

A Way of Life

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, January 13, 2013
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
by S. Michael Durham
© 2013 Real Truth Matters

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 shall direct your paths.”***

In these two verses there are four independent clauses. The four clauses are considered independent because they can stand on their own, having a subject and a verb. For example the first one, *trust in the Lord with all your heart*; secondly, *lean not on your own understanding*; thirdly, *in all your ways acknowledge Him* and lastly, *He shall direct your paths*.

When you put all four independent clauses together they make up one of the greatest conditional promises in the entire Bible. A conditional promise is where one party makes a promise to another, providing that the other fulfills some kind of condition or stipulation. In this case God promises to direct our way and every circumstance if we will simply trust in Him. Which means not to trust in ourselves but rather seek Him. If you will fulfill that condition, then you will most definitely experience the fulfillment of His promise: God will be leading every facet of your life.

Now, I think many are confused about how this works. There are some who believe it is all up to them to pay the price to make this happen. They believe God has more or less given them a recipe and it's up to them to get busy stirring up the ingredients; all they have to do is go to work. They don't understand that even if you follow the recipe exactly, the Master's power is needed to cook the dish. Jesus *did* say you would bear much fruit but, in the next breath, He said that without Him you could do nothing.

I was confused on this for years. I grew up hearing subliminally if not overtly, “It depends upon you,” and so I carried with me for years the idea that somehow it's my responsibility to make things in the kingdom happen. One example, for years I bore the brunt of the lie that if my faith was enough I could make things happen for God, that it was up to my faith. But this cannot be since my faith doesn't come from me, it comes from Him and He will complete it. This mindset sees that God has little to do with our works for Him except to bless them. I was not aware, until God and His mercy, and His longsuffering, taught me I don't bear such a responsibility. My error was to assume the responsibility that only God can carry.

On the other hand, there are those who are equally confused and believe that God does it all and

there is nothing for us to do but to believe. If we just believed God we would see more happen. More or less, this view says God sovereignty will make things happen apart from us. Well, it's true that there are certain promises of God that are unconditional, meaning there is nothing for you to do except to believe, but in the case of our text today if you choose to do nothing but believe that God will direct your steps, you'll not leave "Go" and the will of God will pass you by.

This is a conditional promise. There is something for us to do. We are to work as if it depends on us and believe that it ultimately depends upon God. You and I want to experience God in a much richer, fuller way; we want to see His hand at work and we long to see His kingdom seize this evil day. We want to see the grace of God transform lives, change people and their homes and we want to see God work civilly in our courts, schools and society. We want to see the hand of God revealed in its power, but none of these things are without a condition. Not a price, but a *condition* that must be satisfied. The price has already been paid for us to possess these things but there are conditions we are to meet for them to happen.

I think, here again, we have made a sad mistake in talking to Christians about the price they need to pay in order to see revival or God do something. Friends, there is no price to be paid and if there was, what would that be in comparison to the price that has already been paid? It would be a paltry sum, embarrassing to try to compare it to the price Christ has already paid. No, it's not a price it's a privilege. It's a privilege to seek God and trust Him and to acknowledge Him in all of my ways. That's not a costly thing it's a blessing. But it is a condition.

In the next few weeks you're going to hear about the direction we believe God is leading us as a church, the question we should ask ourselves is—what conditions are we to satisfy? What must we do to take this path He is showing us? I think the text tells us. However, this text is not just about a group of Christians called a local church. This is as much about you personally as it is the group, and if each of you is not living this way of life this text is not going to help us as a church. If you don't take this personally and absorb it until it becomes your lifestyle, we will not experience the direction of God and the supernatural life He intends for us to live.

It's quite simple. There are some things in this world that are complex and terribly difficult to understand, like heart surgery. I heard yesterday of a man who went to have a heart cath and a simple stint put in an artery, but doctor could not do the procedure. They had to do immediate double-bypass surgery, crucial to that man's survival. For a surgeon to do that complex procedure he had to have years of training and education, you couldn't open a man up and do that if you had no understanding.

Some things in life are terribly complex, but the beauty of our text today is that it's not complex. It's not difficult. Our text doesn't require advanced studies or special degrees; it explains how to make your way through this dark world called *life* in simple words even a child could understand. You don't have to have a high IQ or special learning to understand this text. If you will practice these two verses, then this year will prove to be the spiritual equivalent of crossing Jordan and entering the Promised Land.

What I want to do for a few moments is take these independent clauses and break them down as conditions and promises.

I. FIRST CONDITION

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,” (Proverbs 3:5a)

That’s the first condition. What am I to do to see the supernatural power of God to direct and sustain me? I am to trust God. Now if you’ve been at this church for any length of time then it probably is embossed on your forehead or your hand because that’s what we believe and say it so frequently—you are to trust in God. So again this morning let me say it one more time and let it get deeper in consciousness—trust in God. That’s the first condition. But what does it mean? Well, trust means something much deeper than just believing something to be true.

Charles Blondin, was a nineteenth century acrobat, famous for his tightrope walk at one hundred and sixty feet over Niagara Falls on a rope only three inches in diameter stretched eleven hundred feet across the falls. In 1860 a Royal Party from Britain saw Blondin walk across the tightrope not once but several times. The first time he did it on stilts and then he walked it blindfolded. The next time he stopped halfway having strapped on his back a small stove with wood and an egg, unstraps the stove, starts a fire and cooks an omelet. Next time he went across it pushing a wheelbarrow and comes back from the other side carrying potatoes in it. Then Blondin approached the royal party and asked the Duke of Newcastle, “Do you believe I could take a man across this tightrope in this wheelbarrow?”

The Duke said, “Yes, I believe it. I believe you could do that.”

“Well then,” Blondin said. “Hop in!”

The Duke declined Blondin’s challenge. He might have believed Blondin could have done it, but he wouldn’t trust him with his life. But that’s what trust is. *Trust in the Lord* means you are committing something to Christ. It doesn’t just mean that you believe that He can get you through the narrow passes of life and the difficulties that this world offers, it means you literally relinquish control and you’ve climbed in His wheelbarrow with complete confidence. That’s what trust is.

We say to the sinner, “Do you believe in Jesus?” and the sinner responds because he’s grown up in a church, “Oh yes, I believe in Jesus.” Well sir, please tell me, have you committed your life by relinquishing the control thereof over to God? Do you trust Him in all of your ways? Friends, if you’re not trusting God like that, if you’ve not relinquished the control of your life over to God you are not a Christian.

I mean you to hear what I just said. I’m not trying to be melodramatic, I’m not trying to make this more difficult than it seems. Saving faith says I not only believe He died for me but I commit my

life to that fact and I do so by relinquishing control.

What is it about God that you trust? You trust Him with your life, of course, but I don't mean that. I mean, what is it about Christ that makes it so we can relinquish control? Why should we trust God? What is it about Him that makes Him trustworthy? Let me give you three things real quickly.

1. His Character

You can trust God with you because God is good. His attributes are that of kindness and purity and there is not one shred of dishonesty within God. There is not anything that could be considered reproachable about God. He is above reproach and unimpeachable. You cannot bring against Him complaints that He is not decent or kind. My friend, God is good and this is the foundation of every person's faith in God. It's not that we believe certain historical facts, although we do, we believe in the person of God, the person of Christ, that God is good and He has my best interest at heart. It's His character we believe and therefore trust. I know that the Judge of all the earth will do right. I'm confident that whatever He asks of me is absolutely good for me, and best. Why? Because I know His character, I know His heart. His heart is awesome in its benevolence and kindness and generosity. There is no bad bone in God—He is good to the bone.

2. His Word

I can trust His Word because if He lied to me, He would no longer be good. But, because His character is honest and good and virtuous I can believe anything His book says to me or anything His Spirit speaks to my heart. I can take His Word literally and put faith in it.

3. His Way

If I can trust His character and I can trust His Word, then I can trust the way of God. If He tells me this is the way to go, I believe it because His character is good and His Word is good. I can trust God in the way He leads me.

Friends, this is the very heart of it all. Do we really believe that God is good in every way toward us and that no matter what He asks of us He is virtuous and it is best for us?

Some parent may be grieving today because of a wayward child and your complaint may be against God and His very character. You might even say, and perhaps have, *Lord, I asked You to keep this child, to hold this child and look, they are in rebellion against You. Where were You? I thought I could trust You.* The doctor may say to you, "I'm sorry to tell you you've only got six months to live." *But God, I'm in the prime of my life.* The real question is not why these things are happening but can you believe that all of God's ways for your life is good? If you can, you meet the first condition. If you can't, you'll never be able to meet any of the other conditions.

To what degree are we to trust? Let's look at that. He tells us the degree of trust—with all your heart. The Hebrew word for *heart* is also translated in the book of Proverbs, as well as other places in the Bible, *mind* or *wisdom* or *understanding*. The best definition I think is *inner man*. Trust in the Lord with all your inner man. What do I mean by inner man? I mean the real you that lives beyond this physical body. We were talking about the soul as the personality, and when I say *personality* I don't mean whether you're outgoing or shy, whether you're loud and boisterous or quiet and timid. I'm not talking about temperament; I'm talking about the whole person, that's your personality. The real you that lives beyond this body. God says to that degree with all of your heart trust Him. Look at Proverbs 4:23, again Solomon uses the word *heart*.

“Keep your heart with all diligence,”

In other words, do everything you can to guard your heart. Why?

“for out of it are the issues of life.”

This is why we are to trust the Lord with *all* of our heart. Because out of my heart comes every issue of life. Anything that concerns me comes out of this heart, this inner man.

I don't think most of us have really given this much thought, when it says to *trust the Lord with all your heart*, we take it to be a phrase that means *give it all*, to put forth your best effort. Well, it does mean that, of course, but I think it's much deeper than that. It is true we are to give all, but I've learned about my own self that I can think I'm giving it all but it really doesn't mean all of my life. I can give my all to this church or to my family but I'm not necessarily giving my all in every category of my life to God. Again, Proverbs 4:23 defines it for us.

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

The word *issues* is a word that really means *sources* or *starting points*. That's what the Hebrew meaning of the word is. It's like a fountainhead or a spring, the source of the river. So the idea is that all of your life flows from this inner man, every desire, every decision, every action comes from the heart and God is saying, I want you to trust Me with every issue, every desire, every decision, every action that makes you who you are. Not half of the issues of my life, not three-fourths of the issues of my life, but all of them. Every circumstance must be committed to the Lord. I've got to climb into God's wheelbarrow on every matter that concerns me and let Him wheel me over the treacherous falls of this present life in everything.

II. SECOND CONDITION

“lean not on your own understanding;” (Proverbs 3:5b)

Now why would this be the second condition? I think what Solomon is doing here is unpacking

the first condition. It's really not a separate condition, it's really the same thing only stated in a different way. It's the same thing to trust in God with all your heart only here he is clarifying what he means by it, if not give you the very definition of what he means. To trust in your understanding is to doubt God's understanding. Simple. To trust your perception and understanding on a particular situation that confronts you. If you do trust your understanding of the situation, then who have doubted God's understanding.

Very often the Bible in its poetic literature, such as Psalm, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes speaks in parallels. One statement or clause is contrasted with another to say the very same thing. That is what is happening here in our text.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;”*

If you are not leaning on your own understanding, you are trusting God's understanding. Again, here is the issue. Whose understanding of your life, in particularly the things confronting you today, do you really trust? Do you really believe God's understanding of every event or contingency of your life is best? Are you willing to let God's judgment on every matter rule the day? Will you acquiesce, that is submit, to God's judgment rather than try to figure the thing out on your own?

I speak to the wise among us today, because I think the wise are the guiltiest of violating this commandment. You've learned some worldly wisdom, you've learned how to operate in this life and do quite well at it. You have acquired the sufficient people skills, management skills, and principles of how society and certain economic philosophies work.

So for that man or woman I say to you it is doubly hard for you to not trust in your own understanding and to acknowledge God's understanding in everything. Some say experience is the best teacher and so we follow the pattern of experience. Something occurs in your life on three separate occasions and now you are confronted with it again. You think to yourself, *this happened three separate times in my life and now I am confronted with it again, why will it be any different?* So you approach the fourth situation the same way you did the last three times and God says, “No, Maybe I have something altogether different.” The Bible says *lean not onto your own understanding.*

Again, let me say to you, what happens if the doctor says, “You've only got six months to live.” Can you trust that God's understanding is ideal for your life no matter how brief or long your existence is on this earth? Can you really believe that He understands what is best for you? That is a condition that must be fulfilled in order to experience God's will in the supernatural power.

Wait a minute pastor, there are certain verses that tell us we are to think properly. We have the written word of God and along with reason we don't need anything else. Reason is one of the attributes of God's image. Thus, we don't always need to pray and get some word from God. With the ability to reason we can come to the right conclusions. That distinguishes us from the animal world.

Well, very good, you've distinguished yourself from the monkey. I salute you. Your intelligence is intimidating. Yes, reason is part of the image of God in you, but reason doesn't mean you are being led by the Spirit of truth. Human reasoning has been corrupted by the fall. But in addition, using biblical reasoning doesn't make one a Christian. A sinner can put into practice biblical principles. Corporations spend millions of dollars to teach their employees the golden rule. If you've ever taken Dale Carnegie's course "How to Win Friends and Influence People," it's heavily based upon the golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," Secularists and God-haters will teach that to their own managerial staff. Why? In order to make the almighty dollar and succeed in their corporate world. It has nothing to do with spirituality and the kingdom of God.

Just knowing what the Bible says is not enough. We need the Holy Spirit to direct us, to bring those things we've learned back to our minds. Yes, there are those things I don't necessarily have to pray and say, "Oh God, what is Your will?" when the Bible clearly states it. Don't make this more difficult than it is. We are to read God's Word and put it into practice, but once again it's like the ingredients of a cake, you still need the power, the fire of the oven to bring it together. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. Lean not on thy own understanding!

III. THIRD CONDITION

"In all your ways acknowledge Him," (Proverbs 3:6a)

Interesting there is another 'all your.' *All your heart* and now *all your ways*. I say again Solomon is unpacking the first clause: *trust in the Lord with all your heart*, which means you acknowledge God in everything. In every compartment of life, you acknowledge God. Unfortunately for us, the flesh is dangerously deceptive. We can think we're doing the will of God when we're not. For so many folk in church today there is a difference between their church life and their non-church life. We often call it the secular-sacred divide. It says that life has many different compartments or facets; hence it's called compartmentalization.

The easy way to see this is this way we say things like *church life, home life*. Well, how many lives do you have? What you mean is you see church life and home life as two separate entities, two separate compartments of your life? Or you have your career life and extracurricular life. This compartmentalization says that all the Lord is interested in is what is going on here on Sunday morning, that's where His emphasis is.

For example, there are some of us who think what we do on Sundays is the most important compartment of our lives, but Monday morning at work or school is not as important to God. It's important, but not as important as what happens here. The sacred-secular divide believes that God is more interested in how you give your money than how you earn it. I'm here to tell you there is no such secular-sacred divide in the Word of God. He's as interested as much on how you are employed and make your living as you are about your giving. You cannot separate them.

It is assumed God cares more about which church you attend than what house you live in. Friends, that's not true. God is as interested in where you live, as whether you are apart of this church.

The sacred-secular divide says God cares more about your sin than you catching the flu. The Bible doesn't make that distinction. He's as much interested in your flus, as He is your sins. Why? Because He purchased you lock, stock and barrel, beginning to end you are His. You do not belong to yourselves. There is nothing that happens to you that He has no interest in. Are there more important things? Yes, I didn't say there were not. But God's interest and His will is as much about the things we consider less important as the things we consider most important.

There is no sacred-secular divide, that's what this text is saying—acknowledging Him in all your ways. In other words, seek Christ in all things; even phone calls, business decisions, grocery shopping, car buying, shop keeping, internet surfing—everything!

I love Proverbs 3:6 in the Young's Literal Translation. It's public domain, you can go to the Internet and download it and if you have a mobile device you can find a copy of it and download it to your mobile device. Young's Literal Translation is very wooden and doesn't read as smooth but it goes back to the original Hebrew and Greek and brings out the nuances of those words. Listen to how it translates the first part of this verse:

“In all thy ways, know thou Him.”

I love that! In other words, in every facet of your life, find where God is and if He's not there, get rid of it. Many of you have heard me say, “Just keep your eyes focused on Jesus and where He is and you'll always be where God wants you.” That's all the Christian life is. Keep your focus on Christ, watch out for where He is and join Him where He is and you'll always be at the right place at the right time. That's all you've got to be concerned about. That's what this text is saying. In everything, find out what Jesus' judgment is about it. Know God in it and know His mind about it.

Let me see if I can illustrate how important it is to God that not just 99 percent of your life be aligned to His will but all of it. Moses had just experienced the burning bush encounter with God. What he had once longed for but gave up was now coming to pass. God was commissioning him to be the deliverer of His people. Moses finally agrees to go to Egypt to do God's will, but on the way Moses again encounters the Lord and this time God is trying to kill him. Not exactly the kind of encounter you would relish or desire. In Exodus 4:24-26 we read,

“And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. ²⁵ Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, “Surely you are a husband of blood to me!” ²⁶ So He let him go. Then she said, “You are a husband of blood!”—because of the circumcision.”

Evidently Zipporah resisted the circumcising of their son and with great disdain. She did not like this custom the Jews had and therefore had probably refused Gershom their son's circumcision. Now what does this have to do with Proverbs 3:5-6, somebody is asking? Let me help you to see the connection by asking you a question—why does this event happen in Moses's life? If you can answer that question you will see how it fits so perfectly with our text.

Why did this happen? God had just called Moses, appeared to him in a burning bush and Moses was obeying God. He was doing what God told him to do, he was on his way to the Egyptian king as God's messenger. Why kill a man when he is being obedient? Because Moses was not obedient in every area of his life, in *all his ways*. God had given the command to Abraham to circumcise all his descendants because it would be a mark of separation between Israel and the rest of the world. Every male Jew was to be circumcised. And Moses knew it. He had heard it from his mother, he had left the palace of Egypt and had lived among the Jews "...esteeming the riches of Christ more than the reproach of men." He knew this law given to his forefather Abraham. But when Gershom was born, Moses did not obey God's command because of Zipporah's insistence against the custom. Moses was married to a Gentile and lived among Gentiles who loathed this Jewish custom. They thought it was barbaric, so Moses compromised to have peace at home and be like those around him. Therefore, God came to Moses and makes it clear that he had disobeyed the Lord, which proves our text.

You can be 99 percent obedient to God but if there is 1 percent willful disobedience God will reserve the right to use you. Most often He will not. The more you have experienced the glory of God as Moses had, the more accountable you are. The more you experience God's wonderful plan and spiritual dynamic directing your paths and allow one area of your life to cease acknowledging Him, friends, the power of God will shut down in your life. I'm not saying God is going to come to kill you like He did Moses, but you will kill the activity of the supernatural in your life. Moses was on his way to do God's will, he was off to Egypt to be used in one of the most unusual ways of the Bible—we still talk about it thousands of years later, they make movies about the great feats of Moses and yet there was one area in Moses's life not committed by faith to God and thus God would not use him until that area was dealt with. Acknowledge God in all your ways.

Is there some area in your life that you are not acknowledging Him? Is it your finances, is it your time, is it your roles and responsibilities as a husband or a wife? I can't be the Holy Spirit for you, but God knows and He will show you.

IV. THE PROMISE

The first three clauses are conditions and the last is the promise.

"He shall direct your paths."

Friends, this is what worship is—a life lived in absolute surrender—and this is how you do it. A

few weeks ago I brought you a very impromptu message on absolute surrender on the life of Saul and how he disobeyed God with the Amalekites. I showed you that worship was not doing all the right things with sacrifices but being absolutely surrendered. That's what worship is and this is how you do it—you *trust in the Lord with all your heart and you lean not on your own understanding, in all of your ways you acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths*. This is the way God intends for you to live. This is a way of life, not just on Sunday morning, but every morning, noon and night. This is the way we are to live. This is the promise of God and if He puts His character on the line and makes a promise it will happen, I'm convinced of that.

In the next few weeks we're going to be sharing some things that will look very difficult, if not impossible for this church, and it's going to require some prayer on your part because church is not a mass entity alone, it's individual believers coming together for a common purpose. All I'm asking you to do is this text. I'm not asking for time, or money or mission trips, I'm just asking you to do Proverbs 3:5-6 in every area of your life so that it becomes a way of life. And when that happens and more of you are living this way of life we will be able to see demonstrated the power and the hand of God.

Some of you have wondered why does God not do some of the things in the Bible? Why does God's power seem more reserved now than it did back then? I've got one question for you, are you living according to this way of life? Are you fully trusting in the Lord with all your heart and leaning not on your understanding but in every way of your life acknowledging Him? I submit to you that if we did that we would see the hand of God. We would see no difference from the pages of the Bible and the storyline God is writing with our lives. They would look identical. This is a conditional promise; this is what we are to do today if we are to see the Word of God come to pass. Don't sit there and blame God, let's not look at our excuses—we're small, we're out of sorts and hard to find, we don't have much money, we don't have these kinds of ministries, we have ugly facilities and on and on and on—no, friend. Listen to the Word of God. God has put himself out there for us. He has said *Here I am, will you believe Me, will you relinquish control to Me and let Me direct all of your paths?* Friends, will you believe God and cease to lean on your own understanding? Help us God, to do this for the glory and renown of Your Son now and forever. Amen.