

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 4, 2007**

WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Proverbs 3:1-10

This passage from Proverbs 3 contains two of the most familiar, best-known and most-often memorized verses in the whole Bible. It wouldn't surprise me if many of you have committed these verses to memory. Some of you have probably adopted them as your life verses. I'm referring, of course, to 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
(or, and He will direct your paths).

I simply want to try to unpack these verses for you this morning, in the hope that God will sharpen our understanding of His Word, and both inspire and equip us to live it out in a way that pleases Him.

TRUST IN THE LORD

The Bible has a lot to say about trust. It warns us against putting our trust in the wrong place, and reminds us of the blessedness of trusting in Him.

For example, Psalm 146 says:

Do not put your trust in princes (or presidents or political parties),
in mortal men, who cannot save....
Blessed is the one whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God.
(Psalm 146:3,5)

In Psalm 20, David – Israel's mighty king and military leader – says:

Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
(Psalm 20:7)

Or listen to what the Lord Himself says in Jeremiah 17:5, 7:

Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who depends on flesh for his strength,
and whose heart turns away from the LORD....

But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is in Him.

David composed this song of praise to God in Psalm 40:

I waited patiently for the LORD;
He turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
He set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the LORD.
Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.
(Psalm 40:1-4)

God brought David from the mire to the choir, and David sang of the blessedness of trusting in Him.

Isaiah 26:3 reminds us that the Lord “will keep in perfect peace” those who are steadfast and resolute in their faith, because they trust in Him. And the next verse (26:4) urges us to “trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.”

Quoting Isaiah 28:16, both Paul (in Romans 9:33 and 10:11) and Peter (in 1 Peter 2:6) affirm that “anyone who trusts in (the Lord) will never be put to shame.” Never. Our adversary Satan may take his best shot at us and try to trap us in a prison of shame. But if we are not ashamed of the Lord Jesus and the power of the gospel, if our trust is in the righteousness and all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus, God Himself will not allow Satan to succeed. We can rest secure in the sufficiency of God’s grace.

What does it mean to trust in the Lord? Theologian Dale Bruner explains it this way. If you’re a cat person, I think you will especially like it. He says: “The best parable of trust we have in our home is our cat, Clement of Alexandria. When our cat goes outside, he lives in terror. He looks around as though it’s a jungle, and he is terrified. But when he comes in the house, he lies on the floor right between the kitchen and the dining room – where we walk most frequently – and falls asleep in total trust. (My wife) or I could squash Clement’s head, but he trusts us. Our cat lives in complete, total confidence in his human companions. Every time I see Clement just lying there, I say to myself, *That’s what Jesus wants me to do – to trust Him.* The kind of trust the cat shows in us is the kind of trust the Lord Jesus invites from us.”

The essence of trust in the Lord is to rest the weight of our confidence securely and totally on Him. There is an oft-told story – many of you have probably heard it – about a famous tightrope walker over a hundred years ago who strung a cable across Niagara Falls, above the Falls, all the way from the American side to the Canadian side. To the applause and astonishment of a huge crowd, he would walk across the tightrope, with the rushing, cascading waters of the Falls thundering beneath him. Back and forth he went, with the crowd applauding wildly. But that isn't all he did. To the further amazement of the crowd, he put on a blindfold and went back and forth above the Falls. Then he rode a bicycle back and forth across the tightrope. Then he pushed a wheelbarrow back and forth. The people had never seen anything like it.

Then one day, as he was pushing the wheelbarrow back and forth above the Falls, he called out to the crowd on one side of the Falls and asked if they thought he could push the wheelbarrow across the tightrope from one side of the Falls to the other with a person riding in the wheelbarrow. The crowd went wild. They said: “We know you can do it. We've seen you do some amazing things. We believe in you. You're the greatest!” Then the tightrope walker said: “All right, who will go first? Come right up and get in the wheelbarrow.”

Do you think anyone took him up on his offer? No. Would you?

To trust is to rest the weight of your confidence securely on another person. It is imperative that the one you trust be trustworthy, or else you will find yourself disappointed. The Bible consistently – and insistently – calls us to trust in the Lord, because He is worthy of our trust. And He has demonstrated it over and over again.

Think of the ways God has demonstrated His faithfulness, His trustworthiness and sufficiency in your life. And make the decision to trust Him with your life, no matter what you may be facing. Do you believe God is able? Do you believe God is trustworthy? Then get in the wheelbarrow of trust in the Lord, resting the whole weight of your confidence on Him, and trust Him to take you through all the dangers, toils and snares of life, and bring you safely to the other side.

Do you know the story of Gladys Aylward? A missionary to China in the 1930s, she was forced to flee for her life when Japanese forces invaded the region where she had established her mission. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led 100 orphaned children on a dangerous journey over the mountains on foot to a safer province. At one point in their 100-mile journey, Gladys despaired of reaching safety with the children. In her weariness, her hope had all but disappeared. One of the orphans, a 13-year-old girl, reminded Gladys of the story of Moses and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by the people of Israel. “But I am not Moses!” Gladys said in desperation. To which the girl said: “Of course you aren't. But the Lord is still God!”

When Gladys and her band of children made it safely through, they demonstrated once more that no matter how inadequate we *feel*, no matter how inadequate we *are*, God is still God. And we can trust in Him. Because He is able. And worthy of our trust.

Verse 5 urges us not only to “trust in the Lord,” but to trust Him “with all your heart.” With *all* your heart. Not 50 percent of your heart. Not 80 percent of your heart. Not even 95 percent of your heart. With *all* your heart. Nothing held back. In Psalm 86:11, David prayed: “Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear (honor or revere) Your name.” Then he says in the next verse (86:12): “I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart. I will glorify Your name forever.” Wholehearted trust and praise – from an undivided heart – bring joy to God’s heart and honor to His name.

The second part of verse 5 says: “Lean not on your own understanding.” The same idea is echoed in verse 7, which says: “Do not be wise in your own eyes.” Or, as it says in *The Message*: “Don’t assume that you know it all!” There is a limit to human wisdom and understanding. If we think we know it all, if we think we can handle a situation without seeking God’s wisdom or guidance or help, we are prone to get it wrong. In an excellent book on Proverbs called *Making Life Work*, Bill Hybels says that no matter how smart 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 wrong. It just is not wise to lean on or trust in our own understanding of things, because our perspective is always limited and often skewed.

So, one of the keys to “making life work” is to trust in the Lord, not our own wisdom or ingenuity, and to trust Him with all our heart. As the hymn says: “They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.”

A 19th century Roman Catholic Christian named John Henry Newman once said: “God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.... Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain.”

Let me ask you today: Do you believe God does nothing in vain? Do you – will you – trust Him fully? With all your heart?

IN ALL YOUR WAYS

Verse 6 says: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

To acknowledge God is to recognize *His* wisdom and understanding, and to recognize His Lordship in our lives. “In all (our) ways” means just what it says – in *all* our ways.

Have you acknowledged and submitted graciously to God's rule in all your ways? In every area of your life? Or have you put up some "No Trespassing" signs in some areas of your life to keep God out? Is there some area of your life where you have said to God: "I don't want Your involvement in this area. I'll just manage this on my own."? For some, maybe it is your career ambitions or your business practices. For others, maybe it is your money. Maybe it is your sexual desires. Or your choice of friends. Maybe it is your marriage.

If there is any area of your life that you have been keeping from God, if there is any part of your life that you have roped off in order to keep God out, in one way or another you are likely to make a mess of it. If you have posted any "No Trespassing" signs in your life, take them down and acknowledge God in *all* your ways. Live every moment of your life *coram deo* – before the face of God, under His sovereign and gracious rule, and unto His glory.

If you acknowledge God in all your ways, what will He do? "He will make your paths straight" (3:6b). Other versions of the Bible say: "He will direct your paths."

Does this mean that God will automatically make us healthy? Or happy? No. Does it mean God guarantees to make us popular? Or comfortable? Or prosperous? No. Does it mean God will satisfy all our selfish desires and trivial wants? No. Does it mean God will keep us from experiencing disappointment? Or hardship? Or trouble? Or pain? No.

What it means is that as we trust in the Lord, yield to His rule in our lives, and seek His direction, He will guide us so that we can take the right path and stay on it.

Do you want God to direct your paths? Do you want Him to make your paths straight in life? Then trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Rest the weight of your confidence completely on Him. Get in the wheelbarrow and let God take you safely to the other side. In all your ways acknowledge Him – recognize His wisdom, His sufficiency and His right to rule in your life – and He will direct you in the way you should go.

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