

Proverbs Chapter 3

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[0 : 00] So page 636, and it's Proverbs chapter 3, starting in verse 1. My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commandments in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Bind them round 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.

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 path 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. Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of your crops.

Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine. 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.

[1 : 20] 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. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. Those who hold her fast will be blessed.

By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations. By understanding he set the heavens in place. By his knowledge the watery depths were divided and the clouds let drop the dew.

My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight. Preserve sound judgment and discretion. There will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.

[2 : 23] Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid. When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked. For the Lord will be at your side, and will keep your foot from being snared.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbour, come back tomorrow, and I'll give it to you, when you already have it with you.

Do not plot harm against your neighbour, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse anyone for no reason, when they have done you no harm. Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways, for the Lord detests the perverse, but takes the upright into his confidence.

The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers, but shows favour to the humble and oppressed.

[3 : 28] The wise inherit honour, but fools get only shame. Good evening.

Thank you very much for the invitation, and let's just pray as we come to God's word. Father God, we thank you as we've been led in our worship, been reminded of your great sovereignty and power.

And in many of the songs, been reminded that we can trust you. We can put our faith in you. We can believe that you are in control.

And so, Lord, we pray that that will be a reality tonight, as we meet the anxieties on our hearts, the concerns that are in our minds. Lord, we would be comforted and granted your peace, as we learn to place them into your hands and to trust you.

And so, we pray as we consider this proverb, those famous verses. That trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

[4 : 46] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. How, Lord, we long to know this more and more in our lives. And we pray that you'd speak to us through your word and change us, that we might this week live different lives because of what we have heard from you tonight.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, yeah, we are going to look a bit broader than just those couple of verses.

Famous verses from the Proverbs, Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. But we are going to look more broadly at the psalm, but specifically and in detail at those couple of verses.

The promise is right at the end of those two verses. And he will make your paths straight. That's the promise. He will make your paths straight.

And being a bit of a sort of a semi-amateur sort of mathematician, I like the logic of these verses. It goes something like this. Sorry, those of you that aren't into sort of maths.

[6 : 02] I just have to bear with me for a minute. If you do A, and you do not do B, and you do C, then God will do D.

That's basically the structure of those verses. If you do A, and you do not do B, and you do C, then God will do D.

And that D at the end is the promise. He will make your paths straight. Now, this sermon is only going to be of any interest to you if you want your paths to be made straight.

And so, for you to decide whether you're going to be interested in this sermon, you need to know what that means. What does it mean that the Lord would make your paths straight? It could mean several things.

I understand from the Hebrew, having had a bit of a look, and not that I know Hebrew, but reading those that do. The word could mean literally something about being in a straight line.

[7 : 04] Well, I don't think we're talking about that here. It could mean that your journey is made smooth. I don't think we're speaking about that here.

Figuratively, it could mean that your journey would be easy. I don't think we're talking about that.

Rather, what I suggest it means, or I believe it means, is that your ways would be made right.

That the root of the word is pleasing, pleasing to God. That your ways would be pleasing to God.

That your ways would be right or righteous in God's sight.

So, we're speaking about the way that we live, the way that we go on, and the things that we do or don't do, which help us to live in a right path, a way that's pleasing in God's sight.

And other versions would have things like this. The King James Version says, In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Or the New Living Translation says, Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

[8 : 18] How does that sound? I wonder if you would want God to direct your life, and for you to be pleasing to him. I guess, and hope that you do. I guess that's evidenced by the fact that you're here this evening.

But if we do want those things, and let's agree that most of us do at least, if not everyone, then there's three conditions. And those are the things that we're going to spend most of our time thinking about.

If we want the Lord to lead us in right paths, if we want to be the people that please him, then these are the three things that we need to do or not do.

First one is something to do. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Trust, of course, is right at the center of the Christian life.

Trust, you could say, is just another word for faith. I want to just turn your attention to Hebrews for a moment, where it helps us to understand what faith is.

[9 : 17] Hebrews chapter 10, verse 39 onwards. I should have picked up one of the church Bibles.

It's very near page 1208. I think mine's slightly different to yours. Is that about right? 1209. 1209. There we are.

I found that my Bible's close, but not quite. So, Hebrews 10 and verse 39, and then we're going to read into chapter 11. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Now, faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith, Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith, he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith, he still speaks, even though he is dead.

[10 : 37] By faith, Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death. He could not be found because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

You could continue to read that chapter and see more examples of faith in action. The opposite of trusting in the Lord is trusting in ourselves, trusting in our flesh.

We'll come on to think of it in a moment, but I just want to refer briefly to Romans chapter 8 and verse 8, where it says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God. So if we're in the business of asking God to make our paths straight, in other words, to help us to live in a way that pleases him, we can't be people of the flesh, living according to the flesh.

We need to be people walking by faith and trusting in the Lord with all our heart. 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 7 encourages us to be those who live or walk by faith and not by sight.

[11 : 56] So what does God want of you? This first condition is that he wants you to believe him and trust him.

Now we're going to think about some practical examples of this in a short while. But there's a lovely little example, you might have seen it done in a children's talk or something, where you get, I won't do it with one of these guys, but you just get them standing up on the stage and they fall backwards and you tell them you're going to catch them.

And it's easy, isn't it, to tell someone you're going to catch them and it's easy for them to nod and believe that you are going to catch them. But when they actually start to fall and they're just a little bit concerned whether you are going to catch them, they very often just step back and stop you, or stop themselves falling.

And it's just a little picture of how sometimes we know in our heads that we should have faith and trust in the Lord, but when we don't feel his presence, when we're just a little bit concerned about the situation we're in, when the rumblings in Parliament go on and we just sense that insecurity, it's those times where we find out whether we really do trust in the Lord.

We're not just talking about head knowledge, but we're talking about a belief in our heart and soul that works itself out in everyday life.

[13 : 29] If you really did believe that Jesus died for your sins and that you are now forgiven and you now have a place in heaven, then what sort of life would you live?

And this works both ways. You can tell if you really do believe something by thinking about your actions. There are people that tell us that they love the Lord with all their heart, but they show us in the way they act that actually they love alcohol or whatever more than the Lord Jesus.

Is what I say really borne out in the things that I do? We had a friend at a church in Mass.

She's passed away now and with the Lord. But one of the things that she used to say is, you know what, we do the things that we want to do. Now that might sound ridiculously simple, but it's true.

The things that you do are the things that you want to do. And so assess by the things that you do, are you really trusting in the Lord? It will be evident in your actions by the things that you do, by how you spend your money, by how you spend your time, by what your attitude is to the Bible, how you spend time with other believers.

[14 : 50] These things will show whether you really do trust in the Lord with all your heart. It says to us too, doesn't it, that our trust is in the Lord and in nothing else.

It says to us too that he wants us to trust wholeheartedly with all your heart. Remember last week we were speaking about the heart being the wellspring of life.

Something for us to consider how our hearts are in tune with the Lord and want to please him. So do you trust him with your money?

Do you trust him with your future? Do you trust him with your relationships? Do you trust him with your time? Do you trust him with your problems?

Do you trust him with your health? So the first condition. If you want God to direct your paths, if you want straight paths, if you want paths that please God, if you want to live on righteous paths, you must trust him with all your heart.

[16:04] The second condition is something that we must not do. Do not lean on your own understanding. If you put your trust in God, he will never, never let you down.

It doesn't mean you're not going to have troubles and trials, but if you put your trust in him, he will never let you down. You'll never be able to say, God, you've let me down. But the truth is, we probably all remember times when we've let ourselves down.

When we have trusted in ourselves and done things our way. So I was thinking of this, I was thinking of that song.

We all need somebody to lean on. Or lean on me. I looked it up. Bill Withers, 1972 was the original. I was only three, so I don't remember it.

I've heard later versions. It's true. At least in that sense, isn't it? That we cannot trust our own understanding.

[17:18] There are times when we just need to assess something and say, is this something that's strong enough to hold me? I've had a bit of an issue over the years with breaking chairs.

And I'm very cautious if someone offers me a chair sale, especially when it's like an outside chair or it's a foldy up chair. And I'll save myself the embarrassing story about when I went to an American home and sat on, I think it was an antique chair and it crumbled under me.

But you have to assess. You have to have a look and think, is this strong enough to hold me?

Another time I was hanging off or being suggested that I should hang off this cliff on the end of a rope.

And before I dare put myself in that position, not only did I want to check that the rope was strong enough, but all the straps and the harness was strong enough. A couple of weeks ago, we went off to France on a plane.

There's an act of trust, isn't there? Do I trust this guy or this woman? Our lives are in their hands. In fact, earlier this week, I went on a flying simulator experience.

[18:27] Someone had bought me it for my birthday and spent half an hour in a proper 737 cockpit. And it's just daunting. There's just switches everywhere. And you're just hoping that the person up front knows what they're doing.

We need to be able to assess whether this is something that we can lean upon. Is it worth leaning on your understanding? Is your understanding something that's worthy of your trust?

The Bible says that we should not lean on our own understanding. You see, the world loves to think that it's self-sufficient. The world loves to think that we know best, that we're growing in our understanding.

You can put God aside and you can do things our way. We can just do things ourselves, that we can use our intellects and our abilities and skills, and that's going to make life smooth and great and good.

God never designed us to get through life working like that. And if you try and get through life without trusting in the Lord, and if you try and get through life, therefore trusting in your own understanding, it will be exhausting.

[19:39] You will find yourself flat on your face plenty of times and it will pull you to pieces because God did not design us to live life trusting in ourselves. He designed us to live lives trusting in Him.

So the condition is do not lean on your own understanding. Notice that it says do not lean on your own understanding. It does not say do not use your own understanding.

It's not the same as saying don't think. Blindly do things. It's not saying that there's no space for planning.

It's not saying that there's no time to make an effort to do something, that we just sit back and just let God do everything. No. God calls us to use the faculties that He's given us.

But He's saying don't lean on your own understanding. Don't rely wholly upon it. All else being equal God wants us to use our common sense and to use our brains to think about the best course of action.

[20:46] But always we must be aware that God's ways are higher than our ways and sometimes what He calls us to do does not make sense in our own understanding. I'm sure you can think of some examples in the Bible where God has called someone to do something which does not make sense.

There's a lovely little proverb. Proverbs 21 and verse 31. The horse is made ready for the day of battle but victory belongs to or rests with the Lord.

There's horses to get ready. The battle's coming. We need to do the preparations. We need to do what we need to do. We're going to war. We're going to make plans. We're going to have strategies. We're going to think about it.

But the battle belongs to the Lord. The battle rests in His hands. The victory rests with Him. The problem is when we lean on our own understanding to the point where we're trusting in ourselves. Think of the example of Abraham and Sarah when they think well God's promised us children God's promised us this great blessing of a land and as many descendants as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore and they get to an old age and they think this isn't going to happen.

[22 : 12] I know what we'll do. Sarah, your maid servant, Hagar, why doesn't she go and sleep with Abraham? And then, it will sort of be our child and they find their own way.

They're leaning on their own understanding and all they bring themselves is trouble. God had promised and God was going to do it and He showed them His way.

So the second condition, if you want God to direct your paths, do not lean on your own understanding. Are there things in your life right now where you're trying to work it out, where you're refusing perhaps to consider that God might have a different way, where you're trusting in yourself? If we want our paths to be straight, we need to stop those things. Stop leaning upon your own understanding and trust in the Lord with all your heart. Thirdly, third condition, in all your ways, acknowledge Him.

Here's the third condition. We must trust God with all our heart. We must not lean on our own understanding. Now we're on to see we must acknowledge God in all our ways.

[23 : 30] I noticed actually, mine's NIV but yours must be a slightly newer version. Yours had a different word. Submit, was it? We must submit to God in all our ways.

It's a helpful translation. In fact, the original word again there, the root word underneath acknowledge or submit is that we should know God in all our ways.

To know God. What does it mean? What does it mean to submit to God? What does it mean to acknowledge God in all our ways? It means that everything that we do should be done openly before Him.

Are there times when you sort of have that strange notion in some way you're, you wouldn't say it like this, but probably you're trying to hide something from God. You're trying to plan something without Him really knowing about it.

Well, it's ridiculous because He knows but that's really what's going on in your heart. You're trying to do something and you're hiding it from Him. No, you need to do it openly before Him. It means that we should seek His guidance and approval in everything that we do and every decision that we make.

[24 : 36] It means that we should submit to Him, bow before Him, acknowledge that He is greater than us. It means that we must remember God in every situation that we face.

Now, it would be ridiculous to think that we could fool God or hide from God but He's asking us to do a bit more than that. He's asking us to consciously, deliberately, respectfully acknowledge God in every part and every situation in our lives.

Have you had times in your life, I have, where you've headed off in a direction and it's sort of something doesn't feel quite right and you sort of lack a bit of a peace and you think, really, this is quite a big decision I've made and I haven't really prayed about this.

That we should acknowledge Him in all our decisions, individually and as a church, in your family, we should acknowledge God as we make decisions. Are there things that you don't consult Him about?

Are there things in your life that you're trying to make decisions without consulting Him because you're a little bit scared that if you do He might say something you don't really want to hear? I could say, well, take my advice.

[25 : 51] Well, that wouldn't be worth very much, would it? We could take Solomon's advice, which here is in the Bible, so it's God's advice. That's much more sensible. involve Him in everything and it's essential if we want to live a life that pleases Him.

So three conditions, trust God with your whole heart, lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight. Then your life will be pleasing to God.

It's very simple, isn't it? It's not a complicated sermon. If you want to live a life that pleases God, He has three things to do. And as we close, I just want to begin to explore a few practical applications of such thinking.

And some of them come from other parts of this chapter, chapter three. Solomon, you see, is not content to just leave this as some kind of theological principle or some sort of theoretical principle or some sort of formula that we can learn and all quote.

Perhaps many of you could quote those verses, verses five and six. But He wants to help us to understand how the rubber hits the road. That's what's so wonderful about the book of Proverbs, isn't it?

[27 : 09] Someone called it this godliness in working clothes or like godliness in a boiler suit. This is real practical down-to-earth living. We have to remember that sometimes the wisdom that's put before us is not a promise but a principle, a generality.

We have to be careful about making promises out of some of Proverbs because you'll find yourself contradicting, finding contradictory promises. But they're principles that we can follow.

And the first one I want to point out is in verses nine and ten. It's to do with money. Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops.

Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with a new wine. What's the principle? With our money we need to trust God.

With our money we need to lean not on our own understanding. With our money we need to always acknowledge the Lord. honour him with your wealth, with your first fruits and you will know God's blessing.

[28 : 26] I cannot promise that it's going to make you rich, that you're going to be suddenly appear on the top 100 rich people in the country and I don't think that's what we should read into these verses.

But I think we should read that as we honour God with our money he will bless us. There will be a blessing. That things will go well.

The Lord will acknowledge you, will honour you because you are putting him first. So if you're struggling with money right now let me ask you do you honour God with your first fruits?

And this is what it means I think is that the very first thing you do when you get your monthly wage, when you get your benefits, when you get your pocket money, when you get your pension, is the first thing you do honour God with that money and say I want to honour him with a portion of my money.

I'm not going to put a percentage on it but just to say that the first thing that I do I don't wait until the end of the month or the end of the week and see what's left in my pocket and give it to the Lord in some way whether it's through the church or some other gift to the Lord's work.

[29 : 46] The very first thing I'm going to do is to honour the Lord. I'm sure there's many of you can testify and I can too that that act of doing that that becomes a habit is a way of finding real peace and blessing in financial difficulties and troubles.

If you're finding things difficult let me say that that's the first thing you should do. There might be other things to sort out. I'm not suggesting that there aren't but that's the first thing to do.

Trust the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your understanding in all your ways acknowledge him including in your money and he will make your paths straight. Do it God's way and please him.

It speaks of discipline in verses 11 and 12. My son do not despise the Lord's discipline. Do not resent his rebuke because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father the son he delights in. Humanly speaking we don't like being told that we're wronged. We don't like being corrected. We don't like being rebuked. But he's saying no trust the Lord.

[30 : 58] He knows what's best. Don't lean on your human understanding in all your ways including when the Lord is speaking quite painfully to you. Accept what he says.

Believe that he knows best. Trust in his words. Don't lean on what you're thinking and acknowledge God and you will find that you will be doing it God's way and you'll please him.

He'll make your way straight. I noticed just as we were reading it actually it jumped out at me a section I hadn't thought of which is in verse 25.

When trouble comes have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.

perhaps trouble is on you at the moment. Perhaps trouble is around the corner. Perhaps this week we're going to hear of something that's going to shake us.

[32 : 03] Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight. In the time of trial and trouble, when tragedy strikes, when you can't see what God's doing and it just seems terrible, trust in him.

Have confidence in him. He will make your paths straight right through that time of difficulty. Last week, let me turn your attention to verses 27 to 35.

Quite a little stretch. I'm not going to read them all again, but just have a glance through those verses. 27 to the end. It's speaking about relationships. relationships with a neighbour, the way that you might deal with people.

Think of the temptations that it considers. When you say to your neighbour, I'll just come back later, I'll give it to you tomorrow, when actually you could give them it today. Your natural inclination is to hold on to something that you could give.

Don't plot harm against your neighbour. Don't accuse a man for no reason. Don't envy a violent man. In your relationships with other people, including your spouse, including children and parents, including church friends, including those that you work with or live around.

[33 : 30] don't lean on your understanding. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Always acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.

I don't know what you're going through at the moment. I don't know what challenges you're facing. I don't know what situations in your life are just around the corner. I guess none of us know that. But here's some wonderful wisdom. God is promising that he will make our ways right. And he's just saying in order to do that we need to trust him with all our heart and we need to not lean on our understanding and we need to acknowledge God in all that we do.

One final thing I want to say. I presume that many if not all here are Christians but there might be some who are not. There might be some people here that are just sort of exploring or seeking or thinking and you're hearing this and you're thinking I'm not sure if I can do that.

Trust in the Lord with all my heart. Lean not on my own understanding. You know this is the very essence of what it is to be a Christian. The very essence of what it is to be a Christian is to say to humble yourself and to stop thinking that you can rule your life and do things how you want.

[34 : 57] The very heart of being a Christian is to say no I'm rubbish at that. I'm going to make God be the one who's at the middle of my life. I'm going to trust in him with all my heart.

I'm not going to rely on myself anymore. I'm going to acknowledge him in all my ways. And the promise is if you do that he will make your way straight. So I just want to encourage you if you're coming, you're seeking, you're thinking these things through, the very thing that seems the most illogical is the thing that God wants you to do.

Relinquish control to him. You want to hold on to it. Jesus said that the way to save your life is to lose it. It's a topsy-turvy kingdom.

If you want to save your life, you need to lose it. You need to give it to him. You know, if we were to jump on a plane tomorrow, even though I've had my half hour experience in a 737 cockpit, I don't want to be flying the plane.

I want someone flying the plane who knows what they're doing. I don't want to be battling along trying to remember what the guy told me and doing all these things. That's just what a lot of unbelievers are trying to do.

[36 : 17] They're trying to fly the plane and they're not equipped for it. The Lord's the one who's the pilot. We need to trust him, not lead on our own understanding and acknowledge him in all our ways.

Let's pray. Ask God to help us to see where we need to change and to see the joy of walking in right paths. Thank you Lord for the promises that you've given us in your word.

And we thank you especially for this promise that you will make our paths straight, that you will make our paths right. And Lord that is our desire. We do want to live in a way that pleases you, a way that's righteous, a way that honors you.

And so Lord we do ask that you help us to fulfill these conditions. Grant us the faith to trust in you with all our heart. Help us not to hide things from you or think that we're hiding things from you to hold things back but to trust you with all our heart.

Lord please help us not to lean on our own understanding. This is a terrible thing that we've often done. We've found ourselves lying on the floor mess things up because we've tried to do it ourselves.

[37 : 24] And Lord teach us again we pray what a foolish thing it is to do to try and live this life according to our own understanding. And Lord please help us to submit to you to acknowledge you in all our ways.

And Lord please we pray as we go through this next week help us. Please please Lord we pray make our paths straight. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. As we close just remembering your minds you might not necessarily know all the words but the Psalm 23 that picture of God as a shepherd and us being his sheep.

Let's just pray. Father we just thank you that you've given us such a great shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us we pray like silly stupid sheep that are so easily misled and so easily follow each other and do the wrong thing.

Help us to be those who hear his voice, who follow him, who trust him, that he is the one that will provide all that we need. That he'll take us to fields of green pasture.

[38 : 34] That he'll lead us beside still water. That even through the valley of the shadow of death we need fear no evil for his rod and his staff they comfort us.

Lord please lead us and guide us through this life. Help us to trust you with all our hearts. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.