

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, January 1, 2012**

IN ALL YOUR WAYS

Proverbs 3:1-12

Out with the old, in with the new. Good-bye 2011, hello 2012. Another year is history. Another year begins. Like any other year, 2011 had both highs and lows, joys and sorrows, laughter and tears, disappointments and delights, memories to cherish and, perhaps, moments to forget. It certainly had its share of surprises and was, like any other year, filled with opportunities to trust God.

For some of us, for different reasons and in different ways, 2011 was a really hard year. If this is true for you, it may be that the thing(s) that made 2011 so hard are still present in your life. The calendar says it is a new year, but your circumstances haven't changed. For some reason, perhaps for a reason He has not yet revealed to you, God has allowed these things or circumstances to remain a part of your life as you step into the new year. Whatever else God's purpose may be in the trials and hardships we experience in this life, they are opportunities to trust Him. Or to continue to trust Him. To keep on trusting Him. It is true for each one of us. It is true in your marriage, your family, your vocation, your health, your finances, and your dreams. It is certainly true for us as a church family as we face a difficult decision together.

Except for God, no one knows what surprises, what unexpected twists and turns, lie ahead in 2012. Only God knows all that the coming year will hold for us. Lots of people, though, can't seem to resist the urge to try to predict the future. One popular web site (ask.com) recently announced their top ten predictions for 2012. Among their predictions are these – which, you will see, have little or no eternal significance:

- George Clooney will win not one but two Academy Awards this year.
- Dr. Oz will surpass Dr. Phil in the post-Oprah ratings battle.
- Facebook will go public with the world's largest IPO.
- Tiger Woods will retire from golf.
- (Some of you will like this one especially:) The Green Bay Packers will win their second straight Super Bowl.
- Due to the sudden celebrity of Kate Middleton's sister, the name "Pippa" will leap onto the list of the top 10 baby names of the year.

Here is a prediction that is not on the list, but is more certain than all of the others put together, and one of which you can be absolutely sure: God will remain Sovereign over all of creation, not only in 2012, but for all of time and eternity. The attributes and character of God will not change, and His kingdom will prevail. Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). Because Jesus is Savior and Lord, because God rules over all, it can be well with our souls. As James Emery White wrote

in his Church & Culture blog just a few days ago, it may not be well with our world, but it can be well with our souls (www.churchandculture.org, Vol. 7, No. 108, December 29, 2011).

It can be well with your soul and mine as we take to heart the godly counsel we find in Proverbs 3. Solomon presents it as a wise father's instruction to his son. It is good fatherly advice for godly living and, especially in verses 5-7, shows where true wisdom is found. Listen to these verses again:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge (God),
and He will direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

Now, listen to it from *The Message*:

Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart;
don't try to figure out everything on your own.
Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go;
He's the One who will keep you on track.
Don't assume that you know it all.
Run to GOD! Run from evil!

Our natural human inclination is to want to lean on our own understanding. I'm speaking here of unregenerate, unredeemed human nature. Our pride deceives us into thinking we can figure out everything on our own. We take pride in our knowledge – in ourselves – and think we have all the answers. But wisdom tells us that we *don't* have all the answers and that if we lean on our own understanding to navigate all the complexities and perplexities of life, we're going to topple over. We're sure to sink.

To lean on something is to put your full weight on it – like leaning against a wall, or leaning on your car, or leaning on the shoulder of a sister or brother in Christ. Leaning is an act of faith. It is an act of trust. What Solomon is saying – what God is saying to us here – is this: Don't lean on yourself. Don't lean on your own wisdom or knowledge or understanding of life. Don't trust in your own expertise to figure out all the problems of life. Don't put your trust in human wisdom to figure it all out. Instead, lean on the Lord your God. Put the full weight of your faith, your hope, your confidence, your trust, in Him. Trust Him with your life. Trust Him completely. Submit freely, fully, and joyfully to His wise, gracious, and sovereign rule. Trust Him in the things you understand and in the things you don't understand. Trust Him with the things you can see and for the things you cannot see. In all your ways, in every corner and detail of your life, acknowledge Him as Lord and God. Don't put up a fence or a wall with a NO TRESPASSING sign around some private area of your life in order to keep God out. And don't try to box God in. Don't mess around with sin of any kind. Don't hold onto any kind of sin in your heart, thinking it is okay as long as you keep it

“under control.” You cannot fully trust and cherish and honor God as long as you refuse to let go of some sin you secretly enjoy. Do you understand what I’m saying?

In all your ways, acknowledge God as God. Trust Him in everything. With everything. For everything.

In his book *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning tells the story of a Catholic priest named John Kavanaugh who spent a month in Calcutta, India, in 1975, working with Mother Teresa’s ministry at “the house of the dying,” where he helped to care for women and men found dying on the streets. Though Mother Teresa did not receive the Nobel Peace Prize until a few years later, Kavanaugh knew about her ministry and wondered if it was the kind of work God wanted him to do. So, after arriving in Calcutta, he asked Mother Teresa to pray for him. “What do you want me to pray for?” she asked.

“Pray that I have clarity,” he said.

Mother Teresa replied firmly: “No, I will not do that.”

When he asked her why, she said: “Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.” When Kavanaugh responded that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, Mother Teresa said: ‘I have never had clarity. What I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God.’”

Not clarity but trust. Clarity is not a bad thing, but God does not always give us the clarity we long for, does He? We cannot always see the road ahead of us. We have limited visibility. We don’t know what the coming year or even the coming week will bring. Yet God calls us to trust Him completely, with all our heart, and to acknowledge Him as Lord of all things, trusting Him to give us direction for our lives, step by step by step.

Consider Job for a moment. In the midst of overwhelming personal suffering, as he searched for an explanation of what he was going through, he cried out for wisdom and understanding. In Job 28:12, he asks:

Where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell?

He concludes that true wisdom and understanding cannot be found among philosophers and leaders who don’t know God, nor can you buy them with any amount of gold or other precious jewels. In verse 20 he asks again:

Where then does wisdom come from?
Where does understanding dwell?

Then, beginning in verse 23 he gives the answer:

God understands the way to it
 and He alone knows where it dwells,
 for He ... sees everything under the heavens.
 When He established the force of the wind
 and measured out the waters,
 when He made a decree for the rain
 and a path for the thunderstorm,
 then He looked at wisdom and appraised it.
 He confirmed it and tested it.
 And He said to mankind:
 “The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom,
 and to shun evil is understanding.”
 (Job 28:23-28)

God knows where wisdom is found, for He is the source of true wisdom.

“The fear of the LORD,” said Solomon, “is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

The fear of the Lord. Reverence for God. Treating God’s name – and God – as holy. Honoring God. Trusting Him with all your heart. Acknowledging Him, exalting Him, obeying Him, and following Him in all your ways. This is where true wisdom is found. Wisdom does not mean knowing all the answers. Wisdom is knowing the One who has all the answers. Wisdom is knowing and trusting the One who is the final answer.

Whatever this year may hold for you, whatever it may hold for us in our church family, let’s trust in the Lord with all our hearts. Let’s put the full weight of our trust on Him, and not lean on our own understanding. Let’s acknowledge Him as God and Lord in all our ways, in all we think and do and say. Let’s run to God, and run from evil. And let’s follow our Lord and Leader with reverence and trust and joy. This is where true wisdom is found.

Lord, let it be so in us, to the glory of Your name. Amen.