

The Difference Between Trusting and Leaning (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. Bayless Conley here. I'm so glad that you have joined me. I want to ask you something; if you wouldn't mind, just investing the next 25-30 minutes with me if you can. If you have a Bible, grab it. Sit down and let's take a look at God's Word together. There are some things that I want to share with you today that I believe can help you immensely. They're very basic, and yet, we sometimes miss the most basic of things.

I want to read to you from the book of Proverbs 3. I love Proverbs. The book of Proverbs transcends both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is God's eternal wisdom. Proverbs 3:5-7 NKJV says,

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 shall direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.

I love verse 6 that we just read. It said, "In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Whatever it is that you're doing, if it's business, if it's raising a family, if you're purchasing a home, if you're going to rent a new flat, when it comes to choosing friends, when it comes to your activities, whatever it is, in all of your ways, in everything you do, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

The word acknowledge literally means in the Hebrew language, "to listen and to look for." To listen and to look for. Whatever we're doing, whatever we're considering doing, we need to look and listen for God's wisdom and God's direction. So many difficulties could be avoided if we would just look and listen for God to direct us. Many pitfalls could be avoided if we would just look and listen for God's wisdom, and He does want to direct us. In the New Testament, it asks the question in the book of James, "Do any of you lack wisdom?" You don't know what to do? Well, ask God, and He'll give it to you liberally, and He won't find fault. You just need to ask in faith. This says that, "If we will acknowledge Him, if we'll look and listen for God's wisdom in all of our ways, that He will direct our path." The word direct, certainly, means that "He's going to show us the way we should go." But it means much more than that.

It actually carries with it the idea of empowerment to carry out the task that we're considering engaging in or doing. It also means this in the original language. It means to "remove obstacles out of the way." It means to "make a pathway smooth, to make it straight." Yes, God will say, "This is the way you need to go." But it implies empowerment, and it implies that He will remove obstacles out of that pathway. He'll direct our path, and He'll remove obstacles.

Question: do you have any obstacles in your life right now, things that are hindering you from going forward? It might be great bouts with physical illness. That can be a huge obstacle in life where you can't work; you can't be with your family the way you want to because there's just these constant bouts of sickness. An obstacle could be depression, and I know there are some people who suffer from deep, dark depression. I've had some dear friends who have struggled with that in their lives and, oh, what an obstacle it can be.

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It could be a lack of finances. You just don't have the money to do what you need to do or to take care of what needs to be taken care of. The obstacle may have to do with your family. It may have to do with relationships. It may have to do with your job. It may have to do with your spiritual life. Whatever form that takes, the answer is found in looking for and listening to, and acknowledging God and getting His wisdom, if we'll acknowledge Him, if we'll look and listen for Him.

Let's just say that I've got a business opportunity, and there's a lot of unknowns in it. This could end up being great. It could end up providing for me and my family. It could be an answer to prayer, or if it goes wrong, it could set me back years. I get on my knees, and I'm praying, and I'm spending time in God's Word reading. I'm saying, "God, I just ask for Your direction." I'm listening, and I get quiet, and God will begin to speak to me. He'll begin to direct me and speak to my heart. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me." It is the most natural thing in the world for the Lord's sheep to follow Him as the Shepherd. He said, "They know My voice." Then He said this in verse 7, and we read it. Verse 6 again, "In all your ways acknowledge Him." Look and listen for Him, "and then He will direct your paths." He'll show you the way to go. He'll empower you. He'll remove the obstacles. Then Proverbs 3:7 NKJV says,

⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil.

In other words, don't think that you're smarter than God. Don't think that your way is better. You need to do what He says. You need to do what He shows you. Some of the wisest words that have ever been uttered were by Mary, the mother of Jesus. They are at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. She goes to her Son, Jesus, and says, "Son, they don't have any wine." Then she told the servants at the feast, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Not, "Whatever He says to you, think about it. Whatever He says to you, pray about it. Whatever He says to you, reject." No, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Those are wise words. I want to encourage you, whatever He directs you to do, do it. Don't be wise in your own eyes. Don't think that your way is better or that you're smarter than God.

We read in verse 5. It says that we're to trust the Lord with all of our heart and not lean to our own understanding. Are you trusting, or are you leaning? One of the greatest reasons that obstacles remain in front of God's people and continually hinder them is because, instead of trusting, they're leaning. Instead of trusting the Lord with all of our heart, we're leaning on our own understanding. I remember when our oldest son Harrison was probably seven years old, and I told him to bring the trash cans in. The trash truck had come by and taken the trash. It was his job, as a seven-year-old boy, to bring the empty trash cans in. He doesn't want to go out—We have two of them—He didn't want to go get one and then bring the other. He puts one of the cans inside of the other one, so he only has to make one trip.

All right. Clever. Good. He gets them back to the place where they're stored, and then he can't separate them. So he's just going to leave them. I'm watching him. I come out, and I say, "Harrison, get those trash cans separated." He said, "I can't dad. They're stuck." I said, "Get them unstuck." He's pulling, he's jerking, and he can't get the one can that's stuck inside of the other can. He can't get it dislodged. He says, "Dad, I can't." I said, "Well, you're not coming in the house until you get it done." He pulled, and he pulled. I went and sat next to him.

And he tried every way that he could think of, but it wouldn't work. Sitting next to him, I said, "Son, this is what you need to do to dislodge that one can from the other." He looked at me.

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A seven-year-old, in all of his wisdom, and said, "That won't work." He kept tugging and tugging and jerking on it. I just sat there quietly next to him.

I said, "Son, this is what you need to do." He said, "That won't work." He's tugging, and he's tugging. Finally, he's frustrated. He sits down, and he's crying. He says, "They won't come apart. They won't come apart." I said, "Well, you're not coming in. You can't come in the house until you get the job done." I said, "Now I told you what to do. Listen to your father." He said, "It's not going to work." Finally, reluctantly, he did it the way that I said. And boop, the can popped out easily. It dislodged from the other one.

I thought, how much is that like us and God a lot of the time? We're desperately trying to get a problem dislodged from our life, but it sticks. Whether it's a financial problem, an emotional problem, a family problem, a business, whatever it is, we're tugging and we're tugging, and God is telling us what to do. Yet, we refuse because we're wise in our own eyes. We're leaning to our own understanding. Friend, God is smarter than us. Let's say the problem is lack. All right. That can be a huge problem. We need money to pay the rent.

We've got to put fuel in our automobile. We've got the payment on our automobile. We've got to get clothes for our kids. We've got to put food on the table. All of those things cost money. Lack can be a huge hindrance. It can be a huge obstacle. All right. Listen to this. These are the same verses that we were just reading. "Trust the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean to your own understanding. In all your ways, look and listen for Him. He'll direct your path. He'll remove the obstacles. Don't be wise in your own eyes." Then he says this in Proverbs 3:9-10 NKJV,

- ⁹ Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase;
¹⁰ so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

Alright. Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase. Now, the people living in that day and that agricultural society understood that. The first fruits that came out on the trees, that came out on the vines, they brought the first and the best to God as an offering. When they did that, here's God's promise, "Your barns will be filled with plenty. Your vats will overflow with new wine." Now, their prosperity and their blessing were measured in grapes and olives and in the wine in their wine vats. In the barley that they would harvest and put in their barns. In their sheep and their cattle. It was an agrarian society. For us, it can just translate into the fact that God will bless you, but you need to honor Him with your possessions. Bring Him your first and your best. If you do that, God will bless you.

Now, when we bring God our leftovers—we've taken care of everything we want to do. We've taken care of all of our bills. If there's anything left, "Well, God, I'll maybe grudgingly give this to You," that does not honor Him. Honoring has to do with the heart. "God, You are most important in my life. You are first in my life. You're going to be first in my giving. Here, I worked 40 hours this week or 50 hours this week at my job. I traded all those hours, all that time, all that effort of my life. I traded it for a paycheck. Now, I have this paycheck, and it literally represents my life. God, I'm going to honor You with my life by giving You the first part of this paycheck. I bring it to church. I bring it to God's house. I put it in God's work." The promise is that God will bless me.

I know people think, "Well, that won't work. I don't understand. If I give away my first and my best, I'm going to have less. That doesn't make sense. There's no way that could work out." Lean not. Don't lean on your own understanding. Stop being wise in your own eyes. Trust the Lord with all of your heart. "But it doesn't make sense." Lean not.

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I remember many years ago, there was a couple that came into the church, and frankly, I didn't think they were Christians. It was an older couple and they just had no sense of the life of God about them. In fact, they were on the border of what I would call cynical. They were very, very oppressed. It was obvious to see from their countenance and from the things that they would say. It wasn't immediate, but over a period of time, things began to change for them.

They actually came and talked to me. They said, "Pastor when we came, we were in such deep debt. It looked like there was no way out. It was absolutely impossible for us to get out of the debt we were in. Whenever you would get up and you would teach on giving, you would teach what the scriptures said." They said, "We knew it was clear." It's like those verses we just read from Proverbs 3:9-10. It said to honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all of your increase. Then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. Whether it was tithing, "Bring all the tithe into storehouse. That there may be food in my house, prove me now herewith," says the Lord of Hosts." "If I'll not open the windows of heaven and pour out such a blessing for you, you'll not have room enough to receive it."

I know some people right away say, "Oh, yes, tithing. That's legalistic." Well, not necessarily. The Bible in the New Testament, the book of Romans, says that Abraham is the father of faith. That we're to follow in the footprints of Abraham's faith. I look at the life of Abraham, and he actually tithed. That means to honor God with the first tenth. That's all that tithe means, just to give God the first tenth of your income. Abraham did that out of honor and a response of gratitude to God. He did it before the law ever came into existence.

Now, it was incorporated into the law as a part of the law, but it existed before the law. Now, if I'm going to walk in the footprints of Abraham's faith, I'm going to honor God, show God gratitude, and declare that He is the Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth, which is what Abraham did when he brought the tithe to God's priest. I do it for the same reason in the same way. It's not a legalistic thing with me, but I do it as a matter of honor, as a manner of principle, and as a manner of faith. That's the way we teach it here at Cottonwood Church.

Going back to the story about this older couple that were cynical and so oppressed because they were so deeply in debt. I would teach along those lines, and we would go to the book of Corinthians, where it talks about giving into God's work. "Those that sow sparingly will reap sparingly. Those that sow bountifully will reap bountifully." That God, actually, multiplies what we sow. It brings blessing to people, but it also brings blessing back to us. They told me, "Pastor, that graded on us so much, but we knew it was right. We just couldn't figure it out. We're so deeply in debt. This doesn't make sense. But we're not to lean to our own understanding. We're not to lean to human reasoning. We're to trust the Lord with all of our heart." They said, "We began to honor God. We began to give Him the first part of our income."

It didn't happen right away. But over a period of time, God got them out of debt. I remember the wife; she got this fabulous job. Actually, she became one of the top people in her field in the state of California and made a fabulous salary. God just blessed them, and it changed everything about them. They paid off all their debts. They went to our Bible college. They are in their latter years, but God used them in effective ministry to lift, to help, and to bless others. They came to a point where they had to make the decision, "All right. God, this doesn't make sense to me, but I'm going to trust You with all of my heart, and I'm not going to lean to my own reasoning or to my own understanding." If you want the obstacles to be moved out of your way, you need to cease from your own understanding, your own logic, your own reason, and your own wisdom. Trust God with all of your heart.

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There's a story in 2 Kings that I'd like to read to you, and it illustrates the same point. It says this. It's 2 Kings 3, and I'm going to begin around verse nine. It's a real interesting story. Three kings came together: the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom. They're going to go to battle against the Moabites. It says in 2 Kings 3:9-10 NKJV,

⁹ So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days.

By the way, the king of Israel was the one who determined this roundabout route that they were going to go on.

⁹ And there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them. ¹⁰ And the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

That's human nature. We make stupid decisions, and then we blame God. He went out this way where there was no water. There had been a lack of rain. They could have gone on a route where they had crossed rivers, and there would have been water, but they didn't. The king of Israel said, "We're going to go this way." Now, all the animals are completely dehydrated. The soldiers are dehydrated and have no strength left in them. The animals have no strength left in them. The king of Israel, who, by the way, was not a servant of the Lord. He was an idolater, and he didn't love God. He points his fingers and says, "God's done this." Human nature. Anyway, Jehoshaphat was the king of Judah. (2 Kings 3:11 NKJV),

¹¹ But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah."

They bring the prophet, and the prophet says this in 2 Kings 3:15-18 NKJV,

¹⁵ "But now bring me a musician." Then it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. ¹⁶ And he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Make this valley full of ditches.' ¹⁷ For thus says the Lord: 'You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink.' ¹⁸ And this is a simple matter in the sight of the Lord."

It's not hard for God at all. He speaks, and stars are born. He divides the waters of the Red Sea with a word. This is not hard in the sight of the Lord.

¹⁸ "He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand."

Second Kings 3:20 NKJV,

²⁰ Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water.

It made no sense. It's crazy. Can you imagine their minds? Like, "All right. We're already exhausted. The troops are spent, and the animals are spent. We have no water, and God says, 'Dig ditches.' That's stupid! That's idiotic! That's brainless! Dig ditches? The men are at the point of exhaustion already, and You want them to get out there and work in the hot sun with nothing

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to drink. They're at the point of collapse! Now, this is going to kill them! How's that going to bring water? It just doesn't make sense."

"Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." He'll remove the obstacles out of the way, and He will empower you. They did it. It didn't make sense. It defied logic, but they went out and dug the ditches. God empowered them to do it. The soldiers did not collapse due to heat exhaustion or due to the fact that they were dehydrated. They did it, and God supernaturally brought water.

In fact, the story goes on. The sky was red in the morning. So when the Moabites see the reflection, that early morning red sky on the water, the only thing they think is, "That's blood. The armies of these three kings have started fighting with each other, and they've killed each other. The land is just filled with their blood. Come on! Let's go take the spoil." They go down. By this time, all of the animals and all of the troops of Edom, Israel, and Judah are refreshed. They slaughter the Moabites just like what God said would happen. Again, it made no sense.

Someone says, "Pastor, what is it you are trying to do exactly?" I'm trying to help you dig ditches. There's something that God wants you to do in your circumstance. Listen, I realize there are people watching me who are facing a myriad of obstacles. There's got to go be a single mother watching me right now. You've got little kids. You love them with all your heart, but you don't know what to do. You work and work, and you have to pay for daycare. You have to go pay somebody to take care of the kids. Or maybe they're old enough to be in school, and you have to be at work, but they have to go be picked up. You have to pay the rent on your flat, and you don't have enough money to make ends meet. It's like, "God, what do I do?" Listen, sweetheart, God loves you. He loves you, and He sees your dilemma, and He wants to help you.

Now, I don't know what His wisdom is for you, but if you will get in His Book, He will speak to you from the Scriptures, and He'll show you what to do. If you'll ask Him for wisdom, if you'll acknowledge Him, if you'll look and listen, the Great Shepherd will speak to you, little lamb. He'll show you what to do, but then you've got the decision, "Do I trust with my heart, or do I lean on my own understanding?" God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. Listen to this from Isaiah 55:6-7 NKJV. It says,

⁶ Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

That's what we're talking about. Seek Him. It says,

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Sometimes you have to forsake your thoughts before the mercy of God can touch you. It says, "Forsake your way, forsake your thoughts, return to the Lord, and then He'll have mercy." You know what? Sometimes, if we stubbornly cling to our own logic and our own thinking when God has clearly shown us the pathway He wants us to take, one wrong thought can keep His mercy and His blessing from reaching us. He goes on in Isaiah 55:8 NKJV says,

⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.

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It's just so important that we listen to what God's telling us. I remember years ago, we were actually meeting in a building not too far from where I'm sitting now. We had multiple services, and people had to sit outside. We couldn't fit them all inside, and we'd have to open the door so they could hear. They would sit down in the hallways, and we'd run a speaker down the hallways. There just wasn't an inch of room.

We'd been saving in a building fund, and we'd been looking and looking for property, for a building, for a warehouse that we could rent, just everywhere, and nothing opened up. Nothing happened. As I was in prayer one day, I felt like the Lord told me that we were supposed to give the building fund to another ministry. A man who had great traction and was really making an impact in our country at the time.

I went to the elders, and I said, "Guys, this is what I feel like the Holy Spirit has told me. We're supposed to give our building fund away." It's like, "Pastor, we've been saving up. We need this for a down payment on a property or a building. We need it." I said, "Well, nothing's opened up, and we've been looking for months and months, and months, and months. I just feel like it's God. Let's just pray." We all got together, and we prayed, and every one of them had the same witness in their heart, "We need to do this."

We told the church and said, "That the leadership team, the elders, we feel like God wants us to do this, and we're just trusting Him that He's going to open a door for us." We gave all of it. All of the whole building fund that we'd saved into that other ministry. Right after that, a property opened up. Before it did, I had some people come to me, actually, a couple of ladies who said, "You're an idiot, and we're not going to church here anymore. We're not going to have an idiot for a pastor. That's the stupidest thing we ever heard to give the building fund away." I said, "We just had to obey what we felt like the Lord told us to do."

You know what? Something opened up immediately after that. I don't have time to tell you now, but it was supernatural. God got us a piece of property that was far beyond anything that we could have imagined. We ended up in this new building. It was amazing, but it was a matter of trusting or leaning. I want to encourage you today, "Trust the Lord with all of your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." He will empower you. He'll show you the way to go, and He'll remove obstacles out of the way.

Dear friend, as I close, I just want to tell you. You are known by God, and you are loved by God. He sees you. He knows your circumstance and your situation. I just want to tell you. You can expect Him to help you look for Him, and you will find Him. Look with all of your heart. I just want to end by saying thank you to those of you that support us, and that help us bring this encouragement to other people. If you've been encouraged, why not pray about helping us to bring this same encouragement to other people around the world? Until next time, I pray that God would richly bless you. We'll see you again.

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