

“Destinations—Looking Ahead”

We started this series last week by looking at the principle of the path. If you missed last week's message I really encourage you to go to our website and watch it or download the manuscript and read it. It was foundational to what we're talking about. But I hit this path principle pretty hard. **The path principle is that direction, not intention, determines destination.** Direction--not intention, not hopes and dreams--determines destination. That if you packed all your beach stuff in your car and head north on 71 you will not get to Florida, no matter how much you pray, no matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how long you planned the trip, no matter if you asked God for traveling mercies, you are not going to get to Florida. Because direction, not intention, determines destination.

And we know that when we're driving, we know it when we're hiking, but when it comes to our marriages, our money, our morals, our educational pursuits, when it comes to all the other issues of life it's like there's this huge disconnect. We desire to end up here, and we get on a path that's taking us there. And when we get there we think, "God, what happened? And where were you, and why am I where I am?" God, and the people close to you are saying, "That's the path you were on." Because direction determines your destination, not your intention.

We're talking about this in part because our culture sends out the message that the path you're on doesn't matter, as long as your intentions are right, somehow you're going to magically end up there. It's just not true.

But the question I want us to look at today is, **How do you know which path to be on?** Because this is tough. Nobody wants to wake up in their 30's and wish they'd been on a different path than they were on in their 20's. Nobody wants to wake up in their 50's and wish they'd taken a different path when they were in their 30's. Because you only get to be in your 20's once, you only get to be a senior in high school...I say once, but maybe a couple times! But eventually you move on. You only get to be a freshman in college once, you only get one first marriage. Life is complicated enough and the last thing we need to do is complicate it more by dreaming, wishing and praying in this direction, then accidentally, or on purpose, get on a path that takes us in a different direction. So how do you know what path to take? How do you know when you're making those decisions? How do you know that marrying this guy or this girl is really the path? Because marriage is a path. How do you know if moving in together before you're married is really the path that's going to take you to where you want to be? Because living together is not an event, Living together is a path that takes you somewhere.

How do you know your relationship with alcohol, your relationship with drugs, is going to take you where you want to be? Because in your mind you have a destination in mind. How do you know that's a path that will take you where you want to be. How do you know a second marriage is going to take you where you want to be? How do you know if how you're handling your money is going to get you where you want to be? These are major life decisions and they're not isolated events, they are paths that lead to somewhere.

Time is life and the last thing you want to do is waste your life and wake up a few years down the road and have to backtrack. You know if you get lost driving, you waste a few minutes. You get lost in life, you waste years. And you don't want to do that. I don't want to do that.

To take us deeper into this let's digest a passage of scripture that can be the foundation of a powerful prayer than can help you know what paths to take in life. I hope we can all walk out of here today having memorized this verse. We put this verse and the prayer on a card that we'll give you on the way out today. This verse is from Proverbs. **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it” (Proverbs 27:12).** Now, let's just say that out loud together...first half...men...women...second half together...left handed people...

Here's the picture, and you've been in this situation. Somebody begins to tell you their life story because something is a mess. They're upside down financially, or their marriage is a mess, or they made a bad career choice. They're telling the story and before they get to the end of the story, you already know what's going to happen. You already know how it's going to end because you're thinking, "You should have seen this coming!" Because I'm a pastor I hear a lot of stories like that and sometimes I'm bold enough or

dumb enough to just ask, "When she said that didn't you begin to think, 'uh oh'? Or when he did that didn't you begin to get suspicious? Didn't you kind of see this coming?" And 9 times out of 10 people say, "Yeah, but..."

Sometimes I'll follow up with a question like, "During this time when you're life was teetering on the edge of disaster, did anybody warn you? A roommate, or a friend, or a parent? Did anybody at any point say, 'Are you sure you want to spend that much time with them? Are you sure that's a good career choice for you? Do you always drink that much after work?' Did anybody say anything to you?" About half the time the answer is, "Well, yeah."

"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." You see, in this verse you have two people. You have two responses. You have two outcomes. Two people, two responses, two outcomes.

You've got the prudent. **The prudent in the book of Proverbs is the wise person.** In fact those words are used interchangeably. The wise person is the person that understands that life is connected. That there's a relationship between yesterday, today and tomorrow. That if you're a point A, and then move to point B, chances are high that you'll move to point C. The wise person lives their life asking this question, "**Out of my past experience, my future hopes and dreams, what's the wise thing for me to do?**"

Now the **simple person, that same word is translated as naïve**, so the simple or naïve person thinks life is disconnected--that today is about today and tomorrow is about tomorrow and they're not really all that connected. And the fact that this happened that last four times I was there doesn't mean that it's going to happen again the next time. Somehow the simple person, the naïve person doesn't connect the dots about the future. That's the difference in this verse, between the prudent and the simple. Two different people, two different responses to the same situation.

The prudent see danger and they what? Take refuge! Prudent people are always looking down the road, and when they see something, "Uh oh, there's an issue! Uh oh, there's a problem!" They take the appropriate action. In fact, prudent people act like then is now. They don't wait until they're at the wall, they stop a few miles ahead. They don't wait until they are at the brink of disaster, they make changes before they get there.

The simple see the same danger and do what? Keep going. They look at the situation and say, "Huh. That's probably going to be a problem. I really ought to do something." Are you going to do something? "You're right, I know I should. Mom and Dad, you're right, I should, you're right, you're right..." What are you going to do? "Nothing, just keep going." The simple thinks, "If I drive toward the wall, that when I get to the wall I won't hit the wall. I'm going to keep going and when I get there, it's just going to work out."

Let me tell you how religious people handle this. Because as you're listening today, here's what will happen to some of you. You're going to feel convicted. "Oh man he's right! It's like he's talking to me!" But we often think that conviction, or religious feelings, is the end goal. So you sit here today and go, "You know I really ought to end that relationship. I really ought to not drink so much. I really ought to get serious about my career, or my education, or my finances." You feel convicted and, ironically, it feels good to feel convicted. Because when you feel convicted in church you feel close to God. You feel like God is speaking to you. "I had this religious experience! And I love this church!" It feels religious! And the temptation is to stop at the feeling, to think the feeling was the end goal, and then you go out of here and do nothing! That's being naïve. You come to church, you sing all the songs, you feel emotional at times, you even give money. But you keep going down that path.

The same situation. Two different people, two different responses, two different outcomes. The prudent see danger, take refuge, and what's the result? The result of being prudent is that they avoid huge amounts of pain. They avoid huge amounts of suffering. They avoid unnecessary problems. That's the outcome.

So what's the outcome of the simple and naïve. The simple keep going and what? Suffer for it. Because they kept going they suffer. And having talked to enough suffering people who brought it on themselves they often ask, "How could God let this happen to me?" Because God works through principles. If you jump off a building, you hit the concrete. Don't blame God. It's the principle of gravity. He put it in place. We learn about it as a child; that's why you're born short, so you can't fall too far, but you learn the principle.

God is always, always, always saying, "I love you and I want to help you." So often we don't listen and we suffer harm.

And that brings up a very important thing to internalize. **In many paths of life, there is a point of no return.** Whether that's marriage, finances, morals—there are points at which all your options are bad. And you think, "If I could back up 10 years, I'd have better options. If I could back up 5 years I could have gotten off this path with very little consequence." But if you continue down certain roads you hit a point of no return and you don't have any good options and you suffer harm.

Listen, when you're 60 years old, that's not the best time to start thinking about saving for retirement is it? If that's where you are, then start there, but that's not the best time to start. You missed an opportunity. Now you're thinking, "I wish I could go back to those times when people brought up saving, and living in a smaller house, and driving a smaller car, every time I heard it I said, 'We really ought to do that. I feel convicted.'" You didn't disagree. You just didn't do anything about it. You kept going.

Girls, ladies, when you're pregnant is not the best time evaluate, "Do I really love this guy?" But it happens all the time. You're at a point of no return. You're think, "I wish I could back up a couple years and decide then if he was really right for me. I wish I would have stopped and evaluated when I had better options."

Or once your addicted, that's not the best time to think, "Gosh I really need to be more disciplined." Yes, if you find yourself addicted, start where you are and kick it. But the best time to address it is before you're addicted when you're options are good. Not when you're trapped an all your options are painful—confessing to your spouse, or your boss, or your friends. Address it when you have more options, options that aren't painful. Address it when somebody in your life gives you some early warnings: "I think you're drinking too much. You're spending too much time on the internet. You're spending too much time with her. Too much time absorbed in sports or video games, or whatever away from your family." And you said, "Yeah, you're probably right." But you didn't do anything. You just kept going. And the result is suffering.

Now I need to make it clear that when we get to those places where we're suffering and it's our own fault, God doesn't love you any less. God couldn't love you more! But the pain and suffering are real because we've violated a principle and there a consequences. You don't break a principle, you just break yourself against it. And God is there at the bottom, ready to help you put the piece back together again.

The prudent see danger and they do something. But the simple, the naïve, they know better, they've been warned, but they keep going and they suffer for it. Let's talk about how this gets applied to two very important parts of life: our relationships and our finances. In terms of relationships, here's a something important to know. **Never evaluate a relationship based on where it is. Always evaluate a relationship based on where it's headed.** All relationships are moving. They're getting better or worse.

That's why if you're married and your husband or wife is saying, "Honey, I think we need to talk to somebody about our marriage." What they're doing is saying, "I see that we were at point A, and now we're at point B, we're headed toward C. We need to do something." And you're saying, "But honey, we haven't had an argument in 2 days." She says, "Yeah, you've been out of town." You're like, "OK maybe things are a little worse today, but just a little, itty, bit worse." But the same was true the day before, and the day before that. Your spouse sees where it's heading. The prudent see danger and do something. The simple say, "Oh it will just work out. Somehow it will get better." Relationships are always moving. Don't evaluate a relationship based on where it is today. Evaluate it based on where it's moving. You ignore that long enough you'll wake up with very, very painful options. And in that moment you would give anything to be able to come back to today and do something different.

The same is true with finances. Nobody starts their working life saying, "I can't wait to become enslaved to my consumer debt. I can't wait to live life with no financial margin. I can't wait to live in a house that I can't afford. I can't wait to get my first title loan on my car and pay back 5 times what I borrowed. I can't wait to wonder every week if I'll be able to pay my bills on time. I can't wait! It will be so fun!" Nobody says that! Your dream is to be financially free, and have margin in your life, and have some savings, and not worry about retirement. That's your dream, but if you're on a path that's all about leveraging debt for a lifestyle, that path has a predictable destination. And the simple say, "Yeah, we probably ought to downsize. Yeah, we

probably should work up a budget. Yeah, we should probably take the Financial Peace class.” Are you going to? “No. Because I’m on this path with a whole bunch of people and surely we’re not all wrong.” The prudent see danger and do something. The simple keep going and suffer for it.

Now, if you decide to get serious about this principle, there are four words you might want to write down. The first word is **Action**. You have to do something. You have to end that unhealthy relationship. You have to get rid of the internet. You have to downsize. You have to have a hard conversation. Take action.

The second word is **Sacrifice**. This principle requires sacrifice. You have to give something up and we are not good at that! But because that sacrifice stings a little bit right now, we avoid it. We say, “Yeah, that’s probably the right thing to do, but it’s complicated. It’s hard to move out when you’re living with somebody and you’ve made promises. It’s hard to stop spending on a lifestyle you can’t afford. It’s hard to walk away from the porn. It’s difficult to give up that habit that could lead to an addiction.” It’s easy to say, “Yeah, I know I should do something, but I’m just going to keep on going.”

The third word is the word **Embarrassment**. Because if we’re on the wrong path, and change paths it’s admitting that we were wrong to the people closest to us. And in lots of cases people won’t understand and you won’t have a chance to explain. People will think that you’re overreacting. But this is where you say, “I’m not thinking of now, I’m thinking of then. I’m going to be prudent. I’m not going to live just in today, I’m responding to tomorrow and the days after that.”

But the fourth word is the word **Relief**. Because the day is coming where you will breathe a sigh of relief. You may look back to this very day as the day that you got off a path that was going to lead to destruction in some area of your life. And a year from now, 2 years from now, 3 years from now, you’ll look back and say, “What if I hadn’t acted, ended that relationship, stopped abusing alcohol or drugs. What if I hadn’t changed my lifestyle and my spending? Man, where would I be today?” Action, sacrifice, embarrassment, relief, OR it’s much easier to just keep going and one day suffer harm.

Now this can seem daunting, but don’t forget, do not forget, that God is bringing his strength to bear for you. God is walking with you and can give you strength that you don’t have on your own. And that brings me to a simple, yet powerful, prayer that opens us up to where God would have us go. The prayer is this, **“Heavenly Father, help me to see trouble long before it gets here. Then grant me the wisdom to know what to do and the courage to do it.”**

Praying a prayer like this is no guarantee that you’ll get it right every time, but if you start praying a simple prayer like that every day for your marriage, for your finances, for how you spend your time, for how you parent your kids, for patterns or habits in your life, for career decisions, you will avoid many, if not most, of paths that lead to suffering.

None of us, none of us want to live lives of regret, lives where we end up with no good options at some point of no return. God doesn’t want you or me to live lives like that so we turn to him and pray this prayer, as a part of a living thriving prayer life. “Lord, help me to see trouble coming long before it gets here. Then grant me the wisdom to know what to do and the courage to do it.”

So while I’ve been talking today are you seeing some paths you need to get off of? Please, please don’t give in to the temptation to say, “Yeah, you’re right.” And then just keep going. Don’t do it. You will suffer harm.

Don’t waste another minute on a path that leads you somewhere you don’t want to go. Relationally, financially, in the realm of entertainment, in your relationship to alcohol, other substances, in your career, in your education. Do something about it. “The prudent see danger and seek refuge, the simple, the naïve, keep going and suffer for it.” That can change your life. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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