

Trust in the LORD with all your heart * Proverbs 3:5-6
January 4, 2021 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

2020 was quite the year, wasn't it?

The last time we gathered here all together at the church was March 15. And that Sunday, I quoted a CNN article that said "Take this seriously. Coronavirus is about to change your life for a while" (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/11/politics/what-matters-coronavirus-is-about-to-change-your-life/index.html>). I had no idea how true that was. I had no idea how much life would change! And I STILL have no idea!

So I thought that as we launch into a new year, it would be appropriate for us to revisit a passage that I've talked about before and a passage that I know is important to many of you. Proverbs 3:5-6. Say it with me if you know it –

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Pro 3:5-6 NIV).

I may not know what's going on, but God does, and I can trust that He knows what He's doing.

So let's dig into it – verse 5 –

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

TRUST in the LORD with all your heart – rely on Him, depend on Him, have confidence in Him – rather than putting those things in your own understanding.

Why would you do that? Well, two reasons – 1. It's the LORD you're leaning on and 2. Our understanding is limited.

1. It's kind of too bad that YHWH's name is rendered all capitals LORD in English – when you see all caps LORD in English, that means that God's personal name, YHWH, appears in the Hebrew. I understand why they do that, but it's too bad, because obscures a little what it's saying.

The proverb says 'Trust in YHWH' – not an idea, but a person. Not just a person, but YHWH – the Creator of Heaven and earth. The Lord who knows the beginning from the end. The Alpha and Omega. It's a bit like saying 'Trust in Superman with all your heart' or 'Trust in Einstein with all your heart' or 'Trust in Mother Theresa with all your heart' except that in this case, it's trust in YHWH with all your heart and He is more powerful and compassionate and wise than those three put together.

The proverbs tells us to trust in 'the LORD' with all your heart and to lean not on our own understanding.

That second part was really important this year. From time to time, people would ask me 'do you think they'll shut down the schools?' 'do you think they'll extend the lockdown?' 'do you think they'll have a vaccine by summer?' And I would say 'I literally have NO idea!' I just have no frame of reference whatsoever to answer those questions with any confidence. Your guess is as good as mine.

And I can do my best to educate myself and make wise decisions and good guesses, but that's as much as any of us can do. We should do it. We should educate ourselves as best as we can, but the reality is that our understanding is limited.

I had no idea what was coming a year ago today. I had no idea how long schools would be shut. I have no idea when we'll get the vaccine in Brant County. I have no idea how long this will last.

But God does. None of this is a surprise to Him.

Psalm 147:5 says 5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Isaiah 40:28 says "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom" (Isa 40:28 NIV).

The LORD knows when the pandemic will end the way I know when this sentence will end and He is both compassionate and powerful enough to do something about it.

And so that's why we 'Trust in the LORD with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding.'

Now the proverb continues by telling us what we should be doing while leaning on the LORD. The idea is not that we sit around doing nothing, trusting the LORD to take care of us. Or that we go out and do foolish things, trusting that He'll rescue us.

No, God intends for us to go out, to live our lives, to seek His Kingdom and to shine like lights to show how good He is. God intends for us to depend entirely on Him, while doing things in light of His character.

And I think that you see that in verse 6 –

6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Now I think that that first part is the hardest part of the verse to explain. I mean, 'in all your ways acknowledge Him' – I think we 'get' what that means but what does it mean? I mean, how do I acknowledge someone? Tip my hat at them? Pay lip service to them?

I did a bit of digging – and I knew this before – but the word is literally 'know.' Like 'be familiar with' or 'have acquaintance' with the LORD. The NLT translation puts it 'Seek his will in all you do' and I was actually thinking 'Seek His ways in all YOUR ways' because really the idea here is 'allowing your relationship with God to direct your ways.' Do your stuff the way God does His – I think that's what it means to 'in all your ways acknowledge Him.'

In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths.

I never really noticed this until this year but the proverb is really playing with a 'journey motif.' I think that the proverb is using 'a journey' as a metaphor for life. In all your ways – literally, it's like 'wherever you tread' – seek His ways – and He will make 'your wanderings' straight.

The implication here is that we are on a journey and there are wide and easy roads that we can take, but only one straight and narrow road that leads to life. And when we make it our life's goal to walk with God, then He leads us on that path. He directs our steps and smooths the way for us to act with righteousness and integrity. God making our paths straight doesn't mean that that the road will be carefree; sometimes that straight path will lead up mountainsides and down into valleys. But it does mean that God Himself will go before us, preparing the way for us, to move through life with His blessing and integrity.

And notice that there is something 'all encompassing' about this passage – trust in the LORD with ALL your heart. In ALL your ways acknowledge Him.

The proverb is telling us in ALL OF LIFE, with ALL your heart, in ALL situation, trust in the LORD and He will clear the path before you.

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Pro 3:5-6 NIV).

So let's think about this for the upcoming year. We've got coronavirus to deal with. Some of us have additional health concerns that are weighing us down. We've got rent to pay and classes to pass and life to live.

How do we do that? 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

That is, fix in your heart a confidence and conviction that God knows what He's doing. That whatever happens, He is working for good. We might not understand; we probably won't understand because our understanding is limited; but we can trust that God gets it and He's doing something good.

That means that you don't need to carry the stress and anxiety of not knowing what's happening. You don't have to carry the world on your shoulders. You don't have to know what's going on at all times. God knows. And you know Him. And that's enough.

In a sense it's a bit like kids at Christmas. One of my kids wanted this one thing and kept reminding me of it every week or so, nervous I think that they wouldn't get it. And I just kept saying 'A Christmas surprise is better by far' knowing all along that it was in my closet. I was just waiting for the right time and if they had trusted me, they would have saved themselves some anxiety.

Same with us. We do all we can to make good decisions, but when that gives way to worry, then we're bearing a load that God alone can carry – and He's willing to. So trust in the LORD with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding.

And in all you do, get to know Him better. If you're going to make a New Year's resolution, make it getting into a habit of daily Bible reading. 'Acknowledging Him' means learning more about Him, getting to know Him better and the only way that's going to happen is if you intentionally spend time in prayer and Bible study with Him. If you're going to do things the way God does things, then you need to know how He does things. Set aside a time each day to meet with the Lord and you are going to find that seeking His way in all your ways gets easier and easier.

God is overseeing the vaccine roll out. God is overseeing our health care system. And our food delivery system. And our social benefits systems. And as you walk with Him, He will lead you on straight paths.

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.
(Pro 3:5-6 NIV).

Now I know that I've used this before but it's so fitting for the new year that I can't help but use it again. My grandpa Lloyd gave this to me four years ago – something that King George wrote back in 1939 – just at the outbreak of WW2. He wrote:

A new year is at hand. We cannot tell what it will bring. If it brings peace, how thankful we shall all be. If it brings us 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 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 in the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way. May that Almighty Hand guide and uphold us all."

4 Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths;
5 guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.
(Psa 25:4-5 NIV).