

Joke: A man flying in a hot air balloon suddenly realizes he's lost. He reduces height and spots a man down below. He lowers the balloon further and shouts to get directions, "Excuse me, can you tell me where I am?"

The man below says: "Yes. You're in a hot air balloon, hovering 30 feet above this field." "You must work in Information Technology," says the balloonist. "I do" replies the man. "How did you know?" "Well," says the balloonist, "everything you have told me is technically correct, but It's of no use to anyone."

The man below replies, "You must work in management." "I do," replies the balloonist, "But how'd you know?"

"Well", says the man, "you don't know where you are or where you're going, but you expect me to be able to help. You're in the same position you were before we met, but somehow now it's my fault."

Do you remember what the series was we just finished off last week was called?

Fools Gold. . .glad you remembered

Well today we're starting a new series from Proverbs I think this will be a great transition as we talked about wisdom over the last few weeks now it's time to look into the book of Wisdom.

This series from Proverbs is based off of two books by Andy Stanley one is The Principle of the Path: How to get from where you are to where you want to be. And secondly, Better Decisions, fewer regrets 5 questions to help you determine your next move.

Let's begin by looking at Proverbs 1.

The first few verses are known as the "Prologue" to the book of Proverbs. I don't know about you but I like to know something about it before jumping in. Not everything. I do like the being surprised as well.

A movie for example, I like to watch the trailer. I don't want to know the whole story. But I do like to know, what am I about to get myself into? Although the problem is with some trailers is that they show the best scenes and when you get the movie it's a let down because it's not at all what you expected it to be from the trailer.

Anyway before I go to the movie I like to know a little about it. Is it a chick-flick? An action movie where things blow up.

Oh, by the way just so you know I go with Joy to more click flicks then she does with me to watch things blow up.

I'm a romantic guy like that right Judee? Talk about that statement for a minute.

So before we jump into the book of Proverbs, let me tell you about it.

In ancient Israel, there were three groups of people who communicated on behalf of the people with God.

1. The Priests – They gave The Law.
2. The Prophets – They gave direction and correction.
3. The Sages – They gave counsel.

The books of Proverbs and its surrounding books—Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon—are books by the sages.

Scholars called these books “Wisdom Literature.”

Having intelligence means you know things. Having *wisdom* means you know what to do in various situations with the intelligence you have.

So, I’m going to say something that may surprise you sorry, but are you ready?

You can be smart without being wise.

The 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, who was called one of, if not the wisest man who ever lived. The Bible says of Solomon:

1 Kings 4:32–34 (NIV): He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33 He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. 34 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.

In today’s society, he’d have a master’s in literature, some sort of recording deal for all his songs, plus PhDs in philosophy, zoology, herpetology, ichthyology, and a few other “ologies” I have no idea what they are either.

Solomon died in 931 B.C., so *most* of this book was written by then. But Solomon didn’t write all the proverbs. We believe he wrote chapters 1-24, but chapters 25-29 were compiled 200 years later by men in the day of King Hezekiah. We know that because Proverbs 25:1 says. . .

Proverbs 25:1 (NIV): These are more proverbs of Solomon, compiled by the men of Hezekiah king of Judah:

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; all we know is that they must have been wise as well.

Ok enough background.

Let's jump into Proverbs looking today at Chapter 7. . .

Here's something Andy mentions in his book Paths. The road you're on determines where you'll end up.

Isn't that's true. . .

If I head north on I-75, almost 270 miles from where we are right now, I will end up at the Mackinac Bridge.

Here's a truth church. 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, jump in my truck hoping that I can spend a week in California, but if I head north instead of west, I'll end up on a bridge, not in Malibu.

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, financial life, our marriage or dating life, the way we raise our kids, our physical

fitness, or our professional life, it seems like so many don't get that principle, but the same principle applies nonetheless.

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 and resentful?

How many times have you talked to students who didn't get the grades they were hoping for or didn't make the team they wanted to be on, or the group they were hoping to be in. And as they're describing what led up to their failure, you just thought to yourself, "Well, didn't you see that coming?"

Here's another truth for you, 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, even the biggest, or the strongest.

You have heard the phrase, "the road to hell is paved with good intentions," haven't you?

The principle that you can have the best of intentions and end up in the worst of situations 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.

Let me show you this from what Solomon showed his audience 3,000 years ago.

In Proverbs 7, 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. But as he tells the story, he's standing at a window, looking down at the street.:

Proverbs 7:6–7 (NIV): At the window of my house I looked down through the lattice. 7 I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense.

Now let me just pause here and describe the word simple for a moment. The term simple used here is from the Hebrew word Peti meaning young, naive, a person lacking common sense.

And from these 2 verses you just have to realize that something's coming.

So Solomon continues. . .

Proverbs 7:8–9 (NIV): 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.

Let's be honest for a moment 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. As we will see in a second, he knew who this woman was, and he knew she was married.

And, apparently, he knew that her husband was out of town and that she would be prowling around the street corner, looking for. . .well, just looking.

And let's face it 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.

If we were able to get inside this kid's head and tap into the soundtrack he had chosen for this particular evening's activities, we might have heard. . .

, . .(slide) Born to Be Wild

or maybe your more of a. . .(slide) Wild Thing type of person.

Either way, he was confident that this was going to be a night to remember—and maybe one to brag to his friends about the next day during PE in school.

Meanwhile, back at the window, Solomon was watching this young man, and there was a soundtrack playing in his head as well: ? . . .

Theme from Jaws slide.

Why?

Because there was a marked contrast between what this kid was expecting to experience and what Solomon knew was in his future.

Because 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—this night of passion.

A night disconnected from every other event in his life.

But Solomon knew better. 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 with nothing to draw on but your own experience or the experience of someone you know.

Funny how that works. What's so obvious to those watching often escapes us.

The story continues:

Proverbs 7:10–12 (NIV): Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. 11 (She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at home; 12 now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.)

Can you hear the music? It's no longer the theme from Jaws now it's switched to Beethoven's 9th, with the impending sound of fate knocking at his door: dun dun dun dun!

Let's continue. . .

Proverbs 7:13–15 (NIV): She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: 14 "Today I fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home. 15 So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!

When this woman said she had fellowship offerings at home, she was essentially saying, "Look, I'm not a hooker. I have plenty of money at home. I'm not after your money—I want you!"

She was also implying that she had been to the temple and had everything squared away with God. Having already taken her sin-bucket and dumped it out at the altar, she was ready to fill it up again. . .and he was the lucky fellow!

I can imagine this young guy thinking, If my friends could see me now.

At that point, he pumped up the volume of his soundtrack to a ten and pinched himself to be sure this wasn't a dream.

But here's the thing Andy mentions in his better decisions book, our private decisions almost always have public ramifications.

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:

Proverbs 7:16–18 (NIV): 16 I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. 18 Come, let's drink deeply of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!

If you're over 30 say, "Wow!"

If you're under 30 say, "Whoa!"

And just in case he was wondering, she added:

Proverbs 7:19–20 (NIV): My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. 20 He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon."

In the words of Crocodile Dundee he's on a walk about.

Well, that pretty much clinched it right there. Not only did he not have to worry about her husband walking in and catching them,

but he could hang around for breakfast. Watch a little TV. Heck, he could spend the entire weekend.

This just keeps getting better—at least from his perspective, that is.

But Solomon saw this situation in an entirely different light. Listen to his take.

Proverbs 7:21–22 (NIV): 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. . .

What? An ox heading *where*?

Get with program Solomon. Don't you mean "like a celebrity heading into a club?" An ox to the slaughter?

It certainly didn't look that way to this young fellow.

But Solomon was not finished with his creative use of language. He had two more animal analogies for emphasis.

Proverbs 7:22–23 (NIV):. . . 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.

In case you didn't get the ox to the slaughter, how about a deer stepping into a noose, with a bloodied arrow hanging from its bowels?

Or how about this: Solomon says this kid was like a clueless bird caught in a snare.

From his vantage point, Solomon knows that 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, or a bird. Mind your own business old man."

At this point in Solomon's narrative, he turned a corner and addressed his broader audience.

These next words are directed to you and me.

Proverbs 7:24–25 (NIV): 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.

That's the word. *Paths*. This was a path, not an event. Listen closely to this next observation:

Proverbs 7:26 (NIV): Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng.

Not, "a few." *Many*.

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. There is nothing new here. And the outcome is all

too predictable. She's done more than capture your imagination. She's writing a script for your future. You are a dead man walking!"

Driving home the point, Solomon added:

Proverbs 7:27 (NIV): Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.

A highway? Yep. A five-lane none-the-less. There's nothing new about this. Nothing unique. Just another young man who has chosen a path that will take him precisely to where he doesn't want or plan to be.

To be honest, there was a disconnect.

The disconnect in Solomon's scenario is easy to see, at least for us. A young man who wanted his life to be relationally richer chose a path that would ultimately undermine his relationships.

A young man who yearned for something good chose a path that led to something not so good. A youth man striving to prove his independence chose a well-worn path that had the potential to strip him of his independence. There was a disconnect.

Solomon saw it from his window. I've seen similar disconnects from my imaginary window as well. And so have you.

There's a quote that says, "sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."

Now, let's talk about us for a minute. Let's try and make this a little more applicable for us hearing this today. . .

We all have a propensity for choosing paths that lead us where we do not want to go.

In a few weeks, I'll give you my take on what causes this apparent lapse in reason. But for now, I want to focus on how this dynamic plays itself out in our world. Maybe in your world.

- A single woman says, "I want to meet and one day marry a great Christian guy who's really got his act together". . .but then she dates whoever asks her out, as long as he's cute.
- A single guy says, "I want a great sex life once I'm married" so he "practices" with every girl he dates along the way.
- A married woman says, "I want to have a great relationship with my husband" . . .but she makes the children a priority over him.
- 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 newspaper.
- 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.
- A high school freshman intends to graduate with a GPA that will afford him options as he selects a college. . .but neglects his studies.

The list could go on and on.

And the people my list represents 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 dress sizes, you don't eat lunch at a donut shop. If you desire 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.

As I've already said, it is much easier to see these dynamics at work in other people than it is in ourselves. In fact, right now you're probably thinking about several people who you wish had been here today and heard what we're talking about.

We'll send our website it will be there, this Facebook post, better yet invite them to join you next week.

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?

If you've ever gotten lost while driving, and I dare say for anyone that's has been driving before 1983, that's when GPS was available for us, you know that if you backtrack far enough, you can usually get your bearings and be on your way. Worst case, you've wasted a few minutes or hours.

But when you get lost in life, you can't backtrack. When you get lost in life, you don't waste minutes or hours. You can waste an entire season of your life.

Choosing the wrong path in life will cost you precious years. Nobody wants that. Nobody wants to wake up in his fifties and wish he had taken a different path in his thirties.

Nobody wants to arrive at the end of a marriage and wish she had taken a different path during her dating years. Think about it. You only get to be twenty once. You get one senior year. You get one first marriage.

The path we choose at those critical junctions doesn't just determine our destination the following year, but for the following season of life.

The principle of the path is operating in your life every minute of every day. You are currently on a financial path of some kind. You are on a relational path. You are continuing down a moral path, an ethical path, an entertainment path. And each of these paths has a destination.

Which just raises the question again, "Why would a guy like the one in Solomon's story walk down such a path? How come he doesn't see what's coming?"

Answer? He doesn't think it's a path. He thinks it's an event, a one-time occurrence. When the truth is, God says your life and its destination isn't about the immediate, it's about the ultimate.

Your direction, not your intentions, determines your destination.

Some of you have been brokenhearted at times in your life. You wanted to know, “Why did God let this happen to me?” And the truth is He didn’t. He wanted to stop it, but he couldn’t stop *you*.

And that 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. There are so many other areas that we could discuss but I’ll leave it with the big three.

You might want to assess some others as well. And I would encourage you to do that.

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. That is what Billy Graham did every day; he read a chapter of the book of Proverbs.

2. Get an accountability partner. – 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.

"Do you have someone in your life who is allowed to warn you of danger?"

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

See your life the 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 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.

Say this with me:

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

Next week we're going to talk about what to do if you find yourself on a wrong path. I hope you'll join us.

Changing paths are never easy. You will no doubt face challenges from friends that no longer want to hang out with you, the momentum you have on your current path may need to head off in the opposite direction all together and having to switch that mid-stream is no easy task.

So today as we close out I want to pray for each one of you so that the Lord will give you the wisdom, direction and strength to go where He leads.