

Where Are You Going?

Romans 12:2; Matthew 7:12-14; Proverbs 4:25-27

Introduction

The study we are beginning today comes from four different sources that are closely related in their practical truths. Recently I was reading something and came across this quote:

“Bad habits are easy to make, but hard to live with. Good habits are hard to make, but easy to live with.”

And somehow God took that thought and reminded me of one of my favorite Andy Stanley sermon series, Destinations: The Principle of the Path. And when I started thinking about that, I remembered a recent sermon by one of our teaching pastors where he talked about the process of how our thoughts become attitudes and actions, and how those actions become habits, and how those habits will determine our lives. And then I remembered some great wisdom from Andy Andrews that really helps make it all practical.

I began thinking about all four principles and realized there is an important reminder / warning for us at any age and place in life that we be careful with our minds, intentionally choose what is influencing our decisions, and make sure the destinations that are set by our current paths are where we want to end up.

Background Passage:

First let's see the big picture that will contain everything else we discuss:

Romans 12:1-2 – ¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* ²And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is**, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Thoughts will eventually lead to your destination. Within that, there is at least one clear interim step:

Matthew 7:12-14 – ¹²“Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. ¹³Enter by the narrow gate; **for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction**, and many are those who enter by it. ¹⁴For **the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life**, and few are those who find it.”

Paths have a pre-determined, definite, and predictable destination. Every time.

Proverbs 4:25-27 – ²⁵Let your eyes look directly ahead, And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. ²⁶**Watch the path of your feet, And all your ways will be established.** ²⁷Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

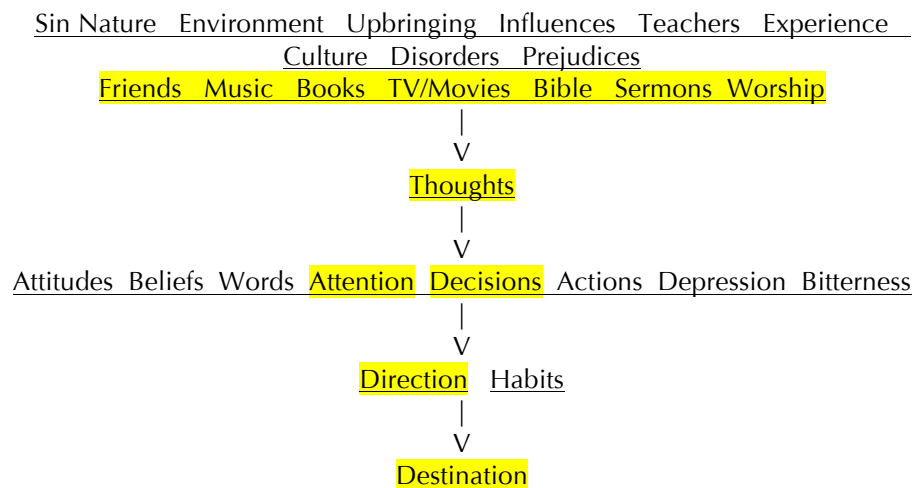
“Your direction, not your intentions, hopes, dreams, prayers, or beliefs, but your direction determines your destination.” - Andy Stanley

“I continue to see a huge disconnect in people between where they want to end up and the path they've chosen.” - Andy Stanley

Direction trumps intention every time.

How do you get from thoughts to destination?

Here I've tried to piece together the different ideas into one consolidated workflow.



We will look at each of these steps now, but in reverse order.

Bible Study:

Destination:

Few would ever say that they are hoping for evil, bad, painful, costly, negative outcomes for their lives. What are typical things we would say we want for our future?

Heaven, happiness, health, financial freedom, professional success, good grades in school, kids happy and marry well, legacy, etc.

Well, what is it that will ensure that we end up at these destinations???

Direction:

Direction, not intention, determines your destination – every time!

Proverbs 16:17 – The highway of the upright is to depart from evil; He who watches his way preserves his life.

Here are a few examples of someone who is on a path. Where do you think they'll end up?

Someone spends more than they make and uses credit, credit cards, cheating, stealing, borrowing from parents, etc., to keep getting more of what they want. Where will be the result of their direction? _____

Someone drinks a lot, all of the time, for a long time, hides their drinking, excuses their drinking, jokes about it, etc. What will be the result of their direction? _____

Someone spends time in God's Word, in prayer, worshipping, every day. Sometimes their children catch them in the act. They lead their spouse and children to do it, too. What will be the result of their direction? _____

What's crazy is that you are so easily able to respond with where those paths will lead, but that we are all so unable to determine the same thing about our own direction.

Now let's consider our current direction and see if we seem to be on the pathway to our desired destination.

What are your habits?

What do you do when you get home everyday?

How often do you and your spouse have dates? Time to talk? Sex?

Are your activities at home typically shared with your spouse or separate?

What do you do when you first wake up every morning?

What do you typically eat?

How often are you active?

Do you have a budget? Do you typically save 10% or more of your income? Do you tithe? Do you rely on borrowing for any part of your lifestyle?

Do you have regular Bible studies with your spouse? Children?

Do you have a quiet time where you pray, read Bible, meditate on Scripture?

After sleeping and work/housework, what do you spend the most time doing?

What are your rules / standards for dating?

How we eat? Exercise? Generous? Borrowing? Living on what or more than you make? Tithing? Integrity? Dating standards? Teaching our kids Scripture? Spending time with our spouse?

Galatians 6:7* Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for **whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.**

Hosea 8:7* For **they sow the wind, And they reap the whirlwind.** The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up.

Bad habits are easy to make and hard to live with. Good habits are difficult to make, but easy to live with. All of these behaviors that we have in our lives have definite destinations.

Decisions:

What is at the end of the decisions we have made?

Proverbs 14:12 – There is a way *which seems* right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Proverbs 22:3 – The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it.

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

Wise people realize that life is connected. There is cause and effect.

The naïve cannot connect the dots about the future. I can have intention A and path B and somehow path B will take me to intention A. I can drive toward the wall, but when I get to the wall, I won't hit the wall.

Wise people make decisions based on the future outcome. Simple people make decisions based only on today.

Religious people get very moved by the "spiritual experience" of being convicted by God, hearing a sermon that "steps on their toes", and then, feeling very spiritual, go and do nothing. Not only does it do no good, it does negative good.

The result of being prudent is looking foolish, because they act like then is now.

God works according to principles. We jump off a building and then ask, "God, how could you let this happen to me?"

When is that point after which there is no chance to prevent a bad outcome?

There comes a time that you no longer have good options. Every option is bad because you waited too long. You can pray all day long, but you are just receiving the expected outcome of a principle. Just like jumping off of a building.

One you're pregnant, it's too late to ask the question, "Do I really love him?"
Once you're an addict, it's too late to say, "Yes, I really need to get more disciplined." Once you're 60 years old, it's too late to start saving for retirement.

And once it's too late to change your direction painlessly, you can probably look back and remember friends, parents, and others telling you that you need to change your path. And you would say, "Yes, you're probably right." And then you would keep right on going. And now you are suffering for it.

Two most important areas: relationships and finances.

Relationships are always moving – either closer together or apart. You can't make decisions about your relationships based on today. You have to make decisions based on where the relationship is going.

Just because you are not yet sleeping with the person you have started spending more and more time with doesn't mean that's not where it's going. You need to stop now before it's too late.

Wise people look at then and make the needed decisions now.

If you are actually going to do something with about going in the wrong direction before it is too late, these four experiences (not steps!) are likely to be a part of your process:

Action: You have to do something. You have to end a relationship, you have to get rid of your internet, you have to make a phone call, you have to downsize.

Sacrifice: You have to give something up. We're not good at this. Maybe your reputation, lifestyle, friendship, romance.

Embarrassment: People who know you will look at your now and wonder what you are doing, but you are looking at the then.

Relief: The day is coming when you will breathe a sigh of relief! "What if I hadn't acted???"

Or you could just keep on going. And suffer harm for it.

"God, please help me see danger a long way off, have wisdom to know what to do, and have courage to do it."

Proverbs 16:1-3 – ³The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.

²All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.

³Commit your works to the LORD, And your plans will be established.

What is at the end of the decisions we have made?

"In the light of my past experience, my future hopes and dreams, what is the right thing to do?"

How do you know which path to take? How do you which decision to make?

How do you know that marrying this person is going to get you on the path where you want to go? Marriage is a path.

How do you know that moving in together is going to get you to on the path where you want to go? Moving in together is not an event; it's a path.

How do you know your relationship with alcohol is going to take you where you want to go? In your mind, you have a destination in mind. Will that take you there?

How do you know that your current financial situation is going to get you where you want to go?

We don't have time to waste on traveling down the wrong path.

Information is not what we need. How many really smart people have done really stupid things???

Hindsight is 20/20. God is the only One who has hindsight today.

Proverbs 3:5-6 – ⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. **⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him,** And He will make your paths straight.

We don't need information. We need submission. First thing before we make any decisions: put God into every area of life. Before we even know what the options are, we must surrender to Him. God says, "I want to make your path clear. I want to clear the way. I want to help you know which path to choose." But it doesn't begin with asking for direction, it begins with absolute and total submission.

We don't need wisdom; we need God. We don't need information; we need God. Look at Solomon's decisions and the major negative outcomes!

Pride eventually overrides wisdom.

Arrogance eventually overrides common sense.

Self-importance overrides discernment.

We entrust to God things we don't have control over all of the time: salvation, children's safety, etc. But this is about areas where we do have control, experience, and wisdom.

Am I afraid to acknowledge God in the areas of life where we think we have control? Why?

Surrender is always required before direction. God requires a “yes” before He asks the question.

Direction determines destination, but often times it is the things and people that get our attention that influence our direction.

When something grabs or captures your attention, there is a sense in which you turn in that direction, and they influence the entire direction of your life.

This can be good, or this can be bad.

I hope that you would agree that your meeting your spouse was a positive example of this principle!

But there are also negative ones. There are likely people you wish you had never met. We wish we had glanced and then just kept right on going. There are relationships you wish you had never started. There are phone numbers you wish you had never called. Emails you wish you’d never sent. Private messages you wish you had never sent. Business opportunities you wish you’d ignored.

On every path that leads to destruction, the reason we choose that path is because there is something very powerful and emotionally engaging on those paths. So often, those are the things that lead to our greatest regrets.

Attention influences direction. Some things grab our attention. We choose to give our attention to others.

Versus the things we give our attention to, or pay attention to. **Grabbing our attention is about emotion. Paying attention is about intention.** There are things you wish you had paid more attention to.

Something bad can grab your attention and keep you from giving your attention to something good.

James 1:14 – But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

Right now there are things you have chosen to pay attention to, and some things that have captured your attention. Most often, the things that grab our attention have negative outcomes. And most often, the things we choose to pay attention to have positive outcomes.

(Does that sound like: Bad habits are easy to make, but hard to live with; and good habits are difficult to make, but easy to live with?)

What has your attention is right now impacting the direction of your entire life. Morally, financially, professionally, spiritually, relationally, academically. The things you pay attention direct your life!!!

God reminded His people throughout all of the Bible about this principle.

Deut. 7:12 – If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.

You are going to be tempted to get distracted by the way the people around you live.

Ps. 119:35, 37 – ³⁵Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. ³⁷Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.

Thoughts:

All of our decisions are results of what we think. So, it’s important for us to consider how to control our thoughts.

“The buck stops here. I accept responsibility for my past. I am responsible for my success. I am where I am today—mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially—because of decisions I have made. My decisions have always been governed by my thinking. Therefore, I am where I am today—mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially—because of how I think. Today I will begin the process of changing where I am—mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially—by changing the way I think.” – Andy Andrews, *The Seven Decisions for Success*

Prov. 4:23 – Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it *flow* the springs of life.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 – ³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,**

Col. 3:2 – Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Phil. 4:8 – Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Reference the lesson “Control Your Mind” from May 1, 2004:
<http://ministry.jabingham.com/2004/05/01/control-your-mind/>

Input:

We're now at the top of the flow that begins with things that influence our thoughts that result in decisions that set our direction that fix our destination.

Back when we first introduced this lesson you all provided input into the list of things that can influence our thoughts. Here is that list:

Sin Nature, Environment, Upbringing, Influences, Teachers, Experience, Culture, Disorders, Prejudices

Friends, Music, Books, TV/Movies, Bible, Sermons, Worship, Memorization / Meditation

Clearly, some of these things we can control, and some we can't. I've grouped them accordingly. We'll talk about each of the ones we can control.

Friends:

Why is it that we spend so much focus on our children's friends, but don't even give a second thought to the types of people we allow into our inner circle?

Prov. 14:7 – Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

Prov 13:20 – He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

2 Cor. 6:14 - Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

"I will seek wisdom. I will choose my friends with care. I am who my friends are. I speak their language, and I wear their clothes. I share their opinions and their habits. From this moment forward, I will choose to associate with people whose lives and lifestyles I admire. If I associate with chickens, I will learn to scratch at the ground and squabble over crumbs. If I associate with eagles, I will learn to soar great heights. I am an eagle. It is my destiny to fly.

I will seek wisdom. I will listen to the counsel of wise men. The words of a wise man are like rain- drops on dry ground. They are precious and quickly used for immediate results. Only the blade of grass that catches a raindrop will prosper and grow. The person who ignores wise counsel is like the blade of grass untouched by the rain—soon to wither and die. When I counsel with myself, I can only make decisions according to what I already know. By counseling with a wise man, I add his knowledge and experience to my own and dramatically increase my success." – Andy Andrews, *The Seven Decisions for Success*

Can you give examples of how the people you have chosen to associate with have had a positive impact on your life? _____

Negative? _____

Who in your life encourages you toward God? _____

Who pulls you away? _____

Whose influence in your life should you reduce? _____

Is there someone whose influence you would like to increase? _____

Music:

Music has been an area of considerable disagreement among Christians in recent years. Some say you shouldn't listen to anything except Christian music, others say that anything is OK, and there are many positions in between. Here's a quote I like that sets us up for a good conversation about music:

"Whatever a person allows to occupy his mind will sooner or later determine his speech and his actions." – gotquestions.org

There are lots of Christians who sing "secular" music.

Does style matter?

No! Style is totally a matter of preference. There are no forbidden music styles in the Bible, and there are none that are commended.

Style is what we often get into fights about at church.

Do lyrics matter?

Yes! Absolutely!!! The lyrics of a song are what should determine if it's OK or not.

What types of lyrics would definitely be acceptable? _____

What types of lyrics would definitely be unacceptable? _____

That leaves a lot of songs in between. What should you do with them? _____

"Obviously, the best kind of music is that which praises and glorifies God. Talented Christian musicians work in nearly every musical genre, ranging from classical to rock, rap, and reggae. There is nothing inherently wrong with any particular style of music. It is the lyrics that determine whether a song is "acceptable" for a Christian to listen to. If anything leads you to think about or get involved in something that does not glorify God, it should be avoided." – gotquestions.org

And I will admit that during the months earlier this year when I was listening only to Christian worship music, my mind was more easily focused on God.

Books:

“You are the same today as you’ll be in five years except for three things, the places you go, the books you read, and the people you meet.” – Charlie “Tremendous” Jones

Books change you.

What kinds of books should we read? _____

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” - [Aristotle](#)

As was the case with music, we cannot declare one particular style or another right or wrong. It is all about the content!

“Knowing that wisdom waits to be gathered, I will actively search her out. My past can never be changed, but I can change the future by changing my actions today. I will change my actions today! I will train my eyes and ears to read and listen to books and recordings that bring about positive changes in my personal relationships and a greater understanding of my fellow man. No longer will I bombard my mind with materials that feed my doubts and fears. I will read and listen only to that which increases my belief in myself and my future.” – Andy Andrews, *The Seven Decisions for Success*

What types of books should we read? _____

Are you a reader? _____ What would it take? _____

Video (Including TV, Movies, and Internet):

Job 31:1* I made a **covenant** with mine **eyes**; why then should I think upon a maid?

Ps 119:37* Turn away mine **eyes** from beholding vanity; *and* quicken thou me in thy way.

This is pretty much the same story as books.

Friends (pt. 2):

Prov. 14:7 – Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.

Prov. 13:20 – He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.

2 Cor. 6:14 - Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Do our “friends” on social media count in this discussion? _____

Are we influenced by them? _____

What should this drive us to do? _____

Bible / Meditation:

We’ve already established that reading books influences our thoughts, and that we should therefore be careful to read books that will be positive influences on us. The Bible is the capstone of that, and therefore should be a big part of our reading activity.

Hebrews 4:12 – For **the word of God is living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 – And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted *it not as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, **the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.**

Isaiah 55:11 – So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

James 1:21-27 – ²¹Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, **in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.** ²²**But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, **and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer,** this man shall be blessed in what he does. ²⁶If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man’s religion is worthless. ²⁷This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

God’s Word helps us know what to think.

And backing up to get a big picture look at it, God’s Word helps determine our path, which determines our destination.

Ps. 119:105 – Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.

What does it mean to meditate on God’s Word? _____

Why would you do it? _____

How do you do it? _____

Sermons:

An additional positive influence on our thoughts can be listening to sermons. We live in such an amazing time that we can listen to many (maybe most?) preachers’ sermons any time we want!

Any recommendations to the group?

Worship / Prayer:

The events of this week just increase the importance of prayer.

Remember our definition of worship from our earlier study? Declaring God's worth.

Father Gerald Murray defined prayer this way: "Prayer is the movement of our mind, heart and soul in which we confess our belief in God and his goodness. We ask him to manifest that goodness in answer to our petitions."

How are prayer and worship related as to how they can affect our thoughts?

One of the many great things about worship and prayer is how they force us to face, admit, and confess the truth.

Ps. 26:2 – Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.

Ps. 51:6 – Behold, **Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being,** And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom.

Eph. 5:18-20 – ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;** ²⁰always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Frequent prayer and worship can keep us from being deceived about our friends, activities, path, and destination.

When you pray, is it just asking God for lots of stuff? Or is it truly communicating with Him? Two-way dialogue?

Conclusion

Where are you going?

Have you been honest?

Prov. 21:2 – Every man's way is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.

Are you a doer of the Word or just a hearer?

Where are you going?

Is that the path you want to be on? Is that the destination you want?

The choice is up to you!