

HE SHALL DIRECT YOUR PATHS

By Iris L. Stovall

Theme: God's Leading

Suggested Call to Worship: Do Not Worry, SDA Hymnal Reading #799

Primary Bible text: Proverbs 3:5-7

Or various texts: (listed in body of sermon)

Opening Song: Trust and Obey #590, SDA Hymnal

Closing Song: Lead On O King, Eternal #619, SDA Hymnal

The path of life often seems like an incredibly complex maze of hurdles we're expected to cross. We can't see over the first hurdle, and we're not sure we even want to go to the next. At one time or another in our lives, we find ourselves running ...not towards the hurdle, but away from it. Or, we find that we're measuring the height of the next one. We may glance occasionally at the Lord, just to make sure He's aware of all the hardships we're going through (and to beg Him, if only silently, to take it easy on us!)

Can you relate to this? I can. Throughout our lifetimes there are so many mountains it seems and too many valleys that we encounter—temptations, sadness, discouragement, and more. We often find ourselves questioning and sometimes pleading with God to show us the path to heaven. Shouldn't it be a smooth pathway? we wonder. No, Ellen White tells us. "It is a path that is narrow and apparently inconvenient; it is a path of conflict, of trial, of tribulation, and suffering. Our Captain, Jesus Christ has hid nothing from us in regard to the battles we are to fight. He opens the map before us and shows us the way. "Strive," He says, "to enter in...."

So what do we do? How can we meet life's hurdles? How can we commit to allowing God to direct our paths?

Turn with me to Proverbs 3:5-7, NKJV: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths.

That means no matter what, come what may – we will each say Lord, I trust you no matter what steps I have to take. And from Proverbs 3:5-7 we've learned what those steps are:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart (STEP ONE)
And lead not unto your own understanding (STEP TWO)
In all your ways acknowledge Him (STEP THREE)
And as a result of these 3 steps... He shall direct your paths.

Let's look at Step ONE – Trust:

Trusting... that means, letting go, and letting God do it His way. Even when we don't know what the outcome will be (and quite often we won't know). We may even be wondering, why trust

God? Let us look at some texts that highlight why it is so necessary for us to trust God.

Psalms 1:6 He knoweth the way of the righteous
Psalms: 3:89 Peace and safety
Psalms 25:10 Mercy and Truth
Psalms 31:3 Our rock and fortress
Psalms 9:10 We can depend on Him
Psalms 34:8 We will be blessed
Psalms 9:10 He won't forsake us

These ARE great reasons to trust God but above all of this – it's because HE is God – the Almighty. Many times you and I may wonder, LORD, do you really mean for THIS to happen to me? Is THIS the way it's supposed to be? Do you really want me to trust you? Do I have to obey – and travel THIS road? Can't I trust myself to know what's best for me, or trust someone who knows me? After all, I am a religious person and I only want to do your will.

In the book, *Faith and Works*, page 89, Ellen White says, "Our faith is not to stand in the ability of men [women] but in the power of God. There is danger of trusting in men [women], even though they may have been used as instruments of God to do a great and good work. Christ must be our strength and our refuge."

Trust, my friends, in the power of God, not in men or women, or ourselves! I can hear someone saying.... Why Lord? Why... my husband left me.... My loved one is terminally ill... my best friend was sent to jail.... My teenager has an unplanned pregnancy... I just got fired from my job... WHY LORD? WHY? Why these heartaches? Why these trials? WHY, WHY, WHY? Today, we just don't understand ... and we may never understand in this life, yet, until Jesus comes, our responsibility is to obey Him and just keep on trusting. He will provide the miracles we need day by day as we place our lives in His care.

In his book *Lightposts for Living*, Thomas Kinkade notes..."You learn to trust in miracles by sailing forward daily with a growing awareness that your needs will be met....summon the courage to untie those ropes and push off from shore.... (and when you encounter a hitch) ...do what you humanly can and watch for the miracle that lies hidden behind the change in course."

Trust... and allow God to work in your life today.

STEP TWO – Lean not on your own understanding...

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 1:25. This text points out that the foolishness of God is wiser than people, and the weakness of God is stronger than people—men or women! The fact that He is wiser is reason enough why I need to surrender to Him. I need to recognize that I am not wise in trusting my thoughts, my views, and my opinion on situations...until I have learned to obey and trust Him in all my ways.

What does that mean? As I see it, it means yielding our ways for His ways.... And God wouldn't have us choosing sin.... God does not want us wandering around in Satan's territory,

compromising, DABBING IN SIN even just a little bit! Do that, and we're doing things OUR way. And our ways will take us on a downward, destructive spiral!

Proverbs 1:7 tell us that fools despise wisdom and instruction. And Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!" Let us not be found classified as 'fools,' friend. You and I need the Savior today. Not next year, or next week, or even tomorrow. We need to surrender to the Lord today. Trust Him. Do it His way. There is nothing out there in the world that we just HAVE to have! For nothing compares to happiness we have in Jesus! Let Him take full control of our lives.

EG White in the book, *This Day with God*, page 64 tells us: "Everyone who is saved must surrender his (her) own plans, his (her) ambitious schemes, which means self-glorification, and follow where Christ leads the way. The *understanding* must be yielded up to Christ, for Him to cleanse and refine and purify." Our understanding must be yielded up to Christ... if we are to be clean, refined...purified.

We need to remember that, "The Potter cannot mold and fashion unto honor that which has never been placed in His hands. The Christian life is one of daily surrender, submission, and continual overcoming. Every day fresh victories will be gained. Self must be lost sight of, and the love of God must be constantly cultivated. Thus we grow up into Christ. Thus the life is fashioned according to the divine model." *Our High Calling*, page 335. Is the Potter in control of our life today? Have we taken the time to consciously give Him the control?

A quote from the *Serenity 12 Step Bible* says "We should not fear that powerlessness will result in passivity – as we subordinate our human wills to God's will we become the most effective and potent instruments we were created to be!" Praise the Lord! Isn't that what we want? Surrender, and have victory in meeting the enemy in the name and power of JESUS, the Conqueror. Every angel will come to our rescue when we depend on Him!

In steps one and two we have discussed how to trust God and are no longer leaning on our own understanding. Now, what's next?

Step THREE: In all thy ways acknowledge Him.

Acknowledge, ... What does that mean? According to Webster...To own or admit as true; to recognize and respond; to confess. It's saying, "You are Lord of my life 100%." You know, the Lord would rather have 1 person who is 100% committed rather than one hundred people who are 75% committed.

It was Henry Varley, a friend of D.L. Moody who said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in and by the man (or woman) who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him." Glorious things await us as we acknowledge God, for Proverbs 3:7 gives us the assurance: He will direct our paths.

What does it mean to have someone "direct?" According to Webster, it's to order or instruct with authority; to tell someone the way; to cause to move, face or go in a desired direction; to

indicate the destination of; to give command or guidance.

Synonyms of the word “direct” – to supervise, guide, run, or oversee.” That’s what God wants to do for us, friends. He wants to direct.... He wants to lead us all the way to the Kingdom.

Let me tell you a story by Josh and Karen Zaronona, received by e-mail entitled: *THE ANT AND THE CONTACT LENS* .

Brenda was a young woman who was invited to go rock climbing. Although she was scared to death, she went with her group to a tremendous granite cliff. In spite of her fear, she put on the gear, took a hold on the rope, and started up the face of that rock. Well, she got to a ledge where she could take a breather. As she was hanging on there, the safety rope snapped against Brenda's eye and knocked out her contact lens. Well, here she is on a rock ledge, with hundreds of feet below her and hundreds of feet above her. Of course, she looked and looked and looked, hoping the lens had landed on the ledge, but it just wasn't there. Here she was, far from home, her sight now blurry. She was desperate and began to get upset, so she prayed to the Lord to help her to find it.

When she got to the top, a friend examined her eye and her clothing for the lens, but there was no contact lens to be found. She sat down, despondent, with the rest of the party, waiting for the rest of them to make it up the face of the cliff. She looked out across range after range of mountains, thinking of that Bible verse that says, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth." She thought, "Lord, You can see all these mountains. You know every stone and leaf, and you know exactly where my contact lens is. Please help me."

Finally, they walked down the trail to the bottom. At the bottom there was a new party of climbers just starting up the face of the cliff. One of them shouted out, "Hey, you guys! Anybody lose a contact lens?" Well, that would be startling enough, but you know why the climber saw it? An ant was moving slowly across the face of the rock, carrying it. Brenda told me that her father is a cartoonist. When she told him the incredible story of the ant, the prayer, and the contact lens, he drew a picture of an ant lugging that contact lens with the words, "Lord, I don't know why You want me to carry this thing. I can't eat it, and it's awfully heavy. But if this is what You want me to do, I'll carry it for You."

What a wonderful story! Such an assurance we have that wherever we are, whatever we do, Jesus will be with us. What a blessed assurance!

True, we will have doubts... fears...anxieties... as we wait, but waiting gives us a chance opportunity to listen to God and as we wait (in an attitude of patient trust, that is)... our faith is strengthened. That doesn't mean tapping our foot trying to rush things... or being mad with the world 'cause things aren't happening as WE planned them... or grumbling and complaining about our fate in life. It's simply waiting.... And having faith in God.

E. M. Bounds, in his book *On Prayer* notes, “Faith in its highest form, is the *attitude as well as the act* of a soul surrendered to God. His Word and His Spirit dwell in the soul.” Allowing His spirit to DWELL! Not breeze by... visit a while... come when we feel like it! DWELL—as we

surrender. Are you running low on faith, my friend? Perhaps you need to stop by for a FILL-UP in Jesus!

It is amazing that Jesus Christ Himself practiced surrendering! At the cross, He surrendered His will to His Father... and because of His surrender, we have salvation. My Bible tells me that every time we sin, we are crucifying the Son of God afresh! Oh what pain, what agony He went through for me, and for you. May we never forget Calvary.

Our Saviour, paid the high price of His life for each one of us so that we can be free. And all He is asking in return is for us to trust in Him and not to lean on our own understanding, and in all our ways acknowledge Him! He will help us – IF we open the door and allow Christ to come in.

Truth be told, we ALL should be throwing the door wide open... Many times we venture to only barely CRACK the door... but you know, God can and does come through doors that are only slightly ajar! He won't however, come through a closed door to your heart! He's waiting.... Waiting to give you a better life... a cleaner life... a healthier life that contains that inner joy and peace.

Won't you SURRENDER the power to HIM? INVITE HIM IN TODAY? Trust Him.... Let HIM direct your paths. Half-hearted, sinful Christians can't enter heaven. They would find no happiness! Oh friends, don't you want to be there? Let Him lead today, tomorrow, and for always until that great day when we'll sing and shout the victory.

Trust my friends.

Lean not on your understanding....

Acknowledge God...

And He will direct your paths.

I want to share one final text: Romans 8:28 (from the *Clear Word* version) -- We know that God will make everything that happens to us in this life come out to our eventual good, as long as we trust Him and remain true to the purpose for which He called us.

A quote from George Truett says... "To know the will of God is the greatest knowledge. To DO the will of God is the greatest achievement."

Let us remember that God's plans are perfect; His plans are pleasant; His presence is promised to every one of us every step of the way. May God help each of us to trust Him to do His will as we let Him direct our paths today and every day for all the days of our lives.

Biographical Information on Sermon Writer:

Iris L. Stovall is lay pastor/first elder at her church where she has worshipped for 21 years. She has worked in the Department of Women's Ministries of the General Conference for over eight years and is administrative assistant to the director. She is also assistant editor of *Mosaic*, the department's monthly newsletter. Iris has been the featured speaker at women's ministries prayer banquets and worship services in the U.S. and a Women's Ministries congress in Fiji Islands, and

been a member of the preaching team for a seven-day evangelistic crusade in Cancun. She is married, has two sons, one daughter, and three granddaughters. For relaxation and fun, she enjoys singing, videotaping beautiful sunsets, and playing with her grands.