

"The Path."
Look Where You're Going
Proverbs 4:25-27

If you've been with us for all or most of the series, you know that the principles that are true in geography are equally true in all of life. Those principles are:

The Principle of the Path: Your direction determines your destination.

This morning I want to add Solomon's qualifier to this statement, one slight modification that I think you'll agree is very true—***What gets your attention determines your destination.*** Or, the short version =

The Principle of Focus: Your attention determines your direction.

Every state in the nation has passed laws prohibiting people from talking on cellphones without some sort of hands-free device? Because they knew that if a person is staring at their phone, giving more attention to it than to the road, there's a good chance they'll steer themselves OFF the road, or maybe steer themselves into somebody else on the road. What you give your attention to will determine your direction. And your direction will determine your destination.

There are 29 times in the book of Proverbs where the word path or paths is mentioned. Here are just a few. In Proverbs 1:15, Solomon is warning us about buddying up to people with questionable morals: ***My child, don't go along with them! Stay far away from their paths.*** In Proverbs 2:9, he talks about following the way of wisdom: ***Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go.*** Those are the paths we do want to take. A few weeks ago, we studied Proverbs 3:6: ***Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.***

We humans have known this for thousands of years because God taught it to us 3,000 years ago in the book of Proverbs. Here's his whole statement on attention. Read this out loud:

²⁵Look straight ahead and fix your eyes on what lies before you. ²⁶Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. ²⁷Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil. Proverbs 4:25-27 NLT

In other words, "Our destination is determined by our direction, and our direction is dictated by whatever holds our attention." The things that capture your attention will influence your direction. A "few years ago" I met a girl who captured my attention in a dramatic way. This girl, so captured my attention that I started spending my time dreaming up ways of capturing her attention. My attention was so diverted by that woman that there are now people in this world because of our mutual change in direction. That's a positive example of how attention influences direction, but I could give a few negative ones as well. Like every principle, the principle of attention can work for us or against us. If you think for a minute, you'll probably be able to drum up a half-dozen instances where your attention got diverted in ways you wish it never had.

Author Andy Stanley writes:

All of us have people or events or opportunities in our past that reflect the much-more-frequent flip side. Looking back, there are people you wish you had never met. Relationships you wish you'd never initiated. Numbers you wish you'd never called. Voicemails you wish you'd never acknowledged. Business "opportunities" you wish you had ignored. Life was better before these things grabbed your attention. In many cases, the path you were on before they came along was the path you should have adhered to. But you didn't. And what grabbed your attention altered your direction.

No doubt you had a mental conversation that went something like this:

Wow... would you look at that. I probably shouldn't go there...

But perhaps I should double-check to make sure I shouldn't go there...

Yep, I shouldn't go there. C'mon now, focus. Probably wouldn't hurt to go there for just a moment.

Remember when common sense seemed to get railroaded by the emotion of whatever or whoever it was that grabbed your attention? Before you knew it, you were moving in an entirely different direction. Usually there is a strong emotional appeal to the things that grab our attention. We get sucked into those detours because something emotionally engaging is on those paths. My observation is that the things that tend to grab my attention are often things I should avoid. Advertisers make a living trying to grab my attention. And that's okay. Everyone needs to eat and live indoors. Great advertisements appeal to our emotions. Let's face it: malls and car dealerships are not emotionally neutral environments. But often the things that grab our attention lead to regret.

What captures our attention influences our direction. Attention, direction, destination. That's the principle of the path in three words. As your attention goes, so goes your life.

Or, as Solomon says it:

²⁵Look straight ahead and fix your eyes on what lies before you. ²⁶Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. ²⁷Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil. Proverbs 4:25-27 NLT

So far, we've placed two verbs in front of "attention." One is positive: something **captures** our attention. The other is negative: something **grabs** our attention. I want to give you two more verbs that may be more useful to you when it comes to your attention, but first, let me read show you what I mean...

[Clip from UP]

Doug doesn't seem to have a choice about where he focuses his attention. But unlike our friends in the animal kingdom, we do have a choice. You and I do not have to be ruled by things that grab or capture our attention.

The Principle of Choice: You get to choose what you give your attention to.

Which leads me to the two other verbs I want to give you. Besides "grab attention" and "capture attention,"

- 1. You can choose to give your attention.***
- 2. You can choose to pay attention.***

Here's ***the key:***

- 1. Emotions tend to fuel the things that grab or capture your attention.***
- 2. Intentionality tends to fuel what you pay and give attention to.***

On every path that leads to disaster or destruction, there is something powerful and emotionally engaging that summoned us, that grabbed or captured our attention. Which is why Solomon warns:

²⁵Look straight ahead and fix your eyes on what lies before you. ²⁶Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path. ²⁷Don't get sidetracked; keep your feet from following evil. Proverbs 4:25-27 NLT

Make a choice. Choose which direction you will go, and then fix your gaze directly on it. What you give your attention to determines your direction. And the direction you head in determines your destination.

I want to ask you a sincere question: what has your attention these days?

- Is it a relationship?
- A career?
- A house?
- An enjoyable pastime?
- Is it a person who is leading you somewhere you don't really want to go?
- Or a person who is leading you towards where you do want to go?
- Is it your marriage?
- Your children?
- Your faith?
- Is it an achievement you're hoping to accomplish soon?
- What has your attention these days?

What captures or grabs your attention, or what you choose to pay or give attention to will determine your direction, and your direction will determine your destination.

Here's a second question: What do you **want** to have your attention? If you could only fix your eyes on one thing, what would it be? Six weeks into this series, I want to make a suggestion to you. The Apostle Paul described his approach to life this way:

No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Philippians 3:13-14 NLT.

He follows that up by saying,

15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. Philippians 3:15 NLT

Almost every book of the Bible describing this same focused life in some way. The author of the book of Hebrews says, ***So, we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it. Hebrews 2:1 NLT***

Some of you here today drifted away from the faith for a while and you wonder how that happened. It happened because of the principle of attention. Our eyes, our attention, followed something other than God and we wound up drifting away from God. This is my suggestion: Don't let our hearts or your attentions be captured by lesser things, focus our attention on Jesus, on following Him, getting to know Him better, serving Him fully, becoming like Him more and more every day.

You have a choice. You can follow Jesus, or you can follow something less. You can let your attention be grabbed by something that feels good for a moment, or you can give your attention to the one who will direct you all the days of your life and on into eternity. Which will you choose today?

Some of you have never chosen Jesus before. Maybe you'd like to choose to fix your eyes on him today. In just a minute, I'm going to lead you in a prayer that will change your eternity because it will change the path you're on spiritually. I hope you'll pray it with me.

And some of you decided to follow Jesus a long time ago, and then you let your attention be grabbed or captured by something or someone else. Today is the day to correct that, don't you think? Today is the day to say, "Jesus is the Lord my God. I will no longer have any other gods before Him."

A prayer:

"Jesus, I know that you are the way, the truth, and the life, but I haven't been walking your path recently. Today, I am choosing to put you first. I choose today to fix my eyes on you and follow you. I purpose to walk your path again, and I'm serious about it."