

How Life Works

Trust God in everything

The book of Proverbs can be summarized in one brief passage that has probably been memorized by more Christians than almost any other passage in the Bible. If you have any church background, I am sure you will know these verses.

They are *Proverbs 3:5-6*: *'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.'*

I consider this the crowning proverb of all the proverbs. Not just because it is familiar to so many people, but because it has had such far-reaching impact on anyone's life who decides to apply this proverb to their life.

I remember walking down the path at school being challenged by God to think about how seriously I intended to take my faith. I can't remember the situation that prompted this thought, but I can still see the moment. It was after lunch, on the way to my next class and obviously something had happened that cause me to think about this.

I knew that Jesus had died for me, I believed all the right things and I thought I wanted to try and walk with him. But to what extent? I knew I should read my Bible a little bit. I knew I should pray now and then. I knew I should get somewhat involved in my church. But how far did I need to take all this?

I knew a few people who were a bit fanatical, totally devoted, full-on Christians. It seemed, their faith was altering everything: their morals, their relationships, their language, their attitudes. Some of this seemed a little extreme to me. I wasn't quite sure I wanted to go that far. But how far did I want to go? To what extent did I want my faith to affect my everyday life?

It was shortly after that time I met Gay, once I got over how gorgeous she was I began to notice the way she lived as a Christian, how she lived out her faith, she lived it whole heartedly. I also met some others in our youth group who were passionate about their faith. I was challenged by their example.

I begun asking myself questions; Why not put my whole life in God's hands? Why not trust him fully? Why not stake my life on him? Why not let him lead and guide me in every area of my life for as long as he proves himself trustworthy?

As I stumbled through life trying to live out my faith I also asked, what might God have in mind for my life? Where might he want me to go? What might he want me to do or to become?

For the next few years I asked God to show me what he wanted me to do. What if he had extraordinary plans for me and I was deaf to his voice? What if I missed all this because I wasn't able to hear him or willing to trust him? All sorts of issues came up; work, marriage, having children, Bible College, ministry?

I never heard an audible voice, I never had a nice bible verse, I took a purely pragmatic view and worked out the risks and made one decision at a time. I knew we could always bail out and get a real job at any stage if we got it wrong or if God proved himself untrustworthy but we decided there was little to lose. We might as well go for it.

It doesn't sound that spiritual and I guess it wasn't, but God was willing to respond to my calculated approach to faith with the gifts of his love and his guidance. And at each step he has taken what I gave and turned my life into just a fantastic adventure. I sometimes think of the things I would have missed had I made a different choice.

The same opportunity is open to all of us. Anyone can make the same decision to trust God, to 'give God a try'. He accepts all of us where we are, with all our doubts and reservations firmly in place - just the way he accepted me. We have to trust him just one day at a time.

Trust in the Lord

Where are you at in the trust journey? Maybe you're almost ready to make this decision, but you have a few questions. Maybe you look at the first part of Proverbs 3:5-6 (*'Trust in the Lord with all your heart'*), and you think you would like to try that, but you are not quite sure what it means. How would you begin trusting God on a daily basis?

Let's use your imagination a bit, imagine the developing of a relationship. For a good number of you, you might need to cast your memory back a fair bit. Maybe you have or are watching your kids go through those "early in relationship" stages. You meet a young man or woman who makes your heart miss a beat. You connect every now and then and you discover you "enjoy each other's company".

During those first interactions you were undoubtedly watching closely to see how trustworthy the new focus of your romantic interest was. Whether you were consciously testing that person, or doing so on a subconscious level, you were assessing things in order to determine whether or not this was someone you could really trust.

If he said he would be at your house at 7.00 p.m., you were quite relieved when he turned up on time. Had he turned up an hour late without so much as a mention of his lateness, you probably would have been annoyed, even if you didn't mention it. Punctuality may seem like a small thing, but deep inside you knew it was an indication of a person's trustworthiness. How could you entrust the deeper issues of your life to someone who wasn't even trustworthy enough to turn up on time? (An aside to note: if the bloke turned up on time but the girl wasn't ready, well that's life.)

But let's assume both of you were ready on time and proved trustworthy in regard to other relatively minor issues in life. **The next step in developing trust was probably to take some risks in conversation and discuss a few matters of the heart.** As the other person spoke, you listened carefully, trying to discern the ring of truth in his or her words. Did this person's thoughts, ideas and descriptions of experiences seem well-grounded and believable, or did they sound far-fetched and away with the fairies?

And when you spoke honestly and openly, did that person listen carefully and respond appropriately? Did he or she offer good insights, heartfelt compassion, thoughtful affirmations or necessary challenges? The nature of that conversation and every conversation that followed either increases or decreases your trust in this person.

As your commitment to each other grows, the trust test continues on a higher level. It has to. The greater the commitment involved in a relationship, the greater the level of trust that is required. What began as attention to a person's **punctuality** and later as attention to the **trustworthiness** of what he or she said has grown into a concern over issues like **long-term loyalty, truthfulness and dependability**. As the commitments become broader and the confidences deeper, the breadth and depth of trust must similarly increase. That is part of what it means to **make life work** in relationships. And we can't sit passively waiting for trust to grow. Building trust requires action. We need to take little steps and then assess the progress. We need to take little risks and then evaluate the consequences.

After engaging in that process for months, perhaps even years, we come to a point where we can say, 'I can fully trust this person. I have no doubt about that. This person is a trustworthy friend!'

Or time and experience may force us to conclude that a certain person **cannot** be trusted. We have seen too many inconsistencies of character in that person and have witnessed too much irresponsible behaviour. In relationship with him or her we have experienced too many disappointments. All the indications tell us that this person is a bad risk.

To trust or not to trust. This is the question. This is no small decision, nor is it a decision we make all at once. I think of it less as a decision than as a gradual move towards a given conclusion, a conclusion based on hundreds of personal interactions and countless hours of deep reflection.

The big step

It is similar in our relationship with God. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart,' says the writer of this proverb. But it is not as easy as just saying it. There is no short cut to trust. There may be good cause for trusting God as we read the biblical record of God's trustworthy behaviour throughout history – but there is a more personal dimension of trust in God that we must develop in the same way that we develop trust with friends, our children, boy and girlfriends or spouses: by sharing our everyday lives with him deeply and genuinely over a long period of time. That is the only way to determine for ourselves if it is safe and wise to entrust our lives to God.

Where are you in your spiritual journey? Has God proved himself to you to the extent that you are ready for the next step of faith?

If this is new to you, the next step may be a big one, but the truth is that you cannot make progress in your relationship with God until you take it.

Sooner or later, every person who investigates Christianity and finds God trustworthy has to take that big step of personally receiving the message of Christ and believing that he is who he claims to be, the Son of God whose life and death opens the way for us to be adopted into the family of God.

Many people come to the point of decision and ask, 'What if I call upon God to forgive my sins and to lead my life, and I discover there is no one at home in heaven? What if nothing happens? What if there is only silence?' My only response is that there is just one-way to find out: Take the step and see if God proves himself trustworthy. If there is only silence from heaven, you have your answer. You gave it a try and it didn't work. Apparently it wasn't real. Now you are free to walk away, and you never have to look back.

This could happen. You could sincerely seek God and find that he is not there. Though the promises of Scripture and the experiences of millions of people throughout history strongly suggest otherwise and give us ample reason for believing that God is there, they do not offer us ultimate proof. Taking the big step towards God always involves an act of faith. But look at it this way: a life worth living requires many steps of faith.

Think of a first time skydiver experience, He may ask the instructor, 'Can I really trust this thing to open?' He says, 'There's only one way to find out.'

Though the stakes in skydiving are high - life and death hang upon a ripcord – I am told the thrill is fantastic, but it is an optional experience. If it seems too scary, we don't have to do it. Unless the challenge and the pleasure entice us, there is no good reason to exercise our faith by jumping out of an aeroplane at five thousand feet.

But deciding how to respond to Christ's offer of salvation is not optional. Eternity hangs in the balance, and we have to choose. Either choice requires faith.

- Choosing to place our trust in Christ demands faith in a Creator and Saviour we cannot see or hear or feel with our senses.
- Turning away from Christ's offer demands either faith in our own sufficiency to face the God of eternity alone or faith in a godless universe.

Which way do you want to go with your faith?

Are you ready to take the big step of faith? You can do it by praying a simple prayer: *'Jesus Christ, I need a Saviour. I need someone to forgive my sins and to lead me in my life. Please do that for me.'*

If you have just prayed that prayer or want to pray that prayer please come and talk to me after the service.

Some of you may have done that long ago, but then you turned away from God's leadership; for whatever reason, you went back to trying to live life on your own. But maybe now you are ready to ask for God's forgiveness and to trust once again in his leadership. If you're ready to do that, please don't hold back. Tell God that you need his help and his guidance and that you are rededicating yourself to him. He is waiting to hear those words.

Mental files

I am confident that anyone who acts on faith will find God to be trustworthy for salvation. But that is only the beginning. The next step is to trust God in the many decisions of everyday life. Throughout this series on Proverbs, I have done my best to build a compelling case for following God's wisdom.

It has been about 35 years since I made the decision to try to entrust my entire life to God. As I look back over the years, I have no regrets about the times I followed God's path. Not a single one. Sometimes it was hard; sometimes it was confusing. But always, in the end, I was glad I had chosen God's wisdom.

Let me assure you I have done plenty of dumb things and I am sure you will see a number more. If I kept a file of stupid things I have done, it would be big. We are not born wise; we are born with foolishness in our hearts and minds. One of the main tasks of life is to grow out of foolishness and into wisdom, God's wisdom. And that involves trusting the Lord with all your heart.

Lean not on your own understanding

What does the second section of Proverbs 3:5 mean?

The Bible tells us to '*lean not on our own understanding*'. Does that mean we throw our brains away in order to grow as Christians? Does it mean we have to discount our discernment and assume that we have no understanding of anything, that we have learnt nothing during the course of our lives? Of course not!

But it does caution us to be wary of our reflex human reactions to the complex issues of life. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, human perspective is always limited, and natural intuition is always slightly suspect. If the truth be told, we will all mess up our lives to some degree if we merely follow our own insights. We need God's input in the decision making of everyday life.

A while back I came across an article called '178 Seconds to Live'. It was about twenty pilots who were capable pilots in clear weather but who had never taken instrument training. Each was put in a flight simulator and instructed to do whatever he could to keep the aeroplane under control as he flew into thick, dark clouds and stormy weather. The

article stated that all twenty pilots 'crashed' and 'killed themselves' within an average of 178 seconds. It took these seasoned pilots with skilled intuition less than three minutes to destroy themselves once they lost their visual reference points! They thought they had things under control, they thought they knew how to correct the situation but each corrective manoeuvre was just another nail in their coffin.

When the writer of this proverb tells us not to lean on our own understanding, he is making the point that no matter how clever we are or how many life experiences we have under our belts, we still need to realize that human judgment is always limited and sometimes just wrong. Sometimes our best notions about what ought to be said or done are ill-advised, dangerous, even destructive. When it comes to the key decisions in our lives, we almost always need deeper insights and a broader perspective than mere human wisdom can offer us.

What we desperately need is God's mind on the serious matters of life. He offers it to us through the teaching of his Word and the inner guidance of his Spirit. Our job is not to question it or to assume that we know better, but to trust that God does know better how to make our lives work. A helpful spiritual rule of thumb might be. 'When in doubt, always, always, always trust the wisdom of God.'

In all your ways acknowledge him

The context of this passage, '*to acknowledge God*' means to acknowledge his wisdom, his insight and his understanding. That is what I have been trying to encourage in my messages on Proverbs. '*In all our ways*' means ... well, in *all* our ways. We can be assured that any area of life we decide to manage without the benefit of God's wisdom, insight and understanding is going to end up creating a problem. Any area in which we try to keep God out will probably be the area that messes up the quality of our lives and threatens those around us. It doesn't take many holes to sink a ship, just one. And it doesn't even have to be a big one.

Some people look at their career ambitions, others at their money, or their choice of friends or their leisure-time activities, and they say, 'I know all about your wisdom, God. I know what the Bible says about this. But the answer is "No, I don't want your advice. I don't want your wisdom. I'll manage this area on my own.'

Many people seem determined to learn everything the hard way. But we could all save ourselves and others enormous trouble if we could learn what millions of people have learned before us: Any area of life that is not placed under God's leadership and wisdom will eventually be the source of great frustration, heartache and pain.

The writer of Proverbs pleads with us not to subject ourselves to this kind of risk. If we acknowledge God in all our ways, in every area of our lives, we can significantly lower the risk of trouble. It is like patching up the one hole that is threatening to sink our ship.

And he will make your paths straight

Before this last line of the passage sends anyone off on a tangent, I want to be clear about what it does not mean. It does not mean that God will necessarily make us healthy, wealthy and happy. It does not mean that he will make us comfortable, popular and slim. It does not mean that he will satisfy all our trivial wishes and desires.

'He will make your paths straight' means that he will give our lives direction, purpose, focus and fulfilment. He will guide us around swamps and ditches so we can stay on the right path. He will work in us to transform our hearts and souls. He will work through us to have an impact on others. And when we die, he will lead us straight through the gates of heaven. What more could we ask for?

Don't miss the adventure

In Jeremiah 29:11, *God says, 'I know the plans I have for you.... They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope'* (LB).

God has a plan, a future and a hope, for each of us, with our own name on it. Though God doesn't promise a life free from problems or pain, he does promise a life that is too good to miss. But we will never discover that life - that adventure - until we entrust ourselves to his guidance and leadership. God knows us better than we know ourselves. He understands our capabilities and our limitations. He knows exactly what pitfalls we need to avoid and sees the full extent of our potential. He sets his sights high for us, and he is willing to give us every form of assistance we need to live out his perfectly designed plan. But we need to turn to him and trust him fully.

Whatever step of faith you need to take, I hope and pray that you will take it. I don't know what God has in store for your life, but I do know that it will be an adventure you won't want to miss!