

“Making Life Work? Trust God in Everything...”

Today we finish up this series of sermons that’s been asking one single question: “How do I make life work?” Sometimes it seems like our own lives aren’t working or the lives of people we love aren’t working and we wonder where we can get the tools to do something. What we’ve done over last several weeks is to try and find those tools primarily in this book of the Bible called Proverbs. I have certainly been challenged and I’ve learned a lot over the course of this series and I hope that you have too.

Do you remember some of the things we’ve looked at? If we want to make life work we **pursue wisdom, we take initiative, speak truth, choose friends wisely, manage anger,**. Those are the tools God wants us to develop that will help us make life work.

Today as we end this series we are going to ask the question one last time. How do I make life work? And the answer today is the most important one of all. It’s found in Proverbs 3:5-6, and it goes like this: ***“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” (NIV).***

This really is the crowning proverb of all the Proverbs. The truths in this passage are so important that you can build your life on them. There are many great verses in the Bible that are worthy of committing to memory...and this is one of them! “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” (NIV).

As we begin today, I’d like to invite you to take our your outline (introduce outline and study guide), so we can look at this together. Today, we are really centering on the first phrase, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” This is such a short little phrase but it has everything to do with your life and your future, because the way that we trust God on a daily basis has a huge impact on every moment of our lives. But what does it mean to trust God? What does it mean to trust?

I asked a group of friends what they thought people trust. Typical of this group, the first response was sarcastic...“the government-ALWAYS!” The real answers that I received were that they thought people have high trust in doctors & pharmacists, banks and certain financial institutions. One of them thought that very few people trust anything more than they trust themselves. Second behind the government on the things that are not trustworthy was Microsoft’s Vista Operating system. I don’t know if that mistrust is validated by any empirical data, but I do know this...I’m still using Windows XP!

Think about the people you trust. Why are they trustworthy, and how did that trust develop? What is it about someone that makes you trust them? It’s because they are dependable, reliable. You have found that they have integrity, can hold confidences, and are committed to you as a friend. You may meet someone who has a high entertainment value, you know? They have an engaging personality, they’re quick-witted, tell good stories...they’re great to be around. But unless they have those other values (dependability, reliability, integrity, commitment) we will never let them be more than a surface level friend.

And it takes time for us to discover all these traits in someone else. We start out with small risks, relationally, then we take another step. In any relationship we can’t just sit back and **wait** for trust to grow. Building trust requires action. We take little steps and then we check the progress. We take little risks and then evaluate the consequences. It may take months or even years, but hopefully we get to a point where we can say, “I can fully trust this person. I have no doubt about that. I’ve had the chance to find out that this person is trustworthy time and time

again, in experience after experience. As far as I'm concerned, the proof is in the pudding. This person is a trustworthy friend."

Or...or, time and experience may tell us that a particular person can not be trusted because we've seen too many inconsistencies in his or her character. We've seen too much irresponsible behavior and experienced too much disappointment.

It is the same in our relationship with God. The bible tells us that God is dependable, reliable. That God will never abandon us or leave us. The Bible tells us that God loves us, forgives us through our faith in his Son, Jesus, and wants to be in a relationship with us, not just now, but for all eternity. The Bible tells us that God is trustworthy and faithful, but guess what? Even though God is God, and even though he is supremely invested in his relationship with every one of us, guess who determines how deep and intimate our relationship goes? Yeah, we do! And the level of our relationship with God is in large part based on our level of trust in him.

The heart of the message from this one proverb is that we should "trust God without reservation." And that's a nice little saying, but it doesn't just happen. That's God's desire, that we would be able to trust him with all our heart, but that's not so easy for us to do. That's because for you and me, trust has to be developed.

So all Christians should be investing in their relationship with God by engaging God in our everyday situations over a long period of time. Because that's how we develop a deep trust in God.

That's what we do when we come to worship and other events that are offered to deepen our faith. That's what we do when we read scripture and pray daily, inviting God into our disappointments, our troubles, our pains and our celebrations. We listen and think and feel and process and then we figure out if what we're hearing and experiencing is trustworthy. Through all that we either find that we trust in God more or less. And I need to say at this point that in my life, God has never broken my trust, God has always been faithful.

Outline: Tangent of significant importance

Now, I need to take a just a little side road here for a few minutes. When we're investing in our relationship with God, when we're evaluating whether or not God is trustworthy, remember that we have to evaluate based on what God promises, not on what we desire! What God promises is a faithful, forgiving, loving, eternal relationship.

We're tempted from time to time, to evaluate God's trustworthiness on something we want or hope that God will do for us. Sometimes those things can be trivial, "Lord I need all green lights this morning." But they can also be very critical things, "Lord, If you get me job, then I'll trust you more. Heal me from my cancer. Bring me a soul mate."

These are all good requests to bring to God in prayer. But granting our requests is not what God promises. What God promises is to always and forever love us, forgive us, bring meaning and purpose to life and never to abandon us, no matter what life-circumstance we face. So we grow our trust in God based on his performance in the relationship, not on the circumstances of life.

Do you remember a time when one of your kids was little and was madder than a wet hen because you didn't do something they wanted you to do? And they are screaming, "You're so mean, or I hate you" or something like that and instead of getting mad in response, you just grabbed them and held them and let them wiggle and cry in your arms until the moment that they accepted your love and returned your embrace?

That's a picture to me of what God promises. God is not promising a burden-free, worry-free, stress-free, get what we want life. If you're basing your trust of God on that, then you're going to be disappointed. God promises to love us no matter what, forgive us no matter what, stick with us no matter what and lead us into a life filled with meaning and purpose. And my experience is that God has never let me down.

Aaron mentioned a few weeks ago that my mother died a little over 7 years ago. She battled a brain tumor for 2 years. I remember the night before her first surgery. We lived about 5 hours away from my parents at the time, and that night was actually the first time Jennifer and I physically saw her after her diagnosis. We were alone with her and my mom got straight to the point.

She said, "I'm going to be OK. No matter what happens, I have my faith in Jesus." She wasn't just talking about the surgery. She was talking about anything and everything that might happen to her from this point forward. And she was delivering two messages to us. The first was for us to know that her faith is intact. She was not basing her trust in God on anything other than God's promise of an always present, eternal relationship. Her other message was for us to follow her example.

So as you go through life's experiences, and you evaluate them to see if God is trustworthy, you have to give God a fair shake in the deal. Trust in God will usually not come by receiving your desired outcome in a circumstance. My experience is that God has always been proven trustworthy in our relationship.

The Next Step: The Risk of Relationship

So where are you on your spiritual journey? How much or how little are you trusting God in your life? Maybe you are still checking God out to see if you can trust him? If so, that's great. Keep up that pursuit. Maybe you are right on the edge of taking that first big step of trusting God and inviting him to be in a relationship with you. This is the step of trust that takes you from saying, "Yes, God exists," to saying, "Yes, God exists and knows me by name." It's the step from saying, "Yes, Jesus died for the world's sins," to saying, "Yes, Jesus died for **my** sins." It's the big step from saying, "Yes, Jesus wants to guide the world," to saying, "Yes, Jesus wants to guide me."

You see, sooner or later, every person who is investigating Christianity and finding God trustworthy has to take that big step of personally receiving the message of Christ and inviting him into your life.

Romans 10:13 tells us that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Everyone! That's great news! But those two key words, "who calls," remind us that we have to take action in response to what God has done. We accept his forgiveness and we accept his leadership in our lives. He offers the gift, he holds out the promise of a loving, forgiving, always with us relationship, but we need to extend our hands and take hold of it.

A lot of people come to the point of decision and ask, "What if I call upon God to forgive my sins and to lead my life, and I find that there's nobody home in heaven? What if nothing happens? What if there's only silence?" All I can say is this: There's only one way to find out. Take that step and see if God proves himself trustworthy. If there is only silence from heaven, you have your answer. You gave it a try and it didn't work. Now you can just walk away and you never have to look back.

But the promises of the scriptures and the experiences of millions of people throughout history show us that that's not going to happen. Taking the big step toward God always involves an act of faith. But look at it this way: a life worth living requires **many** steps of faith.

It's a different experience for every person who has put their faith in God and had a soul-deep conversion. For some people it's an emotional experience; for others it is not. One businessman who finally put his trust in God said, "It feels like a lawsuit has just been dropped—the heavy sense of judgement that had hung over my head for years is gone." Other people experience a deep sense of peace or serenity of their soul like nothing else they've ever known.

I remember the time I made that first step of trusting God. I was 20, it was the summer after my graduation from college. I remember feeling joyful and full of freedom. I also remember an inner change in values and passions, I had a different attitude about my purpose. If you're wondering if God can be trusted with the first step, there is only one sure way to find out. You can do it by praying a simple prayer: "Jesus Christ, I need a Savior. I need someone to forgive my sins and I trust you to lead my life. Please do that for me." All I can tell you is that God my experience of God is that he can be trusted.

The Next Step: From Relationship to Leadership

There are many of us today who have already made that first big step of trust in God, but we know that there are many more steps of trust for us to take. We've made the step of trusting in God's relationship. Now, life is a series of taking steps of trusting God's leadership. These next steps involve trusting God in all the day to day decisions of life. The question becomes, "Will I chose God's wisdom and accept God's leadership at the various intersections of daily life?"

It's been over 20 years since I entrusted my life to God, and I'm more convinced than ever of God's trustworthiness. As I look back over the years I have no regrets about the times I followed God's path. Not a single one. Sometimes it was hard. Sometimes it was confusing. But always, in the end, I was glad I had chosen God's wisdom.

But on the other hand, I could tell you time after time after time of **regret** when I chose another path, mainly my way. All those times when I came a crossroads in my life and I chose the foolish path and every time I'd end up saying, "Well, that didn't work out very well! Look at the consequence. Look at the people I hurt. Look at the time I've lost. Look at the money I wasted. All because I didn't want to go God's way!"

But when I look back I can see that every time I went God's way, my life worked better! Every time I trusted him by doing what he asked and operated according to his wisdom and followed his guidance, he was worthy of my trust and his wisdom worked. This is not a matter of my life being easier. It's not about my getting what I want. It's about life being better. Trusting that God's way leads me to a more fulfilling life.

As we develop trust in God, we give more and more of our heart and life over to God's leadership. For example, when I first became a Christian, I took steps in allowing God to lead my moral decision-making and personal behavior. I was trusting Jesus more and more about what he said was right and what was not. I yielded things to God's leadership; I took words out of my vocabulary; started looking for opportunities to serve others and be less selfish; took control over the fingers of my hand when I was cut off in traffic. These are some ways that I began to trust God with new areas of my life. And I found out that life does really work better when I wasn't giving other people rude gestures.

Other steps of trusting God were more difficult. When I was single and in the dating world, it was tough trusting God's ideas on sex. (You know, right, that God's ideas on sex are to wait until you're married, and if you're married to keep sex inside the marriage). It may not be easy, may not be what you want, but it is true...life works better if we trust God on that one.

It took me even longer to trust God's direction with MY money. Oops, I just said money, didn't I? I learned a long time ago that the pc way to talk about money in the church was to say "resources". Thing is, I don't remember Jesus talking about resources very often, but he was talking about money all the time!

My money was my money, and even though I didn't have a lot of it, I liked spending it on what I wanted to spend it on. So it took me a while to get to the step of trusting God with my money. The Lord spoke to me on day and said, "Mark, I need you to trust me when I say that you can live on 90%. I have given you the skills, the intellect, and the opportunity to earn what

you earn. Please trust me with 10%, to use to build my kingdom.” So I did, and I do. And my life has greater meaning and purpose, and I feel a greater sense of vitality and abundance because I trust God’s leadership with money.

I really still struggle trusting God with my time. I really do. Jesus has greater control of my time than ever before, but man, it is still so much about me. This is my next big step in trusting God. I need to trust God that there is time everyday, everyday, to accomplish what needs to get done, AND take time to share part of my day with him. But when I do take time to be with God, I find that the rest of the day I prioritize and balance my time better. There are days that I think that so much has to get done, that I really need to skip my prayer time. The next step for me is to trust God about that every day, not just the days that are less hectic than others. And while I’m on the topic, we all should know that God’s basic principle for the priority of our time is this: God, Family, Serving Others, Work.

So how about you? Are these some of the areas of life that you have not yielded to God’s leadership. In terms of trusting God to lead in your life, what is your next step? Is it in sexuality, or money, or time? Is there a next step in your relationship with God that you are being prompted to take? Like committing to regular worship, or joining a small group, or giving your time and abilities to help with kids or youth or visit homebound people. Maybe it’s trusting God when God tells you can do something and you’re not sure that you really can. Maybe it’s your business practices. I don’t know for you, but you do. What is it right now, today. What part of your life have you not entrusted to God’s leadership? Name it right now, and write it down on your outline.

I doubt that there’s anyone here today who can say, “My life is perfect! There is no room for improvement”. We’re all looking for ways to make life work. It doesn’t matter if we feel like life is broken and shattered, or we may feel like we need a bit of a tune-up, some adjustments here and there. We desire lives that work, and guess, Jesus wants to lead us into life that works...

Jeremiah 29:11 is one of my favorite Bible passages. God says, ***“I know the plans I have for you... They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and hope” (Living Bible)***. This means that God has a plan with your name on it! A personalized adventure waiting for you. God doesn’t promise a life free from problems or pain, but he does promise a life that’s too good to miss! But we never discover that life, that adventure, until we entrust ourselves to him.

I want to finish today by giving you a chance to do that.

As we’re getting ready for prayer, here’s the deal. I’m going to guide you into prayer today. So take an attitude of prayer and begin your own personal visit with God when you’re ready.

If you’re still in the process of finding out if you can trust God, I want to affirm that. Keep taking those little risks in your relationship with him. You have nothing to lose. Maybe today is a good day to say, “So far so good, God! Lord, thanks for proving yourself trustworthy so far. Thank you!” If that’s where you are that is fantastic. Stay on that journey and keep seeking!

Others of you are at a place where you need to take that bigger step. Maybe your step of faith is to say, “Today God, I ask you to come into my life. I ask you to forgive me of my sins, to pour your love into my love-starved heart and to lead and guide my life.” If you’re ready to take that trembling, but trusting, step right now, please, don’t wait. Let today be your day. The day you become a Christian.

For some of you the challenge is to do a real time of **deepening your trust in God**, where you say, “Lord, there is this part of my life that I thought I could do it on my own. I want to take the next step of trusting you and place this unyielded part of my life to your leadership

and guidance. I will trust you with all my heart and not rely on my own insight. In all my ways I will acknowledge you and trust that you'll direct my paths in this life and all the way to heaven."

Whatever step of faith you need to make right now, please do it and seal it between you and God in this time of quiet.

Prayer...

"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." And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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