

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino
Proverbs 3:5-8
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Step by Step

When I first came to Cascades in August of 2005, one of the first conversations that I had with former charter members was...when would we begin building our new sanctuary? Undergoing a building campaign was not high on my list. But I told them that while I had no idea when, we could trust that the Lord would make it obvious if and when we should. And so they generously provided \$25,000 in seed money for when we were ready.

Then the interim pastor before me, also asked, have you thought about planning for Cascades' new sanctuary? I told him, funny that you should ask, because other folks were asking me the same thing.

After two years of getting settled in here, the idea just wouldn't go away.

In the winter of 2008, I asked a few other charter members what they thought. While the idea certainly made us feel nervous, we thought it was time to step out in faith. Green light.

I also had lunch with Larry and Beth Anderson. Many of us may not know the Andersons, but Larry was not afraid to shoot straight and tell you what he thought. They said, "Why not give it a try?" Green light.

So I pitched the idea to our session which was largely supportive. We came up with a plan that would take it slowly, one step at a time. Green light.

First, we put it to the congregation. Green light.

Then we formed a long range building committee which would learn about how to undergo such a project. We also read some good books, one of which was *When NOT to Build*.

By this point, the 2009 Recession had fully hit! It was not an ideal time to fund raise for any sort of capital project. BUT it was a great time to hire a top notch architect to help us figure out our wants and needs and get us through the conceptual design phase so we could begin fundraising. Green light.

In 2010, we selected Soderstom Architects and by June we presented our Facility Master Plan to the congregation. Green light.

In 2011, we held the first of several capital campaigns to raise enough money to get us through permitting, secure grants and loans through the Presbytery and Synod, and select a contractor. Green light.

In 2013, we received permission from the county to break ground. Green light.

In 2014, we opened the doors to this beautiful space. Green light.

In 2015, we began sharing our space with the Love of God Russian speaking church, which helped us cover a good bit our synod loan payments. Green light.

In 2017, we held our second capital campaign to reduce our debt. Once again, the congregation sacrificed and stepped up to the plate. Green light.

In 2019, we were blessed to receive several estate gifts that helped us reduce our debt burden. Green light.

And finally, in 2020, just a month before the Covid-19 Pandemic shut everything down, we received one last estate gift which allowed us to pay off our all of our loans and we were debt free once again. Amen!

Fifteen years from start to finish, carrying loans for only six of those years.

We took it one step at a time, trusting that God would lead and provide for us along to the way. And look what God has done through us!

Our scripture this morning that Gladwin selected speaks to the way that God guides us through life...One step at time, particularly when we don't know how it's all going to work out.

Listen now as I read Proverbs 3:5-8

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.

8 This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

The Book of Proverbs along with Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs is from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. These important, time tested writings provide practical and moral teachings about life, suffering, wealth, work, and relationships.

The Book of Proverbs which we are in today, contains thirty one chapters of such wisdom. Many of them are attributed to King Solomon, some to King David and even a few to a non-Israelite man named Agur. It is important to remember that these are not promises of God, but general guiding principles for all of us to follow.

Proverbs 3:5-8 are some of my life favorites.

As we consider these proverbs, I'd like to explore how do we know what is right? What is the role of the bible in our decision making? What is the role of the

Holy Spirit? What is our role? What is the role of community? What is God's role? And finally how are we needing God's wisdom today?

The first word in verse five is trust. "Trust in the Lord." The Hebrew word for trust is batah. It can mean to rely on, have confidence in, or feel secure with something or someone. Notice how we are told specifically to trust in Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God above all Gods, also known as the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Proverbs 3:5 instructs us to place our trust in Yahweh among all of the other deities worshiped by people around us.

When the Jewish people heard this, they would immediately have thought of the God of their ancestors...the one who revealed himself through the Law and the Prophets and who brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. When WE hear of this God, we immediately think of Jesus Christ, who the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Colossians instructs is the exact representation of the invisible God, Yahweh. When we see Jesus, we see this God.

We trust in Jesus Christ. With what? ALL of our heart.

The Hebrew word for heart is leb. It was widely used for our feelings, will, or intellect. Those things that drive us to do what we do. Such as:

Passion.

Hormones.

Finances.

The Stock Market.

Politics.

Relationships.

Material things.

Jobs.

Intellect.

Education.

Not all bad things in and of themselves. But they aren't to be primary drivers. They are secondary, behind Jesus Christ.

The next part of the Proverb is "Lean not on your own understanding, but in ALL of your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight."

The Hebrew word for understanding is binah. It can also mean discernment or insight. In other words, we humans don't know everything about life. There is so much more. So we need to rely on God to give us that extra information.

Now what word did we hear repeated in these two verses? ALL! All of our heart. All of our ways. Not some. But ALL. Do you know what the word ALL means in Hebrew? ALL!

I don't know if you are anything like me, but sometimes I struggle with this word ALL. I'll give Jesus part of my heart. But not ALL of it. I'll ask for help in some of my ways. But not ALL of them.

Who in the room would say that they have their lives perfectly ordered? None of us do! In our home, we have a draw in the kitchen called...the JUNK DRAWER. No matter how often we try to empty that out and get rid of stuff we don't need, it always seems to fill back up. It's embarrassing what a mess that drawer is. I'm just not disciplined enough to stay on top of it.

Isn't that so like life? We all have areas of our lives that we'd rather not have Jesus know what's in them. We certainly wouldn't want him to come in and clean them out. And so we give Jesus access to most of our lives but not those unsightly places. Like our politics. Our finances. Our sexuality. Our relationships. Our health. In those areas, we'd rather keep matters under our control, in our own hands.

But what does the Proverb say?

Trust in the Lord with ALL of your Heart.

In ALL of your ways ask him and he will make your paths straight.

Again. All, means all.

That is where the Bible comes in to help our decision making because it provides time tested wisdom on how to live our best lives...or the full life as Jesus offered. Unlike modern philosophy or psychology, the bible's truth never changes. It can always be relied upon.

The Apostle Paul in passing down his wisdom to his mentee Timothy said, "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."¹

The Greek word for God-breathed is theopneustos. It can also mean God inspired. But it gives us the idea just like when God breathed over the water in Genesis to create all that we see, God's Holy Spirit breathes over the pages of scripture to create something new in us.

All scripture is living, breathing, creating, transforming, molding, changing... us.

The Greek word for all is pana. Like we know from the word panorama. It means every, whole, or entire.

Which then leads us to the role of the Holy Spirit that author and pastor Francis Chan says is the most neglected person of the triune God in the Church today.

Upon faith in Jesus Christ, God places his Holy Spirit in us as deposit, a guarantee of what belongs to God will return to God one day.² But Jesus tells even

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

² Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22

more. The Holy Spirit is a Counselor, a Comforter, and a Friend. One who is with us always. One who never leaves us, nor forsakes us.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth."³

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."⁴

Jesus continued, "Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

So the Holy Spirit reminds us what Jesus taught us, speaks truth to us, convicts us of sin, and remains with us.

What is the role of community?

In Old Testament times and in Jesus' day, the community played a vital role of keeping the truth of God. Story telling was the primary way in which people learned about God and what God required of them. They didn't have printed Bibles like we have today. But each synagogue might have had their own copy of the sacred scrolls that they would read each sabbath. What one learned of God was learned in the family or within this sacred community. Being a believer on one's own would have never been thought of.

Since Jesus' resurrection, the Church or his Body, has served as an arc, much like Noah's Arc in the Old Testament which preserved wildlife in the flood. In the same way, the Church carries the scriptures and belief in God. through the storms of life And with fellow Christians, we are to journey together. Never alone.

Now the beauty of Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit is that it can be in me and you, and countless others around the world and throughout the ages. This creates a beautiful diversity within the Body of Christ. Because each of us is uniquely created in God's image. What you may understand about how God works in your life might be different than how I see it. But together, as we share our lives of faith, we learn how to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Because of his Holy Spirit.

What is our role?

Jesus say's very clearly in John 15...To stay connected to him as the vine. Connected to his word, but also connected to his body, the Church. And to intentionally put ourselves in places where we are stretched, challenged, and matured in our faith and understanding.

³ John 14:15-17a

⁴ John 14:26

Psalm 1 states, “Blessed is the one who does walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But their delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.”⁵

According to this psalm, we are stay planted by Jesus’ living waters and remain connected to him as our life source.

According to Proverbs 3, we should not rely on our own understanding.

But we should to trust Jesus.

To read about Him.

To yield to Him.

To obey to Him.

Ultimately, this is how we show our love to Him.

What is the role of God?

A lot. Anyone who’s every been part of a 12 Step program like Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous knows that without God’s help, they will never reach sobriety.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul reminds us, “Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”⁶ “Therefore my friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to His good purposes.”⁷

To the Corinthians Paul said, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.”⁸

Proverbs 3:6 says, “He will set our paths straight.”⁹

God will bring us completion. God will work in us to will and act according to his good purposes. God will make us stand firm in Christ. God will set our paths straight.

Our job is simply to yield to the Holy Spirit, and let God do his work in us.

How are we needing God’s wisdom today?

I believe that there is someone here who is needing to make a very big decision and might be uncertain about which direction they should go. This is

⁵ Psalm 1:1-3

⁶ Philippians 1:6

⁷ Philippians 2:12-13

⁸ 2 Corinthians 1:21

⁹ Proverbs 3:6

where wisdom comes into play. Just like in that decision we needed to make back in 2008 whether or not to go forward with our building campaign.

Proverbs 3:6 calls us to ask God for wisdom. To acknowledge Him in the situation.

James, Jesus' brother, also says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to them."¹⁰

If this is you this morning. Talk with me. Let's grab coffee. Or seek out one of our elders and ask them to pray with you. And see if God doesn't provide the way forward. God rarely lays out the path all at once. But one step at a time. That way we continue to trust in Him and not rely on our own ability to figure it out.

May we remain connected to Jesus's vine or the Church. So may we continue to do our research. May we continue to seek the wisdom of trusted people in our community. May we pray about what is on our hearts. May we let go of it, put it in God's hands, and take it one step at a time. That's our work. And may we see how over time this brings health to our bodies and nourishment to our bones. That's God's work.

Amen.

¹⁰ James 1:5