

Learn the importance of following the right path in life!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] We're going to look at Proverbs chapter 14 through 16 this morning, primarily, although these sermons on the Proverbs are thematic, so we'll be moving around a little bit in the Scripture, really, just to follow the theme.

Today's theme is choosing the importance of choosing the right path, the fork in the road, a famous poem, The Road Less Traveled, you'll probably be familiar with.

I'm not going to read that today. It wasn't that long ago I read it, I think, so have a look at it. Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 12 says, there is a way, next slide, there is a way that seems right to a man, but the end leads to death.

There is a way that seems right for a man, but in the end, it leads to death. Now, when I was a child, I used to like some of the Greek fables, like Jason and the Argonauts.

Yeah, remember Jason and the Argonauts? Well, a lot of these Greek myths and fables come from Homer's work, from his Iliad and his Odyssey, and the Odyssey is about Ulysses.

[1 : 27] You might have remembered a film about Ulysses as well. It's all about a journey, and it takes place after the Trojan War, Helen of Troy, etc., Hector and Achilles, Achilles, after the Trojan War, when the Greek forces were returning back to their various homes in the island, the Greek islands, and Ulysses was returning to Ithaca.

He and his crew got into lots of difficulties and had all kinds of fights with sea monsters and the gods who were trying to disrupt their way, and the Cyclops, remember the Cyclops, the one-eyed monsters that Jason fought, what I think he had a fight with once in the film that I saw as well.

Eventually, all of Ulysses' crew die in a shipwreck because they anger one of the Greek gods, Zeus, and only Ulysses gets to go home.

Where awaiting him is his beautiful wife, Penelope. Who would have thought that name was that old? Penelope. I think of Penelope Pitstop.

Yeah? Those of you who are old enough to remember wacky races. Well, he gets home, and the question is, has she been faithful?

[2 : 45] Because she's very beautiful, and she has lots of suitors. But he discovers that through various means, she has been very faithful, and they are reunited after he first disguised himself, and they all live happily ever after.

And the meaning of the story, or the main lesson of the story, is that through perseverance, you get your rewards. It's the metaphor of life as a journey.

You go through many hardships, the Apostle Paul says, to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Christian life is a journey. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7, and verse 14, you might remember it, Matthew chapter 7, let me just turn to it, and verse 12 to 14, and I have to change my glasses to read.

Here we go. Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

But small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Now, it's very popular and very modern for people to say, well, of course, it really doesn't matter what religion you follow, because all religions lead to God, which is precisely what Jesus does not say.

[4 : 13] It is true that there are many ways of finding Jesus, or we could be equally accurate to say there are many ways in which Jesus finds us. But although there are many ways of finding Jesus, or many ways in which Jesus finds us, there is only one way to God.

Jesus said in John 14, in verse 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. No other way.

We understand fully the implications of what we're saying, by the way, and we understand that it's not popular to say it. But the whole point of the Christian faith is to provide people with hope and a sure and certain way of access to the Father.

And the gospel is very clear about that. We would not expect God to do anything else than to make the way of heaven clear to us, without equivocation and without doubt.

If anyone is to enter into the presence of God, they can only enter the presence of God through Jesus. There is a way that seems right for a man.

[5 : 28] The idea that all roads lead to God, that you can live and believe whatever you like, but still God will somehow welcome you in the end. That seems right to men, but it ends in death.

Eternal death. And so we cannot be equivocal about the gospel. We cannot reduce it down or dilute it so that it makes it palpable to modern society, which has relative truth, which talks about, I have my truth, you have yours.

As if truth was something that we just buy in the marketplace, that suits us for a moment and can be changed to the whim. The truth is that Jesus is the only way.

The only way to life. Another metaphor of the Christian life is shown in the next slide, Pilgrim's Progress. I've never read Pilgrim's Progress.

You ought to read it. I've mentioned it a few times in recent sermons. Pilgrim's Progress is a book written a long time ago by John Bunyan. He was called a tinker, what we would now call a gypsy perhaps, or a hawker, somebody who sells his wares as a means of gaining some living by whatever means.

[6 : 55] He was a simple, rather uneducated young man who violated the Sabbath at a time when to violate the Sabbath was actually a criminal offense.

And he felt so convicted of his sin that he was out playing balls one Sunday afternoon and he felt the Holy Spirit spring conviction into his heart.

And suddenly, his spirit was awakened to the reality of Jesus and he humbly repented before Jesus and accepted him as his Lord and Savior.

And he wrote this wonderful book, Pilgrim's Progress, which was all about a person who has a great burden on their back.

The burden is a picture of carrying a weight of sin, of regret, of guilt. You know, it was weighing him down so heavily and he felt under the judgment of God.

[7 : 53] He felt so threatened by this burden and so unworthy of God's love and grace. And then he starts out on this journey and various people try to stop him from going on the journey.

And eventually, he comes to a mountain and he sees on the mountain a cross and he runs to the cross. And as he runs to the cross, the burden on his back falls off and it rolls down the hill, he says, into an open grave where it has gone forever.

And then he carries on his journey. It doesn't end there. See, this is the problem with kind of easy believism. Easy believism, you know, this idea that all you have to do is pray, pray and ask Jesus into your life and that's the end of it.

And then you're going to sing and dance forevermore to heaven. No, no, no, it isn't that. That's not the New Testament gospel story. That's where you begin.

But perseverance is part of the journey. And you go through many trials and many difficulties, many tribulations as John Bunyan did. But in the preface to his book, this is what he said.

[8 : 57] I seek a place. Oh, I was going to look there for it. It's gone. I seek a place that can never be destroyed, one that is pure and that fades not away, and it is laid up in heaven and safe there to be given at the appointed time to them that seek it with all their heart.

Read it, so if you will, in my book. And that's what the story is about. One man's pursuit of heaven. And never giving up.

However difficult the way, however difficult the trials, never giving up because the goal, the crown, the glory is better than anything this world has to offer.

And that's the Christian life. It's not just about the desire for forgiveness. It's also the desire to know Jesus. It is the desire to be as holy as it is possible to be.

It is a desire to please God and do God's will. It is a desire to be with God forever. That's what awaits us on this journey.

[10 : 08] There is a way that seems right to man. And that way can be easy, as easy as possible. We like that, don't we? Let life be easy as possible with no difficulties, no hardships, where I never get ill and I never worry about my finances and I never have any troubles and nobody ever says anything nasty to me and everything is swimming.

Well, you can get that in a playpen. But you can't get it in real life. Our Heavenly Father knows that we are strengthened most in adversity and trouble.

And faith grows when it has to trust God, when it's seeing God in the dark and it does not know what God is doing or why is He allowing certain things to happen as we journey on this way and why we have to go through these many difficulties.

And yet we discover when we get through them that we have strengthened our faith and grown in our faith and developed our faith and have known Jesus in a new way because of the troubles.

There are two ways. A way that seems right to man. It's always the way of ease. Well, if God was really your friend, He would never let this happen to you, would He?

[11 : 26] I used to believe in God, but when bad things happened to me, I give up believing in God because He obviously didn't love me. You hear that said all of the time. As if God somehow has no purpose for the things that we say are bad in our lives.

The Scripture says, all things work together for the good of those who love God. Notice it does not say, all things are nice. And it doesn't say, you will feel they're good.

It says, they work for your good. A bit like castor oil works for your good. But it doesn't taste very nice.

It works for our good. So God has His reasons and His purposes for our struggles and our suffering, but always for our good.

There is a way that seems right unto man. The way of ease. A trouble-free existence. But it ends in death.

[12 : 33] The Bible frequently exhorts us to choose the right path. Choose the right path. Think about life as a journey and choose the right way.

Be very careful and very thoughtful about the way that you choose. Think about why you're choosing it. Think about what you're choosing.

Think about what your purpose and intention is. Always choose the right path. And the book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom. It's about, as we've said before, a father saying to his son, there are two roads in life.

The way of ease. The way of comfort. The way of pleasure. The way of satisfying your sensual needs and desires. And then there's another way.

Much harder way. But it's a way of life. It's a way of fulfillment. It's a way of ultimate satisfaction. Choose that way.

[13 : 34] Not the wide road that leads to destruction, as Jesus put it, but the narrow road that leads to life. Has anybody ever accused you of being too narrow?

Too black and white? Too clear? Too certain? Well, yeah. There are things that we cannot be clear about or black and white about. We accept mystery in our lives.

But there are some things we are absolutely certain about. And when we're certain about it, even though it is not a popular way, even though it may be a narrow way, it is the way we follow.

So there are a collection of saints through chapter 14 through 16. I just want to draw your attention to them. Proverbs 14, verse 2. Proverbs 14, verse 8.

Proverbs 14, verse 8. Proverbs 14, verse 15. Proverbs 14, 15 and 16.

[14 : 41] The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways, and the good man rewarded for his. A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.

Chapter 15, verses 9 and 10. The Lord detests the way of the wicked, but He loves those who pursue righteousness. Stern discipline awaits Him who leaves the path. He who hates correction will die.

Proverbs 15, verse 19. One of my favorites. The way of the sluggard. I like that. A sluggard. The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

Chapter 15, verse 24. The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave. Chapter 16, verse 2. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Remember what God said to Samuel about David? Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

[15 : 55] He's not easily fooled or tricked by words or actions. He understands human motives. Chapter 16, verse 7. When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes it even his enemies live at peace with him.

Verse 9. In his heart, a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. How many times have you discovered that in your life? You've told God your plans, and He's had a bit of a laugh at you, and then you work out doing what He planned.

You know, you can think, oh, that was the right way, Lord. Wasn't that clever? Who would have thought that God knows what He's doing? He only happens to be omniscient. Yeah? But actually, that doesn't have to be scary at all, does it?

It doesn't have to be fatalistic at all. It's very comforting to begin your day with the Lord's prayer and say, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and then trust God to determine your steps.

It's just saying, God, keep me from going in the wrong way, in the wrong direction. Prevent me making stupid mistakes, because I know I'm prone to be rather silly at times.

[17 : 09] Chapter 16, verse 17. The highway of the upright avoids evil. He who guards his way guards his life. Verses 29.

A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good. Have you ever been led down a path that is not good?

Remember the scripture says, bad company corrupts good character. Have you ever got in with the wrong crowd and found yourself in difficulties, in troubles, because you went against your better judgment, and you ended up in a place or in a situation that you didn't intend to be, and now you have to live with the consequences.

That's what happens if we follow the wrong way with the wrong people and the wrong wisdom at the wrong time. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end leads to death.

There is a danger, the proverb says, of taking the road that leads to death. There is a danger in choosing a course of action that has terrible consequences that we will regret forever.

[18 : 29] Remember when Proverbs 3, 5 to 6 says, trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.

This is all about who we will trust. We take a way that God prescribes, that God gives us instruction for, that God gives us wisdom for, that God shows us the direction in which we should take, or we choose a road that man prescribes, that man directs, that man's wisdom says we ought to take, and then we make our decision.

Whatever we choose, we are acting in faith. Do you notice that? I've said this before.

People will often say, well, I don't have any faith. Yes, you do. You believe a set of values. You believe a collection of wisdom. That collection of wisdom is the kind of wisdom you act on every day.

We might call that folklore. We might call that traditional values. We might call that parental advice. We might call that peer influence.

[19 : 41] But it is all a collection of wisdom upon which we act, and we act in faith, believing that it would have good outcomes. You can follow that, or you can follow the wisdom of Almighty God, who never makes a mistake, and who always acts for our good.

Which one are you going to put your faith in? Which way are you going to take? It's important to discern God's wisdom, and we find it in Scripture.

Scripture is our guidebook to heaven. It is given that we might have the wisdom of God to help us to direct and navigate our lives on the journey, so that we won't end up in shipwreck and be eaten by sea monsters and other things.

And we have the Holy Spirit of God, who takes the wisdom of God and shines a light on it, so that it makes sense in our minds. What we call eureka moments, transformative moments, in which the words of Scripture leap off the page and begin to live in our lives.

And we think, wow, God is speaking to me now. Have you ever been spoken to by God by the most obscure verse in the book of Ecclesiastes? Or even in the book of Leviticus. I mean, imagine Leviticus.

[20 : 57] Being able to give you any instruction, but it's amazing, isn't it? How the Holy Spirit can take the words of God and shine a light into our eyes and say, this is the way you should walk. Walk in it.

The prophet says, it's like hearing a voice behind you. And all of a sudden, you become clear. Absolutely. You stake your life on it. So the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and applies it to our hearts, enables us to walk in the ways of God.

So here is wisdom. Here is a pathway. There is a choice to be made at the fork of the road. Will I follow the wisdom of God or the wisdom of men? Will I entrust my life and my never-dying soul to a God who knows all things and wills everything for my good?

Or will I trust in the wisdom of men that lasts only for time and has no advice for eternity? Accept the possibility, the possibility mind, that when you die, that is it.

Well, good luck on stake in your eternal soul on that bit of wisdom. When you die, that is it. Really? Is it? Are you sure?

[22 : 14] Are you sure? So, two paths in life. First of all, the advice from this proverb is to turn away from the wrong path.

Next slide, please. Sorry, that was a great quote from Bunyan as well, but never mind. Turning the wrong path. There is a way that seems right unto man.

It appears to be the right path. The writer of the proverb says, turn away from it. Now, to illustrate this, I want you to turn to Genesis chapter 16. A very interesting passage in chapter 16.

It's all about Hagar and Abraham and Sarah. I'm just going to read it for you for the sake of context.

Now, Sarah, Abraham's wife, Abraham's wife, had borne him no children, but she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. So she said to Abraham, the Lord has kept me from having children.

[23 : 14] Go sleep with my maidservant. Perhaps I can go and build a family through her. There is a way that seems right unto man. All right. So God said to Abraham, you're going to have a child one day.

Abraham thinks, yeah, of course. I'm a spring chicken. You know, I've been taking all my testosterone supplements. I'm definitely going to have a child. No, he was an old man and he hadn't any children because his wife, Sarah, was barren.

She couldn't have children. So how is God's will going to be fulfilled? God says, you're going to have a child, Abraham. And Abraham said, no, I'm not.

Or at least he thought, how is this possible? Now, Sarah, she didn't know how it was going to happen either. So she thought, I'll work it out. I'll help God out here.

I'll work it for him because I know what I'm doing. So God has plans, but he doesn't know how he's going to do it. So I'll do it. I'll say, here's my maidservant, Hagar, and you can have a child with her and then God's purposes will be worked out.

[24 : 26] Wonderful. Let's see if that's what happens. Abraham agreed to what Sarah said. Foolish man. So after Abraham had been living in Cain in 10 years, Sarah, his wife, took her Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

He slept with Hagar and she conceived. Yay! Sarah's plan is working. Isn't Sarah clever? When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

Then Sarah said to Abraham, you are responsible. Well, that's rich, isn't it? You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. Imagine a man getting the blame. I put my servant in your arms.

That's all I did. I put my servant in your arms. And now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me. Oh, Sarah, you're interested all of a sudden.

In the Lord's will, are you? Bless her heart. Your servant is in your hands, Abraham said.

[25 : 34] Do with her whatever you think best. Then Sarah ill-treated Hagar, so she fled from her. Poor Hagar. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert.

It was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, Hagar, servant of Sarah, where have you come from and where are you going? I'm running away from my mistress, Sarah, she answered.

Then the angel of the Lord told her, go back to your mistress and submit her. Really, God? Really? Hang on a minute, God. This is not... Let me say it just one more time to you, God.

My mistress is mistreating me. Yes, I heard you the first time. Go back. What, to mistreatment? To discomfort?

To being despised? To having a child that she will always look down upon? Really, Lord? Is that your will? Hardship and difficulty for me?

[26 : 37] But she knew that God knew that he would take care of her. And let's see why. The angel of the Lord also said to her, sorry, the angel of the Lord told her, go back to your mistress and submit to her.

The angel added, I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count. The angel of the Lord also said to her, you are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael.

Guess what it means? God hears. You will name him Ishmael. Every time Abraham shouted, Ishmael, he was reminded, God hears.

Every time Sarai shouted, Ishmael, she was reminded, God hears. They were reminded that God also sees. Because that's what happens.

See what happens. He will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him. Would you like such a child in your house? You know, the kind of child when everything goes wrong, things smash, kids cry, they all point to him.

[27 : 48] He is the troublemaker. I think, oh, not Ishmael again. He will live in hostility toward all his brothers. She gives this name to the Lord who spoke to her, you are the God who sees.

Ishmael, God hears. Elroy, God sees. Hagar discovered God and so she could trust him and go back to her mistress because she knew he was a God who takes care of her.

He rescues her from the desert. He hears her prayer. He sees her in a despair and he fulfills his promise to her. There is a way that seems right to man.

Abraham, Sarah went the wrong way. They chose their way rather than God's way and they brought hostility between the Ishmaelites and the Jews which still happened 4,000 years later.

Oh, a little inconsequential thing that has had terrible consequences for generations and is still being played out on our news.

[29 : 01] Imagine. There is a way that seems right to man but it ends in death. Are you on the wrong path? It's an easy thing to answer.

Put it another way, are you living in or outside of the will of God? Are you choosing to live your life in disobedience to God?

If you are, you are on the wrong path. Its end is death. It has consequences. Now, it may not result in eternal death. Of course not. But every action has a consequence.

We reap what we sow. If we seek to live in the will of God, we are safe. We are in the hands of a God who cares. We are under the watchful eye of a God who sees.

We are always heard. But if we step outside of the will of God, then none of that is true. We are on our own to face the consequences.

[30 : 00] There is a way that seems right to man but the end of it is death. It's about who we will serve, who we will follow, who we will believe. Second, next slide please.

So we must pursue the right path. God. This God who sees, this God who cares, this God who watches over us and gives us his wisdom to direct us in our life is a God who says to us, I am always there for you in the desert, in the trials, in the struggles.

I am always there for you. You can count on me. I will never let you down. I will never leave you on your own. You will never be abandoned, however difficult your circumstances may be.

Hagar went back to difficult circumstances. Hagar was always the mistress. Hagar was always despised by Sarai. But God never left her, never forsook her.

God loved her. You see, in our following of Jesus, our circumstances may not change. We may find him in difficult circumstances and continue in them for quite a long time.

[31 : 13] There are brothers and sisters in this world who choose Jesus and who deliberately, when choosing Jesus, choose a life of suffering. The world isn't like different countries in the world.

It's not like our world. I stand in absolute awe of people in Sudan, people in China, people in North Korea who choose to follow Jesus, knowing that to choose Jesus is to choose the way of suffering, persecution, and death.

I stand in awe of those and I think, what would I do if I was in their shoes? Because God doesn't promise to take them out of those circumstances. He promises to see them, care for them, and look after them in the circumstances.

So pursuing the right path is not necessarily pursuing the easy path, but it is pursuing the path that leads to the ultimate desired destination, the destination of eternal glory in heaven.

Think of our lives. How long do we have? You know, I was here last Sunday and I'm here this Sunday and it feels like two minutes since the last time I was here.

[32 : 25] Have you noticed that? People say it gets quicker as you get older. Well, it certainly seems to. Life is over so quickly and we think, well, I've got all of this time and all of these opportunities and I've got all of this possibility of life before me, so I'm just going to kind of go my own way and then I'll trust God at the end of it just in time to get into heaven.

The problem with that is, one, you don't know if you're going to get the opportunity to trust Him then, and to none of us know when our time is anyway.

Today is the day of salvation. Not tomorrow, not putting it off. Choosing to follow God on the right path today is the wise advice of Scripture.

Jesus says, enter through the narrow gate. Do it now. Do it while you still can. Do it while there is still opportunity. Do it while there is still time. I know it's easier for you to go along the broad way.

I know you'll be more popular and I know your needs will be met and I know it will be more pleasurable for you, but it is not a way that leads to life. The end of it is destruction. Enter the narrow gate, for it leads to life.

[33 : 47] John Bunyan says, better though difficult the right way to go than wrong though easy where the end is war. Better though difficult the way to go than the wrong though easy where the end is war.

Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. You want to go to the Father, you come to me. You come to me into relationship with me.

You embrace me as your Lord and Savior and then you have a guarantee, a golden ticket, not to the Willy Wonka factory, but to heaven's glory.

One of the greatest privileges in my life as a minister of the gospel is to spend time with people who are dying, to spend time with people who are holding on to Jesus and are breathing their very last and to be able to pray with them when they pass into glory.

What a privilege it is to know that as we keep our eyes upon Jesus, the moment we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord.

[35 : 10] For there is, as the hymn writer Isaac Watts says, a land of pure delight where saints immortal dwell. Infinite day excludes the night and pleasures banish pain.

The world has nothing in comparison to offer you that is like heaven. It is the greatest goal. It is the thing we long for most.

It is the way that leads to life and it is offered and available to us this very day. Heaven where there will be no more night, where we will be privileged to see his face and his name will be on our foreheads and there will no longer be night.

We have no need for a land light or sunlight because the Lord, our God, will illumine them and we will reign as kings forever and ever.

We all have faith. The question I leave you with this morning is who is your faith in? Is it in Jesus the way, the truth, and the life or is it in the wisdom of men that leads to death?

[36 : 30] And with the last slide I'll close. Let us be like Christian. In Pilgrim's Progress he says of the pilgrim, he had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth written upon his lips, the world behind his back.

He stood as if pleading with men and a crown of gold hung over his head. May that be said of us to the glory of God.

Amen.