The Path Principle, Part 2: **Looking Ahead**

**Review of “The Principle of the Path”**

Last week, Craig discussed Part 1 in our 4-part sermon series called “The Path Principle.”

(By the way, to give credit where credit is due, in this sermon series Craig and I are borrowing heavily from the content of a similar sermon series by Andy Stanley, an outstanding preacher in Atlanta, GA.)

“The Path Principle” is this: **Direction determines destination. Direction — not intention, not hopes and dreams — determines destination.**

If we pack our bags for a vacation in CA and drive east toward the George Washington Bridge, we will not end up in CA! We’ll land in Manhattan! We may intend to arrive in CA, we may plan to arrive there, we may pray we’ll arrive there — but if we drive east, we will not arrive in CA because we’ll be going in the wrong direction! And direction, not intention, determines destination.

We clearly understand this when it comes to driving or hiking but for some reason we don’t seem to grasp this principle when it comes to other areas of life. When it comes to our money, our marriages, our relationships, our moral standards, our educational pursuits, etc. — there’s this huge disconnect. We have this disconnect largely because our culture tells us as long as our intentions are right, we’ll end up at our desired destination. But that is simply not true.

We often wonder, when we arrive at a place that is not where we wanted or expected to be, how did we arrive there? If we really want to know, it is because of the path we chose to take.

**Direction, not intention, determines destination.**

Here’s another way to think about it... *(Show Far Side cartoon of guy pushing to go through a “Pull” door.)*

We can push all we want... but if the correct direction is to pull, then we’ll never reach our destination by pushing!

So, now that we understand the “Principle of the Path,” I want to discuss Part 2 of our sermon series. **Today’s sermon is called, “Looking Ahead.”**

Today we want to address the question: **“How do we know what path to take?”**

**Introduction to Prov. 27:12**

• How do we know what path to take regarding who we marry?
• How do we know what path to take regarding our career?
• How do we know what path to take regarding our finances?
• How do we know what path to take in all these areas and others that will take us where we want to go?

And how do we avoid the wrong paths in all these areas?

We’ve all ended up in places we never meant to be — where life was complicated and there were seemingly no good options. And looking back we saw the warning signs. We just chose to ignore them. But it doesn’t have to be that way. By looking back at a Biblical proverb, we’ll learn to look ahead and avoid the danger that lies in wait for us down the road.

“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”
— Proverbs 27:12 (NIV)

Have you ever talked with a friend who is trying to dig out of a deep hole they’ve dug themselves into — usually financial or relational (too much debt, stuck in an unhealthy relationship, in a bad marriage, etc.)?

You wonder and maybe even ask, “Didn’t you see this coming? Weren’t there warning signs? Didn’t anyone warn you not to go down that path?”

And most of the time, they respond, “Yes, but...”

• Yes, but they ignored the warning signs.
• Yes, but they didn’t listen to the advice they got.
• Yes, but they thought it would all work out anyway.
• Yes, but they thought they would be the exception.

Maybe the person we’re talking about is us! Maybe we have ended up exactly where we did not want to be financially or relationally.

If that is so, how can we keep that from happening again?

One way is by heeding the wisdom found in Prov. 27:12. Let’s see what this verse is really telling us and see how we can apply it to our lives.

**The Principle from Prov. 27:12**

“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

First of all, we see that this verse describes two kinds of people, two responses, and two outcomes... from facing the same situation. What they have in common is that there were things on their paths that hinted at danger.

**The prudent person**

“Prudent” means “wise.” The wise person understands that life is connected; that there is cause and effect, that there are consequences to our actions.

The wise person asks this question: “In light of my past experiences, my future hopes and dreams, what’s the wise thing for me to do?”
They understand that what they do today will affect tomorrow, for good or for bad. They know that one thing will lead to another.

**The simple person**

“Simple” means “naive.” The naive person thinks life is disconnected. Today is about today and tomorrow is about tomorrow and they aren’t really connected. The naive person lives in the moment without regard for the future.

They can have intention A but be on path B and think that path B will lead them to destination A. They think somehow it’s just gonna work out.

**The prudent and simple respond differently**

The prudent or wise see danger and take refuge. When they see danger, they think, “Uh-oh,” and they take action. They do something.

The simple or naive keep going. They see danger and they think, “This is going to be a problem.” “Are you going to do anything about it?” “You’re right, I should but... I’m just going to keep going and it will work out.”

The naive see danger and don’t recognize it, or they ignore the warnings.

**The test of the simple**

No one admits to being simple or naive but here’s a test. Maybe you hear what I’m saying and you feel somewhat convicted by it.

You think, “Wow, this message is for me! I really shouldn’t drink so much. I really shouldn’t keep buying so many things we can’t afford. I really should break off that unhealthy relationship.”

So you feel genuine conviction and think how great it is that the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. “Man, this is what I love about this church! God really speaks to me through the messages!”

Well, that’s great. I’m sincerely happy for you that you hear God’s voice. But what good is that conviction if you leave the service and continue doing what you’ve been doing? Although you’ve been alerted to the danger, you keep going. You don’t take action to avoid the danger you’re in.

If that’s how you — or I — respond to this message, then we are simple. We are naive. And we will suffer for it.

The prudent see danger and do something about it. The simple see danger and may be convicted and know they ought to do something...but they don’t. They keep going.

**The simple always suffer harm**

*The simple always suffer harm. Why? Because there are certain issues that an individual cannot deal with successfully once he passes a certain point.*

There is a point where all your options are bad, a point of no return.
The simple or naive are like the man on a raft who hears a waterfall ahead and says, “That’s way up there; I’ll deal with it when I get there. Besides, the water here is calm.” They read a big sign posted on the side of the river that warns, “Danger: Waterfall in 300 yards!” But they think to themselves, “Yeah, but it’s so nice and calm here.” Then, before they know it, they’re hurtling down Niagara Falls!

There are points of no return sometimes... then it’s too late.

“...the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

**Financial example:**
I once knew a woman who kept racking up huge shopping bills. She put all her purchases on credit cards so it didn’t seem like she was spending real money. She would get her credit card statements every month and could clearly see her debt was growing. Those statements were like warning signs. Yet, she kept spending. Eventually, she went bankrupt and literally cut up her credit cards.

But by then, it was too late. She should have seen a therapist or a debt consultant as soon as she realized she couldn’t control her spending. Or, as a last resort, she should have cut up her credit cards before she went so deeply into debt.

She should have done something, but instead she did nothing. She just kept going.

“...the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

**Relational example:**
I remember a young woman in a church we attended years ago. She was in a relationship that she knew was unhealthy. She felt convicted about engaging in certain behaviors with this guy she loved, behaviors she knew were contrary to God’s word.

She counseled with the pastor about the relationship and was advised to break it off. However, she just couldn’t bring herself to do it. She didn’t heed the warning signs and she ended up getting pregnant. The guy? Once she got pregnant, he flew the coop.

“...the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

(By the way, as a side note, I’m pleased to report that our church supported her throughout her pregnancy and after she gave birth.)

There are situations that if left unattended become so complicated that there are no good options left. If we continue down certain paths past all the warning signs, we will end up doing ourselves harm.

**Age 65 example:**
For example, age 65 is not the time to think about saving money. When we were younger, people advised us to invest our money, or told us to consider a less extravagant lifestyle, or suggested we start a saving plan... and we didn’t disagree. We thought, “They’re right, I really should do those things. But I’m young, I’ve got time.” We just kept going without doing any of those things. Maybe we thought we’d do it later.
Well, 65 arrives, we’re at retirement age, and now it’s too late. We can’t retire because we don’t have enough savings to do so.

We intended to save but we went too far down the path without saving. Now we’re suffering for it. And maybe we cry out to God, “How could you allow this? Lord, please provide!” But it’s not God’s fault we’re in dire financial straits. It’s our fault.

God doesn’t love us any less because we made this error in judgment. He couldn’t love us any more.

But we’re in this fix because we violated one of God’s principles... that when we see danger coming, we should do something about it, not keep going in the same direction. We simply ended up where our path inevitably led us.

**Direction, not intention, determines destination.**

**Addiction example:**
Once we’re addicted is not the time to think, “I really should be more disciplined.” Once you’re an addict, it’s too late for that. No one becomes an addict — of drugs, alcohol, pornography, unhealthy relationships — overnight. There are warning signs along the way.

Maybe friends told us, “You really shouldn’t drink so much. You really shouldn’t spend so much time on the Internet. You really shouldn’t keep calling that guy that’s not your husband.”

And you thought, “They’re probably right, I really shouldn’t do that.” But then you just kept going in the same direction without altering your behavior. And now you’re suffering for it.

**The Application**

Probably the two areas where this principle is most important for us is in the areas of finances and relationships. If we start to view our finances and relationships through the lens of this principle, it could radically change our situations.

**Relationships**

Regarding relationships, we should never evaluate a relationship based on where it is. Rather, we should always evaluate where it is going.

Relationships are dynamic. They are always moving. They are getting healthier or unhealthier. They are growing or dying.

The prudent person doesn’t respond to where the relationship is. He/she responds to where it is heading. For example...

- If you are in a marriage and your partner has been saying, “I think we need to get some help” or “You need to get some help,” do something! Find a counselor... now! To wait is to risk passing the point where all your options are bad.

- If you are in a marriage and you start enjoying the company of someone of the opposite sex in the office... where is that going? Do something to stop it!
• If you are single and that married guy/gal is sort of coming on to you... and you like it... where is that going? Do something about it!

• If you are dating someone and your boyfriend/girlfriend starts to pressure you into behavior you know is wrong but you find hard to resist...where is that leading? You need to do something!

These are all paths. And all these paths are taking you to destinations where, believe me, you don’t want to end up! In all these cases the something you need to do is to get off that path. It’s to change direction. Because direction determines destination.

If we are prudent, we will see the danger these situations present and we will do something to avoid them.

On the other hand, if we do nothing, we prove that we are naive. And we risk harming or even ruining our relationships. If we do nothing, we will suffer for it.

**Finances**
The same principle applies to our finances.

No one intends to be in debt. No one has hopes and dreams to be in debt. No one’s fervent prayer request is to be in debt!

Our intent is to have savings. Our hope is to be financially free. Our dream is to retire early.

But if you’re on a path that is all about leveraging debt to afford a particular lifestyle, that goes somewhere.

Consumer debt is not a sudden event. It is a path. It is a destination.

And we embark on that path when we try to live beyond our means. When we keep spending at the same level even though our income has fallen. When we move into a house that we really can’t afford. When we buy a more expensive car than we really need.

The prudent will see the warning signs of imminent consumer debt and do something about it. They will cut back on their spending. They will downsize their house. They will do without that new suit or those expensive shoes or the latest laptop they really want... but don’t really need. *(Well... the suit and shoes, at least! :)*)

The naive will see the same warning signs and do nothing. And they will suffer crushing debt because of it.

**Three Dynamics of the Prov. 27:12 Principle**

If we want to avoid these problems in our finances and in our relationships... if we want to put into practice the principle of Prov. 27:12... there are three dynamics we need to consider.

**1. Action**
The first dynamic is one of action. You have to do something! You have to make some changes.
• You have to end that relationship.
• You have to have that hard conversation.
• You have to limit your time on the Internet.
• You have to stop going to the mall.
• You have to downsize.
• You have to sell something.
• You have to get a new job.

When the prudent see danger, they don’t just pray about it, they don’t just think about it, they don’t merely reflect on it. They do something!

2. Sacrifice
The second dynamic involved in this principle is sacrifice. You have to give something up. And sacrifice is really difficult for us because it is so counter to our culture.

We live in a culture of acquisition, of materialism, of consumerism. We are predisposed to want the latest and greatest. Forget a 40-inch plasma TV. We want a 60-inch 3-D TV! Forget the new wardrobe we bought last year. Let’s buy the hottest, most fashionable clothes out now!

In addition, our culture pushes us to keep up with and even outdo our friends and neighbors. They buy a huge SUV, we buy a Mercedes Benz. They vacation in Bermuda. We vacation in Thailand.

That’s the American Way!

So sacrifice, doing without, is really, really hard for us! But sacrifice is required if we are to be prudent.

And it’s not always material sacrifice that is required of us...
• We may have to sacrifice a romantic relationship.
• We may have to sacrifice a friendship.
• We may have to sacrifice an enjoyable habit.
• We may have to sacrifice an educational goal.

When the prudent see danger they act. And it almost always requires some kind of sacrifice.

3. Relief
The third dynamic involved in the Prov. 27:12 principle is relief.

If we follow this principle, if we take action, if we sacrifice... then we will be able to experience relief.

You will be able to look back on the day when you took action and sacrificed and see that it was the day you got off a path that was leading to destruction. And you will breathe a sigh of relief.

Conclusion

So let me ask you, “While I’ve been talking, have you thought about a path you’re on that is taking you where you don’t want to go?”
When you leave here, will you do something about it? Or will you just keep going? Because if you just keep going, you will suffer harm.

Be honest with yourself. **Where do you see trouble coming relationally?** What are you going to do about it?

**Where do you see trouble coming in your finances?** What are you going to do about it?

Simply pray? After all, isn’t prayer the spiritual response? Not always. When we see danger coming, the spiritual response, the Biblical response is not only to pray... but to take action!

**Example of Noah**
When God told Noah he was going to destroy all humankind with a flood, did Noah respond by praying for God to change his mind? Did Noah simply keep on going like there would be no flood? No. Noah took action. He built the ark.

**Example of David**
When Israel was surrounded by its enemies, did David merely pray that the Lord would remove them? No. David did pray, but then he took action. He went out to battle.

If Noah hadn’t taken action, he would have suffered harm. In fact, if Noah hadn’t built the ark, we might not be here today!

If David hadn’t taken action, he would have suffered harm. Not only David and his men, but the entire nation of Israel might have been destroyed by her enemies.

“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.”

If we see danger in our relationships or in our finances, let’s be prudent like Noah and David. Let’s take action to get off the dangerous path we’re on. Let’s not keep going. Let’s do something about it now... before it’s too late!