

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding! Wow, that is such a great Proverb and so hard to do. It is easy to say Trust God, but when the rubber hits the road we all like to trust in our wealth, our education, our experience, our contacts – so many things. So many things that can become idols, things that we place our trust in before God.

I read this lovely line from John Calvin last week. The human heart is an idol factory. Meaning we are constantly making things to trust in rather than God!

Well, I enjoyed Tim speaking to us last week, it was great; he spoke about whatever is your King that will lead you, that will become your god. He spoke about the story of the two women and the dead baby. With all the trauma that we can imagine lies behind that story, two women abandoned in to a life of prostitution, trying to bring up their children in a brothel, and then the stark message that in our desperate desires, we must not kill the baby. That can apply on so many levels.

The week before I spoke about how the healthy fear of the Lord directs us to make wise decisions. Because God sees, because God is just, and because God enforces consequences.

Well, this week I'm going to do so line by line preaching, I think this approach will help us to draw out the most from this wisdom book.

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.*

There is a lot of talk about the prosperity gospel, about the false message that we can serve God so that we can get rich. That message ignores the call to suffer with Jesus and to identify with the poor and reach out to the lonely last and least. But in our correction let us not miss the truth of this verse. Life is a good gift, it is right to desire a long and healthy life.

Prosperity here is the biblical word shalom, meaning peace and wellbeing and prosperity. God wants us to flourish and to aim for the flourishing of all. God invites us to share in his new Kingdom building, but he doesn't want us to aim to be miserable – Jesus came to give us life and life in its fullest; this verse reminds us that if we seek Gods Kingdom first - then not to feel guilty if we prosper, as long as we aren't exploiting anyone else, Jesus wants to see our businesses and lives and families flourish.

Now a note about COVID 19, it is killing the elderly dis-proportionately, I was horrified to read of the loss of those two Maori brothers Nigel and Alan Te Hiko, to COVID recently and Joe Williams the Cook Island doctor. What a loss to their people and our culture. And it made me think of many of you, those of you in the 90's club, have more wisdom than you know. Please don't stop sharing it, write it down, speak it out, talk to your grandchildren, be a little more pushy, do not let them forget God's wisdom.

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

Faithfulness is of great value; that means sticking with someone or something, believing in people, trusting in their good intentions, forgiving and moving past their mistakes, being kind even when they hurt you. Sticking with a friend is so valuable, don't you love it when friends come to your special birthdays? Karen is down at a friend's birthday this weekend, she's been a friend for over 30 years. Faithfulness has a beauty about it.

Obviously faithfulness in marriage is vital, but not just avoiding temptations, it is about investing time and effort. Faithfulness at work, what you do when no one is watching, and I don't mean 'presentism' but giving value. At the moment with COVID I've been reading about the depletion of our surge capacity, some of you might need to take a couple of sick days. Faithfulness is doing a good job at the things we commit ourselves to. You know sometimes you walk into a situation expecting one thing and it all changes, sticking with it is faithfulness – and then you will win favour with people and with God, just like Jesus did.

Speaking of Jesus, remember that Christian faith is that it is not so much about us believing in God, but about God believing in us; not so much about our faith in Jesus, but his faithfulness to us. Yes, we need to believe, but that just like tying a rescue rope around us, Jesus does all the heavy lifting.

*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.*

We make our plans, we get our jobs, we earn our degrees, we our families, we develop our businesses, we set our direction and then sometimes God calls us to do something different. John's dad left the farm to become a minister. Darlene's dad left being an actuary to become a teacher, my friend Glenn left accounting to become a youth worker.

It's good to make our plans, but important to be able to change them when we hear God's whisper, his voice and then sometimes his shout when we when we need to act quickly. This verse means do not always lean on conventional wisdom, be willing to set aside your own plan. Acknowledge God in all your ways. We can read this in two ways – acknowledge the Lord in everything we do, meaning see and seek God's hand in everything. Celtic Christians in the middle ages used to have short prayers associated with everything that they did, acknowledge God in everything. Or submit our life plan to God. God is a loving Father, but still a God who wants to direct us. For our sake and here is the truth and sometimes for something bigger than us. It's not always about me. He might want help to someone else through me. Then he will make your paths straight.

I had that experience years ago, I was 22 and taking a year out from ministry training – a gap year. Karen and I were going to do our OE. And everything was going wrong, I was stressed, we didn't have enough money, the plan I had made was not working out, the job I had was going to custard, we were just married and I had promised Karen this trip. We felt God saying, 'turn back' and we submitted to God, and the path ahead suddenly became straight, doors opened and it was extraordinary. I had my place back at Knox, we got a flat, I got a bursary, my course university course got approved, Karen got a job. It was like God opened a runway before us, and three years later we even got our trip. Have you ever had that happen to you?

One translation is Submit to the lord, and he will make your paths straight.

*Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.*

I think this is one of those wonderful tests, don't be wise in your own eyes – we all have a predilection to see ourselves as wise and in the right. True wisdom comes from God. That means don't have our own little plan and think that it is better than God's plan. Let's not decide that we know better than God and we can allow our eyes to wander where-ever we want and we won't be affected by coveting our neighbours house, our neighbours partner or our neighbours life. Don't live on Facebook. Don't be wise in our own eyes. Or perhaps more subtly, make plans by seeking advice, don't trust our own judgement alone. That's not to say run a poll or a focus group, but seek wise counsel, ask your partner, your children, your mentor what they see. 'I'm thinking about converting the farm from sheep to dairy', what do you think, would I be good at that, can I manage change, would I learn to love cows?

One way of reading this is, seek insight from others. Fear the Lord and shun evil, be allergic to evil, run away

from it, don't mess with bad people, don't dance with the devil. Don't do business with bad people. Jesus had different approaches to different people, the interested, the uniformed and the hostile. Don't get entangled with the hostile, of course the apostle Paul is the exception that proves the rule.

*Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

This is a very strong biblical principle, show your commitment to God as first in your life, by giving the first of whatever you make to God. Discipleship that doesn't reach into your pocket is not discipleship at all. I believe that proportional giving is a Godly standard, 10% is a standard, but there are times in our lives when we might give more, and there are times in our lives when we need to give less. I like the principle that every dollar I have is the Lord's. I encourage you to give regularly and proportionally to church, but there are seasons when it is absolutely ok to pause our giving to the church and not to feel guilty. God supplies.

*My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

Discipline. Receiving redirection is one of the hardest things to take. When a friend confronts you – gosh it is hard and it is so hard to do. If you do it too soft, people don't notice, if you go too strong it comes down like a ton of bricks. But sometimes we get into poor practices or we go off in the wrong direction. I remember when I was in one job years ago one of my co-workers observed that I was always leaving a bit early. I felt upset when she said it. But she was right and I changed my behaviour. I remember a talk I once heard about feedback, and how when we get an assignment back most people only look at the grade, whereas the value is in the comments.

As many of you know I have been working with a team on reviewing Theological Education in the Presbyterian Church, some of the feedback we have got is very strong, using emotive words. That wears you out. The challenge is to sift out the noise, and still to hear the valid comments.

God disciplines the children he loves, I have been working with my son William on applications, he wants me to suggest changes that will make his work better. As you know I'm doing some study leave at BTI at the moment, and I remember my lecturer back at Otago would also look over my work and say, you should interact with this writer.

*Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace.*

Let us finish here with this great valuing of wisdom, of wisdom from God. Her ways are pleasant and all her paths are peace. Wisdom makes things go well, like a well-tuned motor, like a walk at a good pace, like a summer's day; and here we finish with peace again – the biblical ideal of wellbeing, the creation in harmony, community in harmony and the person at peace. This is the vision of God's eternal Kingdom, which we might get glimpses of now, but which can only really be fully achieved at the return of Christ. Amen.