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Trusting God in Life's Challenges

Proverbs 3:5-6

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Good morning. My name is Pastor David Pranga. I am one of the pastors here at Brewster Baptist Church. I would like to welcome you to our services, whether you are watching online or here in the sanctuary, we are glad you are here with us today.

We are in a series called Wise Living. From Mother's Day to Father's Day, we are looking at wise sayings of the Bible. I am blessed to share with you a couple of simple verses from the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs is known as the book of wisdom. These proverbs, or sayings, are helpful in our walk with God and how we should live our life. If you read just one chapter a day, for 31 days, I promise you will have more wisdom, more knowledge, and more understanding in your life.

I want to say a special thank you to our teens (Elizabeth Pranga and Charlie Kautz) for being a part of the service this morning. It is great to have them participate with us. Charlie Kautz read to us *Proverbs 4*, which says, ***“Listen, my sons, to a father’s instructions; pay attention and gain understanding.”*** Many of the Proverbs were written and given as a father’s advice to his sons and daughters. As you read through Proverbs, there are many nuggets of wisdom. As parents, we want to pass on nuggets of wisdom to our children as well.

When I was a young child, around the age of 8 or 9 years old, I received a bookmark with two verses on it. My parents shared the importance of these verses. If I followed these verses, it would be helpful to me. My mom even suggested that I should memorize these verses.

I will have to say, looking back, my parents gave me a lot of wisdom that day. Throughout my life, it has become one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. I would like to read them to you. It comes from the book of Proverbs.

***“Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.”***

- ***Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)***

I love these verses, because when I have struggles in my life, time and time again, I turn back to these verses. These verses have helped me to move forward and persevere through the difficult and challenging seasons in my life.

- When I was a teenager and my parents moved us three hours away from home, I was not a happy camper. I started at a new high school with no one I knew. It was lonely. It was these verses that helped me through the difficult times.

- In college, I was only an average student at best. Each semester got tougher, and I felt overwhelmed by my studies. Often, I would sit in my dorm room and think to myself, *“Okay God, I know that I am supposed to be here. I am trusting in you, but I need your help.”* I had no idea how I was going to make it through another semester. These were the verses that I would recite on my bed or at the library as I studied.
- I felt God’s call to go to seminary. I quit my job as an Associate Pastor, with three kids under age 4. My wife was home with the kids. I had no job or money coming in. I knew that God was calling me to get my seminary degree. These were the verses that helped me to persevere in school, and I witnessed God as a provider for our family.
- When I graduated from seminary, we moved our family across the country from Wisconsin to Massachusetts, 1,000 miles from our nearest relative, with three kids five and under and a fourth on the way. Work was exhausting. Friendships were very difficult in New England. Money was extremely tight. I was at a crossroad; I wanted to pack our bags and go back home. Yet, I knew God called us here for a reason. It was these verses that I repeated to myself when I felt alone and in the wilderness of life. God gave me encouragement.
- Even today, I fight the feeling of inadequacy with public speaking. There are times during my sermon prep when I think to myself, there are other people who are more well-spoken or have more knowledge than I do. Yet, as I put my trust in God, I find that He works through my words to bless or help someone where they are.

Little did my parents know that the bookmark with *Proverbs 3:5-6* written on it, that I received as a child, would be such a strong reminder and presence in my life.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

When I was youth pastor, there was a fun activity that we would play with the teenagers. It was called a “trust fall.” The teenager would climb a stool that was off the ground quite a bit. The teens would then have to fall backwards into the arms of the other teenagers and adult volunteers. I hope you can picture this.

Some teens that participated in the “trust fall” just struggled climbing up to the stool. They were very nervous.

There were other teenagers who climbed up the stool. They would turn around. They were ready to fall. But then the teenagers froze. They were often struck with fear and worry. Could they fall backwards? Would their friends and youth leaders catch them?

Each of the teens would stand there for a while. For some of the teens, their knees and legs began to wobble. They did not want to fall. They were experiencing fear and trepidation. They were scared. The rest of the group would try to encourage them. “Come on and trust us!” the teens would shout. Eventually, most of the teens would fall into the arms of the group. Their fears turned to joy.

Why was this exercise so difficult?

I believe that these teenagers were overcome by their fears and anxiety. Often our fears and worries slow us down.

I think sometimes this “trust fall” exercise is a lot like us following and trusting in God.

There are times in our lives, for each of us, when we want to pursue God. We want to follow Him. It is our great desire to trust God. Then something happens in our lives; a problem or circumstance comes upon us. Our lives become off-balance because of life’s struggles and circumstances.

What happens to us? Fear, worry, and anxiety. Often, we let the fear and worries that we struggle with overwhelm us. Sometimes, it can even paralyze us from moving forward. In fact, you could say we hit a crossroads.

What do we do? Often, we rely upon our intelligence, hard work, or even our own understanding to solve the problem. Yet, this verse says we are to “Trust in the Lord.”

I have a question for you: **“Where, in your life, do you need to put your trust in God?”**

What is the area in your life that is causing you fear, worry, and anxiety?

I believe **your greatest point of fear and worry is where you need to trust God the most.**

Think about it. What is the one or two things you fear and have the most difficulty trusting God with? This is the area that I believe God wants you to trust in Him.

What are some of these fears or worries we may face?

- It might be a person that is causing anxiety in your life (a friend or a relative).
- It might be a situation you are worried about at work. You are thinking it is time for a change or time to look for a new job.
- It might be your children you are worried about. You want your child to have just one good friend at school. Maybe you want your child to be successful at school, on a sports team, or club. It can keep you awake at night with worry.
- If you are a single adult, it may be worries about whether you will meet someone to share your life with. Am I willing to trust God that he will bring the right person? What happens if he does not?
- It might be that you have countless bills and just don’t know how you are going to make it week to week or month to month.

- It might be the health of a spouse or loved one. You may be saying to yourself, I don't understand why this is happening. It does not seem like things are getting better.

We often get lost in our fears, worries, and anxieties. What do we need to do?

#1 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Are we really trusting God, with our whole heart, about this situation? Are we seeking after God? Are we inviting God to be part of the solution? Do you really believe in the promises of God? That God will lead you down the right path, even though you cannot see it right now?

The problem for many of us is that we are half-hearted people. We somewhat trust God on some things. We somewhat don't trust God on other things. There are times when we are just unsure of what to do.

God knows that his people can be half-hearted Christians. It is not surprising to God. Yet, God wants our whole hearts to be devoted to Him. As the verse says, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."** We need to be all in. We are not to waver, but to trust God whole-heartedly.

There was a story about a village that had not had a drop of rain for four years. Because of the drought, everyone in the village was sad. There lived a farmer with his wife and daughter. One day, the farmer called to his wife and said, "We should pray to God for rain." His wife came to him with their 6-year-old daughter to pray to God. The farmer was sitting with folded hands. He said in a hoarse voice hiding his tears, "I have heard that God listens to his children's prayers. Let us all together pray to God for rain." Everyone started praying for rain in their own way. The little girl spoke first. "God, my father is very upset. You can do everything. Please make it rain in our village." The mother and father prayed as well.

After some time, the farmer got up. Seeing him going out, the girl said to her father, "Where are you going?" The farmer said, "I am going to the farm to do some work." At this, the girl ran toward her father and said, "Wait, I will come with you!" After saying this, the girl ran inside and quickly came back with an umbrella. Seeing the umbrella in her hand, the farmer asked, "Why did you bring the umbrella?" The little girl said, "Father, we have prayed to God for rain. We will get wet in the rain if we go out without an umbrella." The farmer was shocked to hear the girl's answer. At that very moment, the farmer thought, "It's good to pray, but more important than that, to believe and trust that your prayer will be answered and then act accordingly."

What does it mean to "trust in the Lord with your whole heart"? To have confidence and assurance that God will be there with us, directing our path. When life's challenges are upon us, we need to put our trust in the Lord to help us through the situation that is occurring in our life.

Trusting in the Lord with all your heart means that you have placed your hope in Jesus.

#2 - Lean not on your own understanding.

Many of us, when we read this part of the verse, don't like what it says. Our culture tells us that no one should tell you what is right or wrong; what do you mean that we should not trust ourselves?

I was reading from Pastor and Theologian Tim Keller this week. Here is what Tim Keller had to say about leaning too much into your own understanding.

Tim Keller said, "Remember how your 15-year-old self thought that your 10-year-old self was an idiot because of the way you used to think and believe? Do you remember how your 25-year-old self thought that your 15-year-old self was an idiot? Do you remember how your 45-year-old self thought your 25-year-old self was an idiot?"

How many times have we said, "I wish that I knew this piece of wisdom when I was younger"? Human wisdom and understanding cannot be the standard by which we live. Human wisdom is so often faulty. Culture is constantly changing what is right and wrong.

I believe the one thing we can count on is God. The Bible is the source of truth for our lives. He is the Creator of the universe. It is God that is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

It reminds me of the story "The Man on the Subway" by Steven Covey.

"People were sitting quietly – some reading newspapers, some lost in thought, some resting with their eyes closed. It was a calm, peaceful scene.

Then suddenly, a man and his children entered the subway car. The children were so loud and rambunctious that instantly the whole climate changed.

The man sat down next to me and closed his eyes, apparently oblivious to the situation. The children were yelling back and forth, throwing things, even grabbing people's papers. It was very disturbing. And yet, the man sitting next to me did nothing.

It was difficult not to feel irritated. I could not believe that he could be so insensitive as to let his children run wild like that and do nothing about it, taking no responsibility at all. It was easy to see that everyone else on the subway felt irritated, too. So finally, with what I felt like was unusual patience and restraint, I turned to him and said, 'Sir, your children are really disturbing a lot of people. I wonder if you couldn't control them a little more?'

The man lifted his head, 'Oh, you're right. I guess I should do something about it. We just came from the hospital where their mother died about an hour ago. I don't know what to think, and I guess they don't know how to handle it either.'"

Have you ever said something you regret because you did not have all the information? Your perfect understanding of the situation was completely wrong. Each one of us has

blind spots in our lives. We often don't see what we don't see. Often, we can be wrong with our assumptions and thoughts. We should not rely upon our own understanding. It can be dangerous.

We need guidance from the source of life, which is God. It is God who gives us understanding and wisdom. God is our GPS and our navigator in life. God has given us Himself, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible to navigate our daily life. We can also learn from other wise people and mature Christians.

#3 – In all your ways, submit to Him.

What does the word ALL stand for? It means “in everything we do.” In every area of our lives, we are to put God first – with our work, friendships with people, how we should spend our time and money. It includes the people we date, marriage and how we raise our children. It includes everything we do. Every decision we make.

All simply means “in everything.”

What does God want us to do? Submit everything to Him. Some translations use the word “acknowledge.” The root definitions of both words are similar.

What does “submit” or “acknowledge” mean? “To accept or yield to a superior force or to the authority or will of another person.”

Unfortunately, in our society today, when we use the word “acknowledge,” we often mean “giving a nod to” or a simple “hi” to someone. When a person walks by, we simply acknowledge them. Or when a professional athlete hits a home run, they point to the sky to acknowledge God.

I like the word “submit” because it shows a deeper respect and reverence to God.

As Christians, we are Christ followers; we are to be disciples of Jesus. Jesus is our teacher. We are his students. When we accept Jesus into our lives, we are showing Jesus that we want to follow Him. As followers of Jesus, we are submitting to his teaching in every way.

Often our viewpoint must change. Instead of seeking our ways and our best interests, we should be seeking Jesus and what he would do in the situations that we are facing.

We may need to ask ourselves these questions:

- What would Jesus do in this relationship?
- What would Jesus do in this work situation?
- How would Jesus handle this conflict?

When we submit our life challenges to Jesus, we are acknowledging that his ways are better than our own. We are putting God first.

*Romans 8:28 says, “**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.**”*

I firmly believe that God wants the best for each of us. God sent his Son, Jesus, for one purpose – to die on the cross that our sins could be forgiven and that we could be in relationship with Him. God loves each of us more than we can imagine.

We need to believe when we submit (acknowledge God in our decisions, worries, and anxieties), God will take care of us. Why? Because He loves us. God loves each of us so very much.

Which leads us to blessings.

#4 – He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs starts with three directives and follows with a promise.

What does it mean that God will make our paths straight?

When we trust in ourselves and lean on our own wisdom, it does not usually work out so well for us. Often, we go down a curvy and winding road. Eventually we make it, but there are times when there was unnecessary pain and heartache.

If we want our paths straight, we need to trust in the Lord and not lean on our own understanding; in all our ways, we are to submit to God. Then He will make our paths straight.

I want to add a disclaimer out there - this proverb does not mean you will have success in all you do. This verse does not highlight a prosperity gospel, where you will have money and success.

What this proverb is saying is that when we trust God, we can have peace in our heart by trusting God with our fears and worries. God will be there to work things out. I believe God will show us the paths we should take. We just need to trust in Him.

When life's challenges come our way – relationships with friends or family, issues with our jobs, trouble with finances, time, and hopes and dreams – when we put God's ways first in our life, He will make our paths straight.

Summary:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart” – (Looking up to God)

“Leaning not on your own understanding” – (Don't look at ourselves)

“In all your ways, submit to God” – (Put our palms up as we are asking God's help)

“He will make our paths straight” – (God's promise to us)

Prayer

Questions for Discussion & Reflection:

1. What are some words of advice that your parents passed down to you or that you have passed down to your children? Where do you go to find wisdom and direction?
2. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. Trusting God may not always be easy; in what two areas do you find it difficult to trust? What does it mean to trust God and how do you know if you are doing it?
3. What happens when you depend on your “own understanding” rather than depending on God? In what ways has God been faithful to you?
4. God has promised us that when we seek Him, He will answer. Why is it sometimes difficult to go to God when making small and large decisions? In what ways do you currently seek to know and do the will of God in your life?
5. Why does verse 6 say we are to submit to God? What is the difference between submitting to God and acknowledging God? Which is more difficult to do?
6. God gives three directives followed by one blessing. The blessing is that “he will make your paths straight.” What does a straight path mean to you? To God?
7. God desires to have access to every area of your heart and your mind. What decisions are you currently facing that you could use God’s direction and leading? How could the group pray for you?