

Sermon by Terry Trivette
Dealing with Difficulties – 4
Proverbs 3:5-6
“Instructions for the Indecisive”

1. If you visit the city of Jerusalem, and go near what is known as the “Jaffa Gate”, there you will find a small terrace at the top of hill. The locals call it “the Terrace of Indecision”. On this little terrace, it is said that the ground is so level that when the rain falls upon it, it seems to be at a loss regarding which way to go. Some of the water flows west toward the Valley of Roses. Some of the water flows east toward the Valley of Tophet, which leads on to the Dead Sea.ⁱ

2. There are times in all of our lives when it seems we are standing on a terrace of indecision. Two seemingly valid and equal options lie before us, and we truthfully aren’t sure which one we should take.

3. Most of us know that choices are critical, because all of our choices have direct consequences. There was a sign that was once posted on a rough and undeveloped road in upstate New York. The sign said, “Choose your rut carefully; you’ll be in it for the next ten miles.”ⁱⁱ

4. In those times of indecision, knowing that we will have to live with our choices, many people struggle to know which direction to go.

5. So, what *do* you do when you don’t know what to do? Where *do* you go when you don’t know which way to go? These are questions that are no doubt familiar to most of us.

6. In Proverbs chapter three, we find a couple of verses that are undoubtedly the favorites of many of God’s people. Countless souls have found help and comfort from these wise words of Solomon.

7. As we look at these fond and familiar verses, there are three truths we can draw from them that offer instruction for the indecisive.

8. When the way ahead is clouded with a giant question mark, the Word of God offers some light. As we look at these two verses, those who are facing a decision are instructed to:

I. LEAN ON THE OMNIPOTENT GOD

1. Verse five begins, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

2. Many times, the source of indecision is found in the fact that we are looking for answers in the wrong places.

3. One of my favorite shows is “The Price is Right”. I always get tickled by how the contestants will look out into the crowd hoping one of their friends can help them with the price. Very often, the answer they get is nowhere near the right one, and they probably would do better to ask someone else.

4. With the opening words of verse five, we find some instruction on where we are to turn for the life’s questions. Notice a couple of things we draw from this phrase to help us lean on the omnipotent God. Notice first of all:

A. The dependence we must avoid

1. Verse five says, “...lean not unto thine own understanding...” Notice that word lean. It is a literal word, used here in a figurative sense.

2. The Hebrew word translated “lean” in our text, means to support one’s self upon something; to place one’s weight upon something.

3. This same word is found in II Samuel 1:6, where we are told that Saul “leaned upon his spear.” In Proverbs 3:5, we are told not to “lean” upon our own understanding.

4. The instruction here is to not rely upon and depend upon our conception and understanding of a particular situation. The word translated “understanding” means “comprehension, discernment, and insight.”

5. When we are faced with a decision, the first step is to avoid depending on your comprehension, discernment, and insight, even if you think you know what is going on.

6. They say you should never go shopping when you’re hungry. The reason being, that your hunger will cloud your judgment. For instance, normally you would know that you don’t need two boxes of double stuffed Oreo cookies. Yet, when you get home, and unpack them, you realize that your hunger has clouded your judgment.

7. The Word of God encourages us not to depend upon our own judgment in making decisions. Often, though we think we know what is best, our decisions are clouded by some desire in our hearts.

8. Rather than leaning upon our own understanding, we must learn to lean on the omnipotence of God. To do this, there is not only the dependence we must avoid, but notice also further:

B. The dependence we must acquire

1. Look again at our text in verse five. The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart..." With every fiber of our being, we are called upon to trust in the Lord.
2. Note the word "trust" at the beginning of verse five. It is an interesting word. It is translated from a Hebrew word that appears in many different forms throughout the Old Testament.
3. The idea behind the word is confidence, security, and safety. To "trust", in the sense of this word, is to relax, and to be unconcerned over a particular matter.
4. Think of that. Verse five says that we are to relax ourselves, and to secure ourselves in the Lord. How do we do this? We do it by remembering the power and ability of our God.
5. When we move our trust and dependence from our few and feeble abilities, and we rest them rather upon the unlimited, unmatched ability and strength of our Lord, then we can rest securely, regardless of what we are facing!
6. Are you unsure of what to do and which way to go? The way to the answer begins when you leave the inadequacy of your ability, and acquire a dependence upon the omnipotent God.
7. When the puddle of our abilities runs dry, there are oceans of God's ability we have never even seen. For that reason, when you are facing a decision, lean on the omnipotent God.
8. Notice a second truth we draw from this great passage. Notice not only that we can *lean on the omnipotent God*, but notice also further that when we have a decision to make, we should:

II. LOOK FOR THE OMNIPRESENT GOD

1. As you move into verse six, the instruction continues, "In all thy ways acknowledge him..." I must confess that this is one of those Bible phrases I thought I understood, until I studied it a little more closely.
2. Notice that word "ways". The translators got this exactly right. The Hebrew word translated "ways" literally means the path, the journey, or the road.
3. We could literally translate this verse, "In every which way you go" or "Everywhere you go" acknowledge Him.
4. With that being said, when it is time for a decision, regardless of where we are, or what that decision is, we need to look for the God that is everywhere.

5. Let me give you a couple of truths that I draw from this wonderful phrase. Notice first of all that we should:

A. See God's presence in our ways

1. In Psalm 139:7, David asks God an important question. He says, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?"

2. The simple answer to that question is nowhere. There is nowhere that He is not there. He is everywhere. He is the omnipresent God; the all present God.

3. Our text in verse six says, "In all thy ways..." In other words, in every path that you take, and on every road that you travel you need to see that God is there.

4. Yes, the Lord Jesus is here with us when we gather in the church as the church. But He is also with you when you're sitting on the couch, when you're working at your desk, and when you're driving in your car.

5. His promise is, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Hebrews 13:5)." There is no way we go that He is not with us as we go, and there when we arrive.

6. So many Christians act as if God is only a part of certain parts of their lives. This is so contrary to Scripture. You cannot leave God and go somewhere He is not.

7. For this reason, we must see the fact that He is present in "all our ways". He is present in the work way. He is present in play way. He is present in all our ways.

8. There is a lot of talk in our day about the "right of privacy". People are increasingly worried about the government and others prying into their business.

9. As a Christian, we need to know that there is no part of our life that is off-limits to Christ. We have no privacy with Him. We must see His presence in our ways. Notice also further, that to look for the omnipresent God, we must not only see God's presence in our ways, but we must also further:

B. Seek God's presence in our ways

1. Again, verse six says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him..." Take note of that word "acknowledge". The key to unlocking this phrase is found in understanding this word.

2. Most of the common translations use this word "acknowledge", but the Hebrew word that is found here literally means "to know, or to perceive".

3. It is a very common word in the Old Testament, and it is used in a variety of ways, but in every case, it speaks of knowing something. The writer essentially says, "In all thy ways, know Him..."

4. That is good advice. Everywhere we go, in all our ways, it is not enough to simply see that God is there; we need to seek to know Him in that place.

5. We need to know God, not just in the church building on Sunday, but also in the workplace on Monday. We need to know God in the home. We need to know God in our recreation. In all our ways, we must seek to know God!

6. Often times, we only want God's input when it is something to which we don't know the answer. But verse six instructs us to seek Him and know Him in every decision and every path.

7. I believe it was Chuck Swindoll that said that for many people, God "is little more than a 911 number" to call on in case of emergencies.

8. The injunction of verse six is that we are to look for Him, not just when we think we need Him, but in every avenue of our lives. In all our ways, we must seek the omnipresent God!

9. Notice one more instruction for the indecisive that we draw from this text. When we are faced with a difficult decision, we must *lean on the omnipotent God*, and *look for the omnipresent God*, but notice also thirdly and finally that when we make our decisions, we should:

III. LISTEN TO THE OMNISCIENT GOD

1. Verse six closes with this wonderful promise. "...and he shall direct thy paths."

2. When we are leaning on His power, and looking for His presence, then we can listen for the voice of providence, and know which way we are to go.

3. One of my favorite verses is Isaiah 30:21. It says, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

4. Those who lean on the Lord, and look for the Lord, can listen for that still, small voice that gives divine directions. Notice with me a couple of wonderful reasons to listen carefully to the omniscient God. Notice first of all that:

A. He discerns the path

1. When I was in high school, my older brother was involved in serious car accident. He was on his way back to Carson Newman College in Jefferson City,

TN. He was just about to top a small hill on Interstate 75, near Knoxville, when all he saw were two cars completely stopped in front of him. They had just crashed, and Tim joined the party.

2. Later, I heard Tim say that he did not see the cars until he was right up on them. The hill had obscured his view of the road just ahead.

3. There are times when we cannot see the path in front of us. We aren't sure where to go, because we cannot see what is just over the hill.

4. Verse six says, "...he will direct thy paths." The reason God can direct the path is because God can discern the path.

5. The other side of the hill is not a mystery to Him. He has seen tomorrow already, and there are no question marks in His mind.

6. The omniscient God is a Master Guide, for He has been everywhere, seen everything, and knows all there is to know about the path ahead.

*There's nothing dark about the coming day,
Our sovereign God, He knows the way,
He's gone ahead; He's been there before,
So trust His voice, and worry no more!*

7. We can listen to the omniscient God, not only because He discerns the way, but notice also further that:

B. He dictates the way

1. There is one more word that deserves our attention in verse six. Notice the verse says, "...he shall direct thy paths."

2. Mark the word "direct". This is a wonderful Bible word. It is translated from a Hebrew word that means "to make a way straight".

3. The same word is found in I Samuel 6:12, where we are told that the cows "took the straight way..."

4. In our text, we are told that God will "make straight" our paths. What a wonderful thought?

5. So much of our lives are spent wandering to and fro, back and forth, meandering in and out of the places we ought to be, trying to figure out the right path.

6. Yet, when we just listen to the voice of the God who knows already where we need to God, the path is straightened.

7. One of the earliest mathematical concepts you learn in geometry is that the shortest distant between two points is a straight line.

8. You may be able to get from point A to point B in your own wisdom, but our sovereign, omniscient God knows the straightest and shortest route!

1. During World War II, Winston Churchill faced an extremely difficult decision. The British secret service had cracked the German code. One of the first messages they decoded revealed plans to bomb a particular section of London.

2. Churchill had two options. He could evacuate that particular section, saving hundreds of lives, but also letting the Germans know that their code had been deciphered. Or, Churchill could say nothing about the coming bombing, and continue to gather valuable information that would eventually save countless lives. Churchill chose the second option.

3. Decisions are not always as easy as paper or plastic. There are times when our choices are complex and complicated.

4. Fortunately, the Word of God offers instruction to the indecisive. We can lean on the omnipotent God, look for the omnipresent God, and listen to the omniscient God.

5. Solomon says it so much better than I can. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

ⁱ *Heartwarming Bible Illustrations*; (AMG), p. 109

ⁱⁱ *The Story File*; (Hendrickson), p. 91