

I invite you to open your bibles this morning, to today's scripture text, which can be found in the book of Proverbs, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, verses 5-6. Which can be found on page \_\_\_ in your pew bibles. Today concludes our series "Taking care of God's gifts" Today's scripture reveals a lesson of Trusting God in the midst of Change.

Pr 3:5-6

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
6 in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

NIV

We live in a time that routine is what many of us seek during the course of our day. I myself have been known to say that I am a routine regimented disciplinarian. Someone whose discipline operates within a regiment of routine. We are creatures of habit. We were created to like that routine, and there's nothing wrong with that, unless the routine gets in the way or replaces what God is calling you and I to do. This whole concept is centered out of a sense of comfort and security that comes within the routine. You could even say that it is in itself a sense of rebellion against change. For we all get into comfort zones that we prefer not to disrupt, out of fear of the unknown that might result, if we give into change.

I will attest to you, that there have been many times in my life where God called me to change. He called me to change the way I was thinking. He called me to change the way I was feeling. He called me to change what I was doing in my daily routines. He called me to change my occupation. He called me to change so many things about myself, and my life, that it would be difficult to mention them all here today. The sad reality of this situation is, that sometimes we will not receive the blessings from God, unless we make the tough decision to change. We are talking about the genuine life change that the Gospel tells us about over and over throughout scripture.

At the very core of salvation, is change. At the very core of being saved, of receiving Jesus, is change. Jesus did not come to die on the cross for us, to leave us in the same sad state that we were in. He came here to die on the cross so that you and I could change from being in slavery. Slaves to sin, slaves to unrighteousness, slaves to un-holiness, Jesus calls us to change.

For Jesus said “... if the Son sets you **free**, (meaning Him) if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” So, when we deny change friends, we are denying the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are denying what Jesus will do for us. He said, “Behold, I make all things new.” When we deny change we deny the blessing of God.

So, this morning we are going to take a close look at a way that we can make the difficult decision, to change. Which brings us to this mornings scripture text. In the book of proverbs, chapter 3: verses 5-6 **5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.** NIV

These two verses are among the most beloved in all the Bible. Many of us memorized them in Sunday School years ago. In any listing of favorite Bible passages these verses would rank near the top. I’ll bet there are some of you who have those two verses on a plaque in your home somewhere to remind you of their great truth.

This text is striking in its simplicity. There is nothing difficult about it. It is so simple that it can be understood by the youngest believer and yet it is a comfort to the oldest saint of God. And it is good for all Christians in-between. It has been the hope and encouragement of countless multitudes of God’s people across the centuries.

Because it is utterly simple, we may prove it true any time we like. These words cling to the soul because they speak to a great need we all feel—the need for guidance in our time of change. After all, there is no question greater than this:

What is the will of God for my life? I do not know a Christian who does not wrestle with God's will sooner or later:

—"I wonder if I should get married."

—"I've been offered a new job. Should I take it or wait for a better offer?"

—"I've been accepted at two colleges. Which one should I attend?"

—"Should I go back to school for my master's degree?"

—"Should I quit my job, so I can start a new career? Perhaps start a company?"

—"Lord, what do you want me to do?"

Proverbs 3:5-6 suggests the basis on which guidance will come during your time of change. It is a short course in knowing God's will for your life. If you will learn what this passage really is teaching, and begin to apply it in your daily life, it will make a profound difference when you come to make those really tough decisions about change.

I am finishing the series "taking care of God's gifts" here in this scripture, with the assumption that most of us have known these verses for a long time. Sometimes when we know a passage so well, we almost know it too well. We know it so much that we really have never stopped to think about what its words are really saying.

Recently, I had a chance to study these verses for the first time ever. As I did, I discovered that five key words unlock the message of this text. Let's take those key words one by one and see what each one teaches us.

## 1. Trust.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” That’s a word that in Hebrew means “to lean with the full body,” “to lay upon,” “to rest the full weight upon.” In our thinking the word trust means to rely upon or to have confidence in. But the Hebrew word is stronger. It is the idea of stretching yourself out upon a bed or laying on a hard surface. The word means to put your full weight prostrate on something. To trust in the Lord is to lay your whole weight upon him.

The story is told of a father who discovers three young children walking on the top of a high fence. Fearing that they would fall from such a height, he went over to them with outstretched arms and said to them “hurry before you fall, jump into my arms!” Promptly, without hesitation, two of the children jumped into the fathers outstretched arms. The third one, refused. So the father was asked “why did the third child hesitate? Why didn’t the third child jump into your arms?” To which the father replied, “the first two, are my children, and the third, is not.” You see, my children know that they can depend upon me, my children know that they can trust me, and so they did not hesitate, they immediately jumped. The third didn’t know if I was trustworthy. And so it is, with God, the father.

Friends, you and I know God, amen? That’s why we are gathered here today, amen? We know God. The trouble that we have, is that at times we are more like that third child, than we are like the first two children. Because we don’t want change. We hesitate, we draw back, we fail to trust. That’s the whole message this morning, its about trusting in God. Trust in the Lord, with all your heart. He has proven himself trustworthy over and over and over again.

How many of you, before you sat down in your seats, looked underneath, to be sure that it was stable, so that you could sit down? How many of you hesitantly began to push on the pew to discover if it was strong enough to sit on? I wonder if it can hold me? In our relationship with God, we do that very thing. We question, we hesitate, and God says trust in me with all of your heart, don't hold anything back, jump into my arms is what God is saying.

2. Lean. "Lean not to your own understanding." It means to rest upon for partial support. Leaning is what you do when you walk with a cane or grab a walker because you are unsteady. It is used in the Old Testament for leaning against a tree or a stone cliff. You lean on something when you are not strong enough to stand alone. Sometimes in our life we lean on our strength, we lean on our ability, we lean on those things that we can control, we lean on what we know. We lean on those routines in life, those habits, those things of familiarity. We lean on the comfort and the security that those things bring to us. That's what we lean on; so much so that we drive the same route to work, we do the same activities each day, we get up at the same time every day, we eat the same foods, we are creatures of habit, and we lean on those comfort things. That causes us to not jump, into the arms of God. When we lean on our own control, we are missing what God wants for us.

3. Understanding. "Lean not on your own understanding." The word has to do with your mental faculties. It refers to the mental processes by which you analyze a problem, break it down into its smaller parts, and then you make a decision about what you are going to do. It's what you use early in the morning when you make a list on an index card of all the things you have to do that day.

You use your understanding to chart out the priorities of each day. Or it's what you use on Sunday night when you map out the oncoming week. That's understanding. You use it any time you plan your life, solve a problem, or consider change. So, the word understanding refers to those mental processes by which you look at a problem, you analyze it, and you decide how you are going to solve it. It is also how you set up the order of your life. It is not a bad word. Understanding is simply the decision-making ability that God has given you.

When you take the word "lean," put it with the word "understanding" and add the negative, you get an idea like this: "Use all your mental powers, but do not lean on them for total support." Don't trust in your own ability to figure out your life. Lean instead on the Lord! Rest your weight on him!

4. Acknowledge. I am going to say a little bit more about this word because I think that "acknowledge" doesn't do full justice to the original text. In the Hebrew this word is an imperative. It is a command. It is the imperative form of the verb to know. You could translate this by saying, "In all your ways know him."

The underlying Hebrew word means to know deeply and intimately. It's the kind of knowing that comes with personal experience. It means to know something through and through.

For instance, somebody might say, "Do you know the President of the United States?" I would say, "Sure, I know the President of the United States." What I mean is if the President walked in, I would know who he is. If I were in a room and heard his voice coming over the TV, I would recognize the distinctive voice of the President of the United States. Or if I picked up a newspaper, I might see his picture

on the front page, and I would say, "I know who that is, I know that man. That is the President of the United States."

Now, I don't really know him. I can't pick up the phone and call the White House, and say, "Donald, this is Ray. Let's do lunch this week." He won't take my call because I don't know him personally. I just know him at the level of head knowledge. I don't know him intimately or on a friendship level.

There is another way of knowing. I know my wife and she knows me in a completely different way. We've known each other intimately for 28 years. After being together that long, strange things begin to happen. You will be sitting there thinking about a song. And she'll start singing it. How does that happen? I don't know. Or you will be thinking about a question, and before you can ask it, she'll blurt out the answer. How did she do that? I don't know. Or you'll start a sentence, and to your great irritation, she will finish the sentence before you will. When you say, "How can you do that?" she says with a smile, "I know what you are thinking even before you say it."

Things like that happen to all married couples eventually. When you live together that long, you get to know each other at such a deep level, that you just don't know each other on the outside, you actually begin to know what the other person is thinking as they are thinking it, you know what they are going to say before they say it, you know what they are going to do before they do it because you have a deep, personal, intimate knowledge of each other.

Seen in that light, we might translate verse 5 this way: "In all your ways know God intimately. In all your ways know God deeply. In all your ways know God personally. In every area of your life know God intimately, deeply and personally

because when you know God that way in every area of your life, then he will direct your paths.”

5. Direct. “He will make your paths straight.” That brings me to the fifth word, which in the King James is translated “He shall direct your paths.” That is not bad. But I think the NIV is a little better: “He will make your paths straight.”

It has the idea of a road which appears to be impassable. The road winds through the mountains and goes down into the swamps. It seems to have a thousand switchbacks. As you study it, you discover that portions of the road are washed out, others are filled with potholes, still others with huge boulders. In some places the road apparently becomes a dead end.

It is the road of your life. That’s the road you are traveling right now. As you look at it, it appears to be covered with boulders and rocks. It appears to be filled with potholes. It appears to be a road to nowhere. That’s the way life is. Some of you have come through a week filled with boulders.

And you spent your whole week trying to drive around them. And as far as you can see in the future, the road is filled with nothing but potholes and nothing but sewage in the bottom of those potholes. So, you’ve come out of the tough week, and you are not looking to the week ahead with any excitement because the road seems filled with obstacles and potholes.

Here is God’s message to you from Proverbs 3:5-6. If you will know God in every area of your life, he himself will take personal responsibility to make your way smooth and straight. He will remove the obstacles if they need to be removed. He will fill in the potholes if they need to be filled. He will redirect the detour so

that what seemed to be a dead-end turns out to be the shortest way to reach your destination.

All you have to do is trust in the Lord. Lay yourself completely on him for full support upon him. Don't lean for support on your own human understanding. In all your ways know God intimately. He will take the path of your life which seems to go up and down and around and sometimes seems to curve backwards, and he will make your way straight. That's the promise of Almighty God to you.

You are trusting when you are waiting on God to show you the next step you should take. So many of us don't do that. The Bible says in all your ways know him intimately, know him deeply, know him personally. As a man knows a woman, know God that way. Know him to that depth. Know him to that kind of fellowship and that kind of intimacy.

So often we skip this. When we get up in the morning, and we say, "O God, help us. I'm busy today. I've got a lot of stuff to do. Lord, I don't even have time to pray so here's my list. Bless it all, Lord. I've got to go." We throw our list up toward heaven while we run out the door. What we are saying is, "God, here's my schedule, rubber stamp it with your blessing." And we wonder why our days are filled with frustration.

Many of us want to go through life leaning almost completely upon our own understanding. A lot of us are basically control freaks. I number myself among that group. I like to know what's going on. I like to be in charge of my own destiny. This passage is a warning to all of us control freaks who lay out life the way we want it and then say, "Here, God, you stamp it with your blessing because I am going to go out and do it for you."

God says, "I don't work that way. You know me first. Put me first in everything including all your plans and all your thinking and all your scheming. Put me first. And I then will make your way straight."

Do you want to know the secret of knowing the will of God? Here it is. In everything you do, know God. But we all want a formula. "Pastor Ray, I don't like that. Give me a formula. Give me three steps." Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that the secret is a relationship with God. But we want a formula.

We want to reduce our relationship with God to a formula. Give me three steps so I will know what to do. God says, "Know me. Spend time with me. Put me first in every area of your life because when you do that I will take care of all those details." Brothers and sisters, do you understand that this is a revolutionary way of looking at life and approaching change?

We're hung up on the decisions of life. Should I go here? Should I go there? Should I do this? Should I do that? Should I go back to school? Should I start this company, or should I not? Wait a minute.

Here is the teaching of this passage stated in one sentence: God is much less concerned with what you do than with what kind of person you are. He is much less concerned with what you do; he is much more concerned with what kind of person you are. So when you say, "Lord, should I go here or go there?" you are asking the wrong question. The question is not where are you going to go, but what kind of person are you going to be wherever you go. The question is not: Who should I marry, but what kind of person am I going to be no matter who I marry?

We focus all our energy on decisions. God says, Know me. And I will take care of the details. We want specific direction. God says, In all your ways know me and everything else will fall into place.

In light of this text, what is the will of God for your life? To know God in everything. To see him present everywhere and in everything.

Here in the sanctuary, there in the workplace.

Here when we sing, there when we work.

Here when we worship, there when we study.

Here when we pray, there when we play.

Here when we clap, there when we date.

Here when we listen, there when we speak.

God is saying, "I want you to know me just as much out there as you do in here. I want you to know me on Monday, on Tuesday, on Wednesday just as much as you do on Sunday morning at 11:00 AM." That's crucial. When you decide to know God in every area of life, he takes charge of the details, and the decision to make change comes with ease knowing that God is in control.

So, the most important thing is not just the decisions you are facing. The most important thing is your relationship with God. And the closer you get to God, the easier it will be for God to guide you in the way he wants you to go.

Knowing God means using all your energies for him:

Lord, here are my hands. Use them to do your will this week.

Lord, here are my lips. Speak through them this week.

Lord, here are my eyes. I am going to be watching for you this week.

Lord, here are my ears. I am going to be listening for you this week.

Lord, here are my feet. I am going to be going for you this week.

Knowing God means taking all that you have and placing it at the disposal of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Our text ends with a promise. "He will make your paths straight." God is able to remove the obstacles in front of you. He is able to fill in the potholes and turn a dead-end into a short-cut. God rewards those who show regard to him by leading them straight to the right end and removing all the obstacles along the way.

We rarely see this in advance. We mostly see the potholes. The boulders block our view. Many times it seems as if there is no path at all. But he will make a way.

No one can say how he will do it. There are thousands of ways in which God leads his children. He leads us through delays, detours, miracles, the advice of friends, unexpected opportunities, suddenly closed doors, answered prayer, unanswered prayer, inner impressions, and a still small voice in the night. The old hymn says, "All the way my Savior leads me, What have I to ask beside? Can I doubt his tender mercy, he through life has been my guide."

You don't see it on this side. On this side you see the problems. But when you know God, he leads you step by step. When the journey is done, you look back and say, "I don't know how I got from there to here, but I do know this: Jesus led me all the way."

This verse is true. Thousands of saints living and dead can testify to that fact. He will lead the way. He will remove the obstacles. You will have a straight path for your journey.

One more thought and I am done. What is the secret of this text? One word: He shall direct thy path. Who is the “he” of Proverbs 3:6? The “he” is the God of the Bible. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of Moses. The God of Israel. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God who spoke and a thousand million galaxies sprang into being. The God who has numbered the grains of sand. The God who knows the hair on your head. The God who sees the sparrow when it falls. The God who holds the universe in his hands. That God, the Almighty, Transcendent God of the universe, he will direct your paths. That’s the God who says, “If you will but know me, I will take care of the details. Trust me. Rest your full weight on me. Know me in everything. And I, the God of the universe, will direct your paths.”

If God has said he will lead you, then why are you so fearful of change? If God has said he will take up your cause, then why are you worried about tomorrow?

No evil can battle if he leads the way.

No enemy can stop you if he leads the way.

No opposition can derail you if he leads the way.

No obstacle can stand forever if he leads the way.

In all your ways know him, and he shall direct your paths. He has promised, and it is so. It may not be easy. It may not be exactly the way you want to go. It may not be what seems to you the shortest way. But he will direct your paths.

All he says is “Know me. Know me deeply and intimately in every area of your life, and I will take care of all the rest.” What is the will of God for your life? The will of God for your life is that you in all your ways should know him because when you know him in every area he has said he will direct your paths.

He promised—and he will not fail—he will direct your paths.

Heavenly Father,

We thank you Lord for your grace, we thank you for sending us your Son,

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

We thank you for your presence in our lives moment by moment,

We thank you for your strength that you provide us in times of change,

And for the stability you give us during our weak moments,

when we lean upon you Lord.

Forgive us Father in our times of weakness, when we turn from you,

when we turn to our own will to navigate the tough roads of life,

Show us your paths of righteousness, the straight path, for us to travel.

Give us the wisdom to know that you are in control of our lives,

And that all we need to do is know you intimately,

Moment by moment, and put our trust in you Father,

So that you may be glorified in all we do, and we will truly be blessed.

Amen