1-12-25

Proverbs 3:5-6

I think that most of us are at least vaguely familiar with these verses from Proverbs. They ring with truth and importance; as we read the Bible, we are told these things again and again. But here they are; admonition, advice, instruction, and promise, all boiled down into a couple verses. These are very wise words from king Solomon, passed through him to us by the Holy Spirit.

First, he tells us to “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart*.” Recall that God wants to have a relationship with us; that’s why He made us in the first place. And the most basic element of a good, solid relationship is trust. Just think about a marriage: Usually the first thing we think about in a marriage relationship is love; and that’s a huge part. It is an agape love. It is a love that is self-sacrificial and giving and holds the spouse in higher regard than yourself. It is love that is a decision; it remains no matter how the emotions ebb and flow. But, if the spouses don’t trust each other, all the love in the world isn’t going to make that a good relationship.

Now we are fallen human-beings and we make mistakes; that is where forgiveness comes in. There has to be forgiveness in a good relationship. But if someone in the relationship damages the trust, that is very difficult to fix; it will probably never be fully restored.

Here we are told to trust God. And what an amazing thing that is. God is perfect. He will never fail us. He will never break the trust we give Him. Here is the perfect foundation for our relationship with God: We never have to question whether or not He has our best interest in mind. And we are not to trust Him just a little bit, we are to trust Him with all our heart; with everything we have; even our heart itself.

The Bible tells us to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. One of the best ways we show that love is to trust Him. Also, the LORD God tells us to trust Him; by doing so we are being obedient. Obedience is very important to God; it is the demonstration of our faith: the faith without which we cannot be saved.

It is easy to talk about trust and it’s easy to think we do trust. But we need to be ready for the tests that will come. They come to all of us: death of a loved one; a bad diagnosis; an accident; financial disaster; loss of home or belongings. Is our first reaction when these things happen to trust God; to believe that He has it all in hand and it will eventually be for His glory and for our good? How about when the difficulties and disappointments drag on and on with no end in sight? Do we each maintain our trust in Yahweh? It is important that we do. And mainly because He is trustworthy.

Think about Job’s reaction when he received the news that he had lost all his wealth and his children. He tore his robe and shaved his head and said, in part, “*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD.*” This was not just a stoic acceptance of what had happened. He was terribly grieved as he showed by tearing his robe and shaving his head. Job’s heart was breaking and he was deeply suffering. But he trusted in Yahweh; he trusted that God knew what He was doing and he would not turn his back on his Saviour.

That is where each of us must be. The way to get there is, of course, by the Holy Spirit; but we must also act by prayer and by practice. Yes practice. We daily face aggravations and irritations because things just don’t work and others don’t do their job correctly. How do you react to these things? Use these times to practice holding your temper and trusting that God has even these things under His control.

The providence of God is a real thing; He has plans for us as He told His people through Jeremiah the prophet when they were deported to Babylon: *For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’* (Jer 29:11) Again, those words were spoken to the people being torn out of their homes and taken to Babylon. And God wanted them to trust Him because He had good things in store for them. The bad things happened due to their sin and evil in general; but God still had good provision planned for them.

It is the same for us. God has good things planned for us. He does have blessings for us in this life; and more importantly, in the life to come. Just as God has good works for us to do planned out from before the beginning of creation, He has blessings planned out for us also. And with this, we are called to trust Him. We trust that He will take care of us when we face difficulty; and we trust in His providence that He has good plans for us; both to do and to receive.

Along with trusting in God entirely, we “*do not lean on our own understanding*”. God is not telling us to give up thinking or to blithely skip along through life letting what ever happens happen. When God created human-beings, He gave us the ability to think and to reason. Our minds are absolutely amazing in their ability to solve problems and in creativity. This is part of being made in the image of God; He created in us some of His attributes. God is certainly able to work things out and He is unsurpassed in creative ability.

We can gain some insight regarding this verse from the letter of James. James talks about wisdom; and wisdom and understanding are very closely related. James tells us that one form of wisdom is earthly, coming from our minds that are affected by our fallen nature. This type of wisdom is even demonic. The second kind of wisdom comes from God and we are instructed to ask for it.

This certainly applies to understanding. When something takes place in our lives we can do our best to deal with it through human understanding; and that is exactly what we see the world doing when it tries to solve problems, be they individual or international. And we can also see how well that is working out. Or, we can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to provide the understanding we need. This would be the wise choice and the one that would demonstrate our trust in God.

If you are faced with difficulty, talk to God about it. Ask Him for the guidance you need; ask Him to help you understand what to do and how to deal with things. Then trust Him in the answer. And the answer you receive may be silence. If we trust God, and He doesn’t answer, then we will be content to know that He is bringing about whatever is best. This is very difficult for us. We don’t like not knowing; we want to feel like we are in control. But I think that the longer we live the Christian life, the more we come to realize that the idea of us being in control is an illusion. When we finally admit that we are not ultimately in control of any outcome, what a comfort it is to know that God is and He has plans for our welfare.

Another thing is that we don’t want to lean on our own understanding when we are dealing with God. He is God; we are not. We are incapable of understanding what He is up to. As the LORD tells us through the prophet Isaiah: “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts*.” (Isa 55:9) Because this is so, there is no way we can hope to understand on the level of God. Once more, it comes down to trusting Him. Lean on God, not on our own understanding of things. How often do we look back and recognize how flawed our understanding of a situation was? Hence the adage: Hindsight is 20/20. Of course, God doesn’t need hindsight; He has perfect foresight.

Again, consider Job. According to his own understanding, he did not deserve all the bad things that were happening to him. And he was right. But as God later pointed out to him, he was not the Almighty. Job was not the creator or the sustainer of all creation. His understanding was not such that he was able to do any of these things. Therefore, it was up to Job to simply trust in God who is the One able to do all these things.

God is kind and He has given us revelation through creation and, most importantly, through His word. He has given us a glimpse of His mighty power, His justice, His love and mercy, and of His character. And He has shown us that we can trust Him. Even look back through your own life and think of the times God has brought you through difficulties and the times He has blessed you. There are problems in this fallen world, but He has never failed you.

Again, this is not a call to laziness or inactivity. God gave us a mind and reason. We are to try to deal with things in life, both good and bad. We are to plan; we are to prepare for what might come. The thing is, we ought to turn to God in prayer before we do any of these things. Unfortunately, we usually wait until we’ve gotten ourselves in a jam before we turn to God. Admittedly, this is tough for us. Our default method of dealing with things is to lean on our own understanding. We all have to work on this; make turning to God the first thing you do.

Which leads us into the next line. *In all your ways acknowledge Him.* Does this mean that we turn to God in prayer before we take a quick trip to the Dollar Store? Yes. Not a half-hour on your knees before leaving, but a quick acknowledgement of God being in charge of everything; of asking for His protection. For one thing, you don’t know what’s going to happen on that trip. Probably nothing; but what if? There could be car trouble or a wreck; you may have to help someone with a minor or major problem. Or perhaps you will meet someone whom the Holy Spirit has prepared to hear the Gospel. Wouldn’t you prefer to have asked the Lord to prepare you for whatever encounter you have?

Once more, we have the idea of practice; of developing a habit. We do minor things every day and if we are in the habit of acknowledging God in all of them, it will be automatic to seek Him when something big confronts us. And all this applies to the good as well as the bad. The Bible makes it clear that all good blessings and all good gifts come from our Father above. As James tells us in chapter 1 and verse 17: *Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.*

When something good happens, be it recovery from sickness or finding your lost car keys or a smile from a stranger when you needed it; give thanks to God. Acknowledge Him for each and every good gift.

One more thing about the phrase translated “acknowledge Him” is that it carries another nuance which is “know Him”. It brings us back to fellowship with God, a very close personal relationship with Him. He is one we can commune with and depend on. As Jesus said, He will never leave us or forsake us. Dwell on the idea, that you can have close communion with the creator God of the universe. And, of course, it is through Christ alone that we can have this. We can only come to the Father through Him.

In all these things we have a promise: *And he will make your paths straight.* As usual, the first thing we think this ought to mean is that everything will work out smoothly and we won’t have any problems. I think most of us are familiar enough with the Bible to know that this is not the case. There are plenty of Biblical promises that we will have trouble and trial and tribulation. And these promises prove themselves over and again.

So what does it mean? It means that the Lord will keep us on His paths. Jesus refers to it as the straight and narrow way. It is the path to eternal life. And there are lots of rocks and bumps and stumbling blocks along the way. So many that we can’t see the way ahead of us. The way doesn’t look straight to us and it doesn’t help when we occasionally step off it. Which leads us back to trusting God. We can’t see the way; we don’t understand the path; so we trust God to lead us.

I realize that it is easy for me to stand here and point these things out; but it is much more difficult when you go out and life hits you in the face. And that is exactly why we need the Holy Spirit. He is our helper and our comforter. Our verses here in Proverbs are straightforward and true; but difficult to put into practice. Pray for the Holy Spirit to remind you of these things; to help you to trust God and acknowledge Him in everything you do or experience. In Christ, you are God’s children, and He will make your paths straight.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, You have proven Yourself over and over again. You keep Your promises, You save Your people from trouble, You are the provider of all good things. We know that You are steadfast and unchanging and a very present help in time of trouble. You desire good for Your people and You have plans for us; plans of prosperity and eternal life; plans of good works for us to do that You may be glorified.

Please forgive us for how often we don’t trust You. Forgive us all the times we don’t acknowledge Your sovereignty. Remember that we are but dust. How foolish we are for the many times we attempt to go about our lives without holding Your hand; without looking to You for necessary guidance. And thank You Lord, for the many times You provide good for us anyway.

We ask now that Your Holy Spirit would constantly remind us to seek You in all things. Be they small and simple or life-changingly complex. We know that nothing is too great for You and that nothing is so small that it escapes Your notice. How much better off we are when we rest in You as our strong tower; as our place of refuge. Thank You that all Your goodness is ours through our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

For it is in His name we pray

Amen