

The Path: Week 2

Making a Course Correction
Proverbs 27:12

Last week we started this series called, "The Path," in which we said that there is an unbreakable principle in the universe that if you try to break, it will break you. It's the principle of *The Path*, which says ***Your direction determines your destination.*** We went farther and said it really doesn't matter what you hoped would happen, or what you wanted to have happen — ***Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination.*** It doesn't matter how smart, good-looking, or rich you are, if you get on 81 north, you will eventually end up in Canada.

The principle isn't rocket science; it isn't brain surgery. We all know this when it comes to geography, but for some reason, when it comes to other areas of life, like relationships, finances, morality, eating habits, exercise, and developing skills that make us more competent and valuable, we often walk one way and hope to wind up somewhere in the other direction.

Your direction, not your intention, not your hopes, not your dreams, determines your destination. This is the hinge on which everything we're going to learn today swings. We're going to be in the Book of Proverbs through this entire series of message and ***Proverbs 1:2*** tells us why the Book of Proverbs was written:

² Their purpose is to teach people wisdom and discipline, to help them understand the insights of the wise.
³ Their purpose is to teach people to live disciplined and successful lives, to help them do what is right, just, and fair. ***⁴ These proverbs will give insight to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young.***

Who doesn't want that? God superintended the composition of this book we call Proverbs so that we could become *wise*, so that we would know how to live life well. We are told in these opening verses that this book is written so that we will learn, be wise, see success, gain knowledge, and have discipline. There is a single word that encapsulates all we're going to zone in on and is found in multiple places throughout the Book of Proverbs. The word is "Prudent" or "prudence." To be prudent means "to know what to do," "to exercise good judgment," or "having common sense."

Prudent = Knowing what to do. Exercising good judgment. Having common sense.

We don't use this word very much today, but the book of Proverbs uses it a lot. In fact, Solomon compares and contrasts *prudent people* with a second kind of people, "simple people." His hope is that we are not simple people but prudent people. Simple people let their emotions get the best of them. They get mad and go into a rage; they spout off and complain when things don't go their way, but prudent people know how to control themselves and take things in stride. Listen to this verse from Proverbs:

Only simpletons believe everything they're told! The prudent carefully consider their steps. Proverbs 14:15 NLT

Here's what I think. God put Proverbs in the Bible to make us smarter at living life. So, let's talk today about prudence. Look with me at Proverbs 27:12:

A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences. Proverbs 27:12 NLT

Alright, here's where the serious learning begins. If last week we learned that our path is of paramount importance, then the logical question is: "How do you choose the right path? How do you figure out what path you should be on? Or, in some cases, how do you figure out what path to get off of?" This proverb is telling us... ***The primary difference between the prudent and the simple is not what they see but how they respond to what they see.***

Both the prudent and the simple *see* danger. One responds by changing course, the other keeps going and hopes that the danger will never arrive. It's like the ostrich who buries his head in the sand: "If I can't see it, it can't see me. If I ignore what I know is out there, it can't hurt me." You can see why Solomon calls people like this "simple." So, the first thing prudent people do is:

The prudent make course corrections.

It's a little more complicated than that in life. But part of choosing the right path is *getting off the wrong path*. Saying, "This behavior, this habit, this relationship, this... you name it, is leading me somewhere that's going to hurt, so I'm going to get off of this path and get on a better one."

Unlike the prudent,

The simple keep right on going.

- When a prudent person senses that a relationship is moving in an unhealthy direction, they do something. The simple keep going.
- When a prudent person sees trouble on their financial horizon, they do something. The simple keep spending.
- When a prudent person realizes that God is the most important person in the universe, and their relationship with him isn't growing, they do something about it. The simple keep doing whatever they were doing that took their time away from God.

Just so we're clear, the second half of the proverb says, "the simple keep going *and pay the penalty*." The penalty for what? – For refusing to act on what they see. They pay the penalty because they see no connection between the choices of today and the experiences of tomorrow. They overlook the fact that every path has a destination. Here's the really sad part about not making course corrections: not only does the simple person himself pay a penalty, but often a lot of people around him pay a penalty too: spouses, children, co-workers, friends.

You would hate to be called simple. But if you're 30 years old, or 50 years old, or 15 years old, and you see a problem in the future because of your path, you need to get off that path.

A parent notices that their son or daughter tends to talk back and lose their temper. As they grow a little older, they do the same thing to their teacher or coach. The parent thinks, "When they grow up, this could be a problem."

A 20-something knows that he's gaining a little weight, but hey, that's what happens in your 20's, isn't it? Your metabolism slows down, but your appetite doesn't. A friend says, "When you're 40, this could be a problem."

A couple thinks, "We really need to get on a budget. We need to figure out where our money is going so we can give to God and have some leftover to help others. When we retire, we need some leftover to help ourselves too." But then the bling catches their eyes, budgeting is so *mundane*. So they drive toward the wall hoping that something miraculous will happen just before they hit.

So how do you choose the right path? Here's the key. Are you ready for this?

Prudent people know that it's not what they see that makes a difference, it's what they do.

So they *do* things. They make course corrections. ***How do you make a course correction?***

1. You do something. You take action.

You step off a path and get on another one. This is almost always hard because we are creatures of habit, creatures of momentum. We naturally continue to do what we're used to doing. If we're used to overeating, overeating feels natural to us. If we're used to losing our temper, losing our temper is natural to us. If we're used to online chat rooms or indiscrete pictures, that's what we're used to. Momentum carries us in the same direction, so to change directions means...

2. You almost always give up something.

Here's a corollary to what we're saying: *When you see danger, it almost always requires sacrifice*, which is why we don't do it.

Friends, we all know that life is going to bring us challenges, don't we? When we recover from this economic downturn, there will be some up years, but eventually, there will be another downturn. Prudent people plan for it.

If you're married, some type of challenge will stretch and strain your relationship at some point. Prudent people know that, so they don't take their marriages for granted. They work on them in the good times so they have more strength to weather the bad times.

Prudent people don't just take action or give something up...they take the right steps. In life there are a lot of things that can go one way or another. There are days when taking action feels like a crap shoot. But, there are a whole lot of "right" things we can do to move forward and be prudent.

3. We do something right in these five areas:

- 1. Spiritual***
- 2. Relational***
- 3. Moral***
- 4. Physical***
- 5. Financial***

Friends, let's not waste another minute on a path that leads somewhere you don't want to go. Let's take some time this morning to reflect and redirect. To make some course corrections. It is our direction, not our intentions that will determine our destination.

The prudent see danger and take refuge. They get off the wrong path and get on the right path. They make course corrections. They don't just think about it or worry about it—they do it.

In your small groups this week there are some really good questions that will help you take stock of where you currently are and where you're headed. There's also a good question about letting the members of your group help you make a course correction or two. I hope you'll join a group this week.

Your next steps this week are the same three we covered last week, plus one more.

Prayer cards...