

“Destinations—Lean Not”

Two weeks ago we began this message series called “destinations”. The over-riding principle of this series is that it is our direction, not our intentions that lead us to our destinations. We have all these paths in life; relational, financial, educational, dating, marriage, professional, spiritual paths. We probably have a good idea about where we want these paths to lead; healthy relationships with our children or co-workers, fulfilling marriages, financial freedom, professional fulfillment, etc. Those would be our intentions. The problem is that we often make decisions about our paths that lead us away from, not toward our intended destinations. This series is about how we identify where our paths are leading us, change direction with God’s help, and better follow God’s leading on paths that will lead us to the life that really is life.

A few weeks ago, Aaron talked about how we feel lost when we realize that the path we are on is not where we want to be. I can certainly identify with that. It has happened to me, rarely, that I am physically lost. I more easily identify with being lost spiritually. When he was talking about getting lost, he mentioned that he was directionally challenged. I do get lost occasionally, but I do not identify with being directionally challenged. I think I have a pretty good sense of direction. In fact, I might have claimed in the past, to be directionally gifted! I really trust my inner gyroscope. I rarely get lost and when I do, I like to use my keen sense of direction to find my way out again. I don’t like to ask for directions! Anybody in here with on this? I don’t own a GPS. According to me, I don’t need one!

I am a man, a directionally gifted man. If you’re a directionally gifted woman or man like me, then (tell me if this isn’t true) we don’t even like to admit we are lost even if we are.

A few years ago, Jennifer and I took a short trip over to the Branson Landing. We weren’t in any hurry to get home, so I convinced her to let me take the back roads home. So we drove up the strip and out the west side of Branson, went up through Reed’s Spring, and I wanted to meander our way back up to 60 Hwy. I didn’t look at a map, I just picked a road that went west. And we drove quite a while, and the road never turned north or intersected another highway that headed north. Someone in the car actually said to me, “We’re lost.” Not panicky, just matter of factly – telling me that at some point that day she would really like to arrive at our destination. What did I say, “We’re not lost, I know which way we are headed, I’m just not sure where this comes out.” So eventually, when we found some sign of life that didn’t remind us of “Deliverance”, we stopped and asked for directions to Hwy 60.

Now to this day, there is a part of me that will contend that we were not exactly lost, we were heading in the right direction. I still want to trust my own understanding. But I went back to the map this week and tried to figure out what we did and where we were. We were lost. I think we were headed toward Cassville, which is not exactly heading in the right direction. And that is a parallel to a spiritual problem that we are going to look at today about the paths and we choose.

What we do is we trust our own understanding. Just as I trust my own inner gyroscope for directions, when we make choices that put us on relational paths, spiritual paths, financial paths, we tend to trust our own understanding. We trust our own viewpoints. We trust our own finite level of wisdom to help us navigate toward our intended destinations. Over the past two weeks we’ve talked about choosing what feels right or seems right, or ignoring warnings and wisdom and how those paths lead us far away from our intended destinations. But today, we’re going to talk about why it is that when we gather the information around us, do some

research and try to be very wise and prudent, we can still end up someplace other than where we intended to be.

That's the tension about the choices we make. The choices are now, but the outcomes are later, often much, much later in life. Haven't you ever made a choice about your family or job or finances or spiritual life that at the time seemed to be a wise decision but now you wish you could go back and do it differently? How many of us, knowing what we know now, would go back and choose different paths? The point is that even when we try diligently to gather information and make wise choices, that isn't enough. Gathering information is always a good thing to do in making decisions about our paths, but information alone is not enough. Our own understanding is limited.

Let's take a look at an Old Testament character named Solomon and see if we can gain some insight from his words and his story today to help us figure this out. Solomon was the son of King David. Solomon was still a very young man when he became king. One night, in a dream, God said something like this to Solomon, "Solomon, ask me for anything and I will give it to you. Out of my love for your father David I want to give you whatever you ask." Solomon said something like, "I am still very young and I don't have the experience to be King over this land. So I want to ask for wisdom to help me be a leader for your people." And so God gave Solomon the gift of wisdom. So if there was ever a man had the best odds of making good decisions from his own understanding it was Solomon. We find some wisdom sayings in the book of Proverbs and that is attributed to Solomon. And our scripture for today...which has a lot to say to us about how to choose our paths in life, comes from Proverbs.

Proverbs 3:5-8 TNIV

***Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.
This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.***

Solomon is talking to all of us here. He says to "lean not" to your own understanding! OK that's for us when we put our trust in what we think, what we want. If you like to gather the information and make a decision, that's a great thing to do, but this is still for you too! Gathering information is a one part of making wise decisions, but information is not enough. We need more. We need a trusting relationship with God. Don't lean toward trusting your own viewpoint, your own wisdom, lean toward trusting in God. Our own understandings are limited. They can be very biased. They can be blinded by emotion or desire or jaded by anger or envy. Have you ever asked someone you love why they are doing something that you think is not wise and their response is, "You wouldn't understand" or "you just don't understand?" Maybe you've said that to someone. Our understanding is contextual. Our understandings rise up from our experiences. Even when we try to make it as objective as we can, it can never be totally free from our desires or emotions.

Solomon reminds us to trust God and the paths that God will lead us down. He also says "In ALL your ways, acknowledge God" and God will do what? Make your paths straight.

Trust God in all things. In all things? Don't you wish it said, "In some of your ways, acknowledge God"? We'd all be really comfortable right now if it said, "In a few ways, acknowledge God", right? Because we can do that, right. We do that now. Some of our ways! I like that, that sounds doable.

We are good with some ways. We're good with trusting God with our Sunday mornings, but what about tomorrow? Will we trust God enough to save some time for him on Monday? Will we trust God with our business dealings tomorrow? Will we trust God to follow his ways of love and mercy and selflessness in our relationships with our children or spouses or employees? When we spend our money this week, will that acknowledge God? Will we trust God when he says we can live fuller, more meaningful lives on 90% of our income? Or will we trust our own ways?

Being smart, gathering information is not enough. It wasn't even enough for Solomon's VERY GOOD UNDERSTANDING! Solomon proves another key principle that is true of all of us, but before we get to what that is, let me tell you what he did. There was a time in his life when he did exactly what he warns us against doing. He leaned to his own understanding. Solomon, with all his wisdom, decides that the best way to secure the borders of his kingdom is to enter into marriage alliances with the nations around him. God warns Solomon that this is not a good idea, that Solomon needs to trust God to provide security and the influence of the gods of the foreign women will lead Israel down a path to a bad destination. Solomon trusts in his own understanding and chooses his way, which is in line with the conventional wisdom of his day, and sure enough, it leads Israel down a path that eventually divides the kingdom and ultimately leads to Israel's destruction at the hands of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Solomon is like us, right. We see this in our own lives right? We see smart people making decisions we know will end up in a bad place. And we wonder, "What are they thinking?" And the truth is, we are those smart people and we lean to our own understanding. Being smart is not enough. Having information is not enough. Here is the principle that trapped Solomon and traps us:

Pride eventually overrides wisdom

Arrogance eventually overrides discernment

Self importance eventually overrides common sense

And all three of these, plus many other sins in us like envy, gluttony, lust, sloth, anger, all of these urge us to "lean to our own understanding". To choose not to trust God in all things. Our pride, arrogance, self importance will always lead us to serve our interests first. When we choose our paths, information is not enough, we need God. We need a savior! We need a relationship with Jesus, who can save us from ourselves and lead us into fulfilling life. And the good news is; in spite of our poor decisions about our paths, in spite of the ways we choose to trust our own understanding instead of trusting God's direction, no matter what path we are on and no matter how far it has led us astray, Jesus is that savior who loves and forgives. The consequences of our paths may be with us for sometime in the future, but his grace relieves us from the shame and guilt that comes with leaning to our own understanding. There are things I have done and things I will do and there will be people who will say, "I can't believe he did that, doesn't he see where that path is heading?" I am caught in the trap of this principle....that my pride, my arrogance, or my self-serving will override the trust I place in Jesus. My own understanding will not get me to my destinations, but I will choose it anyway. And so will you.

So when it comes to our destinations, Solomon gives us great wisdom. Lean not to our own understanding, but in all things rely on God. That's great advice! Great advice that I can

get right sometimes, great advice that I will improve at as I continue walking with God through this life, but still advice that I will never perfectly follow, because like Solomon, my pride, arrogance or self-serving will eventually rise up and I will lean again to my own understanding. We need more than information, more than wisdom. We need a savior who loves and forgives us when choose not to follow him. We need a savior who restores us and renews us and empowers us with his Spirit. We need a savior who will meet us on our wayward path and lead us back into life. And Jesus is exactly that savior. When he encountered people on paths to destruction in their life, he didn't judge them or ridicule them, he loved them, and he healed them, he turned them toward God. And that's what he will do for us.

If you would like to invite this savior into your life, or maybe you're thinking "I need to really reconnect with Jesus and turn my life over to him", then I'd like to invite you to join me in this prayer, and repeat it in your own words, make it your own.

Prayer

So as we close, I have a take home assignment for you. Would you please take a few minutes this week, and look at some of the paths of your life and ask the question,

How am I submitting to God in the following paths:

At home

With my money

In my professional/work life

With my time

And don't forget to take your study guide home with you this week. We're going to be going through passages and teachings of Jesus that will help us follow Solomon's great advice.

Will you stand and join me in our blessing today?

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