

# The Path

Week 1: Your Direction Determines Destination

Proverbs 7:7-27

July 7, 2019

I'm glad you're here today. We're starting a new series called, "The Path." It is based on a book written by Pastor Andy Stanley called, *The Principle of the Path: How to get from where you are to where you want to be*. The book uses the biblical book of Proverbs as its source.

The book of Proverbs and its surrounding books—Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon—are books by the sages. Scholars called these books "Wisdom Literature." Wisdom literature was written to make us wise – to help us know what to do in specific situations. The book of Proverbs was written primarily by King Solomon, purported to be one of the wisest men who ever lived. Now, having *intelligence* means you know things. Having *wisdom* means you know what to do with what you know in various situations. So you can be smart without being wise. The Bible says of Solomon: ***He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom. 1 Kings 4:32-34***

In today's society, Solomon would have master's degrees in a wide range of disciplines. Solomon died in 931 B.C., so most of this book was written by then. Solomon didn't write all of it though. We believe he wrote chapters 1-24, but the beginning of Proverbs 25 says... ***These are more proverbs of Solomon, compiled by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah.*** Those are chapters 25-29 and they come along 200 years later. Chapter 30 was written by a man named Agur son of Jakeh, and chapter 31 was written by King Lemuel. We have no idea who those two men were; we just know they were very wise as well. Is that enough background for you?

## ***Writers of Proverbs:***

***1-24 = Written by Solomon before 931 B.C.***

***25-29 = Compiled by men of Hezekiah, 700 B.C.***

***30 = Written by Agur son of Jakeh***

***31 = Written by King Lemuel)***

Alright, flip forward a few pages in your Bible to ***Proverbs 7***. Here's what we all know from Andy Stanley's story and from our own real-life experiences when it comes to paths: The road you're on determines where you'll end up. That's true, isn't it? If I head north, eventually, I will end up in Canada. Whatever road, whatever highway, whatever path I'm on will determine where I end up. I can want to end up somewhere else. I can pack my beach towel, my sunscreen, and my Spanish dictionary with every hope of spending a week in Cabo, but if I head north instead of south, I'll end up in Canada, not in Mexico. We all know that very well, don't we?

So here's ***The Principle of the Path: Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination.***

As obvious as that is in the world of geography, when it comes to the rest of our lives, whether it be our family life, our financial life, our marriage or dating life, the way we raise our kids, our physical fitness, or our professional life, this same principle applies. In every area of life, my direction, not my intention, determines my destination. Yet how many times have you been in a conversation with someone who is describing how their life got shipwrecked, or their marriage blew up, or their kids grew up rebellious or resentful but, their intentions didn't line up with their direction?

Let's take this principle one step further. You can have the best of intentions and end up in the worst of situations. And that can happen to you even if you're the smartest person on the planet – or the best looking, or the biggest, or the strongest, no matter how strong-willed you are, no matter how pleasant you are, no matter how much your momma loves you or how much your daddy leaves you in his will. When it comes to every area of life, ***your direction—not your intentions, not your strengths, not your weaknesses, not your hopes, not your dreams— your direction will determine your destination.*** The path you take will determine where you end up.

Let me show you this from what Solomon showed his audience 3,000 years ago. In Proverbs 7:6, Solomon is about to tell us a story. We don't know whether it's a true story or one he made up to demonstrate this principle. As he tells the story, he's standing at a window, looking down at the street.:

***<sup>6</sup>While I was at the window of my house, looking through the curtain, <sup>7</sup> I saw some naive young men, and one in particular who lacked common sense. <sup>8</sup> He was crossing the street near the house of an immoral woman, strolling down the path by her house. <sup>9</sup> It was at twilight, in the evening, as deep darkness fell. (NLT)***

You don't have to be a Bible scholar to anticipate where this story is heading, do you? A young guy cruising the streets at sunset, heading in the direction of a specific woman's home. He knows who this woman is, and he knew she was married. And, apparently, he knew that her husband was out of town and that she would be prowling. That alone should have stopped him in his tracks. But it didn't. In fact, that was the very reason he was headed in her direction. He was confident that this was going to be a night to remember.

Meanwhile, Solomon was watching this young man, and there was a soundtrack playing in his head as well: the music from Jaws. Why? Because there was a marked contrast between what this kid was expecting to experience and what Solomon knew was in his future. The older, wiser man understood from experience where this path would lead. The adolescent was preoccupied with what he believed would be an exciting event. A night disconnected from every other event in his life. But Solomon knew this night was not an isolated event disconnected from all the other events in this young man's life. This night was a step down a path. A path, like all paths, that leads somewhere. This particular path had a predictable destination. But you don't need to be the wisest man in the world to know that. You could predict the outcome of this encounter. What's so obvious to those watching often escapes us. Even if Solomon called down from the window and warned him, the kid wouldn't have heard him over the seductive words that came next:

***<sup>16</sup> My bed is spread with beautiful blankets, with colored sheets of Egyptian linen. <sup>17</sup> I've perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. <sup>18</sup> Come, let's drink our fill of love until morning. Let's enjoy each other's caresses. (NLT)*** Oh, and by the way, my husband is far away and will not be home. Well, that pretty much clinched it. Not only did he not have to worry about her husband catching them, but he could hang around for breakfast. Watch a little TV. Heck, he could spend the entire weekend. This just kept getting better—from his perspective, that is. But Solomon saw this situation in an entirely different light. Listen to his take.

***<sup>21</sup> So she seduced him with her pretty speech and enticed him with her flattery. <sup>22</sup> He followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter. He was like a stag caught in a trap. (NLT)*** What? An ox heading where? Wait a minute, it certainly doesn't look that way to our young friend. Solomon says, from his vantage point, this young man was throwing away his future. Possibly his life. Of course, were the young man able to read Solomon's mind, he would have shouted back, "You sound a lot like my dad! Besides, what does an old man know about love and passion anyway? This isn't just a date. It's a once-in-a-lifetime event. I'm not an ox, a deer."

Solomon's next words are directed to you and me. ***<sup>24</sup> So listen to me, my sons, and pay attention to my words. <sup>25</sup> Don't let your hearts stray away toward her. Don't wander down her wayward path. (vv. 24-25).*** There's our word. *Path*. This was a path, not an event. Pay attention to this next observation: ***<sup>26</sup> For she has been the ruin of many; many men have been her victims. (v. 26) (NLT).***

Solomon debunked the notion that there was anything unique about what this kid was experiencing. It may have been unique for him, but this experience represents a well-worn path: a path that leads to death despite what the naïve kid may have wanted to argue. If Solomon could have called a time-out in the story and gotten this kid's undivided attention, he might have said something along the lines of, *"Listen, buddy. I hate to break it to you, but there's nothing unique or special or rare about this. You may have never felt this way before, but a lot of other people have. And if they were here to tell you their stories, you would think twice. You're part of a crowd. A herd. A flock. There is nothing new here. And the outcome is all too predictable."*

We all have a propensity for choosing paths that lead us where we do not want to go. I want to focus on how this dynamic plays itself out in our world. For example:

- A single person says, "I want to meet and one day marry a great Christian who's really got their act together" ...but dates whoever asks them out.
- A husband says, "I want my kids to respect me as they grow up"... and then he openly flirts with other women in the neighborhood.
- A young Christian says, "I want to develop a deep and lasting intimacy with God" ... so he gets up every morning and reads his newsfeed instead of the Bible.
- A working man says, "I want to grow old and invest the latter years of my life in my grandchildren" ... but then he neglects his health.

- A regular guy says, "I want to get thin and lose weight ... supersize that."
- A couple says, "We'd like our children to develop a personal relationship with God and choose friends who have done the same" ... but then they skip church every weekend and head to the beach, or sleep in and watch football.
- Newlyweds determine to be financially secure by the time they reach their parents' age ... then adopt a lifestyle of debt and leveraged assets.

These people have legitimate goals and oftentimes every good intention of reaching them. But like the naïve young man in Solomon's story, the paths they choose eventually bring them to a destination that is entirely different from the one they intended. And this isn't rocket science. We shouldn't need someone to connect these dots for us. If your goal is to drop two pant sizes, you don't eat lunch at a donut shop. If your desire is to remain faithful to your spouse, you don't linger in an online chat room with members of the opposite sex. Those aren't pastimes. Those are pathways. They lead somewhere.

Right now you're probably thinking about several people who you wish had been here today and heard what we're talking about. But before you start putting names to the faces in your mind, take a minute to think about your life and let me ask you this:

- Are there disconnects in your life?
- Are there discrepancies between what you desire in your heart and what you are doing with your life?
- Is there alignment between your intentions and your direction?

The principle of the path is operating in your life every minute of every day. You are currently on a financial path, a relational path, a moral path, an ethical path, an entertainment path. And each of these paths has a destination. Your direction, not your intentions, determines your destination. Some of you have been brokenhearted at various times in your life. You wanted to know, "Why did God let this happen to me?" Answer? He didn't. He wanted to stop it, but he couldn't stop *you*.

This leads to two questions I want to ask you:

### ***1. What direction are you headed in today?***

- *Morally*
- *Relationally* (with your family, with friendships)
- *Financially*

These are the biggies. We could probe into many more areas. I can't answer these for you. Only you can. I encourage you to take some time before you go to bed tonight to think about this and talk with your spouse about it if you're married.

### ***2. How do you learn to choose the right path?***

For that, I want to give you a few answers.

***1. Get wisdom.*** That's what we're going to be doing for the next several weeks. Getting wisdom from Solomon and wisdom from the book of Proverbs. Reading Proverbs will increase your wisdom-quotient. There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs. Read one chapter a day for the next 31 days. Billy Graham every day.

***2. Get in a Small Group.*** What if this guy in the story had a friend looking out the window after him, instead of a man he had no relationship with? What if his friend had run down the stairs and warned him and rescued him before he ever got to the woman's house? His whole life would have been different. Who do you have in your life who warns you from danger? Get in a small group.

### ***3. Make choices based on the long-term, not the short-term.***

See your life the way we see your life and the way God sees your life by thinking about it like a path, a series of steps, not a bunch of unrelated events.

- Think about what will happen if you eat that brownie every day. What's the next step after you eat the brownie once?
- Think about what will happen if you balance your checkbook and save and tithe every month. What does your life look like, step by step, if you do that every month? – Looks pretty good, doesn't it?
- Think about what will happen if you pray each morning and say nice things to your spouse before work every day.

Make choices based on what will develop if you do something over a long period of time, because that's the path you're on every time you make a one-time decision.

Every decision is a fork that will lead you down one path or another. Which fork will you take? For the next several weeks of this series, I hope you'll use this fork to remind you of that. So we put a string on it so you can tie it to something you'll see often, like your rearview mirror, or tape it to something you pass often, like your refrigerator – or if you have pierced ears, you can string this thing through it and wear it for the next month.

Say this with me:

***Every decision I make is a new fork in the road.  
Every decision I make takes me down a new path.  
Lord, help me to choose the right path.***