

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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SCHOOL OF WISDOM – Life Lessons from Proverbs
It's Wise to Trust in the Lord
Proverbs 3:5-6

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There is a thought-provoking scene In Lewis Carroll's book, Alice in Wonderland. Alice comes to a fork in the road and realizes she has to make a decision about which way she should go. But she doesn't have the slightest clue which way is the right way. That's when she notices a cheshire cat up in a tree. Alice asked the cat, "What road do I take?" The cat asked, "Where do you want to go?" "I don't know," Alice answered. "Then," said the cat, "it really doesn't matter, does it?"

There's a lot of insight in that little exchange. We really need to know where we want to go in life, don't we? Life is filled with decisions, with proverbial forks in the road. What school should I attend? What job should I pursue? Which person should I marry? Where should we live? How should I spend my money? How should I spend my time?

Every day of our lives, we are constantly making decisions. And, if there is no ultimate goal to life, if there is not a definitive right way or wrong way, then, our choices don't really matter, do they? If there is no God, no heaven or hell, no eternal state of our souls; if we are just the product of random chance or the result of the unguided course of evolutionary processes, then our choices have no ultimate meaning. It doesn't really matter what we choose to do with our lives because nothing really matters if matter is all there is.

However, if there is a God (and there is), if there is right and wrong (and there is), if there is a heaven and a hell and an eternal state to our never-ending souls (and those things do exist), then our decisions matter greatly. What we do at the forks in life's road is of great significance.

So, how do we make great decisions as we travel down the road of life? That's what our text for this morning is about. We are in a series on wisdom from the book of Proverbs. And this morning's passage is likely the most well-known of all the Proverbs. It's a primer on how to make wise decisions as you travel down the road of life.

If you want to build a foundation for making great decisions, I'm so glad you are here this morning. God has a word just for you today. So, look with me at Proverbs 3:5-6.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

If you've ever made a decision you've lived to regret, this passage will keep you from making that mistake. If you've ever felt the paralysis of analysis, this passage will help you get back in gear. If you've ever been so afraid of doing the wrong thing that you've chosen not to do anything, this passage will free you from that prison of fear.

There are four short statements that give us insight into what goes into making WISE decisions of eternal consequence.

- Trust in the Lord with all your heart – that's about who we trust, the Lord.
- Do not lean on your own understanding – that's about who we don't trust, ourselves.
- In all your ways acknowledge him – that's about what (or who) we desire to know.
- He will make straight your paths – that's about what the Lord will do in and through our decisions.

Those are four, straightforward elements that go into making great decisions. And they give us our big idea for this morning.

BIG IDEA: WE MAKE WISE DECISIONS BY TRUSTING IN THE LORD AND NOT THEMSELVES, BY DESIRING HIM ABOVE ALL ELSE, AND BY DEPENDING ON HIM TO DO ALL HE HAS PROMISED.

Now, let's walk through those elements of a great decision, one at a time.

Element #1 – WHO WE TRUST – Start trusting in the Lord completely.

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,

The word translated trust in verse 5 means to rely on or be confident in something or someone else and their ability. It originally meant to lay face down upon something, placing all your weight on it. We are to rely on and be confident in the Lord and His ability. We are to lay our whole self down upon the Lord. That's how we begin the Christian life.

Romans 10:9

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The most important decision you will ever make is to bow before Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. This is the foundation for the entire Christian life and it's the basis for experiencing every blessing God has for His people.

The primary fork in the road of life comes to us at the foot of the cross and the entrance to an empty tomb. Do you believe Jesus is who the Bible says He is? He is God in the flesh. He is the Lord of Heaven and earth. Do you believe Jesus has done what the Bible says He has done. Jesus lived the perfect life we have all failed to live because of our sin. Jesus died on the cross in our place as a substitute and a sacrifice. He paid the penalty of our sin and made a way for us to be forgiven and restored to God the Father. But when Jesus died, He didn't stay dead. He stepped out of the tomb alive and well and victorious and reigns over this universe as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And the call of God for every man, woman, and child is to place their trust completely in Jesus to be and do for us what we can never be and do for ourselves.

If you want your destination to be heaven where you will experience all the eternal blessings God has for His people, then you find yourself at the most critical fork in the road of life. Heaven and hell are weighed in the balance. Trust completely in Jesus today.

But trusting Jesus isn't just how we begin the Christian life. It's how we live it and take every step along the way.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The entire Christian life is a life lived by faith in Jesus. Trusting, believing, depending on Him to be and do all that the Bible says He is and promises to do. That means that trusting Jesus isn't just the most important decision we make, trusting Jesus is the most important element to every decision we make.

As we are going through life, making decisions about our jobs or our families or our health, the most important part of each decision is whether or not it is flowing out of a heart that is trusting the Lord completely.

That's exactly what we find being taught in the rest of the Bible.

Hebrews 11:6

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. That means no matter what you decide about any given matter, if your decision doesn't flow out of a heart that is trusting in and depending on God, it isn't pleasing to God which means it's not a good decision.

Romans 14:23

...this is a chapter about how to make a decision when the Bible hasn't clearly said whether or not it is right or wrong (would be a great passage to study sometime this week as you process Proverbs 3:5-6)...Paul's conclusion on how to make a good decision when the Bible hasn't spoken on a subject is found in Romans 14:23 – Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

The most important element of every decision is whether or not it flows from a heart that is trusting the Lord. Why you do what you decide to do makes all the difference in the choices we make.

Psalms 127:1-2

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. 2 It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

It's a good thing to get up early and start your day. It's a good thing to make bread as part of providing for your household. But, if you choose to get up early from a heart that is full of fear rather than faith, it completely changes the nature of that decision. It's no longer a good decision because it's made from a place of fear and anxiety rather than confident faith in the Lord.

And the Bible is filled with expressions of this principle. From the people of Israel choosing not to go to war because they feared the giants more than they had faith in the Lord to the disciples bailing water in their sinking boat because they didn't trust the Lord to keep His word. Choosing not to go to war and bailing water in a sinking boat are not necessarily bad decisions...unless they flow from hearts that aren't trusting in the Lord.

So, if you want to make great decisions, start trusting the Lord completely. Is there any part of your life where you are struggling to trust the Lord? Will you lay that down before Him in faith today? Start trusting in the Lord.

Element #2 – WHO WE DON'T TRUST - Stop trusting in yourself immediately.

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

We aren't trusting in the Lord so long as we are leaning on our own understanding. There are a couple of important implications to the word "leaning."

1. Leaning means direction.

You can't lean in opposite directions at the same time. And we can't trust in opposite things at the same time, either. We can't trust in God when we are really trusting in ourselves. We can't trust in Jesus when we are leaning into our own ability or our parents or our spouse or secular psychology or godless philosophies. Secular humanism and biblical Christianity are two opposing worldviews. Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't trust our spouse or our mom or science, at all. This isn't a call to forsake intellectual or social pursuits. God isn't calling us to be unreasonable or irrational...that's not what it means to not lean on our own understanding. It means our understanding shouldn't be the first place we turn as we make decisions in our lives. We should lean toward the Lord.

As you are seeking to make decisions and choose the direction for your life, where do you go first and foremost for understanding? Your own thoughts? The thoughts of people around you? The thinkers and philosophers of this age? Or the Lord?

2. Leaning means dependence.

When we lean on something we are placing our weight on it, we are relying on it. And if you want to know whether or not someone is leaning on something, just kick it out from underneath them. Have you ever seen someone lean on something and it give way? Several years ago, I sat down on a plastic Adirondack chair on my back porch. Little did I know that the plastic was old and brittle...so, when I put my weight on it, it collapsed underneath me. I had thought I would be relaxing in a comfortable chair, but I wound up bumped and bruised on the ground. The point is that you can tell if someone is leaning on something by what happens when that thing is removed. And that's a great way to tell if you are depending on the Lord or not. What would happen to your life if you removed everything about it that is focused on Jesus? What if you didn't have a Bible to consult every day and to assimilate into your decisions? Would your decisions look at all different? If your decisions primarily look just like the majority of a godless world that disregards God's word, then how can you say you are relying on God to make them? There is a direct connection between depending on Jesus and listening to what He says in His word.

Luke 6:46

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

If you disregard what Jesus says in His word, then you aren't completely trusting in Him as Lord. You aren't leaning on Him, which means you are leaning on your own understanding...your own ability to figure out what is best.

So, as you are making decisions, ask yourself questions like these:

- What COMMANDS has the Lord given that I need to OBEY?
- What WISDOM principles has He given that I need to APPLY? Principles about hard work and debt and integrity and the kind of person to marry are found throughout the Bible...When we apply wisdom principles, that's one of the ways we put our trust in the Lord.
- What KINGDOM VALUES do I need to EXPRESS? For instance, Jesus calls us to seek His Kingdom and His glory. How are you incorporating those values into the decisions you're making?

Trusting in the Lord means we don't lean on our own understanding, we lean on Him and what He says in His word.

Element #3 – WHAT WE DESIRE - Desire to know the Lord above all else.

Proverbs 3:6

In all your ways acknowledge him,

That word “acknowledge” is a common word in the Hebrew Old Testament. It occurs about 900 times and about 500 times it is translated “to know.” It conveys the idea of intimacy. It also conveys the idea of experience. Like men who knew the experience war.

So, when Proverbs 3:6 says to acknowledge the Lord in all of your ways, I take that to primarily mean that we look around at every area of our life and seek to know and experience the Lord more. There's a mindset that needs to change for many of us. It's the mindset that at the center of Christianity is a plan. A step-by-step plan for what we need to do to be pleasing to God. A plan with a list of good things we need to do that are God's plan for our life and a list of lesser things that are not God's plan for our lives. We think making decisions is about getting the decision right according to that plan...that is often a mystery to us...it feels like finding a needle in a haystack.

And, God does have a plan. He does tell us things that are best for our lives and things that aren't best for our lives. That's absolutely true. But at the center of Christianity isn't a plan, it's a person. Jesus is real and alive and desires for you to know Him and experience His life and resurrection power.

That means when we are making decisions, we look to the Lord and say, “Jesus, my deepest desire in this decision is to know you better through it...to experience more of your life and power as a result of it. I'm not as concerned about whether I should live in Florida or Africa as I am about knowing you and making you known. I don't care most about being an engineer or a teacher. I don't care most about how much money I make or what kind of car I drive. What I care about more than any of those things is knowing you and experiencing your power in my life.” That's the essence of a wise decision and the direction of a godly life.

This truth changed my life...

Freshmen in college...trying to figure it all out...trying to figure out if Noah's ark could hold all the animals. One day my heart became overwhelmed with the reality that Jesus is real and alive and that one day I'll stand before Him, face to face...*Jesus, I trust you. I don't have it all figured out but want to know you more than anything else.*

First year of marriage...trying to figure it all out...where will we serve...considered several positions at a few different churches – without peace. Em and I were compelled to step out like Abraham. The only decision that we had peace with was the one decision that didn't make a whole lot of sense. We packed up all our earthly possessions and moved to Merritt Island where neither of us had jobs. Started attending a little church called FBCMI...*Jesus, we trust you...we have no idea what the future holds and definitely don't have the next steps figured out but we just want to know you more than anything else. We don't need the plan, we want you.*

Best decisions of our lives. Because when those elements are part of your decisions, our text gives us the final element of a great decision...

Element #4 – WHAT GOD WILL DO - Depend on God to do what He has promised.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

In the book of Proverbs, the crooked path is simply the wrong path, the sinful path, the way of this world. And the straight path is the opposite...it's the right path, the good path, the blessed path. In other words, when you live your life and make your decisions by trusting Jesus, committing your whole life to Him by believing and obeying His word, desiring to know Him and experience His presence and power more than anything else in this world and in all your ways for all your life...God will make it right.

You have nothing to worry about. Nothing to fear. Nothing to dread. Jesus may not make your life easy, but He will make it right. He might lead you onto seas that bring you into storms, but He will make it right. He might lead you into a place that feels like death so that you can experience resurrection power. He will make it right. He might lead you on what seems like a detour from what you thought would be His plan, but He will make it right.

When we have the kind of trust in Jesus that expresses itself in obedience and a desire to know and experience Him, I believe we have already made the right decision. God is so big and good and strong that He will not let His children down when they trust in Him and obey Him and desire Him. He will not let you down...ever. He will make it right.

The work of Jesus in our lives depends on Him and His power. So, the best decisions we make trust Him, not just in the decision but for the outcome. Wisdom depends on God to do what He has promised and leaves the outcome to Him.