

“Destinations—Paying Attention”

Growing up, I was told that I had ADD. Attention Deficit Disorder. That means that I couldn't keep my attention on what everybody else thought I needed to. Anybody else out there get that diagnosis? About all the men in the room!

Recently I was diagnosed with STS. Shiny Thing Syndrome. “Oh look! Shiny things!” I'm still easily distracted. We are a very distracted people. There are shiny things all around us that capture or grab our attention and we have a very hard time focusing on anything. I'll be getting a message ready which I do at home to limit distractions. But even there things reach out to grab my attention. The home phone will ring, “Oh, who's that?” My cell phone will ring, “Ah!” I'll get texts, “Oh!” Emails will come buzzing in. Facebook will alert me to posts on my wall. The cat will yak on the floor. Ants will crawl across my desk. A while back my neighbor's puppy wouldn't shut up. It just kept whining and yapping. I went over to yell at it. I found it hanging upside down on the fence around its pen. It had tried to jump over and its leg got caught.

Hundreds of things every hour try to grab our attention. In fact, I'm convinced that the most successful people in life are not the smartest, or richest, or most skilled. The most successful people are those who somehow, some way, control all those things that try to grab their attention so they can focus on something—their business, their family, their faith--whatever it might be. What has our attention, has us. Keep that in mind for a minute or two. What has our attention, has us.

We're wrapping up this series today and the concept we've been trying to internalize and make a part of our lives and our world view is the principle of the path. **The principle of the path: Direction determines destination.** When it comes to driving down a highway or hiking through the woods, we know that it's the road we take, the path we travel down, that will determine our destination. We know it driving and hiking, but in so many other parts of our lives, whether we talking about our finances, relationships, marriages, faith we have this idea that if we just intend to be somewhere, then we'll somehow just get there. “I want to end up here in my life, so I'm going to head there...” in the opposite direction. “My intentions will somehow get me there.” No...they...won't. Direction, not intention, determines destination. Now, for all of us, it's tempting to think that you can get away with breaking this principle, but all you'll do is break yourself against it. It's a principle, it's like gravity, you're not going to change it.

A few weeks ago we hit that simple, but powerful, passage in the Bible in Proverbs 27 that says, **“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”** It's that call to develop and practice wisdom. The wise look for danger and when we see it coming, we do something. The simple, the naïve, the foolish, just keep going and suffer for it.

Last week Mark focused on that passage from Proverbs that tells us not to lean on our own understanding. That as wise as we might be or become, we can never push away from God when it comes to this journey of life.

Well, this morning as we close this series, I want to add one last element to this principle of the path. And I want to thank pastor Andy Stanley, who's written and spoken about this “principle of the path.” Direction, not intention, determines destination. But he adds one more element to this formula. So, yes, direction determines your destination. But, a lot of the time, it's the things or people that grab our attention that influence the direction of our lives. So it looks something like this: **Attention influences Direction which determines Destination.**

You see, when something grabs or captures your attention, you turn in that direction. And this can be good thing, and this can be a bad thing. When you're learning to drive this is an important concept because when you're first learning you find out quickly that when you look over at that other car, or that thing on the side of the road, or that sign, you start to steer towards it. You've got to learn to keep your attention on the road ahead.

When I was in high school I had a teacher at school named John Willard who was also my Bible Study leader at church. He was a single guy at the time and he didn't just talk about the Christian life, he didn't just teach it, he lived it and that grabbed my attention. I had a youth pastor named David Cheeks who did the same. He was married and had two kids and we got to see him as a dad and husband. He made an impact

on my life and the lives of lots of other youth. The way he lived out his faith grabbed my attention and that affected the direction of my life. If it weren't for them, and some others who did the same, I wouldn't be where I am today.

When I was in seminary a young woman in Kansas City grabbed my attention. I had met her when we were in college, but when I was in seminary, BAM! She not only grabbed my attention but also my affection and that changed the direction of my life. I'm just going along doing my thing and, "Whoa!" Life would never be the same!

We've all had those kinds of defining moments where we're just traveling along and something or someone captures or grabs our attention. And as we look back, we can see just how the things changed the direction of our life.

Now, of course, what I just shared were a few good examples. But the truth is that, for all of us, there have been events, opportunities, things or people that have grabbed our attention, and when we look back, we wished we had walked right past them. There are people we wish we would've never met. Relationships we wish we never had, business opportunities we wish we would have ignored, websites we wish we had stayed clear of. That's why we use the language she/he "grabbed" my attention... it "captured" my attention... and so I put the blinker on and took a turn. And the next thing you know is that you're in a very different place in life... wondering how in the world you got where you are.

So there are things and people that capture or grab our attention. But there are those things or people we choose to give our attention to, or pay attention to. There's a big difference between what grabs our attention and what we choose to give our attention to. Grabbing our attention is about capturing our emotions. Giving our attention to is all about intentionality--a decision we make.

There's no doubt as you look back on your life that there are things you wish you had given more of your attention to. You may wish that you had given or paid more attention to your health. You may wish, now, that you had given more attention to how you handled your finances; how you paid attention to your marriage, or spiritual life. I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone share with regret about one or more of these.

You see, generally speaking, it's the things that grab or capture my attention that are the most dangerous. On the other hand, the things that I generally choose to give my attention to are often the things that move me closer to becoming the person I want to be. Grabbed or given, either way, what has your attention will determine your destination... financially, relationally, spiritually, morally, professionally, whatever it might be.

Over and over again through Scripture, God reminds us how the things we pay attention direct our lives... In Psalm 119:35, for example, David shares his heart with God... **"Direct me in the path of your commands for there I find delight" (Psalm 119:35).** Direct me, God... guide me in the paths that you have for me.

Then in verse 37, he says... **"Turn my eyes away from worthless things..." (119:37)** Why? Because if I focus on worthless things, then so often, I'll find myself moving in the direction of worthless things. All of us can tell a story about that.

Then look at the last part of **verse 37**. He writes, **"Turn my eyes away from worthless things: preserve my life according to your word" (119:37).** In other words, I don't want to end up at some stage of life and wonder, "how in the world did I get here?" *"Preserve my life, God... direct me in the path of your word"*

Then, David's son, Solomon weighs in on this a bit in Proverbs 4:25-27. He says, **"Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." (Proverbs 4:25-27).**

"Let your eyes look straight ahead. Do not look to the left or to the right." Why? Because the stuff on the periphery is trying to grab your attention. When you're learning to drive this is an important concept because when you're first learning you find out quickly that when you look over at that other car, or that thing on the side of the road, or that sign, you start to steer towards it. You've got to learn to keep your attention on the road ahead.

If you're married but at the office is a flirtatious single woman, or man, keep your eyes from looking there. When you're on the internet and seductive images pop up, don't let your eyes go in that direction. If any of this catches your attention, it will affect your direction and destination.

From time to time in life, whether it's relationally, financially... you name the arena... We're going to be tempted to allow our gaze to go where it doesn't need to go. And, where our gaze goes, we go. As our attention goes, we go. So Solomon says, *"Let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you."* Make the decision to pay attention to the right things.

In Matthew chapter 14 we see a good illustration of this. Jesus has just feed 5,000 people. He then spends time talking, teaching, healing. While he's wrapping up he tells his disciples to go ahead and get in the boat and head across the Sea of Galilee. They push off from shore and get a ways out when a storm comes along. The wind churns up the waves and the disciples are a little bit panicked. This is where Jesus walks on the water to get to the boat. When the disciples see him, they're terrified. They think it's a ghost coming after them. Jesus tells them that it's him. Peter says, "If it's you tell me to come to you and I will." Here's what the text says, **Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him" (Matthew 14:29-31).**

Peter was doing great as long as his attention was fixed on Jesus. But as soon as his attention was drawn to the wind and the waves, he started to sink. I've known quite a few people who gave their lives to Christ and were on an amazing path with him—learning, growing, making a difference in the lives of the people they work with, making a difference in the lives of the poor, the marginalized. Their faith was on fire, and then they caught sight of something that derailed them. Maybe it was a hobby, maybe a lake home, maybe a sport, maybe a substance, maybe sexual lust, maybe material possessions, maybe money. But the distraction was there, they took their eyes off of Jesus and they sank into some pretty dark places. **Attention influences Direction, which determines Destination.**

Truth is, this principle is so easy to see in the lives of other people. Maybe you're thinking, *"Oh, I wish my uncle was here. I wish my wife was here. Man, do they need this!"* Every one of us has seen a friend or family member that we love get distracted. We've all heard someone say, *"No big deal, I can handle this. It's not a big deal. I'm just taking a look."*

We can see this in the lives of other people, but it can be so difficult to see this while looking into a mirror. In fact, right now, it could be that a husband or wife or finance or friend has been getting on your case... *"I think you're spending too much time engaged in..."* "Oh it's not a big deal, I can handle it." And you just blow it off. And they see what's happening and they're concerned. You respond to where you are, but they're responding to where they're afraid you will go.

Parents do this all the time. We're built with an overactive radar and our kids think we're nuts. *"All I said is that I'll be calling him on the phone... it's not like we're gonna get married or anything."* They're seeing it as a one-time call... but we're seeing it as a path that leads to a fairly predictable destination.

So, let me ask you two questions before we wrap up. First...**What has captured or grabbed your attention?** A person that you shouldn't be giving attention? Things? Sex? Success? Failure?

It doesn't have to be something bad. It could be a hobby, a sport, the yard. In fact, we have to be extra careful with good things because we can begin to think that they're not evil so we give them more attention that they're due and the result is the same. We don't end up where we want to be. Attention influences direction, which determines destination. And if you think, "Oh no, not me," then, like so many before you who believed they'd be the one person to defy a principle like this... you'll just have to learn the hard way. You can't break a scriptural principle. You can only break yourself against it. Attention, direction, destination.

The second question is this: **What do you need to begin giving or paying more attention to?** What do you need to give more attention to? For some of you, you need to give more attention to your spiritual life. If you're faith seems like a scrawny prune instead of a juicy plum then maybe you haven't paid enough attention to your spiritual life. Maybe you need carve out more time alone with God each day giving attention to your growing your relationship with God.

Maybe it's your health. Life has gotten you distracted and you're not taking care of the body God entrusted to you. You're not eating right, not exercising, not getting good rest. The Bible says that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. How are you taking care of it?

What about your marriage? Is that something you need to pay more attention to? Maybe after the first year of marriage, you began drifting along on autopilot with each of you beginning to give more and more attention to other things. If you want a great marriage then pay attention to your marriage! Find ways to communicate better, to express love, to work in tandem.

Maybe you realize that it's been a long time since you've paid attention to the poor and needy around you. Maybe you're looking back and wondering how you lost that heart for the poor that you once had? It's not hard to do. As we live out our day-to-day lives, there are things to the left or right that grab or capture our attention.

If you're a parent, you may need to pay more attention to the faith development of your kids. This isn't something you can start paying attention to once they hit their teenage years. You can't wait till they have no faith to begin paying attention to their faith development.

So, what is it or who is it that you need to pay more attention to now? Because the things you pay attention are, in this moment, influencing the direction of your life. And every direction has a destination. And it's your direction not your intention, not your hopes, not your dreams that influences and determines the destination of your life. And the reason this is so important to God is because he loves you and because he's interested in your destination.

And listen if all this seems overwhelming because of where you find yourself right now, remember that God isn't so much interested in where you've been, but where you're going. And he is willing to bring his strength to bear on your future, if you let him. And if the path you're on isn't going to get you where you want to go, it's never too late to change. It comes down to making some decisions about how you choose to live your life. It comes down to deciding, "Where do I want to go? What kind of person do I want to become? What has God laid on my heart to be and do? And is the path I'm on heading that way?"

Unfortunately, there are no short cuts, no simple answers. **Attention influences Direction which determines Destination.** But what would happen if we took these principles and laid them out before our Heavenly Father and said, "*Would you help me, God?*" "God, help me to trust in you with all of my heart and to lean not in my own wisdom and understanding but in all my ways, lean on and acknowledge you... so that you would direct my paths. Because right now, God, I see red flags on this path I'm on. I realize there's something pulling my attention away from intimacy with you... from loving you, and loving others and serving the world. There are things I'm beginning to pay attention to that I never could have imaged that I'd pay attention to and its already beginning to influence the direction in my life... they're already beginning to create tension in some of my most valued relationships. God, there are some things I've neglected for years and years which I need to give attention to."

I don't know how all this resonates with you. But, I know this... what we're talking about here will affect the outcome of your life. And that means that next year at this time or 5 years from now we'll look back and your life WILL have been impacted by these truths...whether or not you think about them again, whether or not you embrace them again, whether or not you make any change. Things that you give your attention to WILL impact the direction of your life... and, direction will always determine destination.

So, bottom-line... lets pay attention to the things that have our attention, because they're influencing our future. Let's pay attention to the things we need to give attention to because they are impacting the future of the people that God has placed under our care. Let your eye look directly ahead and let your gaze be fixed straight ahead of you... because your eye is the lamp of your body. Attention, direction, destination. It's the principle of the path. 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, Senior Pastor of Northpoint Community Church, for his resources in this message.