

## GET WISDOM! II. “Wholehearted Trust”

7-30-06  
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Proverbs 3:1-12

TEXT: *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.*

### INTRODUCTION

A few weeks ago, Bunny Detro sent me something she'd received on the internet titled, “It’s Strange Isn’t It?” Here’s a few of the observations:

- § Isn’t it strange how a \$20 bill seems like such a large amount when you put it in the offering plate, but such a small amount when you go shopping?
- § Isn’t it strange we need to know about an event for church two or three weeks in advance so we can get it in our schedule, but when a friend calls at the last minute inviting us to do something we want, we can quickly rearrange everything to do it?
- § Isn’t it strange how two hours seem so long at church, and so short when you’re watching a good movie?
- § Isn’t it strange how difficult it is to find time to read a chapter in the Bible, but we have little trouble finding time to read 100 pages of a good novel?
- § Isn’t it strange how difficult it is to find time to pray for even 15 minutes, but we find time to talk for an hour with a friend on the phone?

Those light-hearted observations do have a serious point– they poke fun at the shallowness of our commitment to the things of God. I remember an elder in my first church, Harry. At one session meeting we were talking about why people didn’t come to church. After a number of theories were shared, Harry spoke in a very authoritative way, “I can tell you why people don’t come to church.” Then, after a long, dramatic pause, he said, “They don’t come because they don’t want to.” We all had to agree that he’d gotten to the bottom of things. The “want to” is *really* the issue. When you get right down to it, we pretty much do what we really want to do (within limits of course). Most of our excuses are actually coverups for a choice we made– we wanted to do something else more and so we did.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful, as Christians, if our hearts were always pulling us toward God– if our desires, our “want to,” was continually directed that way? In Proverbs, a lot is said about our hearts. The word is used 70 times in this book, and three times in the twelve verses we read for our Scripture. When the Bible talks about our hearts it is used in much the same way we often use it in terms of our motivation, as when we say, “Put your heart into it.” Proverbs keeps getting at the root of things. Proverbs 4:23 is especially insightful:

*Above all else, guard your heart,  
for it is the wellspring of life.*

We live in a world that is constantly competing for the loyalty of our hearts— trying to motivate us to do this or buy that. It is not our reasoning powers that are appealed to, but desire.

§ This car will make us feel sexy and free.

§ Eating this will give you pleasure.

§ Doing this or buying this will make you happy.

It is all heart appeal. Why? Because we are driven by our desires. And we are exposed to something like 3500 messages like that every day. Everyone's out there trying to capture our hearts.

In our Scripture this morning, we have some help in getting our hearts oriented in the right direction.

## TRUST

Our text this morning is a familiar one, and probably a favorite of many of you. In fact, I was reading recently that when Gerald Ford took the oath of office as President of the United States, placing his hand on an open Bible, this was the verse he had the Bible opened to. A most fitting verse, wouldn't you say? It is also interesting to note, we know of the Bible verse(s) 29 presidents had the Bible opened to for their oath of office and Proverbs is the second most popular book, just behind Psalms. As we consider the practical wisdom of Proverbs, it is easy to see why it has been so popular with presidents taking the oath of office.

Our text is a wonderful promise. But it is the “allness” of this text that gives me pause.

*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.*

I'm sure there is some level of trust in the Lord in everyone here, or you wouldn't be here. The *with **all** your heart* is the tough part. Yet, in other areas of life, we know half-hearted doesn't hack it. In anything difficult and demanding— a course of study or a challenging hike— if we aren't really committed and determined, when the going gets tough, we'll quit.

There's plenty here to make us feel guilty. Probably few of us could say the Lord has absolutely everything in our hearts. While we may have moments of total surrender, most of the time there are some “withholds.” But, in Proverbs I see a path laid out for us that helps us get there. First, let me take you back for a minute to last week's sermon on the fear-of-the-Lord being the beginning of wisdom because I believe this connects with this text. In fact, I'd originally planned to include this text in that sermon, but it was just too much for one sermon.

The fear-of-the-LORD is something like living in reverential awe of God's sovereignty, goodness, and mercy while in obedient relationship with Him. I've included that definition again in this week's bulletin. It is a glimpse of the greatness of God and a humble realization that we are not in charge. It is choosing to live in the reality of the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” This phrase, “fear-of-the-LORD” occurs 21 times in Proverbs. It is the theme, most fully stated in 9:10,

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,  
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

So, we begin there if we are going to *trust in the LORD with all your heart*. It involves that heart attitude of exalting Him, letting Him indeed be Lord over us and all our lives. There is also a process laid out for us here in getting there. Look at the beginning of Proverbs 2, 1-5

*My son, if you accept my words  
and store up my commands within you,  
turning your ear to wisdom  
and applying your heart to understanding,  
and if you call out for insight  
and cry aloud for understanding,  
and if you look for it as for silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasure,  
then you will understand the fear of the LORD  
and find the knowledge of God. (Vs. 1-5)*

This is about seriously listening to God and what He tells us through His Word. Notice the words— most of them quite passionate: “accept,” “store up,” “turning your ear,” “applying,” “call out,” “cry out,” “look,” “search as for hidden treasure.” Doing this means coming to God’s Word in a deliberate, seeking way, studying it, and even memorizing it (“store up”). This includes being present for the proclamation of God’s Word in the sermon— a means the Holy Spirit can use to make truth alive and penetrate our hearts. And also, the Holy Spirit can communicate God’s truths directly to our hearts in meditation and prayer.

There is a similarity in the way chapter 3 begins that we read a few minutes ago:

*My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but keep my commands in your heart, (Prov 3:1)*

Then, you get that passionate call to obedience in vs. 3,

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.*

The Message expresses that first line as, *Don’t lose your grip on love and loyalty...* This is doing the right thing.

Do you see the pathway mapped out for us? We get to the “with all our hearts” through the little steps of reverencing God in our daily affairs, and faithful attendance to God’s Word. There’s an ordinariness, a daily-ness to all this. But as we are faithful, more and more of the “withholds” of our hearts will be displaced with an “allness.”

## **LEAN**

Most proverbs are two lines long, with paired ideas. The second phrase here is complimentary, *and lean not on your own understanding*. I find this image of leaning is helpful. I have in mind an image of a sign on an unstable railing in a national park, “CAUTION! DO NOT LEAN ON

RAILING.” We all have some understanding of things. This tells us to not just depend upon that, lean upon it– it can’t be trusted since it is finite and limited. Instead, we are to put our trust and our confidence in the Lord, seeking what He wants. Lean away from your understanding, toward the Lord.

This does not mean we shouldn’t use our minds. Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, used to say, “God gave you an awful lot of leading when He gave you your mind.” God works through our minds, enlightening, invigorating. He expects us to use the analytical powers and common sense He has given us. But, the warning of our text is to not lean on it alone so that it is all that is supporting us. Instead, we use our minds as best we can, then submit everything in trust to God.

At our last session meeting, we tried an experiment. While I was at the Whitworth Institute of Ministry a couple of weeks ago, one of the evening preachers (and I can’t even remember which one) made an off-hand comment that we Presbyterians spend more time in committee meetings than in prayer meetings. It stuck like a burr in my mind. The session embraced this idea this last week in our meeting. So, instead of just beginning with devotions, then doing our business and closing in prayer, we tried to let prayer, Scripture, and spiritual sharing flow in, around, and through all we did. While we didn’t keep track, I expect at least half our time was in prayer and spiritual reflection. I know I left feeling rather renewed and encouraged. We were really trying to not just *lean on our own understanding*.

Maybe that is a little bit of what our lives should look like if we take our text seriously. Take advantage of those time when you’re alone walking, driving, or waiting on someone. These can be times of turning our hearts to quiet prayer. In life’s perplexing things and simpler things– find a time to turn to God and let Him guide your mind’s reflection on the matter. We do our best, but our leaning is not to our own understanding. We lean toward God’s perfect wisdom and insight. Is it the Gaithers that have that little song, “Learning to lean, learning to lean, I’m learning to lean on Jesus...?”

## GUIDANCE

The second couplet is about guidance, but again we see that word of totality, “all.”

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

Just “some of our ways” doesn’t do it. “All” means our business life, our at home life, our private lives, our thought lives, our recreational lives, all our relationships– everything. To *acknowledge him*, means, since He is our rightful Lord, obedience to His will and conforming our lives to His purposes for us. When we do that, we have a wonderful promise– *he will make your paths straight*. They won’t be confusing with twists and turns. Your going will be simple, straight-forward to reach God’s glorious goal for your living.

If you are confused about what to do in a situation you’re facing, chances are you need to ask the first questions:

§ Am I acknowledging Him as Lord in all my life?

§ Am I trusting Him?

Spend time wrestling in prayer until you can truly let go of your will and trust His will in all things. I've often been rather confused about what God wants me to do. But, in the end, when I've gotten to an answer, almost always I see it has been a question of willingness on my part. I haven't totally relinquished everything— my heart has been set in one direction, my direction. Often it takes us awhile to realize that. We're of course saying the right words and praying, "Not my will but Thy will be done." But, sometimes even at a subconscious level, we are holding back. There is clarity in our journey once we really are willing for whatever God wants.

### CONCLUSION

As we close, I want to point out that this way of trusting the Lord and walking in obedience to Him is also the best way to live. Just notice, living God's way:

*...will prolong your life many years  
and bring you prosperity. (Prov 3:2)*

*Then you will win favor and a good name  
in the sight of God and man. (Prov 3:4)*

*This will bring health to your body  
and nourishment to your bones.*

*Honor the LORD with your wealth,  
with the firstfruits of all your crops;  
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,  
and your vats will brim over with new wine. (Prov 3:8-10)*

I'll deal more with some of those themes in other sermons in this series. But for now, it is clear, that trusting the Lord makes sense in the practical realities of life. In the Bible, we have the Creator's handbook in how this life is designed to work. Following it is the best way to live.