was to gain the disrespect of your kids. Men, that's where that path goes every time. You think you'll be the exception, but you won't be.

"I want to grow old and be there for my grand children, be there at all their games, and events and birthday parties...so I'm going to neglect my health."

"I want to lose weight...so supersize that."

"I want to know about God and I want to learn the scriptures and have them in my heart and life so that they shape me... so I'm going to get up every morning and read the newspaper."

"When I get married, I want to have a great sex life with my spouse, I want that intimate part of our marriage to be amazing...so I'm going to practice with everybody I date." That's a path and you will not find somebody in their fifties who says that's the way to a great sex life in marriage. That's a path with a very specific destination and it's not good, but in our culture nobody says that.

"I want to be financially healthy, able to weather the storms, I don't want to have to worry about my finances...so I'm going to rack up as much consumer debt at the banks will let me."

"I want to support some charities and good causes...so I'm going to spend all my money on me."

"I want my children to be brought up with strong Christians values...so we are going to sleep in on Sunday, or go to the Lake, every Sunday."

Here's a good question: Why does it seem like we're drawn to the wrong path? Because there is always something on the wrong path that offers an immediate fix or thrill. Making a quick buck, zero percent financing, "She makes me feel alive", "But he's rich." There's always something on the wrong path that has a

strong emotional appeal. It's emotional, not rational, and we get so fixated on the immediate that we don't think about the ultimate.

That's why other people will have more insight into where our paths are taking us than we do. That's why you should always listen to God, this is why you should have people around you that can speak freely into your life. This is why you should listen to your parents. This is why you should have people older than you in your life that have time and experience that you don't. They can see our weaknesses and blind spots. This is one reason why we're always encouraging you to get into a group where you're sharing honestly so others can speak into your life when they can see where the path you're on is headed when you can't. We've all got to have people in our lives that are willing to send that email or make that awkward phone call saying, "I'm watching and I've seen your decisions and I feel like you're moving in a dangerous direction." The question is, will we listen. Or will we think that somehow we are going to be the exception, that we're going to be the one to break the path principle.

Now I've been on the warning side today, but I need to mention that the path principle can work for you too. Some of you have been on the path of faithfulness and righteousness and forgiveness for years and you're beginning to see where those paths lead—to some amazing destinations. Of blessings in life, and healthy relationships, and healthy finances, and a deep awareness of God. You chose a path that has a predetermined destination. Because it's a powerful principle. Direction, not intention, determines destination.

Let me end with a few more questions: As you think about all the paths, your relational path, your spiritual path, your financial path, **Is the path you're on going to take you where you ultimately want to be?** Has someone recently tried to warn you and you blew them off? Has someone pointed out something dangerous to you, but you've thought, "It won't happen to me because I'm smarter than that. Somehow what happens to everybody else on this path won't happen to me"?

Is the path you're on taking you where you want to go? Maybe this is the moment you begin making some course corrections. God is ready to bring his strength to bear on this. We're not out here on our own and next week that is exactly what we're going to talk about. How do we pray, and connect with God, so we can see where we are and what path to take next. Direction determines destination. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Andy Stanley for his resources for this series of messages. His book [The Principle of the Path](#) and his message series [Destinations](#).