

Joke: A truck driver stops to rest at a local truck stop. It's one that he had been to many times and all the waitresses knew what he orders every time.

But on this particular day a new waitress who had know clue what his normal order was, so she has to ask him.

He begins telling her that he would like 3 flat tires, 2 headlights, and a pair of running boards.

The waitress not wanting to let him know that she does have a clue what he ordered, goes back to the kitchen and tells the cook the cook chuckles and said, oh that's an easy order.

The 3 flat tires are 3 pancakes, the 2 headlights are 2 eggs over easy and the 2 running boards are two strips of bacon.

After she heard that not wanting the trucker to think she doesn't have a clue what it was he wanted, she grabs a bowl of bean soup and brings it to the truck driver.

He says, "that's not what ai ordered."

To which the waitress reply's, "I know but I figured with the flat tire, new headlights and running boards you also might want to fill up with gas as well."

Your Heart Matters - Proverbs 3:5-6

If I ever get out west I would love to take a mule ride down the Bright Angel trail in the Grand Canyon. The trail is 15.6 miles round trip. With an elevation change of 4,285 feet.

I think that would be a blast, at least I did until I read this story of someone who has had that opportunity to do so.

Let me share with you their experience on that trail. Here's how they told it. . .

Before they assigned us our mules, the mule driver made a big deal of describing how dangerous this trip was, how stubborn the mules were, and how expensive it would be to helicopter us out of the canyon if something went wrong.

Then he sized us all up, and when it came to me, he assigned me the orneriest mule in the pack. I don't remember his name exactly. It was something like "Man-Slayer," or maybe it was "Chuck Norris." His wife got a placid female named "Blue Duck," and the kids got young innocents with names like "Daisy" and "Misty." He goes on to say that Man-Slayer was the mule from hell.

The guide's mantra was, "A tight group equals a safe trip." By that, he meant that if you want to keep your mule from doing something stupid or falling over the side, you need to keep his front end tucked up against the back end of the mule in front of him.

Man-Slayer wasn't having any of that. If he saw a weed growing six or eight inches over the edge of the cliff, he'd stop and lean his head down there to get it. I'd kick him in the ribs to get going and he'd snort at me like a wild bull. It was a test of wills all the way down and a test of wills all the way back.

At about 4:30, with just a few hundred yards to go before we were home, we passed a group of hikers. One of them said, "I would give anything to be riding one of those right now."

And he thought to myself, “I would give you anything to take me off this thing right now.” He seriously thought about hoping off and letting her finish the ride, but then they wouldn’t have had a tight group or a safe trip, and he didn’t want to see her helicoptered out after falling over the side on that mule.

At one point on the way up, their guide stopped them and said, “Let’s take a minute to rest and enjoy the view.” While everyone else rested, he wrestled with the mule from hell.

Man-Slayer found a weed two feet over the edge of the trail and insisted on bending down to eat it. He pulled with all his might to keep him from dumping him over the edge and succeeded in getting his head right up with the underbelly of his wife’s mule Blue Duck.

When his mule noticed the extra length of strap hanging from Blue Duck’s saddle, he had to eat it. So, he just decided to see how he would pull it off. One suck and slurp at a time, he pulled that length of strap down his throat until his lips were stuck up against his wife’s stirrup. He couldn’t go any further, so he just patiently waited until we hit the trail again.

When the guide put us back in motion, his wife turned Blue Duck back to the trail. He said, you have never heard such a frustrated gagging sound as when that strap was yanked back up Man-Slayer’s throat. For a minute, he thought his mule Man-slayer was going to throw up. He admits that he couldn’t resist feeling smug and avenged as he gagged and sputtered the last few hundred feet to the top of the canyon.

As funny as that story is, it is also true.

Mules are after all one of the most stubborn creatures on earth.

And they would almost never choose the right path, because mules don't like to think about the future consequences, they just want to do what they want to do when they want to do it, regardless of the outcome.

In that way, they're not unlike many of us. We two-legged mules are just a little more subtle with our rebellion.

Here's what we do sometimes. We come to a fork in the road and weigh our options. Then, we choose the road that *feels* the best to us at the moment. That path may not be the best path for us, so as soon as we figure out what we want to do, we put our minds to work figuring out reasons that justify our decision.

The battery on our cellphone no longer lasts a full day. So we decide to pick up the new iPhone, even though the iPhone costs newly a \$1000.00 and a new battery would have cost somewhere around \$100.00. "It just made sense," we say.

The question is what kind of sense? "Cents" or "sense"?

More and more these days, people seem to ask, "How did I end up on this path? How did I get here? Why did God let me get into this situation in the first place?"

In the book *The Path*, Andy Stanley says, "Our problem rarely stems from a lack of information or insight. It's something else. Something we don't outgrow. Something that another academic degree won't resolve. Our problem stems from the fact that we are not on a truth quest. That is, we don't wake up every morning with a burning desire to know what's true, what's right, what's honorable. We are on a happiness quest. We want to be – as in feel – happy. And our quest for happiness often trumps our appreciation for and pursuit of what's true."

So, why Do We Find Ourselves on the Wrong Path?

Let me give you two reasons. I'm sure there are many more but here's two:

1. Our heart is on a happiness quest, not a truth quest.
2. Our heart chooses the happy-now rather than the happy-later path. Almost every time.

Isn't that true?

Andy continues, "Now I understand why you may take exception to that. But stay with me for just a couple of more pages while I make my case. Let's start with coffee drinkers. What is that all about? My coffee of choice costs about four bucks a cup. That's ridiculous. Inexcusable in light of the needs of the world today. That's eighty dollars a month if I skip weekends. I could sponsor two more kids through Compassion International for less than that. What's wrong with me? Well, I'm on a happiness quest. And soy lattes contribute to my happiness. In fact, as I learned a few years ago when I quit drinking coffee for a few months, my soy lattes contribute to the happiness of my staff as well. I actually had a key staff member call me aside and tell me in no uncertain terms that I was more fun to be around when I was drinking coffee. That's all the excuse I needed."

"As smart as we are and as aware as we are that life is connected and that decisions today shape the experiences of tomorrow, we still don't wake up in the morning in search of truth, insight, and enlightenment. We get up and do the things that make us happy. We are all on a happiness quest. And I don't think that's necessarily wrong. Fortunately, there is a great deal of overlap between doing what's right and wise and doing what makes us happy. For example, my wife loves to exercise. And that makes me happy. But that's not really the point, is it?

Exercise – something that is good for my wife’s current and future health – is something she enjoys. So in that case, pursuing something that makes her happy is a good thing. But she would be quick to tell you that chocolate makes her happy as well. Happier than exercise. Pursuing that happy-path every day would not be a good thing. It’s these forks in the road – or for our purposes – forks in the path – that make things complicated. When happiness points in one direction while wisdom, truth, integrity and common sense point in another, that’s when really smart people start doing really stupid things. That’s when the happiness quest becomes dangerous. That is the underlying reason we intentionally choose paths that will not take us to where we ultimately want to go, regardless of our SAT scores.”

Are you getting the concept?

Let’s take a moment to pray before I point you towards a solution.

Papa we thank you for who You are, speak to us today through Your Word and Your Holy Spirit. Speak to us in ways that change us, transform us and make us more like you. Help us be sensitive to what You desire to teach us. Let us grab hold of the wisdom and revelation you have for us today. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Two weeks ago when we started this series, we said there is a principle do you remember what that principle was, I mentioned it a couple times last week as well, the principle is? . . .your direction determines your destination.

This principle trumps just about every other natural principle in the universe.

Last week we said that prudent people switch paths when they see trouble coming. They make course corrections, even though

that requires more energy and determination. Certainly more than staying on the wrong path.

The prudent see danger and take refuge, while the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

Solomon diagnosed this problem 3,000 years ago, right along with the problem we're looking at today.

Apparently, people back then weren't too different from people today. Today we are going to look at Proverbs chapter 3. Here Solomon gives a solution to the happiness quest in what may be the most famous section of the book of Proverbs.

Some of you who've been in church a long time may have a portion of this memorized. What you may not have ever seen before is its relationship to this idea of a path.

Proverbs 3:5–12 (NIV): Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. 9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. 11 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

According to Solomon, God will make your paths straight if you do three things:

1. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
2. Lean not on your own understanding.
3. Acknowledge him in all your ways.

Some of you have never heard this before, so let me walk you through it. And some of you are almost too familiar with this verse, so I want to help you to see it as if for the first time.

The starting place for a straight path is just what it says on all American money, "In God we trust." This is somewhat ironic, because, in my experience, money is often the last thing that we Americans trust God with.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."

In every arena of life, in every possible path, in every category of path, "trust" God. The answer to choosing the right path is to choose God, to trust God, to go where he asks you to go, do what he asks you to do, and to do it every day. This is not a one-time thing. It's a path. Place all your confidence, all your faith, all your hope, all your plans in God.

Abraham was told to pack up his tent and go where the Lord was directing him. The problem was Abraham had no clue what that place was, but in spite of that he packed his things and went.

You find that story in Genesis 12, but look what Hebrews 11 tells about that story. . .

Hebrews 11:8 (TPT) - Faith motivated Abraham to obey God's call and leave the familiar to discover the territory he was destined to inherit from God. So he left with only a promise and without even knowing ahead of time where he was going, Abraham stepped out in faith.

That is the kind of trust that God wants from us.

The challenge is to not lean on what your heart says is right, not on what your heart wants to do, not on your understanding of how

luscious the weeds are growing two feet under your path or the strap hanging down from the mule in front of you.

How many times have you said to someone, “Just go with what your heart is telling you”? Or “Follow your heart.” We’ve all said that, haven’t we?

But truth is that just might not be the best advice, look what the prophet Jeremiah said,

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV): The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Do you know what he meant by that?

He meant sometimes our hearts lie to us. Almost every time we want to do something that feels good short term that we intuitively know is not good for us long term, our hearts come up with reasons to do the thing we want to do rather than the thing that’s best for us over the longer term.

The Apostle Paul struggled with that. . .

Romans 7:15–19 (NIV): 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Turn to the person next to you and say: Your heart lies to you!

Now say it to yourself, “My heart lies to me!”

The heart is deceitful above all things. So Solomon says, “When you find yourself at a fork in the road – and by the way every decision we make is a fork in the road – when you find yourself at a fork in the road, don’t trust your heart – trust God. Don’t lean on your own understanding, lean on God. Don’t acknowledge your motivations, your intentions, your ambitions, acknowledge God’s.”

If you do that, he will make your paths straight.

Jesus said something similar in his Sermon on the Mount when he said,

Matthew 6:33 (NIV): But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Acknowledge God and his ways, and he will make your paths straight. He’ll direct you in the way you should go. He’ll protect you when evil and junk try to crowd in on you.

Read this out loud with me:

Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV): Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Has there ever been a time when you acknowledged God in all your ways?

Many of you have trusted him for salvation – which is kind of like inviting God into your living room. “Here, Lord, come into my life.” But then that’s as far as you let him go. Have you invited him into your bedroom, where all your private thoughts are? Have you invited him onto your computer, where all your access to the world is? Have you invited him into your closet, where all your secret things are?

Seek first the kingdom of God and he'll take care of the rest. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, acknowledge him in all your ways, and he'll steer your ship in the right direction, your car onto the right path, your life into the right places and plans and priorities.

This is the path, church.

I'm so thankful for Roger L. Easton, Ivan Getting, Bradford Parkinson, and Dr. Gladys West aren't you? You have no clue who those people are do you? They are the ones credited for giving us that technology that we sometimes rely way to much. . . GPS.

All we need to do is type in an address and the little woman inside the box says, "take exit 24 in 1 mile. Turn left onto Pontiac road in 100 yards in a quarter mile turn right onto . . .you get the picture.

Wouldn't it be nice if getting on and staying on your path was just that simple?

Well, honestly it almost is.

The only trick to it is to override the happiness-now bias in your brain, which really comes from the deceitfulness of your heart. Override it with the perfect wisdom that God gives from his Word and his Spirit.

Now before I go any further let me ask you this question, If you could strip away the self-deceiving reasons for your actions and be completely honest right now, what path are you on that you know you shouldn't be, but you chose to be on it because you wanted something other than to simply acknowledge God's ways?

On one level, this is the one question we never want to be asked by others, because it reveals so much about us. On another level,

it's the one question we've always wanted to be asked, because this is the area we most want help with.

Of course, you can always lie to yourself or others when it comes to this question.

But here's the thing even though it might be a difficult question what it's really asking is, "Where is it that you haven't been trusting God with all your heart? Where is it that, at least before now, you hadn't acknowledged God in all your ways?"

And then the question that follows is, "Is there a way we as a body can help you with that?"

Solomon continues his thought about getting on God's path:

Proverbs 3:7–8 (NIV): Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

"Do not be wise in your own eyes." After telling us the key to a straight path, the path you should want to take, the path that will always get you from where you are to exactly where you want to be, Solomon suggests three steps to take in order to trust God fully and acknowledge him in everything.

1. Don't be wise in your own eyes.

Don't for a minute think, "I don't need to consult God on this one, after all, I'm an expert at it. I've taken classes in it. I've taught others about it. I've done this type of thing a thousand times before."

Every decision, every fork in the road is a new fork? Wherever you are today, you've never been there before. So resist the

temptation to think you know it all. That's when you get into trouble. Consult God in all your ways, with all your forks in the road.

2. Honor God's provision for you.

Proverbs 3:9–10 (NIV): Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

After all, it all came from him. If you want him to direct your paths, first, let him direct your wallet. For most of us, our wallets are somehow connected to our hearts, aren't they?

God says, "Hey, if you want my input, trust me with your output—I gave it all to you anyway. If you trust me, give."

You know this is true: You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

Think about people you know say in their 20s it's funny how they go from what they think is poor to being really rich. They say to themselves, "There's this concert coming up, but I can barely afford it. I barely made my rent car payment last week, should I go? . . . Of course! After all, an opportunity like this only comes around once in lifetime. I've gotta go see Taylor Swift, or whoever it is." They feel poor, but they find the money and go.

Then, a few years later, they get married and have a child. The baby needs diapers and formula, and blankets and shoes and more things than his newly-minted mom and dad ever dreamed of. Now, when the concerts in their area and they find themselves in the same difficulty they say, "Are you kidding? Of course I can't go to the concert. I have a kid to provide for!" At least a responsible parent does that.

Suddenly, their love for a person has changed all their priorities. They love that baby boy or girl so much, they don't even think of it as giving. Now it's just, "providing for."

You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving.

And something mysterious happens when you give. Jesus says,

Matthew 6:21 (NIV): For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Which, let's face it that kind of seems backward. If you love, you'll give. But God knows that if you give, you'll love. So he says, "If you want my direction for your life, if you want me to guide you, honor me with the firstfruits of all your crops—the first of everything you earn for whatever kind of work you do." Then I'll be able to fill your barns to overflowing."

Solomon says, "If you're going to acknowledge God in all your ways, let one of them be in financial ways."

Talk about my giving. First apartment. All the times he has blessed me. Faithfully even when laid off have always given.

There church sermon on giving.

3. Don't blame God for your pain.

Proverbs 3:11–12 (NIV): My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Sometimes you caused what is happening to you. And sometimes God knows you need some correction, which he provides like every loving father does.

I've heard so many people say, "Why did God let this happen to me?" Usually, they're in too much pain to hear the truth at that moment. But the truth is, in most cases, God didn't let that happen to them. God didn't want that to happen to them. God tried to prevent it from happening to them. He tried to stop it, but he couldn't stop them.

Truth is God loves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to have us stay just the way we are. So he woo's us to become more like Him. He transforms us into being the son or daughter He is calling us to become.

"The Lord disciplines those he loves, like a father does with a son he delights in."

1. Don't be wise in your own eyes.
2. Honor God's provision for you.
3. Don't blame God for your pain.

Those are Solomon's suggestions.

Let me share Proverbs 3 once more in full from the Passion Translation.

Proverbs 3:1-18 (TPT) - 1-2 My child, if you truly want a long and satisfying life, never forget the things that I've taught you. Follow closely every truth I've given you. Then you will have a full, rewarding life. 3 Hold on to loyal love and don't let it go, and be faithful to all that you've been taught. Let your life be shaped by integrity, with truth written upon your heart. 4 That's how you will find favor and understanding with both God and man - you will gain the reputation of living life well. 5 Trust in the Lord completely, and do not rely on your own opinions. With all your heart rely on him to guide you, and he will lead you in every decision you make. 6 Become intimate with him in whatever you

do, and he will lead you wherever you go. 7 Don't think for a moment that you know it all, for wisdom comes when you adore him with undivided devotion and avoid everything that's wrong. 8 Then you will find the healing refreshment your body and spirit long for. 9 Glorify God with all your wealth, honoring him with your very best, with every increase that comes to you. 10 Then every dimension of your life will overflow with blessings from an uncontainable source of inner joy! 11 My child, when the Lord speaks to you, never take his words lightly, and never be upset when he corrects you. 12 For the Father's discipline comes only from his passionate love and pleasure for you. Even when it seems like his correction is harsh, it's still better than any father on earth gives to his child. 13 Those who find true wisdom obtain the tools for understanding the proper way to live, for they will have a fountain of blessing pouring into their lives, to gain the riches of wisdom is far greater than gaining the wealth of the world. 14 As wisdom increases, a great treasure is imparted, greater than many bars of refined gold. 15 It is a more valuable commodity than gold and gemstones, for there is nothing you desire that could compare to her. 16 Wisdom extends to you long life in one hand and wealth and promotion in the other. Out of her mouth flows righteousness, and her words release both law and mercy. 17 The ways of wisdom are sweet, always drawing you into the place of wholeness. 18 Seeking for her brings the discovery of untold blessings, for she is the healing tree of life to those who taste her fruits.