

Proverbs 3.1-11

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote in their 1970 hit song:

*“When I find myself in times of trouble,
mother Mary comes to me,
speaking words of wisdom...
let it be”*

Personally I’ve never experienced “*mother Mary*” speaking “words of wisdom”, but as I go through life, I do find again and again that *verses of Scripture* pop into my mind at just the time I need them.

I wonder if its ever happened to you:

You’re discouraged and a verse of encouragement pops into your brain,

Or you are not sure what to do, and your mind finds itself mulling over a sentence of Scripture.

Or you’re not sure how to pray for someone and you are reminded of a bible verse which says just the right thing for the occasion.

Is this just chance?

Of course not!

Jesus at his last supper with his friends said, “I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper – just like me.” (John 14.18).

Of this “Helper”, the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, “he will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14.26).

God, as the collect for Bible Sunday which I prayed at the beginning of this sermon says, has caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.

Then, by his Holy Spirit, he reminds us of passages from the bible at just the right time, to help and guide us.

Today we begin our summer sermon series: “A summer with the Word – bible passages to learn and live by.”

The ministry team will be exploring some of the passages they have found particularly helpful; passages through which God has spoken to them, with the aim that we might: “mark, learn and inwardly digest them”;

that they might sink into our spirits and become a resource through which God can speak to us as we journey on through life.

We want to encourage you to engage with these passages, reading them before you come church, pondering on them in the week afterwards.

We'd want to encourage you to write and meditate on your own list of bible passages through which God has spoken to you.

And maybe share some of these passages in your home group.

The psalmist says in Psalm 119:

"Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth"

We want to delight in God's Word this summer and allow God to speak to us through it.

So, we are going to start our series this morning with 2 verses from the book of Proverbs:

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

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight"

Proverbs 3.5-6

To set some context – its always important to understand Scripture in its context – if you take a text out of its context you are left with a con –

Proverbs is the 20th of the 39 books of the Old Testament. Its found in the middle of the 'wisdom' section, which also includes Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

Its headed, "The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel" and so originates from around the 10th century before Jesus.

Proverbs contains some wonderful passages about the nature of wisdom, in which wisdom appears in the guise of a woman who calls out to those who would listen and delight in her teaching. She promises knowledge of God (2.5), guidance through life (2.9) and protection from evil (2.12).

Proverbs also contains many pithy sayings offering practical advice and guidance.

Proverbs 3.1-11, our reading for this morning teaches a number of ways in which God's people might express their love for him:

1-3. By keeping the commands of the divinely inspired teacher – i.e. God's commands

5-8. By trusting his leading

9-10. By honouring God with gratitude for his provision

11-12. By accepting his correction

And so it is in *this* context that we read, Proverbs 3.5-6:

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

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight"

For me, this passage goes to the heart of who I am as a human being.

Descartes famously wrote: "I think, therefore I am"

Tesco means "I shop, therefore I am" (only joking!)

The bible tells us different. It tells us, "God is, therefore I am"

From front cover to back, the Bible tells us that we exist because God does. It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves. We are his creation, for his glory.
True meaning in life, true joy, can only be found when we discover and live our part in God's story.

To "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" means to accept that you are not your own creation, but God's. That there is one who:
knows you better than you know yourself
who loves you better than you could love yourself
who has better plans for your life than you could ever imagine

To "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" means to come to God and say:
Father God, there is so much I don't know and I don't understand,
But I trust that you do.
I can't do life well, at least not without you, but I believe that you are all good, all loving and all powerful.
Would you please lead me, guide me and help me?
And even when I don't get it,
When its hard
Or even when I just don't want to,
I'll trust you and go your way, rather than going my own.

So, what would this look like in practice?
Let's look at a few examples, based on Proverbs 3.1-11:

Firstly, trusting in the Lord with all your heart, means obedience to God's commands (v 1-3).
When we are trying to work out the right thing to do, and God has spoken clearly about it, we will go with what God has said, not what we might want to do, or what looks most attractive, or is easiest.

Should I sleep with someone to whom I am not married?
Should I get back at the person who has hurt me?
Should I fiddle my tax returns?

In each case, 'no' – God has spoken very clearly.
Not to spoil our fun or squash us.
But because he knows what's best for us and our families and the wider community.

Next time you want to do one thing, but the bible says something else; resolve to do what God says – its always best, even if it's hard.

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

Secondly, it means trusting in God (v 5-6); in his love, in his goodness and in his power.

For example:

When you go through sickness or tough times, do you face them through the lens of Scripture?

Do you say, pain and suffering are not part of God's original good plan for humanity and thank goodness that one day all this will be over and I'm going to enjoy heaven for ever?

And do you say, "but in the meantime, Lord, I chose to believe that you have either willed or allowed me to experience these trials, that there is something for me to learn in them and that you will bring some good out of it"?

Do you choose to say, "The Lord Jesus suffered for the love of humanity, and in my suffering I believe that in some mysterious way I can share in those sufferings?"

Its not easy to face suffering and trials in this way. In fact its really hard.

It goes against our normal way of thinking.

But then, are we going to trust in our own understanding, or trust in the Lord with all our heart?

Thirdly, it means being grateful to God for his material provision – "honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of your produce" (v9-10).

If we have a roof over our heads, clothes to wear, food to eat, clean water to drink, the opportunity to go to school and access to basic health care, then by world standards we are rich.

We have lots to be thankful for!

And God expects us to show our gratitude by being generous to others; particularly to the work of his church and to the care of the poor.

Note – it is with our first fruits that Proverbs says we are to honour God, not with what we have left after we have done everything else.

If we want to experience abundance (full barns and bursting vats) then paradoxically we must begin by giving away. This runs completely against human logic, but then we are going to: *Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding*

Aren't we!

Fourthly, it means that we will accept God's correction.

It is so easy to fall into the trap of thinking, when things in our lives are hard, that God doesn't care, isn't very nice, can't do anything... isn't it God's job to make my life easy and give me everything I want?!?

Yet in Proverbs 3.11-12 we see that God is a loving father who delights in his children, and so like any loving father he corrects and disciplines his children...us.

Now, it takes maturity to accept discipline – to welcome it even;

To admit that we might not be perfect, that we might have something to learn.

I fear that many of us are not mature enough yet to receive God's correction and discipline in the way we should.

And so we miss out on learning and growing.

Welcoming correction and discipline goes against our human instincts – we want to be right, we want to be masters of our own lives and work things out for ourselves, but then are we going *to trust in our own understanding, or trust in the Lord with all our heart?*

I have set before you today some hard teaching.

But then what do you want; a preacher to tickle your ears and make you feel good, or a preacher to set before you the Word of God and encourage you to press on into all that God has for you?

As I conclude, let me say once again:

God is good – not just some of the time but all of the time.

He is perfectly loving and perfectly powerful.

He is the one who made you,

He is the one who knows you inside out

And he is the one who has good plans for your life.

So, who are you going to entrust your life to?

Yourself or God?

Jesus did not come that we might have an easy life,

But he came to give us eternal life; life for ever as a child of God

The choice is yours:

Lean on your own understanding,

Or trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Which will you choose?