

Trust in the Lord \* Proverbs 3:5-6

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Given that we are just hours away from a brand new year, it seems like a pretty good time to revisit a passage of Scripture that I know many of you know well:

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 straight your paths.

That's Proverbs 3:5-6 and it is excellent counsel for us as we look ahead into 2018.

We don't know what all lies ahead but I am sure that this year will be filled with some really exciting events. I know there's a wedding already on the calendar for the church and some of you will get really great news. Maybe a promotion, maybe an invitation to play on a particular team, maybe new grandchildren – who knows, maybe you'll shoot the next viral video and become an overnight internet star. Evert Winkels, YouTube sensation – I could see that.

Now that's all true, but 2018 will probably bring along its fair share of trials too. What do we do then – with circumstances that are well beyond our control, situations that make no sense to us, trials that seem just plain bad?

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

I want to spend this morning planting that truth in your heart so that it's there when you need it.

I want to spend a bit of time unpacking that verse with you this morning, and then I want to take it one step further and ask 'why?' 'Why should we trust in the LORD with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding?' A lot of people these days would say that that's just foolishness, escapism that doesn't really want to face the realities of the situation. You fight like hell to get what you want. (that a telling expression, isn't it?).

I want to unpack the passage a little bit and show you that it's not escapism. That it's not passive but actually an active and responsible way to bring our hardships to the only person who can really deal with them. I want to give you three reasons why trusting in the LORD makes sense.

First though, let's take a look at the passage, one line at a time.

Proverbs 3, verse 5.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart.

Now tell me – who does this call us to trust in? The LORD. That's right. Now, look in your Bible – what does it say specifically? Capital L, lower case o-r-d? Or all caps – LORD?

Do you remember what that means? That means that the personal name of God – Y H W H – appears there in the original Hebrew language. And do you remember who YHWH – the all caps LORD is?

The LORD created the heavens and the earth.<sup>i</sup>

The LORD promised to bless His people.

The LORD answered their cries for help and delivered them at the Exodus.

The LORD forgave His people when they sinned against Him with the Golden Calf.

The LORD delivered His people into the Promised Land and tore down the walls of Jericho.

The LORD took down the giant Goliath.

The LORD set up an eternal kingdom under David.

That's our God – YHWH – and that's who we are called to put our trust in – the LORD who creates, blesses, forgives, delivers, reigns – His actions have shown that He can be trusted.

And how much does it call us to trust Him? With all our heart. Not a little. Not trusting God until things get really bad and giving up. Trust Him with all your heart.

And what does it mean to trust Him?

Trusting God means intentionally choosing to root your hope in God's unfailing character, not in your circumstances. Do you see that? Trusting God means rooting your hope in God's unfailing character, not your circumstances.

Often times, people will look at their circumstances and say 'this is no good, God must not be good.'

But trusting God means letting what we know about God shape how our attitude towards our circumstances, not the other way around.

God looks at every situation and says 'I can handle this.' Trusting Him means acting with confidence that He will.

And that's where the second line comes in, doesn't it – lean not on your own understanding. We are smart people. God created us with brains to think and minds to make sense of the world around us. But there is a limit to our knowledge, isn't there? I'm sure you've had that experience where you're trying to make a decision and you say 'If only I knew how this one variable would turn out, that would make this decision a whole lot easier.'

That's why the proverb says –

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding.

Because there is no variable that God doesn't know.

We see what's happening around us but God sees the big picture. He knows how the pieces work together and how one seemingly pointless thing leads to another, to another, to another, to the blessings that He has planned for us.

And that's why we are called to trust Him and not our own understanding.

So that leads to the next phrase, because how exactly do you do that? How exactly do you lean on God's wisdom? Close your eyes and walking out into traffic? Refuse medical treatment trusting God to make something happen? Commit to a new job without thinking it through first?

No, we lean on God's understanding by acknowledging Him in all things. By putting Him first in all that we do. Acknowledging God means letting your relationship with Him shape everything that you do.

This word 'acknowledge' is notoriously hard to translate and you may see that if you have a different Bible translation. Literally it says here – 'In all your ways 'know' God' – and acknowledge is a pretty good way to translating it but I think there's a relational aspect here too.

I'm just trying to imagine that you're sitting in the doctor's office and you've received some news you didn't want – how do you acknowledge/know God in that situation? I think it means, in every situation, act in light of His relationship with you. Sometimes when we face a trial, all we can see is that trial and we forget that the loving, forgiving, delivering God is in our corner. Acknowledging Him means facing every situation with the knowledge that we are His beloved children, that God is at work and that we can honour God as He carries us.

In all you do, acknowledge Him, 'know' Him -

Because when you do – the verse continues – He will make your paths straight. And straight there has a moral sense – more like 'right' – He will makes your paths right. Right? Because sometimes – the straight path – the right path – the path that leads to God's blessings – actually takes a lot of bends and curves.

We're so close to Christmas so just think about Joseph's experience with Mary. Joseph most likely knew this proverb and probably thought He was going to marry Mary and settle down into a nice quiet life but then what happened? Marry Mary? Quite contrary. It turned out that 'the straight path' – the 'right' path – would lead him to stick with Mary even as she carried the son not his own, to believe the angel that this baby was in fact the son of God and not the product of infidelity, to travel over land with his pregnant wife to comply with Augustus's census, to flee from a mad king all the way down to Egypt and then back again to Galilee and then Nazareth. You can almost picture Joseph walking along in front of the donkey, reminding himself – trust in the LORD with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

So there's the proverb – have I said it enough times now that you've got it locked into your mind? I really encourage each of you to store this one away in your heart – memorize Proverbs 3:5-6 because it will give you guidance and peace at times when everything seems to be falling apart.

So that's the proverb but let's take it one step further and think about WHY we should trust in the LORD with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding.

I want to give you three reasons why it makes sense for us to put this proverb into practice.

The first is this. God is sovereign.

You know, often times, the times when this proverb will be most meaningful are times when things seem way out of our control. Someone's in a car accident, someone's in the hospice, someone with access to nuclear weapons is picking a fight with another world leader.

These things are just entirely outside of our control.

But they're not outside of God's control. For years, I had this card up on a bulletin board in my office – Relax. God's in charge.

And while I wouldn't necessarily give that particular card to someone who had just lost a loved one, the sentiment is true. God is in charge.

Psalm 135:5-6 says

5 the LORD is great... our Lord is greater than all gods.

6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths (Psa 135:5-6 NIV).

Job put it like this –

"I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. (Job 42:2 NIV).

And of course we've just heard, haven't we, in the Christmas story, one of the most powerful affirmations of God's sovereignty of all - For nothing is impossible with God." (Luk 1:37 NIV).

God is sovereign. God is in charge. There is nothing that He can't handle.

And that's one reason why we can trust Him with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding.

Now the second reason is this – God is wise.

You know, it's one thing to say – ok God – I believe that You are physically capable of handling this, but, if you take a step back and look at the situation, you may be apt to ask 'why is this even happening?' You know, as far as we can see, as far as our understanding reaches, this trial, whatever it is, just seems pointless.

And yet, God is wise. He sees with greater clarity and greater perception and greater distance all that is happening and He understands our circumstances better than we ever could. Hebrews 4:13 says:

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before [Him] (Heb 4:13 NIV).

Because He sees all the pieces, every variable, God is at work, laying out and then acting on plans that are way more complicated and way more intricate than we could ever imagine.

Paul gushes about God's wisdom in Romans 11, starting at verse 33 –

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! (Rom 11:33-36 NIV).

Now the outcome of that is that sometimes we go through things that we don't understand, but that doesn't mean that God's in the dark. In fact, sometimes God works through these trials to bring about a greater good.

I saw that illustrated last year when we were taking care of Ben's finger nail.

Remember, last Christmas, Christmas morning we had church here and Ben got his finger stuck in the door and the back and it pulled out his fingernail? Well, it's all grown back now and it's really neat to see how fast that happened.

But in the meantime, he had some stitches that needed to come out.

I knew that they needed to come out. Well, let's be honest – Julie knew that they needed to come out because if they didn't, it would get infected and just cause greater problems. But, the process of taking out the stitches would probably be uncomfortable and maybe even hurt a little. And so Ben wanted nothing to do with it. All he saw was the pain of the process and he didn't want to go through it, even though time and again, we said 'trust us – this will actually help you.'

And I realized in that moment that that illustrates our experience with God sometimes. He knows the trials we are going through, but He also knows the outcome, and in His wisdom, He has set it up for our benefit.

But all we can see is the trial and we don't want to go through it.

It's in these moments that this proverb becomes really important – trust in the LORD with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding – because God is wise.

But I want to take that one step further and say 'ok, He's wise, but people can be wise too and that doesn't always stop them from being a jerk.'

That's why the last reason is really important.

God is sovereign, so He can handle it.

God is wise, so He understands what is happening.

And here's the third one – God is good, so whatever happens, we know it is right and it will ultimately be for our benefit.

I think Jeremiah 29:11 is probably the clearest expression of this – you know this one –

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jer 29:11 NIV).

Now, I need you to understand that when it says 'plans to prosper you,' it doesn't mean 'plans to give you a golden goose that will give you everything you've always wanted.' The word there is that word 'shalom' - to make things good and peaceable for you – and I think that that really accurately reflects God's character:

God's plans are for our benefit, not for harm.

Our circumstances may not be good, but God always is, and so good will come from those circumstances.

God's plans are always for good.

I think I told you this last year, but it's a helpful illustration so I'll use it again. Before coming here I was the worship pastor at a church in Woodstock and we left there under really difficult circumstances. The leadership was headed in a much more radically conservative direction theologically but still, contemplating leaving there meant leaving a congregation that was like family to me, giving up a job I enjoyed, anticipating probably needing to move soon. And there was about a month where we were trying to discern the next best step for us and reciting this proverb over and over. 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.' So I was trying to give this over as much as I could to God, trusting that He could handle it and trusting that He knew what He was doing.

The day that we announced to the congregation that I was leaving, I remember very clearly saying to one of the leaders there - I don't know why this is happening and this really hurts – a lot. But I know that God is good and I am convinced that six months down the road, a year from now – I don't know when – but I know that I'll look back and realize how good God has been. And eight or so months later,

God led me here. And it was good. And by the way, the first Sunday I was here as your pastor, this was the sign out front – ‘Trust in the LORD’. I got the message. God showed His goodness.

And that’s exactly what Paul says in Romans 8:28, doesn’t he?

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28 NIV).

In ALL things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

And even to those who don’t love Him, God is always working for good. It’s just in His nature to be and to do good.

So what’s the implication of that? – if you are in the middle of something right now – hang on. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve sat in people’s living rooms and said ‘I wish I could make this all better’ or ‘I don’t know why this is happening’ – but, I know that God does and God can. If you are struggling through something right now, I want to say to you with every ounce of pastoral nature in my body – cling to God, because He is at work. In time, you will be able to look back and see – yes, God did work for good in this. And for now, cling to the knowledge that He is good.

We can trust God with all our hearts because He is sovereign, He is wise and He is good.

Frankly, I think we see all of those at play on the Cross. God sent His one and only Son into the world and what did the world do? Crucified Him. That’s suffering. That’s hardship. That’s awful.

And yet, God is sovereign.

Jesus was handed over to sinful men and put to death all according to God’s purpose and plan. None of it was by accident.

And God is wise.

He knew what He was doing, because it was His intention to raise Jesus from the dead, to free all people from the agony of death.

Because God is good.

Because God is so rich in mercy, abundant in steadfast love that He would give His own Son to win us back to Him.

If He did all that to deliver us from eternal destruction, then we can certainly trust what He is doing in this life.

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 straight your paths. Because He is sovereign. He is wise. And He is good.

I know I shared this last year, but I think it's so bang on that it's worth hearing again.

Christmas of 1939, Britain was already entangled in what we now call the Second World War, and King George VI went on the air to broadcast his royal Christmas message to the nation.

He concluded his messages with a few words and then quoted a poem called 'God knows' or 'the Gate of the Year.'

King George said 'A new year is at hand. We cannot tell which it will bring. If it brings peace how thankful we shall all be. If it brings continued struggle, we shall remain undaunted.

In the meantime, I feel that we may all find a message of encouragement in the lines which, in my closing words, I would like to say to you.

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year. "Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown." And he replied. "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way." (Minnie Haskins).

May that Almighty hand guide and uphold us all.

And actually the poem continues with this verse -

*God knows. His will  
Is best. The stretch of years  
Which wind ahead, so dim  
To our imperfect vision,  
Are clear to God. Our fears  
Are premature; In Him,  
All time hath full provision.*

May that Almighty hand guide and uphold us all.

#### BENEDICTION

24 " ' "The LORD bless you and keep you;

25 the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' "

(Num 6:24-26 NIV).

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<sup>i</sup> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. (Gen 2:4 ESV).

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. (Gen 12:1-2 NIV).

14 Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened (after the Golden Calf incident). (Exo 32:14 NIV).

25 He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt." (Exo 14:25 NIV).

2 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. (Jos 6:2 NIV).

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. (Psa 107:13 ESV).