

Years ago... when I was first starting out in ministry... I came across a quote... which I think has impacted my ministry. I hope that as you consider what it says... and how it is illustrated in our passage of Scripture today... that it will also impact your life as well... The quote says:

“Following the path of least resistance makes both rivers... and people crooked.”

When I took a geology course in college... I remember looking at birds-eye view pictures of rivers from around the world. ... We didn't see any that followed a straight line. That is because the water carves a path into the soil ... as it moves toward the sea... and it will always take an alternative route whenever it hits an obstruction... such as a granite structure... Once it's path is blocked... it immediately changes course. It always takes the easiest route. So rivers are constantly bending and turning as they wind their way to the ocean. “Following the path of least resistance makes rivers crooked.”

And it also makes people crooked.

Fred is the same as you and I. ... He wants to be well-liked by others. As a believer... he knows that it is not appropriate to participate in sexually graphic humor and course jesting. ... But when his friends... who he feels accepted by... and whom he meets with every Tuesday for breakfast down at Gordy's Coffee shop... (when they) move the conversation in that direction... it is just easier to say nothing. The first couple of times Fred just sat there. He said nothing. He did not participate in the conversation. But by the third week... when conversation turned raunchy... he felt some discomfort that he was beginning to stand out... because of his silence. ...

He sensed that he was being perceived as not being one of the guys. To keep from being rejected... now the easiest thing was to start showing approval. So he starts nodding and laughing. Mildly... at first... then more vigorously. Eventually he comes to the point where he feels he should start demonstrating his own creativity... in order to keep up... and remain one of the guys. So he begins to initiate the course jesting and dirty joke telling.

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Rita is new to the church. She and her husband just moved here and they are looking forward to how God might use them with their gifts. ... Imagine how excited she was when Mary called... Mary is the food-for-the-homeless- ministry coordinator... Mary asked Rita if she would like to help with the Thanksgiving outreach project. ... She asked Rita if she would like to be in on the planning of the event... and of course... help serve the meal. ...Of course Rita agrees. She attends the planning meeting where Rita is immediately welcomed by Judy... Francine... and Cora. The meeting... (held at Judy's house)... was run smoothly and efficiently... and immediately afterward... Mary (who led the meeting) had to leave... Mary had barely walked out the door before Judy (the hostess for the meeting) starts criticizing Mary. *“I can't believe the way she passed out all our assignments. Who does she think she is and who does she think we are... her minions...?”* Rita heard other things about how Mary wears the pants in her family... at home... and how her husband is such a passive Harvey Milquetoast. The other two ladies also offered their stories and things they had heard from others about Mary's home life. *“You know... the only reason she is head of this committee is because she is the best friend of*

the pastor's wife..." ... As Rita listens to all of this... she knows how wrong gossip and grumbling are... that Paul makes it clear in Philippians 2:14 that believers are to have nothing to do with it. And although Rita recognizes how destructive it is in the church... she is new in this church. She knows how difficult it would be for someone like her to stand up for what is right. It would be much easier to ignore it... and hope that it gets addressed by someone else who has been there longer. ... But because Rita did not say anything... you can well imagine what happened during the Thanksgiving outreach... when Mary had to leave and go buy more napkins. ... Rita was allowed in to more conversations about Mary's improper leadership at church and in her home. ... But you know... the Thanksgiving outreach did not seem like the time and place for her to make a scene... by challenging the other two ladies... so Rita remained silent.

“Following the path of least resistance makes both rivers... and people crooked.”

Have you ever kept your mouth shut... because it was easier... when you were being prompted to witness for Christ...? Do you have inconsistent times when you get alone with the Lord to pray and read Scripture... because... well... it is just easier to turn the television on... or to sleep in a little longer...? Men... are you praying with your wives every day... before your head hits the pillow at night...? Are you praying with her about the stresses and challenges of her day... and your day...? Or are you giving in... to what is easier... just go to sleep... and let her deal with her own issues...? (Why bring them up, anyway...? It might lead to an all-night discussion...)

My prayer... is that today's passage of Scripture... will cause us to sit up... and take notice of the areas in our life... where we are at great risk... because we have been seeking the easiest way... the path of least resistance. ... But before we turn to our passage... let me call your attention to what Jesus asked His followers... in Luke 6:46... In a section of this Gospel... where Jesus is telling several parables... He stops... and he profoundly asks... "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?"

You know... to be very honest here... the reason that I think I am so willing to call Jesus "Lord, Lord" but not do what He says... is because I am too consumed by a pursuit of following paths of least resistance in my life. *"Lord... I don't want to deal with THAT! Not now... not me! I prefer to just ignore it and hope it goes away... or somebody else will take care of it..."*

Now... let's turn to our passage in Judges 18... and see where that attitude takes us... The chapter constitutes the conclusion to the story that began in Judges 17 (our passage last week.) It features a man named Micah and an anonymous Levite — that is... a member of the Israelite tribe of Levi. ... Now... in Judges 18... we are about to see the tribe of Dan join the story. Together... the two chapters make up part one of the two-part epilogue to the book of Judges.

Judges 18:1-2

The Danites did not believe... nor have the courage... to claim their inheritance in the promised land of God. ... Society was permeated with a spirit of unbelief... and a lack of courage. This is clearly seen in the tribe of

Dan who failed to believe God... failed to lay claim to their inheritance in the promised land.

Remember... Joshua had led the Israelite army to conquer the major city-fortresses throughout Canaan. ... He had broken the back of the enemy so that a major alliance could not be formed against the Israelites. ... Once the promised land had been divided among the twelve tribes... it was up to the individual tribes to complete the conquest of their inheritance. ... Only small pockets of resistance remained. ... Each tribe was entrusted with the task of mopping up... by driving the remaining Canaanites out.

But as the Israelites settled down in their various inherited territories... many of them decided to take the path of least resistance. ... They became lax and complacent... failing to continue the conquest. ... Dan was one of these tribes.

The Danites were "at ease in Zion"... and they failed to lay claim to their full territorial inheritance in the promised land. ... As a result... of their not driving the Canaanites out of the land... eventually the Danites became squeezed between the Amorites to the east of them... and the Philistines to the west. ... They became pinched- in and land-locked. ... At this point they could have obeyed what the Lord called them to do – drive out the occupiers of the land God had given them... or look for an easier way – which is what they chose. Thus, the Danites had to search for more land. Hopefully something not too difficult for them to take.

Their leaders appointed five spies and sent them out on a reconnaissance mission to find land that would be easier to conquer... than pushing the Amorites and the Philistines off their land. ...

This speaks to us... doesn't it...? The path of least resistance for us... is to become satisfied with what we have in Christ... (our salvation)... and to see that if we are to lay hold of any more of His promises... or commit any more of ourselves to the One we call Lord... it will cost too much: too much energy... too much money... too much personal sacrifice. ... The result is tragic... the desperate needs of those around us go unmet. ... Marriages suffer... homes remain dark without the light of the Gospel... our missionaries serving overseas feel abandoned... local kids get their sense of belonging from joining a gang... A lot of ministry just does not happen – because ministry is always inconvenient... and churches are full of believers who want to follow the path of least resistance.

Believers refuse to drive from their lives sin patterns and habits that need to go... because it is much easier to just come to church... put a little money in the offering... and take on the appearance of godliness... ... instead of finding an accountability prayer partner or getting linked with a strong Bible study fellowship.

When we fail to obey and trust the Lord and His Word, though it may be difficult at times, we lose what God intended for us.

When we get serious with God... He will get serious with us. ... When God's people learn to pray and get hold of God... they will see things happen beyond their comprehension.

But... it was the love of ease... that the Danites had... that led them down the road to idolatry. ... There was no commitment to God's will.

Judges 18:3-6

If the tribe of Dan had really wanted God's counsel... they could have consulted with the high priest... over in Shiloh. ... But they didn't because they were actually rejecting God's counsel by refusing to remain in the land He had assigned to them. ... Therefore, it wasn't likely God would have revealed anything to them. Look what Jesus said...

John 7:17 (ESV)

If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

The best way of knowing God's will on something... is to make sure you are obeying Him in what He has already told you He wants...

God had told the Danites what He wanted... they rejected it for what they thought would be an easier way... and so they should not expect to hear a true message from God. But here they are... the disobedient... seeking God's counsel from a disobedient priest!

Today... disobedient people have a tendency to seek approval for their decisions... by seeking counsel from those... who will agree with them... instead of those who... are their proper authority. ...They usually will not go to the ones who are spiritually responsible for them which might be a parent... a husband... and elder... or a pastor. ... If you need counsel... go to those who are spiritually responsible for you. ... All that these Danites got... was the answer they wanted to hear.

The priest's answer... "under the eye of the Lord" ... captures the ambiguity of the priest's response. What kind of a Fortune cookie answer is that...? The future actions of the Danites may have been seen by God... but what exactly does that mean...? Does it mean that they were approved by God...? ... No.

Judges 18:7

The Danites come to Laish and find the people careless... calm... and confident. ... They are a prime target for attack and are considered a possible easy victory. ... The land in this valley was like a paradise with lush... green land overgrown with vegetation. ... Water came from almost every rock and hill as it poured down from Mount Lebanon. ... What a prize this would be! This was exactly what they were looking for – so much easier than God's very inconvenient plan for them.

Satan uses this same tactic on us. ... He makes the alternative path to God's will smooth... easy... alluring... and even beautiful. ... It is only later that all the rocks... thorns... and poisonous weeds begin to surface. ... Softness and ease NOW... pain and overwhelming hardship LATER. ... When Jonah ran from God, he just happened to find a ship going the opposite direction from where the Lord wanted him to go. The path out of God's will was easily accessible but a huge storm came later into Jonah's life. ... (AND YOU CAN BE CERTAIN) that those storms will come into our life if we get out of God's will.

Judges 18:8-10

Hearing what they want to hear from the false priest... the scouts see what they want to see when they come to Laish. ... The land is bountiful—it “lacks nothing”—and its inhabitants are defenseless. ... Upon their return... they urge their tribesmen to attack the unsuspecting residents of Laish, even saying that God has given the land to them.

“Arise... Ondelay! Ondelay! We have to act fast. It is now or never!” ... You know... that is how Satan often acts isn't it. Do not stop and think... and especially don't pray about it... or seek Godly counsel. Simply act NOW – or you'll lose out!

Judges 18:11-16

This was not a social call... but a criminal act of breaking and entering... and of stealing valuables from Micah's property. ... With their superior manpower... the migrating Danites were able to take whatever they wanted. But note what they took... only the religious items sitting in the shrine on Micah's property.

Judges 18:17-19

The spies had advised their tribesmen that they knew what to do... but now the Levite asks the Danites, “What are you doing?” ... It's a good question for a Levite... a supposed teacher of the law of Israel... to ask of fellow Israelites who are breaking the law. ... Earlier... the scouts asked the Levite to inquire of God and speak to them... and he endorsed their disobedience. Now they urge him to be quiet so that they can break the law of God without interference. ... Moreover... the scouts offer the Levite a more prestigious job as priest to an entire tribe. ... The Levite jumps at the offer...

abandons Micah... who had taken him in... and goes off with the thieves. What are the Danites doing? ... We might ask of the Levite... “What are you doing?”

What are you doing? ... It’s a good question. ... Much of what we do... we don’t do reflectively - but instead... we do it reflexively (without thinking.) The whole point of today’s message... is to get us to slow down long enough to ask... “What am I doing...? Am I merely pursuing the path of least resistance...? ... So many of our decisions are reflexive – an automatic response to take the easiest route. ... But what seems easier... as we have been seeing... is OFTEN Satan’s deception to get us away from God’s will.

Take time to ask yourself what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. Whatever it is you’re doing, are you governed by a sense of wanting to please God...? Examine even your prayer life. What are the things you most often pray for...? ... An easier life...? “*Lord, please remove this situation in my life... because it sure would make my life a lot easier...*”

Sometimes I even wonder why we as Believers pray for revival in our land. Is it because it would make our lives a whole lot easier... not having to worry about crime and injustice being done against us...? ... Why are we praying for revival...? Because God deserves such glory...? Because so many lost souls will end up in Hell if we don’t have one soon..? ... If that is the case... than we would be willing to be personally inconvenienced... in order to see revival in our land...?

Judges 18:20-22

The Danites put the women and children in the front... since that was the safest place... because any attacks would come from the rear. ... By the time the Danites had traveled some distance away... Micah discovered that his shrine was out of business... having neither gods nor priest... so he called his neighbors together... and they pursued the invaders. ... After all... a man must protect his gods... you know!

Idolaters worship gods they can carry... but Christians worship a God who carries us!

Judges 18:23-24

Micah's sad question "*What else do I have?*" reveals the folly and the tragedy of merely having the appearance of godliness... by following the path of least resistance.

The Danite thugs questioned Micah about the armed force he had mobilized. ... But Micah sharply protested... accusing them of being thieves and stealing his idol gods... the most important thing he possessed. ... In essence... he was claiming that he was helpless... and vulnerable without the idols sitting in his shrine. ... Without them... his gods would not be present to guide him nor to look after his welfare.

Pathetically... Micah pleads, "*What else do I have?*"... He built his life around his gods and his priest. But now his gods and his priest have left him. ... Without his gods and his priest... Micah feels naked and vulnerable to all manner of calamity. ... What else does Micah have? ... Nothing!

If you and I are ever led down a path... that is not part of God's will... because we have reflexively been making choices on what was easy... Hopefully we will come to the same conclusion. I have nothing.

The Danites actually may have done him a favor by stealing his idols and his priest. They took from him idols and a "priest" who were intensifying his spiritual corruption. ... Without them to lean on... perhaps he will lean on the Lord.

Later on in Israel's history... the gods and the Levite will also fail the Danites... who will also be left to plead... "What else do we have?" It came many years later... when the Assyrians came and captured them... along with nine other tribes of Israel.

One of the paths that Satan often gets a believer to follow is the elusive way of financial security. ... As practical as a retirement account is... as wise as it is to put away for the future... and to be good stewards of our money... it can lead down a wrong path... as we set our sights on making life easier.

Let's face it: no matter what you do, your money is never Safe . Your dollars, wherever they are, are about as reliable as Micah's idols, which he lost to the more powerful Danites, who stood to lose them to the next taker. Furthermore, there are plenty of pseudo priests in this world who will service you as well, as the Levite serviced the Danites: pitchmen, schemers, and charlatans, not to mention fortune tellers, astrologists, and even, sad to say, preachers, who predict that your way will be successful,

telling you not what you need to hear but what you want to hear and, in some cases, even promising God's blessing, contrary to the instruction of his word. Such pseudo priests make the easy way even easier and reinforce your sinful, wayward quest, especially if you, like the Danites, line their pockets and give them the credibility they covet.

The shape-shifting pseudo priests, however, are just as reliable as our money. Men and women who tell you what you want to hear, not what you need to hear, in order to line their pockets and raise their profiles, so that more people will believe them and pay them, simply can't be trusted.

One day, if we put our trust in money, which counts for nothing in the end, and in pseudo priests, who can't bring themselves to speak the truth, we will find ourselves pleading, as they slip through our grasp, just as they slipped through the grasp of the Levite and, eventually, the Danites, "What else do I have?" If that day arrives before our death, we can thank God, for when you have nothing, then you can find everything—that is, you can find the Lord.

Judges 18:25-27

The soldiers of the Tribe of Dan travel one hundred miles north and attack the peaceful people of Laish. ...These folks were minding their own business and bothered no one. ... But do you know what...? This was actually the very fulfilment of a prophecy that Jacob made... as he spoke about the character of each of his sons... and their heritage... before he died. ... In today's narrative... we see what Jacob meant...

Genesis 49:17 (ESV)

Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward.

But let's be clear about something... Just because the Danites successfully defeated Laish... does not mean their actions were right. ... Their idolatry showed that God was not guiding them. ... They were merely following the path of least resistance.

Today many justify their wrong actions by outward signs of success. They think that wealth... popularity... or lack of suffering is an indication of God's blessing. ... But many stories in the Bible indicate that evil and earthly success can go hand in hand. ... Success doesn't indicate God's approval. Don't allow personal success (especially if it leads to an easier life) to become a measuring rod of whether or not you are pleasing God.

Judges 18:28-30

Wait, the Levite has a name...? ... Jonathan...? ... And he is the son of who...? ... Of Gershom...? ... And just so we are clear... was this Gershom the son of Moses... ? ... Yes! ... Moses...? ... You mean the corrupt Levite is the grandson of Moses... the lawgiver... ? Yes... That is exactly what the narrator goes out of his way... to make clear. ... Idolatry has even overtaken the family of one of the most revered households in all of Israel.

The Levite's name is revealed for the first time (**Jonathan**), as well as his lineage — apostasy has even infected the house of **Moses**.

Things go from bad to worse in Israel. ... Earlier... one man and his family bowed before an idol. ... Now an entire tribe bows before it. And a member of Israel's most respected families is right in the center of it!

Apostasy that comes from pursuing choices because they are easy... is no respecter of households. ... It can happen anywhere... to anyone. ... The withholding of Johnathan's name and his relationship to Moses... until the very end of the narrative... is a Paul Harvey type ending... "And now you know... .. the rest... .. of the story! But hold on... there is just a little more to the rest of the story concerning the tribe of Dan...

Judges 18:31

The Danites were the first tribe of Israelites to have their own official god... that was in contrast to Yahweh... Who was to be worship in Shiloh... at that time. ... The contrast that is seen as the chapter closes is quite significant.

Idolatry and easy choices for the Danites did not bring immediate consequences. They looked successful at first but eventually failed. In First Chronicles the tribe of Dan was ignored in the list of tribes. They vanished into obscurity by intermarrying with the other nations. When you look at Revelation chapter seven you will find 144,000 Jewish believers will evangelize the world in the Tribulation. The tribe of Dan is not mentioned. God refused to give them special ministry of being a witness for Him in the future because they refused to follow God's commands for the land of Israel by choosing the easy-looking way. The Danites would not take what God had provided. They would not accept God's will and choice for them. Instead, they took what God had not given and ended up losing everything they had. The same thing happened to Micah. The same thing happens to us!

"Following the path of least resistance makes both rivers... and people crooked."