

## YOUR DIRECTION DETERMINES YOUR DESTINATION

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Out of the mouth of babes?” Certainly you have. It comes from the simple truth that sometimes it takes a child to reveal lasting wisdom. For example:

- Patrick, age 10, said, “Never trust a dog to watch your food.”
- Michael, 14, said, “When your dad is mad and asks you, “Do I look stupid?” don’t answer him.” he also said, “Never tell your mom her diet’s not working.”
- Kylie, age 9, said, “Never hold a dust buster and a cat at the same time.”
- Joel, 10 years old, said, “Don’t pick on your sister when she’s holding a baseball bat.” and
- Eileen, age 8 said, “Never try to baptize a cat.”

Wise words. Today we are starting a new series in the book of Proverbs called The Path, so today I want to talk about wisdom. Wisdom is important. In ancient Israel, there were three groups of people who communicated on behalf of God. There were the Priests who gave the law. There were the Prophets who spoke direction and correction from God. Then there were the Sages. They gave wise counsel.

The Old Testament is made up of 39 books, broken up into 3 different sections. There are the 17 Historical books which include the first 5 books of the Law (the Pentateuch) and the 12 other historical books. There are the 17 Prophetic books which include the 5 Major Prophets and 12 Minor Prophets. In the middle are the 5 books of Wisdom.

What are the 5 books that are included in the Wisdom Literature? They are the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Last winter we had a series looking at the book of Psalms. Today we are starting this new series looking at the book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs is broken into 31 Chapters. The first 24 chapters were written by Solomon before he died in 931 B.C. Chapters 25-29 were compiled 200 years later by men in the day of King Hezekiah. They were wise sayings taken from the life of Solomon but added to by the wisdom of the day. The last 2 were written by two other individuals who were also known to be very wise.

As most of the book of Proverbs was written by King Solomon, so it is important that we remember who he was. Solomon was the son of King David. We read in 2 Chronicles chapter 1 that God appeared to Solomon one night and told him “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Solomon asked for wisdom so that he could lead the nation of Israel. So God gave it to him.

1 Kings 4:30-34 Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 He was wiser than any other man ... And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. 32 He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33 He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. 34 Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

So why are we doing a study in Proverbs? Because wisdom is important. Whenever I read a book I like knowing a little about it before I start. Is it adventure? Is it Sci Fi? Is it Christian Living? The beginning of the book of Proverbs starts out by stating why it is important;

Proverbs 1:2-3 for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; 3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair

Eugene Peterson, from his intro to Proverbs in The Message Bible wrote: "Wisdom has to do with becoming skillful in honoring our parents and raising our children, handling our money and conducting our sexual lives, going to work and exercising leadership, using words well and treating friends kindly, eating and drinking healthily, cultivating emotions within ourselves, and attitudes towards others that makes for peace. Threaded through all these items is the insistence that the way we think of and respond to God is the most practical thing we can do. In matters of everyday practicality, nothing, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God. Proverbs concentrates on these concerns more than any other book of the Bible."

So what can we learn from the book of proverbs? Your direction determines your destination. Whatever road, whatever highway, whatever path I'm on will determine where I end up. If you get on the 401 Westbound you will eventually get to London. It will not take you to Owen Sound or Cornwall. If you get on I75 in the states and go North, eventually you will reach Canada. If you go South on I75, eventually you will reach Florida. If you want to go to Florida – you do not want to be on I75 going North!

Proverbs 7:6-10 At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. 7 I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. 8 He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house 9 at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. 10 Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

## 1. Choose your Path Correctly

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 it is your direction, not your intention, that determines your destination.

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? And as they're describing what led up to that failure, you just thought to yourself, "Didn't you see that coming?"

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. This principle is true 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 loves 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.

In the story we just read, you do not have to be a Bible scholar to anticipate where this story is going. As Solomon sat there looking out his window through the lattice (which let you see out but not in) he saw a young guy cruising the streets at sunset, heading in the direction of a specific woman's home. He knew it was a youth who lacked judgement and it was a woman who had plans.

The gender is not important. You can picture what is happening. If they made a movie of it they could have put the theme song to Jaws in the background. The story continues;

Proverbs 7:13-15 She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: 14 I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. 15 So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!

She is saying here that she is a good religious girl. She has been just been to bible study. She makes her intentions fully known. Her husband is out of town and will not be returning any time soon. She is just lonely and looking for a little company... The trap is set and the young guy walks right into it.

How could he have fallen for something like that? We all have a propensity for choosing paths that lead us where we do not want to go. As a pastor I see this all the time. For example:

The single woman says, "I want to meet and one day marry a great Christian guy who's really got his life together" But then she dates whoever asks her out, as long as he's cute.

The husband who says, "I want my kids to respect me as they grow up." But then he openly flirts with other women in the neighborhood.

The working man who says, "I want to grow old and invest the latter years of my life in my grandchildren" ... but then he does everything he can to neglect his health.

The couple that say, "We want 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.

The newlyweds that say that they are determined to be financially secure by the time they reach their parents' age but then adopt a lifestyle sustained by debt and leveraged assets.

The young Christian who says, "I want to develop a deep and lasting intimacy with God." But then gets up every morning and instead of reading his bible reads the newspaper.

Before you say "Pastor Steve says we should not read the paper" let me be clear. I am not saying that we should not be aware of what is happening around us in the world today. I am not saying that reading the paper is bad, I am saying that reading the bible is better. I hear so many people today talking about current issues and simply parroting what they heard on the news or read online. At the end of the day it does not matter what a person at CBC, or CNN or Fox News or your Uncle Albert or Aunt Gertrude says about an issue, it only matters what God says about the issue. We need to stop trying to be so politically correct and start being biblically correct.

The high school student that intends to go to college and get great grades but then neglects his studies and spends all day playing video games.

Your direction, not your intention, determines your destination. It is not what you intend but what you do that matters. Choose your path correctly.

## 2. Choose your Path Carefully

How do you learn to choose the right path? It is something that you must do carefully. That means it requires thought and effort. Let me mention 2 things.

The first way to get wisdom is what we are going to be doing the next few months. We are studying the bible to see what it says about wisdom. There are 31 chapters in the book of Proverbs. Read one chapter a day for the next 31 days and see what happens. This is what Billy Graham used to do. He would read a chapter of Proverbs every day.

We learn by being students of God's word. Whenever you go on a trip you have to first study the map. If you want to live for Jesus, you have to know what Jesus says about how you live your life for Him. You have to study. You have to be a student of God's word.

Proverbs 1:5-7 let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance-- 6 for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

The second way you learn is by not only by listening to God's word but by listening to God's people. That means you need to get into a small group. You can come to church and hear a message and even take notes. However, if you really want to learn to have to process what you have heard, you need to discuss it with others. As you talk about it in a group you will hear different people give different points of view on what they have heard. You will see the lesson from different perspectives, and perhaps see it in a way that you had not even thought of before.

You will also find accountability. What if this guy in the story had a friend who was walking along with him. As they walked down the street his friend saw what was happening and was able to warn him away from danger. It would have made a huge difference. We all need people like that who will walk with us and watch our backs.

Let me ask you basic question. Who do you have in your life who warns you from danger? If the answer to that question is "no one" than you are setting yourself up for a fall. Get in a small group.

Edwin Thomas was a master of the stage. During the later half of the 1800's in America there were few actors more successful than he was. At age 15 he starred in his first play, Richard III. He quickly established himself as a premier Shakespearean actor. In New York he performed Hamlet for one hundred consecutive nights. Edwin had a brother who was also an actor. John was never as successful as his brother. In 1863 John and Edwin united their talents to perform Julius Caesar. John played the part of Brutus, the assassin. This was foreshadowing things to come. You see 2 years later John, who played the assassin in Julius Caesar took on the role of assassin in another theatre. On a crisp night in 1865 John walked into Ford's Theatre in Washington and fired a bullet into the head of Abraham Lincoln. Oh, I forgot to mention their last names - Edwin Thomas Booth and John Wilkes Booth.

But the story does not end here. Edwin Thomas Booth was never the same after that night. Shame from his brother's crime drove him into early retirement. He might have never returned to the stage had it not been for a twist of fate at a New Jersey train station. While he was waiting for his train Edwin noticed a young, well-dressed man who, pressed by the crowd, lost his footing on the platform and fell on to the track in front of the approaching train. Without hesitation Edwin jumped forward and pulled the young man to safety. After a deep sigh of relief the rescued man recognized the famous actor Edwin Booth. Edwin had no idea of who it was he had rescued. It wasn't until weeks later when he received a letter which he would carry with him for the rest of his life. The letter was from General Ulysses S. Grant. The letter thanked Edwin Booth for saving the life of Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of Abraham Lincoln.

How ironic that one son would choose to kill the president while the other to save the president's son. Edwin and John Booth – same parents, same upbringing, same profession, yet one chose death and the other life. Choose your path correctly. Choose it carefully.

### 3. Choose your Path Cautiously

Choosing the right path means that you need to heed the warning signs. You need to watch out for signs of danger. You need to live today based on where those choices will lead you tomorrow. The young man in the story did not see the danger that was before him. Solomon saw it, but the young man did not. Because he did not see the danger, he fell right into the trap.

Proverbs 7:21-23 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. 22 All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose 23 till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

We have all seen this. YouTube is filled with videos of people hunting or fishing. You see the animal come closer and closer. The hunter raises the bow or the gun. Closer, closer and then BAM – dinner is served. Their ignorance of the danger that was before them has killed them.

We have all seen the hidden camera videos. A guy puts a package on his porch with a glitter bomb in it. The porch pirate walks by and sees the package just sitting there. They pause for a moment – you can see what is going through their mind. Do I do this or not? They look around. The moment they take a step towards the package you know that their course is set. They grab the package and BOOM – another YouTube video is born.

That is just for entertainment. You see police surveillance and you see the bait car that is placed out for thieves to steal. You see the person pause as they pass by. Their decision to stop or keep moving will have life long consequences. The decision they make in that moment may change the course of their lives forever. Solomon gives this warning;

Proverbs 7:24-25 Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. 25 Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths.

If you are here this morning and you are thinking to yourself “what’s the big deal? So they slept with each other. They are two consenting adults. No one was hurt. No harm was done. What is the wrong with that?” If so, you are walking a very dangerous path. Sin always has consequences. Let me be very clear...

If you are here today and you are living with someone outside of marriage, you need to STOP IT! You are walking a path that is contrary to God’s will for life, a path that will only lead to destruction. You can try to rationalize it, or justify it or spiritualize it but the reality is that your direction, not your intention, determines your destination. You can say “Pastor, we love each other, and we are going to get married some day.” Fine then, do it now. But to continue to live together outside of marriage is wrong and is a choice that will destroy you.

If you are here today and you are married but you are cheating on your spouse, you need to STOP IT! You are walking a path that is going to lead to you destroy your marriage, your family, your life and your testimony.

You can try to rationalize it, or justify it or spiritualize it but the reality is that your direction, not your intention, determines your destination. You can say “pastor, we love each other, and my marriage is simply not fulfilling my emotional and physical needs.” No. Just stop it.

If you are here today and you are unmarried but you are messing around, you need to STOP IT! Like the young man in the story, you are at a crossroads. What you do now determines the rest of your life.

See your life 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 balance your check book and save and tithe every month. What does your life look like, step by step, if you do that every month? It 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?

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.

An old farmer and his wife were determined to give their boy a good education. They were as poor as they could be, but they made the decision to send their boy to the university. They knew he would be gone three years and it would take everything they had to send him. Every dollar they would send him increased the pinch of poverty at home.

Finally after 2 years the old man said: "Wife, I cannot stand it; I am going to see him." He did not have money enough to go by train, so he drove by horse and wagon across the hills. It took him days and days. When he arrived he was dirty from the trip and the sight of the poor man and the horse provoked a smile from all who saw him as he arrived at the university.

The boy had been gone from home only 2 years, but in that time he had forgotten his father's teaching and his faith. Three young fellows were walking down the sidewalk. When they saw the old man, ragged from the trip, they laughed at him and began to hurl insults. It was then that the farmer noticed that one of the boys was his son. He jumped down from the wagon and ran to meet him, but his son just looked at him for a moment and then turned to his friends and continued hurling insults. He told them the old man was crazy saying "You are not my father!"

The old man turned and, without a word, got back into his wagon and rode away. After days of travel he arrived back at the old farmhouse and sat down in his old chair. His head drooped forward as he wept, his heart broken. The boy had lost his path. He had forgotten the old days, when his father said he would teach him. He had left the faith his father had tried so hard to lead him to.

How often we are just like that. God has given us everything we need. He has given us His word and His Spirit to guide us, but how quickly we forget, and in so doing break the heart of God!