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Sermon Notes

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God's Conditional Promise for a Straight Journey

Proverbs 3:5-6

On July 4, 1776, representatives to the Continental Congress passed what John Adams called "The most important resolution that ever was taken in America." It was of course the Declaration of Independence, and the key statement read as follows:

Resolved, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved

It was the origin of a new, independent nation, and that date has been marked as the birthday of the United States.

The text we're looking at today, however, is our spiritual Declaration of Dependence... on Jesus Christ

Perhaps the most famous of all the Proverbs

Proverbs 3:5-6 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.

Three commands, and one resulting promise

Context: Much of Proverbs given as a father's advice to his son... so it is in Proverbs 3

Proverbs 3:1-4 My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, ² for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. ³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

This could be read as King Solomon speaking to his son, perhaps Rehoboam, getting him ready for the rigors of being king in his place

But Almighty God saw fit to include this as Holy Scripture... so it ends up being a word of wisdom from a loving heavenly Father to all His adopted sons and daughters in Christ

In this section of Proverbs, the loving father is urging his son to be mindful constantly of his commands, storing them up in his heart

He promises LONG LIFE if his son obeys... very much like the promise God made to young King Solomon the night Solomon asked for wisdom:

1 Kings 3:14 if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.

These verse promise prosperity, favor, and a good name in the sight of both God and man... all for careful obedience to these commands

Then the wise, loving father gives a series of three commands coupled with a wonderful promise:

Proverbs 3:5-6 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.

Four lines in two verses

- ***Command #1: Trust in the Lord with all your heart***
- ***Command #2: Lean not on your own understanding***
- ***Command #3: In all your ways acknowledge him***
- ***Resulting Promise: And He will direct your paths***

I. Command #1: Total Trust in the Lord

Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart...”

A. Fundamental Issue in our Relationship with God: TRUST

1. Synonym for faith
2. Root Hebrew word means to throw oneself down on the face in total abandonment
3. General usage has to do with a feeling of peace or security

Leviticus 25:18-19 “Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. ¹⁹ Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety.”

^{ESV} Job 11:18 And you will feel secure, because there is hope; you will look around and take your rest in security.

Psalm 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Isaiah 26:3-4 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ⁴ Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

Ezekiel 28:26 They will live there in safety and will build houses and plant vineyards; they will live in safety

Illus. The word use is a FEELING of peacefulness, of security, of ease and comfort; sometimes even in dire circumstances:

Psalm 27:3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

B. God's Constant Desire for His Children: TRUST ME!!

1. Lessons of God the Savior

In moving Israel out of bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land, God began to teach this central lesson: *Trust in the Lord with all of your heart.*

God put His omnipotence on display in the Ten Plagues with which He judged the gods of Egypt and the mighty power of Pharaoh. Egypt trusted in their gods and Pharaoh to save them, and both failed utterly.

This display came to a climax when Israel was trapped by the Red Sea with no possible escape, and Pharaoh had encircled them with the mightiest army on the face of the earth. Israel cried out to the Lord, who spoke through Moses saying,

The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. (Exodus 14:14)

After Israel safely crossed the Red Sea with the water like a mighty wall to the left and the right, and the mighty Egyptian army was subsequently drowned, then the nation had a solid basis for trusting in the Lord forever:

And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. (Exodus 14:31)

2. Lessons of God the Provider

a. God had more lessons to teach Israel... not only that He was sufficient as Savior, but He was also sufficient as PROVIDER

b. Manna

Deuteronomy 8:3 He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man

does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Throughout Israel's history, again and again, the Lord was teaching them this one lesson: TRUST ME, BE SECURE IN ME, REST IN ME

C. Constant Lessons for the Christian

1. Every trial you go through is a new opportunity to TRUST in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART
2. "With all your heart" = fully, completely... no competing alternatives
3. I'll talk in a moment about competing alternatives, but it is always a temptation for a Christian to trust in the Lord PLUS something
 - a. Trust in the Lord PLUS your own piety or church attendance or service to the Lord
 - b. Trust in the Lord PLUS your strength or skill or experience
 - c. Trust in the Lord PLUS your money or stocks or resources
4. Many lessons in the Christian life exist to teach us TOTAL TRUST in the Lord... Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart

II. Command #2: Rejection of Prideful Independence

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean NOT on your own understanding

A. The Enemy of Genuine Trust: SELF-RELIANCE

1. But when the time came to enter the Promised Land, the ten spies came back and led Israel away from trust in the Lord by causing Israel to LOOK INWARD and to trust its own military strength

Numbers 13:32-33 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Israel should have been QUIET, PEACEFUL, and CONFIDENT as a child on his mother's breast, unconcerned for the danger, because this MIGHTY GOD was fighting for them

Instead, they forgot God and relied on themselves... they lost TRUST and clamored to go back to Egypt

In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go. (Deuteronomy 1:32-33)

B. Key Issue Throughout Old Testament: What Are You Trusting In?

1. Situation after situation in the Old Testament, God would bring some huge trial to His chosen people... they would be forced to choose what they were trusting in
2. Some godly kings would recognize their own weakness and openly throw themselves down before the Lord in open trust and confidence

C. Multiple False Trusts

People can rely on their own understanding (Proverbs 3:5); physical strength or personal wisdom (Jeremiah 9:23); material wealth (Proverbs 18:11); the fortifications of a well-built city wall (Deuteronomy 28:52); chariots and horses (Psalm 20:7); self-righteousness (Ezekiel 33:13); and worst of all, idols (Isaiah 42:17)

Clear usage of TRUST... by the field commander of the King of Assyria to King Hezekiah:

Isaiah 36:4 The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah, "This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours?"

Isaiah 36:6 Look now, you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces a man's hand and wounds him if he leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him.

ON WHAT ARE YOU RELYING to get you out of trouble? What is your confidence? What do you console yourself with?

D. Your Own Understanding

1. "Lean not"... it has to do with a support system, like a staff or crutch, on which you rest your whole weight
2. The contrast here is with our pathetic little THIMBLEFULL of wisdom compared with the infinite scope of God's wisdom
 - a. By God's omniscience He made the universe... with immense galaxies, swirling nebulae, quasars and pulsars
 - b. by God's understanding He crafted the ecosystems of life in a complex dance—one system relying on the others
 - c. by God's understanding, He invented DNA and the double-helix

d. but US????

Job 8:9 we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow.

3. Trusting in your OWN TAKE ON THE SITUATION

The longer we go in this life, the more we can become ARROGANTLY confident in our own understanding... and we STOP praying for wisdom and guidance

E. Central False Trust: SELF

1. "your own understanding" represents all that you are... your wisdom, insight, thoughts, perceptiveness
2. Something God says may not make sense... believe it anyway
 - a. You may not understand some point of doctrine: God's sovereignty and human responsibility... LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING

Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Francis Adrian Van der Kemp, dated July 30, 1816, wrote this about the Trinity

Ridicule is the only weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions. Ideas must be distinct before reason can act upon them; and no man ever had a distinct idea of the trinity. It is the mere Abracadabra of the mountebanks calling themselves the priests of Jesus.

In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity makes NO SENSE to my own understanding; therefore it is only to be ridiculed

Mark Twain, so in love with his own understanding, said this about all religions:

"Faith is believin' what you know ain't so!"

And

The gods offer no rewards for intellect. There was never one yet that showed any interest in it.

So, does this verse teach that we check our brains at the door when we choose to believe in the Bible and in Jesus?

NO... the Bible is full of appeals to human reasoning power

BUT what this is teaching is, that sometimes the things God teaches about Himself may be difficult for your understanding to accept... accept it anyway

- b. Even more to the point, you may not understand WHAT GOD IS DOING in your life or in the world

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

- c. You may be going through some terrible suffering... LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING... do not say "A loving God would never do such and such to me..."

Learn to minimize your own perspective and trust in God's holy word

III. Command #3: Consistent Relationship with the Lord

"In all your ways, acknowledge him."

A. In All Your Ways

1. This speaks of a daily life RELATIONSHIP with the Lord
2. "In all your ways" refers to how you live every moment of your life
3. The word "ways" is literally "roads" or "paths"... a frequent Hebrew metaphor for how you make progress in your daily life, what roads you take
4. It is as practical as the rubber meeting the road... it covers every decision and action you make in your lives, great and small
 - a. How long you sleep, what clothes you wear, how you earn your money and what you do with it after you've earned it, how you eat and drink, how you speak, how you behave with family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, strangers, etc.
 - b. This is a COMPREHENSIVE life issue

B. Not Merely "Acknowledge" Him

1. Most English translations "acknowledge Him"
2. This is AN IMPORTANT aspect... as if to say "I recognize your authority to rule over me!"
3. To acknowledge God's JURISDICTION over us
4. So, IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM means at least this... but it means MORE

C. In All Your Ways **KNOW HIM**

1. Hebrew is simple: *In all your ways, know Him*
2. To know the Lord means to have a deep, growing, covenant relationship with him
3. To see His hand in all your ways... more than that, to see His authority, His throne ruling over everything
4. To realize that the most important issue in life at every single moment is to KNOW your GOD

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life, that they may KNOW you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent

Philippians 3:8 I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

In all your ways, to say “My goal is to KNOW you better, Lord... to know your heart, your personality, your will, your power, your love

IV. Promise: He Will Make Your Paths Straight

Proverbs 3:5-6 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.

A. Three Conditions, One Promise

1. If you... trust in the Lord with all your heart, AND
2. If you ... lean not on your own understanding, AND
3. If in all your ways you KNOW Him... THEN
4. He will direct your paths

B. What Does this Mean?

1. Again, the word “paths” implies your life course... the direction of your life
2. He will “smooth out” your path... make it clear of obstacles

Isaiah 26:7 The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth.

Isaiah 40:3-4 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

3. Implication: God will guide your paths in uprightness, making it smooth and clear before you

C. Two Ways God Directs Paths

1. What to AVOID

- a. Sin COMPLICATES life, makes it weird, twisted, rocky, immensely difficult

^{ESV} Proverbs 22:5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them.

Proverbs 15:19 The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.

Proverbs 21:8 The way of the guilty is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright

Proverbs 2:14-15 who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways...

- b. If you trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, if you know the Lord in all your ways, God will KEEP YOUR PATH FREE of the twisted, perverse, thorny obstacles that sin inevitably brings
- i) Like the chronic liar, whose lies get ever more complex in order to cover up the previous lies
 - ii) Like the adulterer, whose deceptions reach to every area of his life—lying to his wife, to his children, to his friends, to himself, as he covers his tracks and tries to keep from getting caught in this adulterous relationship
 - iii) Like the Wall Street financier and stock defrauder, whose elaborate defenses against investigation for securities fraud will not survive the FBI investigation
 - iv) Like the tax evader who hopes he won't be audited
 - v) Like the spouse abuser who fears his wife's check-up will reveal the bruises he left on her the last time he lost his temper
 - vi) Like the procrastinator, who keeps putting off getting bills in the mail or keeps putting off getting the car fixed... only to find that the troubles get worse and worse all the time

- vii) Like the constantly angry person who has to keep going back and apologizing to co-workers and family members for his outbursts
- viii) Like the gossip, who has to call people back and try somehow to undo the damage she's done by letting something slip about a fellow church member
- ix) SIN COMPLICATES LIFE... God DIRECTS our paths AWAY

2. What to DO

- a. God directs your paths in POSTIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS, a pathway lined by the good works He as ordained
- b. This goes deeper than just common guidance: what job should I take, who should I marry, what car should I buy, where should we live, should we refinance our home, etc.
- c. It has to do with walking in a path of righteousness lined by GOOD WORKS set up specifically by God

ESV Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

IF you trust in the Lord with all your heart, AND

IF you lean not on your own understanding, AND

IF in all your ways you know the Lord...

HE WILL DIRECT YOU TO A LIFETIME of Good works that will glorify Him maximally and enrich you eternally!

V. Applications

- 1. To the Unbeliever
 - a. The foundational issue: FAITH
 - i. "trust in the Lord with all your heart"
 - ii. Justification by FAITH
 - b. Salvation from sin is "from faith to faith"
 - c. Trust in the LORD with all your heart
 - i. Trust in the work of Christ for your salvation...

- ii. His shed blood is sufficient for all your sins
- d. Simple question: “On what are you relying, on what are you LEANING in order to survive judgment day?”
- e. If your own understanding is that there is no judgment day, God’s word says there is... LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING
- f. If your own understanding is that, if your good deeds outweigh your bad, you will get into heaven, God’s word says **“There is no one who does good, not even one.”** ... LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING
- g. If your own understanding is that all religions are about the same, Jesus said **“I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me.”** ... LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING
- h. In all your ways know Him: learn who Christ is in your everyday life, to find His glory to be your central motivation
- i. “AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT...” Jesus will be your straight and narrow path to heavenly joy and eternal life

2. To the Successful Christian

- a. Trust in the Lord with all your heart:
 - i. Don’t trust in how well things are going right now... don’t trust in business success or prosperity; don’t trust in a healthy beautiful family, or blessings in your ministry or answers to prayer; don’t trust in good feelings you get in your quiet times
 - ii. Trust in Jesus Christ: His blood shed for you; His prayers at the right hand of God; His righteousness imputed to you; His promises to you, **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”**
- b. Lean not on your own understanding
 - i. Don’t become arrogant as a growing Christian and forget to ask God for wisdom in prayer

- ii. Don't become independent as a successful Christian and forget that ***“Every good and perfect gift comes from above”***
 - iii. Don't be impressed with your growing knowledge of the Bible or of Christian doctrine, ***“If anyone thinks he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know.”***
 - iv. When asked to give counsel to someone who's struggling, remember to pray to God for wisdom, and not to lean on your own understanding
 - v. When figuring out what to do with the money God is blessing you with, “Lean not on your own understanding”; instead ask Him, saying “Lord, all this money is yours; how should I best invest it for your Kingdom?”
- c. “In all your ways know Him...”
- i. As you continue to lead the blessed life you are leading, learn to know Christ in everything you do
 - ii. Make learning Jesus the central focus of every moment of your life
 - iii. Bring Jesus into the secret chambers of your outwardly successful life, and be sure you are just as successful and faithful in secret as you appear to be in public
- d. “and he will direct your paths...”
- i. Sometimes God moves us from success to trial in the blink of an eye... it doesn't mean He now loves you any less

Ecclesiastes 7:14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

- ii. Be ready for the trials that God will use to shape your character and to prepare you
- iii. In the meantime, ***“Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise!”***
- iv. Successful Christian, happy Christian, blessed Christian: let God direct your paths to real riches: godly character in Christ Jesus

3. To the Unemployed

- a. You are going through a huge trial... struggling with fears about the future, with questions of self-worth; every day is a challenge as you try to address this one pressing issue, “Where can I get a job?”
- b. It’s easy at such a time to feel like you’re on your own, that it is totally up to you to solve this problem
- c. It’s easy to let anxiety overwhelm you, and doubts to dominate your mind

Proverbs 3:5-6 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.

- d. TRUST HIM... now more than ever before!!
- e. Don’t become self-immersed and forget the Lord’s mighty power; He can move His little finger and get you a job; Don’t focus exclusively on your strengths and weaknesses, your experience, your educational background, you, you, you; LEAN INTO THE LORD
- f. “In all your ways know Him...” As you work on your resume, as you apply for jobs, as you go to the interview, as you wait, wait, wait to hear back... in all your ways, seek to know Christ and see His power and His will
- g. Let Him direct your paths... let Him lead you and guide you to where you must go

4. To the Single Adult

- a. I’m speaking especially to the singles in our church who yearn to be married, to find a godly spouse... this can be one of the most trying trials in life
- b. It seems like it will take a miracle of epic proportions to find that right person
- c. Trust in the LORD with all your heart: don’t let the devil lie to you that God has forgotten the deepest desires of your heart; God knows what you want, what you have wept for, what you are waiting for; as you TRUSTED HIM for your soul, so TRUST HIM for your spouse

- d. Lean not on your own understanding: Don't resort to techniques, or lower your standards or try to catch someone by unworthy means; don't think it's all up to you to catch the right spouse; don't LEAN on or RELY on yourself
- e. In all your ways, Know the Lord: seek to follow Christ closely as you prepare for marriage... seek to put Christ first, seek to know Him in your singleness, to make the most of the advantages of the single life for ministry that Paul discusses in 1 Cor. 7;
- f. AND HE WILL DIRECT YOUR PATHS: He will protect you from a bad marriage, like to a non-Christian; he will guide you to the right person in His own good time: ***“What God has joined together...”***

5. To the New Parent

- a. Trust in the Lord with all your heart: there is so much to learn about being a parent; so many people have said that children don't come with an instruction manual; actually, God's word is in fact sufficient for you to become a godly mother or father; put your full confidence in God's word as SUFFICIENT for parenting; don't be anxious about your inadequacies as a parent
- b. LEAN NOT on your own understanding: be humble to admit you need a lot of instruction; seek wisdom and guidance from older godly parents who can help you; don't be too proud to ask for help with your children... as they grow, the issues will get more complex; LEAN NOT on your own virtues as a parent... especially entrust them to God daily in prayer
- c. In all your ways know the Lord: the best thing a parent can do is to make Christ the center of your own DAILY LIFE... your children stare at you, and watch you to see if you are consistent; in all your ways acknowledge Christ
- d. AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT: He will bless your parenting efforts

6. To the College Student

7. To the Lonely Elderly

8. To those with Chronic Illness

9. To the Dying