

Journey
Wk 1
The Types of Path

I want you to think for a second about the last time you went on a long walk or trip. Some of us do this all the time, for others of us it's tough to remember. Maybe it was on a camping trip and you were playing flash light tag, running through the woods. Maybe you were running laps in gym class or for a team. Maybe it was @ ski retreat and you found yourself in the bus for 6 hours or having to walk up a hill to catch a ski lift. Maybe it was when your car broke down and you had to walk to find help, or maybe it was on a date. No matter where or when it was we've all been on long walks or trips before where we find ourselves waiting to get to the destination. Many times the length of the trip or walk determines how quickly we want to get to the destination. Some of these trips or walks we don't have any control over, 2009 just ended and 2010 is just beginning. We don't have any control over that, no matter what happens the length of time it takes to get through 2010 is not going to change. Things are a bit different if we are running laps, the faster we go the sooner we finish, the slower we go the longer it takes to finish.

That's how we do life most of the time, we are either anxious to finish and do whatever it takes to finish as quickly as possible without contemplating the results. Or we are slow to finish, we don't want to finish our chores, our homework, and we take so long that the journey takes longer than it's supposed to and the results are skewed because we've missed out on some things that we would have gained if we had finished in an adequate time.

Think about a few examples for a second, two weeks ago Becky and I and the kids drove to New England. It's a 20 hour drive, now we had planned on taking like 2.5 days to get there, taking our time, seeing some sites on the way. About the time we got to D.C. we realized that there was blizzard heading our way. So we changed our plans and drove 13 hours on day two. Why? There was a storm coming and getting stuck in it would have thrown our vacation off and we would have missed out. On the other hand if we had been so determined to beat the storm that we excessively broke the speed limit the results could have been catastrophic, we could have been in a wreck, in pot hole and busted a tire, etc. You see whenever we think about the walk, the drive, the journey we always think about the destination. How fast or slow am I going, when I will get there, what will happen there, etc. Make no mistake about it the destination is important, but many times the journey we are on plays a much bigger part in the destination than we give it credit for.

Let me give you another example, we are on our way up Winter Blast and someone's got to go the bathroom, is that important? The answer is probably yes, but is it as important as getting there? It depends a little doesn't it? It depends if you or I is the one that has to go. Let's say that we don't stop

and we just drive six hours straight, what is outcome... we get there, we get there fast but people are probably sick, the bus smells like pee and no one is real happy. You see sometimes you and I are so caught up in getting to the destination or in some cases not getting to the destination that we miss very important aspects of the journey. And it's not because they are not there, it's because we miss them.

For the next few weeks we're not going to focus on destinations, where we are headed and the time it takes to get there. But rather we are going to focus on the journey itself. The scenery, the type of road, the road signs, the bill boards, what type of path are you on. What direction are you headed, is it God's path, and what signs, scenery, and advertisements on the path that answers those questions?

Tonight as we jump into this I want to challenge you to look at the physical path or road you are on, what's under your feet, what are you traveling on? Is it pavement, sand, dirt, gravel, marshmallows? Is it level or full of potholes, humps, things that will make you stumble and or fall? Scripture tells us that there are really two types of paths. One path is straight and level, the other crooked and unstable. Let's look at a few passages.

Pr 4:26 **Make level paths** for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Pr 4:27 Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Pr 10:9 The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.

Isa 59:8 The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have **turned them** into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.

Jer 18:15 Yet my people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They **made** them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up.

Mt 3:3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, **make straight paths** for him.' "

Heb 12:13 "**Make level paths** for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed

One thing that's really interesting is that it appears that both types of paths are made, someone or something makes each and every path we choose to walk in. Just like the strength and pattern of physical road's are created by supplies and decisions, so are the paths and roads of life. The paths are roads of life are made by the decisions we make, and the God or gods we follow. If I'm making a

highway and I use beach sand instead of gravel, the road is going to be unstable and cause destruction. As I'm building my life path, if I'm using the information I gaining from the television as a supply, and building my life by what I watch on CSI it's going to end in destruction. CSI can't hold the weight of my life, just like beach sand can't hold the weight of a tractor trailer. And how much more valuable is your life than that of a tractor trailer?

One sermon I heard reminded me that many times we look at life as a series of events, school is an event that happens, relationships are events that happen, church is something that happens. What we deem events are actually paths. Going to school isn't an event, it's path to education, our friends the people you date, these are not events, they are paths that goes somewhere. Church was not created to be an event, but a path that draws a community of believers closer to each other and to their creator. They are paths that we create and they lead us either closer to God or further away from Him.

Scripture shows us that there are at least two things that build crooked and unstable roads and two things that build level and straight roads.

Crooked and Unstable Roads: are built by an unguarded heart

According to the passage we looked at in Proverbs 4, it's the heart that is unguarded that provides the resources for a crooked and unstable road. All the stuff that we allow to come into our lives, friends, music, movies, tv, etc. All these things come in through our brain and begin to take residence in our lives. We end up taking so much unfiltered, unguarded stuff into our brains that it seeps into our hearts and eventually spews out of our mouths and hearts. In fact I would challenge you who struggle with cussing and actually want to stop. Cut out any movies, music, or conversations that cuss and prayerfully ask God to take away that desire. I would bet within a week you'll significantly cut back. The reason is that you've chosen to guard your heart, and keep that junk out of it.

Crooked and Unstable Roads: are built by idolatry

The passage we looked at in Jeremiah 18 tells us that it was the idols that the people followed that caused them to stumble. The roads they built because of the idols led them to unstable ground. An idol is anything that is more important to you than God. A starting point in figuring out if you have an idol is to look at the amount of time you spend doing something verses the amount of time you spend with God. It's not a fool proof way because obviously there are things you have to do, school, work, etc. But when you're doing those things is God the focus or are there other things that are the focus. Look at your free time, how much of it is centered on God?

Crooked and Unstable roads always cause people to stray from God and usually lead to a painful fall.

Straight and Level Roads are built by integrity: There are a couple different ways to define integrity but for the sake of our study tonight we are going to define integrity like this; integrity is when you live the life the claim to live. In other words, if I claim to be a Christian, than I should be doing everything in my power to live the life of a Christ follower. This doesn't mean that I never mess up or fall, but rather that I'm striving to live the life that I claim to live instead of saying one thing and doing another. When we call things like they are we begin to build stable roads which God uses to lead us closer to him.

Straight and Level Roads are built by repentance; in the passage in Mt 3 and the others like it in Luke and Mark, we see that John the Baptist is the one who is preaching these words. Right before he states "prepare the way" and "make straight" paths, he tells them how, "repent". If we are going to walk on God's path, a straight and level road, it begins with repentance. We need to turn away from the idols in our lives, and guard our hearts so that we can begin to walk in obedience to God and His word. This keeps us from stumbling and from walking paths that are created with poor and unstable materials which usually cause us to get hurt.

What sorts of road or path are you walking on; is straight or crooked, is it level or unstable?

Remember that each situation we find ourselves in, throughout life, are not mere events they are paths, roads. Roads that lead somewhere, and will ultimately either draw you closer to God or pull you further away.

Suggested Discussions for Small Groups:

1. What does your path look like?
2. Why does it look that way, what things have happened that have placed you on that path?
3. Are there any idols in your life, what/who?
4. Would you say for the most part your heart is guarded or unguarded?
 - How do you know that?
 - How do/can you guard your heart?