

The Principles Of The Path

Proverbs 27:12

Albert Einstein is traveling on a train, likely from Princeton. The conductor comes to punch tickets. Einstein searches his pockets, briefcase, and then under the seat for his ticket, but cannot find it. The conductor, recognizing the famous scientist, says, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. You don't need to worry about it. You're sure to have bought a ticket". Even after being reassured, Einstein continues to search frantically. The conductor returns, and Einstein explains, "Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going!" The story serves as a metaphor for the importance of having goals and direction in life. It highlights the idea that while knowing who you are is valuable, it is equally important, if not more so, to understand your life's trajectory and destination. It can be interpreted as a reminder to pause and reflect on one's life and ensure they have a clear understanding of their ultimate purpose.

What do you think is the difference between people who are really fulfilled in life and those who are not?

Fulfilled means they have great and meaningful relationships. They're strong financially and generous with people around them. They love their life. They're fulfilled in life, and they do meaningful things with their life.

What is the difference between people who live a fulfilled life and those who are struggling relationally. Those who are struggling financially and don't know that they could be generous. They want to be, but they don't feel like they could be. Those who know there's something more in life, but can't quite find it. Those who feel empty.

What is the difference between those who are really fulfilled and the rest of the world, who's so often struggling?

The difference is not their intelligence. It's not their talent. It's not even their appearance. We've all seen smart people who are miserable. We've seen talented people that are broke. We've seen attractive people that can't keep a relationship.

The difference is their decisions. Our decisions are indescribably important. The quality of our decisions determines the quality of our life. You make your decisions, and your decisions end up making you. The problem is that, most of us, we are not good decision-makers.

We want to eat right, but then we decide to eat more than we should. We want to be wise with our money, but we decide to buy things we can't afford. We want to be wise with our words, but we decide to say things that we regret. We want to do the right thing, but we make decisions to do the wrong thing. We want to love the people around us, but unfortunately, sometimes our decisions end up hurting the people that we love most. We want to be good decision makers, but the problem is most of us aren't.

In an article on choices called "The Power of Choice" the author says that the average working adult makes over 70 decisions a day. About 12 decisions of those are before 9 a.m. Everyday we make a lot of decisions.

We have high-impact choices that can alter the direction of life. We have low-impact choices that are day-to-day, week-to-week kinds of things. And then, there are mid-range, mid-impact choices. There are some choices that we just don't bother to stress over.

Choices are made over and over again, all the way from Genesis to Revelation. The word "choose" or some form of choice is used several hundred times in the Scriptures. The book of Proverbs is a very personal and practical book. It is real, relevant, and relational. The book of Proverbs is filled with road signs and traffic lights to help us to be on the lookout and watch out for the traps of life.

Eugene Peterson, who has given us THE MESSAGE, a paraphrase of the Bible, has written an introduction to the book of Proverbs that is appropriate explains how relevant and real the Bible is when it comes not only to heavenly wisdom, but heavenly wisdom that applies to our earthly lives. God not only saves us and prepares us to go to heaven, but along the way He gives us wisdom to teach us His ways and His will as long as we live. According to Peterson,

“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 make 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 do. In matters of everyday practicality, absolutely nothing, takes precedence over God!” To love God, to honor God, and to please God is what life is about, and that we would make a series of choices that bring skill to living and success to life.

Life is a series of decisions that ultimately determine our destiny and our destination. We are the sum total of the choices that we've made. Who are we today? We're a result of the choices that we've made in the past. Who will we be tomorrow? Essentially, the decisions that we're making today will determine who we become and what we're able to do tomorrow. Our choices matter.

The Principle of the Path is this: Direction, not intention, determines destination. Today's decisions create tomorrow's experiences.

“Who is the man who fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.” Psalm 25:12

“Let us choose what is right; let us know among ourselves what is good.” Job 34:4

How would you define success? Success is knowing and doing and loving and obeying the will of God for our lives. Success is the progressive realization of God's purpose and God's plan for each one of us and the choices that we make form us into fulfilling God's plan and purpose in life. How are we going to learn to make these wise choices?

Deuteronomy 4:9 says, *“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and to your children's children.”*

We have the privilege of passing the faith and the truth of God's Word along to our children. So many people learn their wisdom from the culture and the opinions of this world. There is a wisdom that comes from above and there is a wisdom that comes from below. The wisdom that is below is the wisdom of this world. This wisdom is on a horizontal plane. It never looks up; it only looks horizontal. The wisdom of this world without God is foolishness according to the Bible!

In Proverbs we have a wise father, Solomon, who is passing truth along to his son, just as David, the king of Israel passed truth along to young Solomon. When Solomon, at age 20, was taking the reins of leadership of Israel he felt inadequate at that time. God speaks to him in a dream and makes a most amazing offer.

“At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” 1 Kings 3:5

Solomon's response is amazing.

“Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.” 1 Kings 3:7-13

Young Solomon said, “I’m not prepared for the task that is ahead of me, O God, just as you gave wisdom to my father, David, give wisdom to me. Give me understanding and discernment that I can do what You want me to do in leading your nation.” He was the wisest man on earth! They came from everywhere to ask him the questions of discernment and understanding. The difference between right and wrong and good and evil, what was wise and what was unwise.

Wisdom as the ability to see things from God's perspective, God's point of view. Wisdom is choosing God's way over my own way, and applying His truth and principles to life. To learn life-enhancing skills that build your character and forge your future, ask God to put wisdom in your heart and teach this to your children.

General Douglas MacArthur wrote and prayed a prayer for his sons: “Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak, brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat and humble and gentle in victory. Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee, and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge. Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fall. Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goals will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will learn how to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past. And after all these things are his, add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself so seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, and the open mind of true wisdom, the meekness of true strength. Then I, his father, will dare to whisper, ‘I have not lived in vain.’”

God promises us wisdom if we want wisdom! He says, “*If any of you lack wisdom, ask God and he will give it to you generously.*” James 1:5

God will give you the wisdom that you need to make the right choice! Paul said, “Be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:16

We wonder what's next in the culture? What other kinds of changes will we face and what choices will we be forced to make as we stand for Christ? The days are evil! It's getting tougher and tougher! Times are harder for people now more than it ever! More hurt, more pain, more brokenness than ever before! We need God’s wisdom! For ourselves, for our families, for our children and our grandchildren. We only have a limited number of days and hours and minutes and seconds in these times!

Proverbs 3:13 tells us that the result of wise decisions, the result of God's wisdom, seeing things through His perspective, His point of view. “*Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.*” God's wisdom is available to all. He wants you to have it. You can choose to walk in His way, to keep His commandments. The Scripture says, “*Above all, get wisdom.*” Proverbs 9:10

You may be brilliant, you may be educated, you may be talented, but if you don't know God and you're living without the fear of the Lord, then the Bible says you are living as a fool.

“*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*” The difference between making good decisions and bad decisions is often the fear of the Lord (the beginning of wisdom.) Making essential or non-essential choices is based upon whether we live life by remembering God's wisdom. That's what God has called every one of us to do in these days, to remember His wisdom.

1. Every Path Has A Destination.

105 times Solomon uses the word “ways” to serve as a caution to watch where we step as we walk through life. The word “ways” speaks of our path, our direction, or our travels.

“The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.” Proverbs 12:15

“There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Proverbs 14:12

“Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.” Proverbs 11:14

The prudent, or wise, see danger and change their course. They act on what they see. There are naive people who overlook the fact that every path has a destination. Few crisis come in a moment. Most are years in the making, caused by neglect and bad choices.

- You can't pray your way out of that.
- You can't talk your way out of that.
- You can't repent your way out of that.

It is the way God designed the world to work. The most challenging aspect about picking the right path is that the choices are *now*. Most of the time the outcome of our decision won't be felt until much later. We don't know the outcome of many decisions we make until it's too late to do anything about it. We cannot go back in time, reset the clock, and recapture those years.

The simple or naive person lives as though life is disconnected. They live as if there is no connection between today's choices and tomorrow's experiences.

“The simple keep going and suffer for it.” Proverbs 27:12

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

The simple suffer for being oblivious to the obvious. There is a point at which it becomes impossible to sidestep consequences. The prudent see danger and take refuge. That is, they DO something about it. If there is going to be change, you must take refuge. You've got to do something.

- Have an awkward but honest conversation with a friend.
- Cut up some credit cards.
- Find a new circle of friends.
- Set the alarm clock on Sunday morning.
- Empty the liquor cabinet.
- Join a twelve-step group.
- Make an appointment with a counselor.

You know people who would give anything to be able to rewind their lives and do things differently if that's what it took to avoid the circumstances they are in.

Pray: “Lord, help us to see trouble coming long before it gets here, and give us the wisdom to know what to do and the courage to do it.”

Clarity “to know what to do.”

Courage “to do it.”

“Listen dear child, become wise; point your life in the right direction.” Proverbs 23:19

“People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives.” Romans 1:21

There is a current to this world, a current that will take us in the wrong direction. You may find yourself drifting in all kinds of direction into things that you can not believe you are a part of.

- Sometimes we make the wrong choice because it is the easy thing to do.

If you don't clarify your priorities and values, you find yourself doing what is easy. We find ourselves moving through life like a river moves, seeking the path of least resistance.

- Sometimes we make the wrong choice because it is the most attractive choice.

We don't wake up every morning with a burning desire to know what's true, what's right, or what's honorable. We are not on a truth quest. We are on a happiness quest. Our quest for happiness often trumps our appreciation for and pursuit of what's true. When happiness points in one direction while wisdom, truth, integrity, and common sense point in another, that's when really smart people start doing really stupid things.

We intentionally choose paths that will not take us to where we ultimately want to go. The problem with the happiness quest is that happy today does not necessarily equal happy tomorrow.

Decisions and experiences that fill me with happiness today may very well fill me with regret tomorrow. We begin selling ourselves on what we *want* to do rather than what we *ought* to do.

- Sometimes we do things because they are imposed on us.

If you have no compass to guide your life, then other people's lives and values will be imposed on you. Long before that moment came, you made the decision. It just showed up in that moment.

5 Guides (like a guide on a river)

- Your Legacy

The younger we are, the less we want to think about our legacy. If you wait until you are old, you have waited too long. Your life is an object in motion that affects and touches other people. What are the things you will be remembered for?

- Your Mission

You have to find something significant to do with your life. You may have an occupation (a job) and still have no mission for your life. Ask yourself, "What am I living for? What are my dreams?"

- Your Relationships

Ask yourself, "Who are the people who matter to me?" You need to have someone you love more than yourself.

The more people you place in higher importance than yourself, the more you will find it possible to rise above life's destructive choices. You come to the point that you don't want to make decisions that bring more pain to the people in your life. If you place others before yourself, then it will clarify a lot of what you will do with your life.

- Your Character

Character prepares for the challenges of your life. Character is who you are. You are created in the image of God, and He has poured gifts and talents and uniqueness into you.

"All things are permissible, but all things are not profitable." 1 Corinthians 6:12

Paul didn't make decisions on the basis of right and wrong, but rather what's wise or unwise.

- Your Spirit

Is my life bringing pleasure to God? Are my life and the decisions of my life breaking the heart of God? When you live a life pleasing to God, you begin to experience the pleasure of God. There is a relationship between submission to God and our ability to pick the best path.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6

The term translated “*trust*” means “lying helplessly facedown, vulnerable and dependent.” “Lean not” means “Don’t prop yourself up against something else and be supported by it.” In every area of life, we are to acknowledge God.

2. Direction—Not Intention—Determines Our Destination.

We must trust God in His purpose, His plan, and His will for our lives. To know God is to fear God, to fear God is to love God, to love God is to trust God, and to trust God is to obey God! That's living in His wisdom. And if you trust someone because you love someone, you will do what they ask.

If you walk wisely in the will of God and His purposes and obey God's commandment step by step, God will open doors that no one can shut. He will say, *“This is the way, walk within it.”* Isaiah 30:21

His word will teach you. His Spirit will whisper His still small voice, divine directions. Romans 8:14, *“As many as are led by the Spirit of God these are the children of God.”* As we go, God will lead us. If you want to find God's will, do God's will! Do God's will right now!

So often we think of the will of God as out there in the future. But what I need to do, what you need to do, is do the will of God right now! Today! And if I do the will of God today, my todays will turn into tomorrows, and my tomorrows will turn into new days, and before you know it, you're walking wisely in the will of God, dead-center, or should I say life-centered, in the will of God! You don't need to be afraid or skittish regarding God's will.

Someone has said, “God will choose for you what you would choose for yourself if you had sense enough to choose it.” Romans 12:2 says, *“The will of God is good and perfect and acceptable.”* Too many people have the idea that if I choose to do the will of God, He'll make me miserable for the rest of my life. God will bless you as you follow Him wherever you go.

David Livingstone, the great missionary, said, “I would rather be in the heart of Africa in the will of God than sitting on the throne of England out of the will of God!” God will prepare us, but it doesn't mean that there won't be pain in the providences of God and in the plan of God. While we would like to do His will, it's not always easy to do His will. Sometimes His will doesn't even make sense on the human level. It didn't make sense for Abraham, called of God to go out without a map to a destination unknown, but by faith he believed God! That did not make sense, and yet God brought a nation from Abraham. It didn't make sense when God said to Moses, “Take the children of Israel across the Red Sea!” Water standing before them, Pharaoh behind them, mountains on either side! God said, *“Go forward!”* Exodus 14:15

Moses stepped forward by faith, even though it didn't make sense, and God parted the waters and they walked through on dry ground. It didn't make sense when God called a young shepherd boy David with a few stones to go out and fight the giant of Gath, Goliath, but a great victory was won! Why? Because God's ways are not our ways! His ways are higher than our ways! He does things that are beyond our comprehension or understanding!

Ephesians 3:20, *“He is able to do Exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think.”* It didn't make sense for Gideon to reduce his army of 30,000 down to 300, to go against the Midianites but it was God's way, it was God's will. When he obeyed God, God gave him a great victory. It didn't make sense when the angel of the Lord said to

Mary, *"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."* Luke 1:31-32

Mary said, *"Be it unto me according to Your will,"* and the world was changed, God's way. It didn't make sense when Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee and saw Peter and James and John, and said, *"Leave your nets. Come and follow Me, and I'll make you fishers of men."* Matthew 4:19

It didn't make sense to leave their vocation, their nets, their livelihood, their families, and just follow this stranger! Yet they were compelled by the call of God! These men changed the world, even though it didn't make sense. Sometimes life doesn't make sense and it's painful, but providences of life lead us on by the hand of God.

Proverbs 3:5, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."* Not part of you, but all of you. Don't lean unto your own understanding! When you can't figure it out, trust in God who already has it figured out. Just because life doesn't make sense, doesn't mean it doesn't make sense! Trust in the Lord with all your heart and He will open the way! He will clear the path! He will give you guidance!

3. Divine Direction Begins With Submission.

"Blessed is the one who always trembles before God, but whoever hardens their hearts falls into trouble." Proverbs 28:14

Blessed means more than happy. A lot of times people are pursuing happiness. Happiness is based on circumstances, but the blessings of God are solely based on the goodness in the presence of God. Solomon doesn't say, "Blessed is the one who occasionally trembles before God or who occasionally fears God, but who always trembles before God." Imagine being so aware of the sovereignty, power, goodness, and awesomeness of God, that we always live in the holy, righteous fear of God.

"Trembles before God" is a great picture of the fear of the Almighty.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs 1:7

The fear of God is not being afraid He's going to get me, but there's this real sense that He is the creator and I'm the creature. He is magnificent and glorious and powerful. He does not exist to serve me, I exist to serve Him. I know who He is, and I submit myself completely to Him. People want to pick and choose the characteristics of God. A lot of people say, "I want His love, but I don't want the wrath of God. I want His mercy, but I don't want His judgment. I want His blessings, but I don't ever want to be disciplined."

At the same time we have to say, He's a righteous judge. He is the King of Kings. He is the King of glory. He is above all. He is omniscient. He is omnipresent. He is all-powerful. He is ever-present. He is all-knowing. He was there before the world existed. He is already in tomorrow.

Whenever we live with sin and rationalize it or justify it, we're hardening our heart. Our heart is not soft to God in this area, and we're putting up a little wall. If we do this enough, "Well, I'm not going to obey God here. I'm going to do whatever I want here. I don't really care." Essentially we're putting up bricks and we're breaking the intimacy and fellowship and communication with God. Over time, we're not as sensitive to His voice. Suddenly, people who used to be really close to God are not even sure they believe in God.

Consider these questions:

Why do I hesitate to give God full access to every part of my life?

What do I fear will happen on the other side of that decision?

What is the most difficult area of my life to yield control?

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him; and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5–6

“Sin whispers to the wicked deep within their hearts.” Psalm 36:1-2

Imagine if sin whispers to the wicked deep in their hearts, they have no fear of God to restrain them. In their blind conceit, they cannot see how wicked they really are. They have no fear of God to restrain them. They cannot see how wicked they really are. The reality is the more I recognize the holiness of God, the more I see the dreadfulness of my own sin.

Lord, soften our heart towards you. God, may we be people who always, not some of time, but always, live in the righteous fear of a holy God.

The reality is that the more I recognize the holiness of God, the more I see the dreadfulness of my own sin. The more I see the dreadfulness of my own sin, the more I recognize the glory of His salvation. The more I recognize the glory of His salvation, the more I want to truly please Him. The more, in a righteous way, I tremble before Him. The more I tremble before Him, the more I have wisdom. The more I have wisdom, the more I want to surrender to Him.