

Lenten Message Series: Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living

Feb. 26 - April 12

Series Text: Jeremiah 31:21-22a

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter?”

Sun., March 15: Third Sunday of Lent

Message: Signs for Life: DO NOT ENTER

Scripture: Proverbs 4:10-27 (CEB) “Stay on the path of wisdom”

Text: “Everything is permitted, but everything isn’t beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn’t build others up.” -1 Corinthians 10:23

Memory Verse: “Don’t deviate a bit to the right or the left; turn your feet away from evil.” -Proverbs 4:27

Blurb: We try to stay on God’s way, and yet, while on God’s highway, we tend to drift a bit. We try to stay centered on God, but we are attracted to other paths. We must heed the “Do Not Enter” signs! God’s path is a calling to stay close to the center line. We seek to live pure, holy and perfect lives.

Kid’s Moment: Show clip from *The Pilgrim’s Progress: Journey to Heaven* by DRC Films (2020) Animated movie based on John Pilgrim’s 17th century classic.

Clip

Provide popcorn/goldfish for kids

Opening Song: *Hymn Sing* -Andrew

Welcome -David

Memory Verse -David

“Don’t deviate a bit to the right or the left; turn your feet away from evil.” -Proverbs 4:27

Worship Music -Sanctify

Threshold of Glory

Be Thou My Vision

Show Me How to Live

Worship Prayer -Andrew

Apostles’ Creed: “My Version of the Apostles’ Creed, by Tony Lloyd”

“I believe in Almighty God the Father and that He made heaven and earth.

“I believe in His one and only son Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born to Mary, who was a virgin. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was

beaten, crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day He arose from the dead and went back into heaven. He now sits right next to God the Father Almighty. He will be the judge between people who live and die when He comes back.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the church around the world, that those who die are still a part of God’s family, that God forgives our sins when we ask, that our bodies will be resurrected some day, and that we will live forever.

“Amen.”

Offering: *One True God* -Andrew

Generational Bridge: Pilgrim’s Progress -Andrew

Prayers -Andrew

Message: Signs for Life #4: DO NOT ENTER -David

Bumper: Video

Sign: *Change sign from SPEED LIMIT to DO NOT ENTER during the video.*

Call to Focus: *Following 2 PP slides:*

PP#1: L: We are on the journey of Lent. God has given us road signs for the journey.

P: We are on the journey of life. God has given us road signs for the journey.

L: Jeremiah 31:21 says, “Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take.”

P: STOP. Stop to discern your journey. Stop to reorient your lives. Stop sinning.

L: NO OUTLET. So many paths in life lead to nothing. We come to see clearly.

PP#2 P: SPEED LIMIT. God’s timing is always right. We must take care not to travel along our path of life faster or slower than God has planned for us.

L: DO NOT ENTER. We stick to God’s path with perseverance. We avoid the dangerous exits. We keep fast to the center.

P: We come to see the road signs God has placed for our life’s journeys.

PP#3: Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living

Sign for Life: DO NOT ENTER

“Everything is permitted, but everything isn’t beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn’t build others up.” -1 Corinthians 10:23

Signs for Life: Learning to Navigate Spiritual Living. DO NOT ENTER. 1 Corinthians 10:23, “Everything is permitted, but everything isn’t beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn’t build others up.”

PP#4: *Image of a guy sizing up a beautiful woman while his wife is next to him.*

Shoulder Christians. Sometimes we tend to travel over on the shoulder.

“Is it really a sin to lie? What if it’s just a white lie? What if it’s told to protect someone else from pain? What if it’s just easier not to have to get into it all? What if...”

“Is it really a sin to notice and appreciate the God-given beauty of that person walking by? Come on. Is flirting really a sin? It’s just some harmless fun. How does pornography truly hurt anyone? Isn’t it OK to go window shopping as long as I come home to buy?”

“Don’t you think that God has bigger concerns than being worried about if I’m not totally honest on my taxes?” “What’s wrong with this music? Please, no one really listens to *the words* anyway. I love the beat.” “I’m working *towards* full tithing. I give more now than I used to.” “I know the TV show has some questionable material, but I know the difference and can draw the line.” “So I swear when I’m angry. Who doesn’t? Besides, as far as God’s concerned, it’s no worse than the person who is angry on the inside.” “What’s a little off-color joke? Its just innocent entertainment.” “I’m generally a good person. You can’t expect me to be perfect all the time. Besides, I’m better than *that guy!*”

Shoulder Christians. Sometimes we tend to drive on the shoulder.

PP#5: *Image of a person in a car looking over at something tempting that’s not along his road*

We have chosen the path that God has for us. We have taken Christ as our Savior and Lord. We have agreed to live our lives for God. We try to stay on God’s way.

Yet while on God’s highway, we tend to drift a bit. We know where the hard core central line is. Total abstinence. Radical Christianity. Ultimate selflessness. Fully committed. Holiness.

We also know where the bad stuff is: Sinning. Hurting. Hating. Breaking the 10 Commandments. Violence. Abusiveness. Self-centeredness.

The way we travel is not on the bad roads, but we tend to not hug the center line, either. We tend to drift a bit. We want to be on God’s road, but we also feel the call of the other roads as well. We tend to travel on the shoulder: as close to the edge as we possibly can be, while still technically staying on God’s road. And so, our concern is more about the exact location of where the outer edge of God’s road is, rather than where the center is. We want to know just how much we can get away with, and still be okay. “Is it really a sin to wear stylishly low-cut dresses and trendy short-shorts? Exactly how revealing is too revealing? How short, exactly, is too short?” “I know we should help staff the homeless shelter, but I’ve had a rough time lately. Is it wrong to have a ‘me night?’” “Am I a terrible person if I give the Gideons only \$80 and keep \$20 for eating out?” “Is it technically a sin to read novels about the passionate joys of forbidden pleasures?”

Well, no. But your drifting away from the center. You’re on the shoulder, and you’re focusing on the outer line rather than the middle one.

PP#6: *Image of a person with healthy food looking longingly at someone eating a pizza*

Sometimes we live our Christian lives like we diet. We commit to stay on the healthy side of eating, but we secretly desire all the forbidden desserts. We crunch our dry rice cake while dreaming of a flowing fudge brownie sundae. And so we also cheat. Perhaps harmlessly, or without dire consequences. What’s one Snickers bar when I’ve been so good the last three days! So cheating is not so bad. We don’t want the lettuce salad. We want the cheesy pizza. But we choose the salad because we don’t want the consequences of the pizza.

We don't want to live pure, holy and perfect lives. We want the life of self-indulgence and self-centeredness. But sometimes we choose God's path to avoid the consequences of the other paths. Then we travel that path as close to the outer edge as possible. And then we cheat, just a little. Sometimes we tend to drive on the shoulder.

PP#7: *Image of a car driving along on the shoulder with a flat tire*

When I was learning to drive, Dad told me to stay off the shoulder. I couldn't figure out why. It was paved, and smooth, and good to travel on. Particularly, I wanted to pass on the right, taking advantage of that open and tempting lane. But Dad said that it was for emergencies, for when things go wrong. A car might be pulled over there. But even when I could see no car there, Dad still cautioned me against driving on it. "You see," he explained, "it's on the shoulder that all the stuff ends up from the road:" garbage, the little pieces of glass, little bits of shrapnel, nails, and so many things to blow your tires and hamper your journey.

I also found out—from personal experience!—that driving on the shoulder is hard when you come to curves. In our Christian lives, the curves are the hardships, the trials, the difficulties. They are there, we must get through them. But they can pull us away from the center.

PP#8: *Image of a car veering off the road and into the ditch from the shoulder on a curvy road*

The safest and most successful way of driving through curves is to stick to the center line as closely as possible. When you come to a steep curve and you are traveling on the margins, it is so easy to slip off the road. And that's exactly where most Christians lose it. We travel on the margins, and then we hit some difficulties or trials or temptations. Before we realize it, we slip off, and are surprised to find ourselves sinning so badly.

DO NOT ENTER. God gracefully posts this sign near all sorts of dangerous exits and off ramps from the path He has chosen for us. He wants us to stay safely on the chosen road. But when we look at the other roads, they look so inviting and tempting.

PP#9: *A DO NOT ENTER sign, along with:* "What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God."
-Galatians 5:19-21

This innate desire to be on the other roads, this inborn longing for the forbidden, is called original sin. Our human tendency is to want what is not good for us. It's kind of like a bad alignment. When we are born, we are given a human life that is out of alignment. Our natural tendency is not to go straight down the middle. Instead we have an inherent drift to the right and to the left. To stay close to the center, we constantly and consistently have to apply effort and intentionality. We have to purposely steer to stay down the middle. When we don't, we naturally drift toward the edges.

Paul gets rather blunt about this drift, this original sin. In Galatians 5:19-21 he says, "What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do

other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God.”

PP#10: “So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn’t an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live.” - Romans 8:12-13

Paul also speaks about this original sin in terms of our old selves. This person of flesh, he says, desires all that is selfish and greedy, all that is wrong and ungodly. It pulls us away from the center and towards the outer edges, towards the exits to other tempting paths. And so we must deliberately put our old selves to the death—to crucify it with Jesus. We have to tell it “No!” and heed God’s DO NOT ENTER signs.

And so we must make intentional decisions not to steer off onto wrong paths. It’s not just about *knowing* right. It’s about *staying* right. The Christian life is not just about initially *choosing* the right path. It is about continuously *staying* on that path as you go, always steering to compensate for the natural drift towards the outer edge, and not taking other roads.

A couple of weeks ago we saw God’s sign that said NO OUTLET. Those paths don’t go all the way to where we want to go. But the paths that God have posted DO NOT ENTER by are so dangerous and destructive to travel that they will lead to your danger and possible ruin.

Let’s take a closer look at these. I’ll sort them into three kinds.

PP#11: DO NOT ENTER

1. Paths strictly forbidden

“Don’t deviate a bit to the right or the left; turn your feet away from evil.” -Proverbs 4:27

There are some paths that are strictly forbidden. They will thwart our journeys and stop us in our tracks. The most famous of these are the 10 Commandments. “Thou Shalt not...” These are clear “Do Not Enter” signs.

A couple of weeks ago we read from Proverbs 4. It warned about no outlets. Let’s go back to that chapter and look at it again, but keep reading. It also has God’s DO NOT ENTER sign.

PP#12: Proverbs 4:10-27 (CEB)

- 10 Listen, my son, and take in my speech,
then the years of your life will be many.
- 11 I teach you the path of wisdom.
I lead you in straight courses.
- 12 When you walk, you won’t be hindered;
when you run, you won’t stumble.
- 13 Hold on to instruction; don’t slack off;
protect it, for it is your life.
- 14 Don’t go on the way of the wicked;
don’t walk on the path of evil people.

Proverbs 4, Solomon says this is how to keep on the journey, not to be stopped early, “that the years of your life will be many.” The other paths are full of holes and stumbling stones. They will

trip you up and cause you to stumble. Starting in verse 10, “Listen, my son, and take in my speech, then the years of your life will be many. I teach you the path of wisdom. I lead you in straight courses. When you walk, you won’t be hindered; when you run, you won’t stumble. Hold on to instruction; don’t slack off; protect it, for it is your life.” Watch, now! Verse 14 starts with God’s DO NOT ENTER sign. “Don’t go on the way of the wicked; don’t walk on the path of evil people.”

PP#13: Proverbs 4:10-27 (CEB)

- 15 Avoid it! Don’t turn onto it;
stay off of it and keep going!
- 16 They don’t sleep unless they do evil;
they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble.
- 17 They eat the bread of evil,
and they drink the wine of violence.
- 18 The way of the righteous is like morning light
that gets brighter and brighter till it is full day.
- 19 The path of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they don’t know where they will stumble.

Again, in verse 15, “Avoid it! Don’t turn onto it [DO NOT ENTER!]; stay off of it and keep going! They don’t sleep unless they do evil; they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble. They eat the bread of evil, and they drink the wine of violence. The way of the righteous is like morning light that gets brighter and brighter till it is full day.”

Why has God placed a DO NOT ENTER sign there? Verse 19, “The path of the wicked is like deep darkness [it’s dangerous!]; they don’t know where they will stumble.” You will veer off! You don’t see it coming. You are surprised to find yourself stumbling. But that’s the quality of those roads. They may seem fine to our judgement, but they are dark and full of problems.

PP#14: Proverbs 4:10-27 (CEB)

- 20 My son, pay attention to my words.
Bend your ear to my speech.
- 21 Don’t let them slip from your sight.
Guard them in your mind.
- 22 They are life to those who find them,
and healing for their entire body.
- 23 More than anything you guard,
protect your heart, for life flows from it.

Avoid the dangerous roads. DO NOT ENTER. Instead, we are to stay fast on the right path, and strive to stay in the center. How? Verse 20, “My son, pay attention to my words. Bend your ear to my speech.” Pay attention to God’s words. Verse 21, “Don’t let them slip from your sight. Guard them in your mind. They are life to those who find them, and healing for their entire body.” Don’t take your eyes off God’s directions. Keep them in your heart. Desire God’s way, not the other paths. Verse 23, “More than anything you guard, protect your mind, for life flows from it.” Guard your heart...your desires, your will, your resolve. This is where the path of life is determined. Treasure God’s path. Want to be on God’s path. Don’t choose it merely to avoid the consequences of the other

paths, choose God's path because you want to be right with God, and have all of God's intention. Keep to the middle. Put to death that old self, that person of flesh.

PP#15: Proverbs 4:10-27 (CEB)

- 24 Have nothing to do with a corrupt mouth;
keep devious lips far from you.
- 25 Focus your eyes straight ahead;
keep your gaze on what is in front of you.
- 26 Watch your feet on the way,
and all your paths will be secure.
- 27 Don't deviate a bit to the right or the left;
turn your feet away from evil.

How? Stay off the shoulder. Look at verse 24. "Have nothing to do with a corrupt mouth; keep devious lips far from you." Start with the little things. Watch those little cheatings. Strive for purity and holiness, not to be as close to the edge as possible. Verse 25: Focus your eyes straight ahead; keep your gaze on what is in front of you. Watch your feet on the way, and all your paths will be secure." Stop your eye from wandering over to what you would like. Be careful about what you focus on, what you watch, what you see. Staying on God's road, but looking over at the other paths, makes you drift. I'm that way when I drive. When I look at something to my right, unintentionally, my hand moves my steering wheel to the right. Or if I look left, I drift towards the left. What you focus on is where you tend to head. What are you focused on?

Same with traveling on the margins. When we are focusing on the other paths, if that is where our hearts really are, then we are in danger of going off on a DO NOT ENTER path.

My mother-in-law said the best birth control pill is an M&M—between your knees! Don't even go there! Abstinence is the safest form of premarital sex. But we prefer the margins. "But we're just messing around a little bit. Nothing serious," or "But everyone does it," or "But it feels so right," or "But what if...we're truly in love," or "But what if...we're planning to get married."

Verse 27, "Don't deviate a bit to the right or the left; turn your feet away from evil." Don't dabble in satisfying the old flesh: Crucify the old flesh.

So God has placed some DO NOT ENTER signs in front of paths that are strictly forbidden. Don't even go there. Avoid them. They are destructive in and of themselves.

PP#16: DO NOT ENTER

- 1. Paths strictly forbidden
 - 2. Paths that seem harmless but are not beneficial
- "Everything is permitted, but everything isn't beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn't build others up." -1 Corinthians 10:23

But then there are paths that are not so clearly forbidden, paths that seem harmless enough. "What's wrong with that movie? What's wrong with that web site. Christians can get so prudish."

Well, why not? Again, why is our standard only what is permissible. Why isn't our standard what is beneficial. Why do we only ask, "What's wrong with it?" That's traveling on the shoulder. We should ask, "What's right with it." That's traveling closer to the center line. Christian is a *radical* follower of Jesus. He, and we, desire good, not just to avoid evil. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:23 "Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial." Or again, in 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul

says, “Even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything.” These innocent enough paths can become destructive when they lead to things slightly less innocent. Desensitization.

Few people get up one day and decide to go out and sin boldly. “Today I am going to go commit adultery and throw away all that I hold dear.” No. It happens slowly, one tiny little step at a time. It starts by asking, “What’s wrong with a harmless little lunch with so-and-so?” Well, nothing. But you’re traveling on the shoulder. As Proverbs said, the wicked don’t know why they stumble. There’s so busy asking, “What’s wrong with a little innocent on-line relationship?”

So the wise Christian holds close to the center line because it is good, and right, and wholesome. The focus is on what is helpful, and edifying and constructive. The desire is to stay on what is right, not simply avoid what is wrong.

I’m not saying that Christians can’t have fun, and indulge in harmless entertainment, or that Christians must be like the Puritans. But I do think that we should be asking a bit more frequently, “So what is good about it?” Ask that about the ways we spend our time, our monies, our talents. How am I living like a disciple? Does my life look different than those around me? I choose Jesus!

PP#17: DO NOT ENTER

1. Paths strictly forbidden
2. Paths that seem harmless but are not beneficial
3. Paths that cause others to stumble

“But watch out or else this freedom of yours might be a problem for those who are weak.”

-1 Cor. 8:9

“It’s a bad thing if it trips someone else.” -Romans 14:20b

But there is also a third kind of DO NOT ENTER sign. This is for paths that although fine, are for the sake of the brother and sister. Here Paul applies the higher standard of taking care not to offend someone else, or out of concern for a weaker brother (1 Cor. 8:9 and 10:24). That is the main reason United Methodists are careful with alcohol. It’s not bad, in and of itself. It may even be harmless...do you. But it can cause a disaster for a brother or sister. He or she may see us and think it is okay, only to find it a slave and a trap, destroying their lives. Imagine a dry alcoholic, for example, coming to take Holy Communion with the smell of wine in the air.

Or again, as Paul says in Romans 14:20, we abstain for the sake of appearance. The Christian desires his or her life to be a witness and an example. When others watch us, we want them to see Christ. We avoid certain things for the sake of appearances. An example of this may be going to the casino. It may be harmless to us, if we are able to cap our gambling at \$100 bucks. That’s the same price as a show downtown. So, fair price for pleasant entertainment. But, what about others? Do they think this is how we handle money? The culture teaches us to risk for big gain, solve our financial problems by hoping to win. We DO NOT ENTER because of what others might learn from us.

So God has posted DO NOT ENTER signs all along our journey. He posts them for our own benefit. He posts them so we may avoid what is destructive and pursue what is good. He posts them for the benefit of others. He posts them because God desires us to stick to the path of life. DO NOT ENTER. Why? Because God has a better way. God has a plan for our journey that is far better.

PP#18: DO NOT ENTER

1. Paths strictly forbidden
2. Paths that seem harmless but are not beneficial

3. Paths that cause others to stumble

4. Any path that is not love

“And now I’m going to show you the most excellent way....the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 12:31b, 13:13b

Paul also said *that*, right before 1 Corinthians 13. He’s talking about all the spiritual gifts. And then he comes to 1 Corinthians 12:31. He says, “And now I will show you *the most excellent way*.” And he launches into what has become one of the most famous and most powerful passages of Scripture: the Love Chapter. That is what God is directing us toward. That is what should characterize our Christian journeys. “Love is patient. Love is kind...Love bears all things, love hopes all things, love endures all things...Now these three remain: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.”

PP#19: *Image of a car driving down the center of a road named “The Most Excellent Way.*

God places lots of Do Not Enter signs along our Christian journey, because He wants us to hold fast to the center of the path of love. That is “the most excellent way.”

Amen.

Closing Song: *Standing on the Promises* -Sanctify

Memory Verse -David

“Don’t deviate a bit to the right or the left; turn your feet away from evil.” -Proverbs 4:27

Announcements -David

-Grow Groups

-St. Andrew’s Family Shelter

Benediction -David