

# Trust in the Lord

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] as we have a look through it, the more observant of you might have noticed that we've not looked at Proverbs chapter 2. No, perhaps not. We haven't.

We're going straight into chapter 3 this morning. Why is that? Well, I've mentioned before how this kind of wisdom literature that Proverbs is a part of, it's a type of writing that's quite different to what we're often used to.

I mentioned to a friend who's a minister this week that we'd begun working through the book of Proverbs at church and he kind of raised his eyebrows and smirked at me in a sort of rather you than me type way.

Why is that? Well, I think it's because we're used to kind of reading things and working through things that kind of go in straight lines, aren't we? This and then that and then that or kind of A, therefore B and so C.

And yet Proverbs and really this type of writing doesn't really work like that. It's much more sort of circular. There's a lot of repetition of big ideas that come up again and again and again.

[ 1 : 0 2 ] And that's kind of what happens here. The things that we've seen in chapter 1 are then kind of repeated, re-looked at through chapter 2. They're then really peppered throughout the book, especially in the first nine chapters of Proverbs that act as a kind of an elongated introduction, constantly reminding us of some of these ideas that we've seen, the importance of listening to wisdom, of prioritizing wisdom, of the blessings of wisdom.

And then also, as we saw last week, kind of the flip side of that, the other side of the coin, the warnings not to listen to foolishness, not to follow those voices who would draw us away from God, but to keep wisdom, to get wisdom, that it's life and death was kind of the point that we saw last week, that it couldn't be more important.

And these themes come up time and time again through these opening chapters, through the whole of Proverbs, really. And there's no doubt it would be beneficial, I suppose, to look through all these chapters to remind ourselves week by week to seek wisdom in this general sense.

But I think what's also really helpful, and how we're going to kind of approach Proverbs going forward, is then to focus in on some particular aspects of life and the wisdom that we're given for them.

You might want to think of it like this, if it helps. Our girls love to go and look at the fish at the garden center up at Dunbar, or down at Dobie's, or wherever we go. They're kind of entertained by the fish for a while. These big tanks full of water with these bright little fish in them.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] In some ways, the big ideas that we've seen in chapter 1 of Proverbs, of seeking wisdom, of listening to God, of the fear of the Lord. They're kind of like the water in those tanks.

They're everywhere. Wherever we go, we're going to find those in Proverbs. And then dotted throughout the tank are the actual fish, almost kind of like the specific life applications of this wisdom, dealing with money, with anger, with relationship, with speech, all sorts of different things.

Our approach, I suppose, rather than kind of drink the whole tank, is to look at these individual fish and see what we can learn about these specific areas of life.

But always remembering that they will only survive. They will only make sense if we keep them in this big idea, this kind of water of wisdom. If we keep coming back to the big picture of Proverbs as we dig in to these specific details.

So that's kind of our plan going forward through the book. The verses we're looking at this morning, I think help us do that really well and set the scene for the next few weeks. Because they begin by reinforcing, by deepening our understanding of what this wisdom is on the big scale of things.

[ 3 : 42 ] And then we're going to zoom down and see that worked out in a couple of very ordinary, very day-to-day, very practical areas of life. So that's the plan for this week and for the next few weeks.

So first up, the big picture. So first up, verses 1 down to 8 help us grasp a bit more what this wisdom we're talking about is. And really the headline is this, that wisdom is knowing God and trusting in him.

Wisdom is knowing God and trusting in him. Verse 1, My son, do not forget my teaching. Again, that will sound familiar from last week. This father calling his son to listen.

A parent passing on God's wisdom to a child. That call for all of us to listen to God, our Heavenly Father. And what does he want us to listen to? Well, two things. Firstly, his commandments.

Verse 1, My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments. And then secondly, his character. Verse 3, Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you.

[ 4 : 44 ] Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart. It's remembering what God says, his commandments, his teaching. But it's also remembering who God is.

That he is the God of steadfast love and faithfulness. Elsewhere in the Bible, the book of Exodus, God uses these kind of particular terms almost to define who he is.

That that is his character. The God who teaches and commands us is that patient and loving and faithful Heavenly Father. And in both these things, God's commands and God's character, we see here we're called to take them to heart.

Let your heart keep my commandments. Write them, that is this steadfast love and faithfulness, write them on the tablet of your heart. This is not the kind of wisdom of the book of Proverbs.

It's not an external thing. It's a heart thing. The heart in the Bible as well is not just to do with kind of emotions and feelings and Valentine's Day and things like that as we might use the heart.

[ 5 : 48 ] Really, the heart, biblically speaking, is our very center, our very core. It's the very essence of who we are. It's our controlling motivation that shapes how we live.

And this passage says, we're to let God's commandments and character shape us in these deepest parts. That what we're looking at are not kind of things that we kind of bolt on, but things which we're to take deep inside, that shape us.

As we said last week, this is the voice that we're to listen to, kind of the internal voice, the voice of our heart that shapes the way that we walk. And listening to that, taking that to heart is not always easy, is it?

There are other voices calling in other directions. We saw that again last week. There are other things trying to pull our hearts away. Look at the language that's used in these verses. That word keep in verse one has that idea of kind of guarding, of remaining vigilant.

Verse three, binding these truths around your neck, holding on tight to them. These are active words. Keeping this in our hearts, building our lives on top of them and around them, requires effort on our part.

[ 6 : 58 ] We don't kind of drift into these things of God's command and character. We don't just kind of, if we float along, we don't remember them. I used to work taking people kayaking or canoeing down rivers.

And one thing we'd always tell people is if you fall in, keep hold of your paddle. It didn't always fill them with confidence when we told them, but the idea was if you lose your paddle, as the phrase goes, if you lose your paddle, you're in trouble.

And if you're in the water and you don't grab it, if you don't grip it, if you don't hold on to it, it will get washed away. You'll go down here and your paddle will go here and we'll never see it again. And then you'll be stuck.

It's not just going to kind of float nicely down alongside you. God, we used to say, hold on tight. We just used to yell, paddle, paddle. Well, that's what the book of Proverbs is saying about our knowledge, our understanding of God, of his commandments, of his character.

Keep hold of it. Work at it. Fight for it. Don't just drift along or these things will be dragged away from us. I found that a real challenge for me, thinking about this big picture of wisdom, because I know that for me, often in a busy day, it is taking time with God to read my Bible or to pray, making time to focus on God's commands and character, doing what will help me with that.

[ 8 : 17 ] So often those are the first things to go. So often those are the things I did not have time for today or this week or actually the last fortnight or whatever it might be. So often I think as well, in a busy week, a busy weekend, coming to church is the first thing that we drop.

I don't have the luxury of that one. But it is so important that that's often the thing we think, oh, I just don't think I'm going to make that. But we just need to be so careful that we don't drift, that actually we take note of this language here, that we guard, that we keep, that we bind these truths about God to us, that we take them to heart and that we hold them there and so that they can shape who we are as a person.

That can be hard, that's difficult, that the Bible encourages to kind of engage in that battle, engage in that struggle. And it encourages us because it says it is worth the, it's worth the result.

Verse two, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Verse four, you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and men. This is a bit like a recap of what we saw at the end of last week.

Chapter one, verse 33, whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease without dread of disaster. And these verses, just as it was there, it's not a promise that living according to God's will will always make life easy.

[ 9 : 40 ] It's not a kind of simple cause and effect, but it's that understanding that living according to God's will is how life works best. As we said last week, it's kind of cutting in line with the grain of the universe.

It's following the instructions of the maker of the universe. It makes sense that that is how things work out best for us. It makes sense that to ignore that is so often how we find ourselves in trouble and disaster.

And so wisdom is knowing God, keeping hold in our hearts of that knowledge of his commands and his character. And yet these verses say it also goes beyond that.

It is also trusting in him. Verse five continues, trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. It's not enough, the Bible says, to just know these things about God, even to hold on to these things really tightly.

We need to put our trust in him. Real wisdom means that knowing that God knows best and that God will do what is best in every situation.

[ 10 : 49 ] Again, notice that word heart that keeps on popping up. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. This is talking about trusting in God, not kind of here or there, not trusting him a little bit but making kind of contingency plans, but trusting him with everything that we have in every situation.

I don't know if anyone here has ever been skydiving. I have not. I don't intend to. But I imagine that to do that you have to trust in that parachute with all your heart. You don't think, well, the parachute might work but I've got some plans on my sleeve just in case that doesn't pan out.

No, it's the parachute or nothing. And that is the kind of wholehearted trust that this passage is speaking about. It means accepting that actually we don't know it all but trusting that God does.

Verse 7, be not wise in your own eyes but fear the Lord and turn away from evil. Again, back to chapter 1, that idea of the fear of the Lord that we've spoken about again.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That recognition that God is up here and that we are down here and responding rightly to that.

[ 11 : 58 ] The fear of the Lord leads us to trust in him and his commands, his character and not ourselves. Trusting him with all our hearts in every aspect of our lives and that is what true wisdom is.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. We can only do that when we know God's commandment, when we know his character, that we know he is good, when we know that that trust is not misplaced.

And so then what does that look like? How do we know if we are trusting the Lord with all our heart rather than our own understanding? A couple of things and we could talk about this for a lot longer but a couple of examples.

Number one, I suppose the biggest thing of all, are we trusting in Jesus in order to be saved? Is our hope for eternity based on him? The world around us, our own understanding, being wise in our own eyes will tell us that surely God will like good people.

Surely if my good outweighs my bad then that's okay. Surely if there is a God will he be pleased with people like me? And yet to trust in the Lord means actually accepting what he says.

[ 13 : 10 ] That Jesus is the only way that we can be saved. Recognizing that we can't do that ourselves. We can't kind of build a ladder up to God. We have to trust in Jesus who came down to us.

Accept his sacrifice on the cross. That is our only hope. Not put our trust in our efforts or our wisdom. I suppose that is the number one fundamental to trusting in the Lord to the beginning of wisdom.

What does it look like then to continue to walk trusting in the Lord with all our heart? I think it also means being willing to be challenged by what we hear in God's word the Bible.

If we read things in the Bible or if we hear things on a Sunday morning which perhaps don't immediately fit with how we view the world or how those around us view the world how do we respond to that?

Do we just kind of ignore those bits? Do we just move on? Do we try and explain those away? Well that was fine for them back there but things are different now or are we actually willing to dig into the Bible and say look if this is God's word if this is what God is saying through his word then actually I need to shape my life my approach my thinking around that rather than vice versa.

[ 14 : 25 ] And again we're able to do that only if we know God's commandments and his character. If we know that God knows best that he is loving and good then we can trust him with our whole heart.

Trust him to make those decisions that maybe we wouldn't do by ourselves. And one of the great figures of the early church a guy called Augustine said this if you believe what you like in the gospels and reject what you don't like it's not the gospel you believe but yourself.

He's saying if we hold ourselves as kind of the ultimate editor over God's word then we're not really trusting in the Lord we're trusting in our own wisdom we're just picking the bits that we like. And yet to truly trust trust in the Lord to truly have this wisdom it means to accept what God says and submit to it.

And as we do that to remember that we do that to a God of steadfast love a God who is faithful it is difficult to change our views on things it is difficult to go against the prevailing wisdom of the world we can only do that if we remember the greatness of God and the goodness of God if we have that fear of the Lord if we have that trust in him that to listen to him his voice really is the best way of life really gives true wisdom.

So this big kind of overview of wisdom wisdom is knowing God his character and his commands and trusting in God and that changes our approach to life in every aspect of life and really that leads us on then to the last four verses of our passage these two examples these two specific areas of life what does it look like to put this wisdom into action in what we might call times of gain and times of pain firstly gain what does wisdom look like in terms of our money and our possessions verses 9 and 10 honour the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine now perhaps straight away you see that word wealth and you think well this is not really relevant for me I'm not a wealthy person actually that word wealth there it could be translated and it is in kind of older versions substance or stuff it's just speaking about the things that we have the things that we own the things that we earn however much or however little that might be now wisdom says to use that whatever it is to use that to honour the Lord and that's different from our own worldly wisdom isn't it we like to hold on tight to stuff we're kind of taught to do that and yet if we have this trust in the Lord rather than ourselves this trust based on what

[ 17 : 12 ] God has said and what he's like if that is what shapes our hearts if that is kind of who we are it freezes up to be much more open with our money and our possessions because that is not where our security is found God is and so we can be bold in our generosity the Bible talks about money a lot because money is a big deal think how many decisions you make each day in which money is a factor even today what are you wearing how did you get to church this morning what are you going to do with the rest of the week what things are worrying you at the moment money will play a big part in a lot of those answers it would be stupid for us to say our money is unimportant or money is bad how are we able to meet here as a church this morning money has played a part in that wisdom does not say that money is bad it doesn't say that money is irrelevant it says instead what are you going to do with your money is what's important and it says honour the Lord with your money use your wealth not to honour yourself and not to bring glory to yourself but to bring glory to God don't trust in your money money money cannot carry that burden money will not truly satisfy it won't be money that you cry out to when there is sickness or injury in our lives or the lives of those we love trust in

God who can bear that burden and use your money to honour him how we use our money so often shows where our trust really lies you can tell what is important to people or to a business or to a church even by looking at their budget and seeing where the money goes and you see how here it says in this passage the first fruits of your produce the proverb says it's not giving what is left over not seeing if there's anything spare but giving to God first prioritising him the picture if you want to kind of picture the scene in an agricultural community and way of life that the proverbs is written into the first fruits of your annual crop come in and it's a time of great celebration it's a time of uncertainty what's going to happen thank goodness the crops have not failed this year here are the first fruits and yet still you don't know what the next crop is going to be like you don't know what is going to happen the rest of the year and yet to live in wisdom to demonstrate this trust means that you don't wait to see well let's see if we get much more and see what is spare for

God says no they were to give from the first fruits from all that they had but they took that out before anything else because God was their priority and in God was their trust and that is how we honor God with our wealth not by kind of leaving to see what's left at the end but by giving the first fruits by recognizing that our trust is in God not money and God then promises that he'll repay that verse 10 therefore your bonds will be filled with plenty your vats will be bursting with wine when we demonstrate our trust in God in that way he will not let us down and this absolutely does not mean that that God is a kind of get rich quick scheme you might have heard of something called the prosperity gospel it says if you give to God you'll be rich you'll be healthy he'll give you whatever you want that is not what this passage or indeed any passage in the Bible teaches we'll see that even more clearly in just a moment but what it does mean is that God will care for those who trust in him that those who are using what they have for his glory will be able to continue doing that

God gives us what we need to honor him to glorify him a quick thought for us as a church as a church we don't kind of pass along a bag or a plate or anything like that to get a collection during our service that's kind of intentional the reason behind that we don't want anyone to feel that they're here just so we can get money out of them I always want it to be the case that people are free to come and join us people are free to come and listen to God's word people are coming are free to come and hear God's free invitation to them as we share that together and are never made to feel bad about that and yet at the same time we don't want to go too far the other way and never speak about money because the Bible does speak about money but I was quite clear that for those of us who are Christians who trust in the Lord that one way we show that that we honor the Lord with our wealth is by giving to his church so that the good news of his gospel can be shared so that he can be honored among the among the nations among the places where he has sent his people for this church here to last the same as any church in any community to be an ongoing witness you know money is needed for that that's not something that we need to be shy about or ashamed of and yet true wisdom that true dependence on God is not just saying we'll give a gift to the church and then you're done you're fine it's saying that all we have from all of our substance all of the stuff which we realize are good gifts from God we're to use for his honor for his glory and we are free to do that we're able to do that we're empowered to do that only if our trust is not in ourselves not in our wisdom not in our capacity to earn not in what we have saved away for a rainy day but in God and in God alone so wisdom in terms of gain honoring God with what we have however much or little that might be the next couple of verses where we'll finish this morning speak about how wisdom changes how we respond in times of pain how do we respond when times are hard verses 11 and 12 my son do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father the son in whom he delights now we've seen a few times and we will keep on coming back to this how living according to wisdom as a general rule helps life work well it tends to lead to blessing and security far more than an unwise or a wicked life might and yet it's so important that we look at verses like these as well to remind ourselves that Proverbs is not suggesting some kind of mechanical transaction and it's not like a lever that we press and say if we do this well

God will respond in that way it's not as we mentioned before a prosperity gospel of health and wealth and success and an easy life these verses remind us that actually there are hard times in being a Christian but even here perhaps especially here God is at work and is still in control and being wise affects how we respond to these times and it's so important that we remember that otherwise when these hard times come we get totally the wrong idea of God we say oh God is not there or God does not care or God does not love me and these hard times push us away from God we despise them is the word these verses use and yet actually the truth it says here is the opposite God reproves him who he loves as a father the son in whom he delights these difficulties are a sign that God is there and that he does love us he loves us so much he wants us to grow he has plans for us he has developments in mind for us and that example given of a parent and a child it's so clear isn't it and we let our children go through hard times we let our children go through difficulties we don't just kind of whisk them away at the first sign of any trouble when I first went to school I was kind of four or five years old

[ 25 : 04 ] I used to complain and cry and fuss I was very small it's hard to believe now but my parents made sure that I stuck at it they didn't say oh well you've tried it for three days now just give that up school's not for you no they just kept on sending me every day they bought me a magnifying glass as if that would somehow make it all okay but they did that they kept sending me not because they didn't love me it's because they did love me that they wanted the best for me and they knew that sometimes it is hard to learn the important lessons in life the Bible elsewhere speaks about the the refining process of precious metals being subjected to great temperatures and and pressures in order that it comes out the end pure and refined and God sometimes puts us through those processes how do we deal with that well we can only deal with it well if we keep coming back to this big idea of verse five trust in the

Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding knowing that God is up here that he knows the big picture that he will do what is good and we're down here we don't know everything so often we can't possibly see how this could be for anyone's good let alone our own and actually the call is is to trust in God's command and character in these difficult times so that we can continue to walk with God and let him do his work assured of his love for us we can only do that in those hard times you can only deal with these hard times if we have this true wisdom that comes from trusting in God and we might never know the reason for these difficulties so easy isn't it for us to say to people going through hard times oh one day you'll look back and this will all make sense we might not the Bible doesn't promise that that's not the experience of a lot of people and yet we can from passages like this encourage people that this does not mean that God isn't there and this does not mean that God doesn't care because God reproves those he loves we can encourage people with the promise that at all times God stays with those who trust in him and that hardships are not a sign that something has gone wrong that we have taken a wrong turn but they are so often the sign that God is right there and working on us and with us now what is the ultimate encouragement in that in times of hardship that God's still there that

God's at work that we should continue to trust in him even when it doesn't make sense to us or those around us well the ultimate encouragement isn't it is to point to Jesus and to point to the cross there Jesus went through the ultimate hardship the ultimate difficulty at the ultimate time when it looked to everyone's own understanding when it looked to all the worldly wisdom as though things had gone completely wrong that God was not there that God did not care that God's plan had failed and yet actually it's at the cross isn't it that we see that God was at work that that Jesus continued to trust in him depend on him walk with him and it's through that that God's plan of salvation was completed it is because of the cross that we can have certainty in God's character certainty that we can fully trust in him that that is true wisdom however it may feel whatever we might be tempted towards and it's when we know that when we have that trust in him that we can demonstrate it through how we respond in times of gain and in pain with what we have that when times are hard to be able to live out this wisdom in our day-to-day lives as we trust in the Lord and not in our own understanding let's pray together