

# “Trust God, Not Yourself”

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

The world we live in encourages us to use our own abilities and resources to be successful in life. Who of us haven't heard these statements:

Follow your dreams  
You can do anything if you put your mind to it  
Believe in yourself  
Follow your heart

And there are many like that. As positive as they sound, they are not really the best advice. While I might put my mind to becoming a professional athlete, my body may disagree with me. While I might believe I would make a great astronaut, my math skills and scientific knowledge would suggest I not give up my day job!

While it sounds good to believe in yourself or follow your heart, the Bible says *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”* (Jer. 17:8). While we should make plans and pursue them the Bible also says, *“Instead, what you ought to say is ‘If it is the Lord’s will we will do this or that’”* (James 4:14-15).

Of course, believing God’s Word come from a perspective that believes God is sovereign over our lives and is directly involved in guiding our lives. The best advice to live by is found in the Bible. While there are many ‘life verses’ to live by (I hope you have more than one or that it changes from time to time as life changes) a good one we should all live by is Prov. 3:5-6,

*<sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup> in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*

By itself, this verse is very powerful. Yet as we’ve seen every verse is written in a context of verses and its full meaning is more powerful when understood in the context – even in Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is different from other books in the Bible. It’s not narrative yet it still needs to be understood under Israel’s Old Testament history, particularly during the time when Solomon reigned as king. It’s not an epistle but it is full of admonition on how to live a life that pleases God. It’s not song or worship, but it is very much God-centered. It is not prophecy but it is somewhat prophetic because Proverbs spells out the future blessings or consequences depending on whether you believe these Spirit-led proverbs or you ignore them to your own peril. What exactly are proverbs? Let’s turn to the opening verses in Proverbs itself:

*<sup>1:1</sup> The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:  
<sup>2</sup> for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight;  
<sup>3</sup> for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair;  
<sup>4</sup> for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—  
<sup>5</sup> let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—  
<sup>6</sup> for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.*

A proverb is a short, poetic saying that declares or teaches a practical truth from God’s perspective to help us know how to live wisely. Proverbs is wisdom literature (as is Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon). Its intent is to guide the follower of God into pursuing knowledge

from God and applying it in life's daily decisions. It is Hebrew poetry, which is mostly two or three line statements that are synonymous and say the same thing or are opposites which show the good and the bad.

What is the theme of Proverbs?

## **Proverbs teaches us that *Fearing God Leads to Wise Thinking and Godly Actions***

It is stated right after those introductory verse we read in 1:7,

*1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Here we have two contrasting lines; those who fear God grow in knowledge and wisdom (knowledge and wisdom and instruction are all synonymous). Those who despise it do not fear God and as a result are fools. It's declared again in 9:10,

*10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

Here are two synonymous lines encouraging us that to fear God is to know Him and have wisdom and understanding. It is not a coincidence that Ch. 1 begins this way and ch.9 repeats it because Ch. 1-9 is a unit. The first 9 chapters are teaching units written by a Father/King to his (mostly) sons who are teenagers or young men. Old enough to be warned about following prostitutes in Ch. 5-6. They are a collection of Biblically wise truths that guide the young person (who by then often think they know it all and can run their own life without anyone's help) into the reality that only God knows everything and life will go a lot better if you trust what He says and do what He says. That goes for anyone of any age but it also is an about face to the 'follow your heart' and 'do whatever you feel is right' mindset of the world we live in. Unsaved people are in the mess they are in because they despise God's truths and are suffering the consequences of unwise choices.

Our two verses this morning fall into Ch. 3, a larger immediate section of which they are in the middle of vv.1-12 yet the rest of the chapter flows from as well, especially vv.13-18. Of all the chapters in Proverbs this shows most clearly that wisdom is rooted in God and in keeping His Word. Vv. 5-6 remind us that

### ***The wisest thing to do is to put our trust in God***

What does it mean to "*Trust in the Lord*"? Trust in v.5 is synonymous with 'lean' in v.6, even though they contrast what we should trust in or lean on. Trust means to rely on, to depend on. It is not simply a belief, something we mentally affirm but it is something we are totally dependent on so that we place our hope in. To trust God means ...

### **To place our hope confidently in God (v.5a)**

There's a good illustration of trust found in Ps. 112:6-9,

*6 Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.*

*7 They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

*8 Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.*

<sup>9</sup> *They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor.*

Trust means security, and God is the object of our trust because while circumstances may temporarily shake us, we know the future and that one day we will look in triumph on those who oppose us and God. The early church fathers it this way because when they translated the Hebrew into Greek, they translated the word 'hope' for trust. Hope in God with all your heart. We have hope in God because through faith in Him and His Word He gives us a secure future. This means He controls our present in order to get us to our secure future with Him.

We trust in the LORD – Yahweh, God's covenant name. This is important because Solomon has been building on this in v.1. *'My son, do not forget my teaching but keep my commands in your heart.'* The word for teaching here is Torah, so his teaching is not common sense, or good business practice or parenting advice, its Scripture. Trust in the Lord means to place our hope confidently in God

### ***As the Word shows (vv.1-3)***

And its not just the word 'teaching/torah' that points us in that direction. 'Command' is the word used for God's commandments. Love and faith in v.3 are the familiar Hebrew words 'hesed' and 'emet'; hesed referring God's covenant faithfulness and 'emet' meaning truth referring to God's faithfulness to His Word.

There is a poetic pattern here in 3:1-12. There are six pairs of verses. The odd verses 1,3,5,7,9,11 give an admonition and the even verses that follow (2,4,6,8,10,12) give the benefit or reward if one obeys the admonition. So what does putting our hope in God do for us?

### ***He gives us a life of shalom (v.2, 8)***

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, <sup>2</sup> for they will prolong your life many years  
and bring you peace and prosperity.*

The benefit of obeying and worshipping God (definition of fearing God) is a longer life, peace and prosperity. Before we all get \$ signs in our minds remember the context of this verse: Old Testament Israel. God made promises to Israel that He didn't make to the church. God tied Israel's obedience directly to their agriculture. He said if you obey Me, I will send rain so your crops can grow, so your cattle can eat and you can reap the benefits of a productive farm. You will have plenty to live on and trade with your neighbours and sell at the market.

However, let me also tell you that the word 'prosperity' is not in the Hebrew. It literally reads *'For length of days, years of lives and peace they [God's teachings and commands] will bring you.'* The word for peace means to be physically, relationally and spiritually healthy. So Old Testament prosperity is implied but only as part of a complete understanding of shalom/peace.

'And the peace/shalom of God that transcends all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus when we put our hope in God and don't worry about how to meet our own needs and solve our own problems. When we actively trust God we have His peace.

When we actively trust God He meets our needs and we have shalom. As well, when we actively trust God we understand

## ***He wants to show us His grace (v.4)***

When we *'Let love and faithfulness never leave you; [and] bind them around your neck, [and] write them on the tablet of your heart. 'Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

V.4 sounds a lot like Deut. 6:6-8 where Israel was commanded by God to put His commands on their hearts, impress them to their children, tie them on their foreheads and arms and write them on the doorframes of their houses. Wherever you go. Same principle here in Prov. 3:4, the neck being your outward adornment and your heart being your internal mind. When we live out what we believe (putting our hope confidently in God) He gives us favour (word for grace) toward people and Himself. This proverb becomes an echo forward to Luke 2:52 where we read about a young man named Jesus, who because He feared God and obeyed His Word grew in wisdom and favour with God and man. When we live according to God's Word, we will treat people well and develop a good testimony. Even if they disagree with what we believe they respect us because we are people of integrity who benefit the communities where we live.

Another benefit of trusting God is we find that

## ***He wants to bless us (v.8, 10, 13, 18)***

... when we confidently put our hope in Him. V. 7 is the admonition *'Do not be wise in your own eyes'* (because that is the opposite of trusting God as we'll see in a minute) *fear the lord and shun evil, this (result) will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.* The word for body is actually navel. The navel is metaphoric for what's outside our body and bones the inside of our body. Obedience to God is both physically and spiritually beneficial. Remember how David, in Ps. 32 described his physical and spiritual turmoil when he tried to hide his sin of adultery with Bathsheba? He said

*<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

When we worry about a problem and don't give it to God, or refuse to repent of a sin in our life, it affects us spiritually and physically. Trusting God brings wholeness; a peace of body and mind. Shunning evil is physically and spiritually healthy.

V. 9, the admonition to honour God with our wealth results in the blessing v.10 of having our needs met. I'll come back to this. Another way God blesses us. And then vv.13-18 is another unit of the benefits of trusting God and notice that it begins and ends with the word blessing:

*<sup>13</sup> Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding,*

*<sup>18</sup> She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.*

Trust in the Lord with all your heart – an internal commitment is contrasted with *lean not on your own understanding.* The wisest thing to do is to put our hope confidently in God

## ***Not in our limited understanding (v.5b)***

The word understanding is a good word – often synonymous with wisdom – but here it is not God's understanding or wisdom but it is ours. How do we avoid trusting our 'wisdom'? *'In all your*

ways *acknowledge Him*'. The word acknowledge means to know with familiarity. To acknowledge Him in all our ways means to

### ***Know God and how He thinks (v.6a)***

Is. 55:8-9 tells us that there's a huge difference between how we think and God thinks,

<sup>8</sup> *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.*

<sup>9</sup> *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

The heavens are astronomically higher than the earth! Our thoughts are selfish and marred by sin. We look at life through our own eyes or the opinions of those around us. Putting our hope confidently in a God who we can't see does not sound logical from an earthly perspective. But from God's perspective – who sees all and knows all and is taking us in a direction that will result in our presence with Him for all eternity – it makes perfect sense. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean (put all your weight on, put all your eggs in that basket) on your own limited and skewed understanding. How about an illustration? God gives us two illustrations right after v.6 (this is why we have to read the Bible in context).

#### Illustration # 1

<sup>9</sup> *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops;*

<sup>10</sup> *then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

Both the Old Testament and New Testament teach us that we are to first set aside for God a portion of our income to be given to Him. That doesn't make sense because if I give some away I'll have less in order to fill my barn or fridge or closet! *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.* Again, from a human perspective it doesn't sound logical but from God's it does because He blesses obedience. Shalom – healthy relationships and an inner peace. Those of us who have chosen to honour God with the income we receive and experienced the blessing of seeing God meet our needs time and time again know this is true.

#### Illustration # 2

<sup>11</sup> *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke,*

<sup>12</sup> *because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

Discipline and rebuking are unpleasant and even painful. Logically it doesn't make sense to hurt someone in order to help them. But when done right and done with grace and love, discipline produces repentance and turns us back in the right direction. Acknowledge the Lord in all your ways. As we go on our way every day ask God for help to make wise decisions that honour Him. Put your hope confidently in the One who sees our way ahead of us that we can't. And when we trust Him,

### ***The path of life will have fewer roadblocks (v.6b)***

The benefit is '*And He will direct our paths or make our paths straight*'. The idea here is that when we don't trust God in life's choices, we are going to experience a lot of self-inflicted obstacles that hinder our life, that make life rockier. Disobedience creates problems with God and with people. That's obvious. Obedience will improve our attitude and relationships, and we'll inflict less pain on others and ourselves. We'll experience more shalom, more wholeness.

We all have some turmoil, stress and fractured relationships in our life. Could some of it be self-inflicted because we're trying to do everything our way thinking as if we are wise in our own eyes? *Put your hope confidently in the One who knows every-thing about us, about our world, about our future with all your heart which opposes our limited understanding.* It is an act of faith. Get to know Him more each day, studying His Word, especially in community – because then we get a balanced perspective making sure we're understanding properly – and doing what He says. Jesus says we are blessed when we are doers of His Word and not just hearers.

Then watch God gradually remove the roadblocks and potholes of stress and people problems. It's not going to happen overnight because life is a long road but as we slowly trust Him more and ourselves less, we'll begin to see a transformation take place in our hearts, because God's shalom/peace is becoming more evident to us the more we trust Him with all our hearts.

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