

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## Some lessons from Proverbs: A lesson in trust

This morning I want to use a series of verses in the Book of Proverbs as a lesson in trust. I don't think these verses cover all aspects of what it means to trust in God, but they do provide some very clear guidance.

### Trust God completely

The series of verses begins with one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. It appears early in this wonderful Old Testament book and it is the foundation of what Proverbs teaches us about trusting God. Its first four words sum up our subject - trust in the LORD.

The verse is found in Proverbs 3:5: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."*

As with all well-known verses from the Bible, we can become so familiar with the words and use them so frequently that we lose the power and promises contained in them.

The verse begins with the word 'trust'. As we know, trust is widely expressed. We trust ourselves, we trust our friends, we trust our families, we trust in money, we trust governments, and sometimes we trust complete strangers. Think of the many times you have asked a complete stranger directions and, without knowing them at all, you trust the directions they give. Trust is part of human behaviour. God made us with a wonderful capacity to trust. In Proverbs 3:5 the writer tells us where that capacity should be directed. He does not write about trusting in God in a casual way but about placing our complete trust in God. He connects this first to our hearts - *"with all your heart"*; secondly, in the following part of the verse, to our minds - *"lean not on your own understanding"*.

In the Gospels a lawyer asked Jesus the question, *"Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* Jesus answered, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself"* (Luke 10:25-27). In the Old Testament the people of God were instructed to love God first and demonstrate that love by loving their neighbours (see Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). Such love emerged from a complete trust in the LORD: it was this trust which, in turn, taught them the love of God. So the first part of the lesson is to trust God completely.

### Material things are not to be trusted

The next verse we are going to look at in Proverbs is found in Proverbs 11. It is not about trusting in God, but the danger of trusting in riches: *"He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage"* (Proverbs 11:28).

Proverbs is most associated with the King Solomon, one of the richest kings that ever lived. Yet in it we find a warning against trusting in riches.

In 1 Kings 3 God appears to Solomon and invites him to *"Ask! What shall I give you?"* (1 Kings 3:5) In response Solomon requests: *"Give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?"* (1 Kings 3:9). Then God says to him, *"Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honour, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days"* (1 Kings 3:11-14).

Solomon did not choose riches, but wisdom, and he became the wisest of men. In addition, God gave him riches and honour, though Solomon goes on to describe in Ecclesiastes the emptiness of materialism. Sadly, at the end of his reign Solomon's *"heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God"* (1 Kings 11:4); in other words the man who began his reign trusting in the LORD with all his heart ceased to trust at the end of his reign. Solomon serves as a warning to

continue to trust in the One who has loved us for the whole of our lives. In the words of Psalm 92: *“Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing (Psalm 92:13-14).*

Proverbs teaches us not to trust in materialism but to experience a fruitful life by daily trusting in God.

### **Trusting God leads to happiness**

Our next verse teaches us that trusting God leads to happiness: *“He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he” (Proverbs 16:20).*

Happiness often has to do with our circumstances. If the circumstances are good, we experience happiness. If they appear against us, we often experience sadness and disappointment. What this verse promises is that trusting in God brings us into a state of happiness which remains even in adverse circumstances.

We have some powerful examples of this in the Bible. It is difficult to find a man more unjustly treated than Joseph in the book of Genesis, but there is an interesting introduction to the story of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh's butler and baker. The morning after they had their respective dreams Joseph says to them, *“Why do you look so sad today?” (Genesis 40:7).* This tiny sentence demonstrates that Joseph's demeanour, in spite of his trials, was that of a cheerful, kindly man with a genuine interest in others who were distressed. Instead of allowing the injustice he had suffered to make him despondent and uncaring of others, he is concerned about the sadness of other prisoners. The reason for this can be seen in the final verses of Genesis 39: *“But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and he gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. The keeper of the prison did not look into anything that was under Joseph's authority, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper” (Genesis 39:21-23).*

Joseph trusted God with all his heart and mind and God was with him and ultimately rewarded his outstanding and consistent trust.

We see another remarkable example of this in Acts 16 when Paul and Silas are imprisoned. In Acts 16:25 we read: *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* Paul articulates this daily trust in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”*

Trust is best expressed in prayer. By daily coming to the throne with thankful praising hearts, by expressing confidence in knowing that God the Father will answer our need, and by knowing that Jesus has not only invited us to “ask in [His] name” (see John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26) but also invited us to *“cast all our care upon Him, for He cares for us” (see 1 Peter 5:7)* - in this way we experience the happiness that comes from trusting God.

Daniel is a great example of this when, as an older man carrying the burden of governmental responsibilities, he suffers the consequences of a wicked conspiracy to put him death. What does he do? He goes home - *“And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days” (Daniel 6:10).*

Daniel was happy in his God and trusted Him to protect and keep him. He knew the power and promises of God and he never ceased to have a thankful heart. Such faith should mark our experience of God as Christians: *“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:14-16).*

### **Trusting God makes you victorious**

Our next verse is about the victories we win by trusting in God: *“A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the trusted stronghold” (Proverbs 21:22).*

Trust is not simply a passive experience. It is about action. Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5: *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”*

Paul describes our faith as a victorious faith and a faith that has the power to overcome the challenges it faces. John also writes about this in 1 John 5, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His*

*commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith" (1 John 5:3-4).*

### **Trusting God is a daily experience**

Our next verse is about how God trains us to trust Him. *"So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today" (Proverbs 22:19)*

Trusting in God is fundamentally linked to our understanding of the word of God and I like the fact that this verse relates to a daily instruction. It is through daily experience of reading the word of God and allowing it to penetrate our hearts and minds that we instinctively follow God's path for us. This is what David describes as *"the paths of righteousness"* in Psalm 23:3. Paul writes about how the Bible instructs us in righteousness: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16).

The word of God, by the Spirit of God, provides all the instruction necessary to live our lives for God. In Proverbs 3:5 we read about not leaning on our own understanding. When Jesus spoke to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-49) he spoke to their hearts, *"Did not our hearts burn within us?"* (Luke 24:32). Then afterwards He spoke to the whole company of disciples and *"opened their understanding."* (Luke 24:36-49) He spoke to their minds and gave them, not simply an intellectual understanding but a far deeper, spiritual understanding. There are many people who know the Scriptures very well, perhaps even in the original languages, but who have no spiritual understanding whatsoever. We do not blindly trust God. We trust Him through the eyes of faith based upon the revelation of Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ in the word of God. We trust Him for every aspect of our lives and in doing so prove the reality of His faithfulness and power in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

### **Trusting God leads to contentment**

Our next verse is about how trusting in the LORD leads to prosperity: *"He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will be prospered" (Proverbs 28:25).*

Let's not confuse the prosperity referred to in this verse with amassing person wealth. Prosperity in the word of God always has a spiritual dimension. It is about spiritual, emotional and physical prosperity. The Lord Jesus constantly reminds us that we cannot serve God and Mammon. It has not been uncommon in the history of Christendom for the things of God to be pursued for material gain. This verse implies a lowly heart in contrast to a proud one, and a simple daily trust in the God who cares for and provides for His children. In is interesting that John the Baptist lived the simplest of lives as he prepared for the coming Saviour of the world. The Lord Jesus lived the simplest of lives, content only to have what He needed. In our society with all its considerable affluence we are often tempted to focus on materialism. The Bible teaches us that godliness plus contentment is great gain: *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:6-7).*

Trusting in God develops contentment within us, a contentment which understands the value of all that God has given us and protects us from pride and avarice.

### **Don't trust in your self-confidence**

Our next verse focuses on the foolishness of trusting in one's own self-confidence: *"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered" (Proverbs 28:26).*

One of the greatest examples we have of the mistake of trusting oneself is that of Simon Peter. He was the most self-confident of all the disciples. The trust he had in himself reached a climax when, in John 13, he said, *"Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward.' Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake.' Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for my sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied me three times'" (John 13:36-38).*

In Luke 22, following Peter's denial, we read: *"Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.' So Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:60-62).*

The Christian life is one of faith, not in ourselves, but in the One who is our Saviour. The Lord Jesus Christ has not only saved us from the penalty of sin but He also saves us now from the power of sin - and will ultimately save us from the presence of sin. But to experience this present salvation we have to trust in Him and not trust in ourselves. We all discover, like Peter, the disastrous consequences of trusting in ourselves. And, in our verse, the writer in Proverbs describes such trust as foolishness, and that deliverance comes from walking wisely. Here the writer is explaining that

the power for daily living comes from looking outside ourselves by placing our trust in God. Even when we possess considerable abilities and gifts, these should be used by faith in God and not in self-confidence.

Peter, in his second letter, explains how trusting in God leads to a life which, instead of being full of self confidence and pride, is marked by self-control, holiness, love and Christlikeness: *“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:5-8).

### Trusting God makes you secure

Our next verse shows us how trusting in the Lord leads to security: *“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe”* (Proverbs 29:25).

There is no doubt that at times we can all be fearful of people at times. We have just seen this in the life of Peter when he was challenged as he warmed himself by the fire (Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-62, John 18:15-18). Alone and having seen Jesus being taken into judgement, he became fearful. That fear led to him deny Jesus. After the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and the apostles began preaching Jesus, all fear disappeared. Peter and John fearlessly confronted the Jewish rulers and refused to stop preaching the Gospel.

Later, after executing James (see Acts 12:1-2), King Herod has Peter arrested and prepares to execute him too (Acts 12:3-4). As he awaits execution, the church prays for him and God sends an angel to deliver him from prison (Acts 12:5-19). When the angel arrives, what is Peter doing? - he is fast asleep (Acts 12:6). So fast asleep the angel has to strike him to wake him up! (Acts 12:7)

What happened to the fearful Simon Peter of Luke 22? He was trusting in the Saviour who had told him at the end of John's Gospel that he would live to be an old man (John 21:18). Peter slept soundly because he trusted in God's word. The challenge for us is: are we living fearful or trusting lives?

### Are you trusting God's word?

Our final verse expands on this theme of trusting God's word: *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in him”* (Proverbs 30:5).

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth and the Bible is the record of that complete revelation. It is not there to be added to or taken from but to be believed in and acted upon. In doing so we discover the spiritual protection it provides. Paul explains this in Ephesians 6 when he writes *“... above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:16-17).

### Conclusion

This morning we have explored a lesson in trust in the book of Proverbs and here are the parts of that lesson for us all to think about as we enter a new week:

- *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart”* (Proverbs 3:5) - Trust God completely
- *“He who trusts in his riches will fall”* (Proverbs 11:28) - Material things are not to be trusted
- *“Whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he”* (Proverbs 16:20) - Trusting God leads to happiness
- *“A wise man scales the city of the mighty”* (Proverbs 21:22) - Trusting God makes you victorious
- *“So that your trust may be in the LORD; I have instructed you today”* (Proverbs 22:19) - Trusting God is a daily experience
- *“He who trusts in the LORD will be prospered”* (Proverbs 28:25) - Trusting God leads to contentment
- *“He who trusts in his own heart is a fool”* (Proverbs 28:26) - Don't trust in your self-confidence
- *“Whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe”* (Proverbs 29:25) - Trusting God makes you secure
- *“Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him”* (Proverbs 30:5) - Are you trusting God's word?

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