

The Core of Christian Living

Proverbs 3:5-8

Part of my conversation this past week with the doctor I saw for my back was about exercise. He informed me that I need to strengthen the core muscles in my stomach and low back and that doesn't include Twinkies. Over the years my main routine for exercise has always been running, to the exclusion of core strength. Now I have read plenty of articles from training experts about the kinds of exercises that will help improve running and it's not just more or different running. Along with proper stretching one of the essential elements of running well and really for any sports activity is developing the core muscles. They help provide support for the rest of the body during regular and exercise activities.

Part of the problem has been a matter of time. If I did all the exercises I'm supposed to do I'd be in the gym all day. It takes a lot of time to do everything the experts say you should do to keep fit and keep in mind that they don't have regular jobs like us. They get to run around all day in their designer sweats. But I will work on this issue because I don't want the problem to happen again. So I told Robyn I'm going to get rock hard abs that will be under a protective layer of, well a protective layer. Carl wants to be my accountability partner, but you can check in to see how I'm doing, too.

Since core strength is essential for healthy living I thought today we would clear the chairs out of the way and do some crunches and jumping jacks.

Well, you know I'm kidding. We're not here to do physical fitness but to do spiritual fitness. Our passage reveals what should be a core strength if we are going to be a spiritually fit believer. It all has to do with trust.

These days trust has a lot of shades of meaning. We know what the dictionary definition says: to rely on

or have confidence in someone or something, but we find that trust seems to be more relative than absolute. If it's trust in a person, we believe in them only so far as we believe in their integrity or honesty or strength or ability or, as the saying goes, "only so far as we can throw them."

If we are trusting in something, it is often based on the reputation of its brand. We have a certain level of confident trust in that thing. Trust is often laced with a dose of suspicion because, truth be told, we really aren't sure we can trust them that much.

I would suspect that those who have come to trust with confidence the integrity of their Mercedes Benz would have difficulty getting behind the wheel of a Pinto with their questionable history and reputation. Some people don't learn to trust anyone. *Like the father who got his young son to stand on the railing of the porch telling him to jump and he would catch him. When the son jumped, the father stepped aside allowing the son to fall to the ground. He then told his son that he can never trust anyone.*

We have come to learn that while we would like to fully trust others, we really know that at some point we are going to be let down. Unfortunately and admittedly I know I have. Maybe you have too. It's bound to happen sometime.

The Bible provides us with evidence of someone we can completely trust in. He will never let us down, but we need to come to the place that we fully trust Him – without exception. So it is that we come to **Proverbs 3:5-8** where we see some additional benefits of pursuing after God and the wisdom that comes from such a pursuit. There is a benefit to trusting Him.

In today's passage we will note two additional benefits to seeking wisdom. The first one is really the fundamental truth or the core that should guide the Christian life. This principle is the theme of

Proverbs and the key to the Christian life. Without following this principle we will be spiritually weak. We will today see these four truths on how to live:

We are to live confidently in God – v. 5

We are to live carefully after God – v. 6

We are to live correctly through God – v. 7

We are to live cheerfully by God – v. 8

I. WE ARE TO LIVE CONFIDENTLY IN GOD – v. 5

Many years ago a German botanist was traveling in Turkey. As he was making some observation in the countryside he saw a rare flower hanging from an inaccessible cliff. Nearby was a boy whom he offered to pay if he would go over the cliff on a rope and retrieve the flower. The boy was tempted but hesitating. Then he had an idea. He said to the botanist, “wait here a moment, and I will go for my father to come and hold the rope; then I will go down and get the flower.” He trusted his father to hold the rope securely.

The world suggests many different places or people where we should place our trust. Places like educational or financial institutions. We are told to put our trust in government or the military to provide or protect. But we know all too well they will let us down.

Psalm 20:7 *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”*

When we sing “trust and obey for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus” do we really mean it? Or are we keeping our options open just in case we need a fall back plan?

In our passage Solomon is telling his son an important truth he hopes will carry him through life: **“Trust in the Lord.”** He’s not offering this as another option to consider, he’s making it the only

option. Everything else in life will let you down son, but not God. You may think at times that’s not the case, but when you look back you will see that He was leading you down the right path, so be confident in God. He can be trusted 100% of the time.

This past week I went to a Dr. I had never met to undergo a procedure I have never had. I talked only briefly with him as he explained to Robyn and I what was wrong, what he was going to do, and why he was going to do it. They started an IV, wheeled me down the hall and into a room with two nurses neither of whom I had met before who would assist this Dr. Would you agree with me that there had to be a great measure of trust in this man to get me to the desired goal of freedom from pain? Now I’m here to tell you that I went solely on the advice of someone else who experienced his credibility and reputation first hand. I had to trust that what he said he was going to do. I had to trust his reputation based on the recommendation of someone else.

God’s Word provides evidence for us that supports the credibility of His character. His reputation can never be called into question because of the integrity of His Word about the promises He has made and kept. **Can I get a witness?**

***Numbers 23:19**

Lamentations 3:19-26

Romans 4:20-21

***Hebrews 6:18-19a** *“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure...”*

Hebrews 11:11

Is God someone you have learned to have complete trust in? Is there confidence in His promises?

That God is unchanging in His nature assures us that what He has promised in His Word will come true, so that when Solomon speaks of our need to trust Him, His enduring and never changing

reputation assures us that we can fully trust Him in every area of our life. **Can I get a witness?**

The question is, how much are we willing to trust Him? I'm amazed, even at myself, how we can trust a God we have never seen for an unknown, and from our perspective, an uncertain destination like heaven because He says in a book that was written about Him that if we believe by faith that His Son Jesus died for our sins and took God's wrath on Himself on our behalf that we'll go to heaven. Yet we have a hard time trusting Him for something that is happening in our life right now.

Does that make sense, but isn't that true? God says "I'll give you a home in heaven where you will be free from My wrath for your sins if you will only believe by faith that Jesus' death on the cross was sufficient to cover your sin," and we jump on board without question or hesitation. But I find that when He wants me to trust Him for some area of my life, I hesitate because it involves letting go of my own abilities or possessions to follow Him.

Exodus 3:1-4, 10-14

Here's Moses. He had been raised on the knees and in the halls of Pharaoh. Somewhere before the age of 40 God began to work in his heart and show him the plight of the Israelites. I believe he understood then that God was calling him to help these people, but in his pride and because of his position he thought he could deliver them in his own power rather than fully trust God's plan. But I also believe that deliverance was supposed to wait because God was working in Moses' life to spiritually reshape him. God had to bring Moses to a place where all his self-sufficiency could be stripped off so that his confidence to deliver them would not be in his own ability, but instead to fully trust in the ability of God. It wasn't until he was 80 that he learned to fully trust in the Lord. But we also see that God not only had to take away the self-sufficiency of Moses, He also had to deal with his feelings of ineptness.

God wants to bring us to a place where we fully trust Him. And He does it in incremental steps. Moses told God he wasn't sure he could do it and wasn't sure he was the right guy. In essence he was telling God, I'm not sure I can fully trust You yet. So God gave him some simple things to do to learn trust.

"What's in your hand Moses?"

"A staff."

"Throw it down." It turned to a serpent.

"Pick it up." It turned back to a staff.

"Put your hand in your coat."

"Pull it out." It was diseased.

"Put it back in your coat."

"Pull it out." It was healed.

Can we come to a place of full surrender to what God wants us to do? That can be a pretty frightening place, can't it? But isn't that where God wants to take us where our sufficiency is not in ourselves but rather in Him? I think David understood that when he wrote Psalm 23. He understood God's promise that whether in the desert or in the shadow of death, God is always with us.

God may not ask us to lead millions of slaves out of bondage against the world's greatest military in defiance to the world's fiercest leader. He may be asking us to take a small test of faith and trust Him by going next door, or teaching a class or any number of things. Only you know what God is asking of you. But then greater is He who is in me. **What is it that God is asking you to do that requires your complete trust in Him? Isn't that after all, what He is asking, that it be with all our heart?** Last week we saw that the heart is the place of moral decisions. The heart can also refer to the intellect, understanding, discernment or will. We must come to a place where we totally surrender our will, what we want to do, in order for God to do His work both in us and through us. At times what God wants us to do just doesn't make sense. Sometimes we think they're down right crazy.

Back in Egypt Moses was a wanted man. He had killed someone. Now God was asking him to go back to the place he left for fear of his life. But obediently he went trusting God, even when the hardship of those he was supposed to deliver was made worse. Though they didn't believe it at the time or even trust Him, it was all part of God's plan
Exodus 14:13-16

A lot of what God did in His intervention didn't make sense. As they left Egypt they came to the banks of the Red Sea. A commotion in the back of the crowd quickly reached the front where Moses was. Pharaoh had a change of heart. He was not willing to give up a couple million slaves so he sent his army to bring them back. In the back there was fear of death from the army and in the front fear of death by drowning in the sea. Fearful parents hugged trembling children. Old couples clung to each other in dread of what was going to happen. It didn't make sense to move forward or backward. It made sense to stand still. Moses you will recall was groomed in the finest universities of Egypt. He had been prepared to be the next pharaoh. He had learned military strategy and political diplomacy. He could have reasoned that man for man they outnumbered the army or maybe they would listen to reason. But he relied on none of his previous training. He didn't seek his own understanding, He trusted God to do what He said. No wisdom that we acquire can ever replace our need to trust God or surpass His wisdom (**Romans 11:33 "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out."**)
Do we believe that sometimes God takes us to places where we have to believe that the only way out is fully and completely trusting God?

We need to remember that *if God brings us to it, He'll bring us through it.* So we have to believe God and take Him fully at His Word. **Is that easy or hard?** If it weren't hard it wouldn't be faith. Otherwise there wouldn't be much to trust in.

Hebrews 11:6 I believe is the New Testament equivalent to **Proverbs 3:5-6**. I believe that faith and trust are two sides of the same coin. Both require belief in God. Both require complete confidence in His ability to do what He says.

Trust requires a heart that is not divided about God, doesn't it? A divided heart is not a trusting heart. It is a heart that is not fully confident in God. One author suggests that trust in this sense means to lie helpless. Complete trust requires complete obedience.

Before the 1988 Winter Olympics a television program was shown featuring blind skiers being trained for slalom skiing, impossible as that sounds. Paired with sighted skiers, the blind skiers were taught on the flats how to make right and left turns. When that was mastered, they were taken to the slalom slope, where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left!" and "Right!" As they obeyed the commands, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line, depending solely on the sighted skiers' word. It was either complete trust or catastrophe. Success did not come from being blind but from being obedient.

Can we trust God that much by following Him along every course in life that only He sees?

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't lean on your own understanding." It's total dependence on His leading as we lean on Him. To lean means to put your whole weight on something in order to rest on it or to be strengthened or supported by it.

Uncle Oscar was taking his first airplane ride. After the flight his friends asked how it went and if he enjoyed the flight. He said that it wasn't as bad as he thought it might be, but then added that he never put all his weight down.

How much of our weight are we putting on God? We sing about it and quote passages about it, but do we really believe it?

When we lean on our own understanding, our own abilities, our bank account, our personality, our profession, our popularity, or our education it is like leaning all my weight against this microphone stand. It will always let me down at some point. But if I fully lean on God it's as if this stand were solidly anchored to the ground. God is a sure foundation in whom we can rest all our weight with every confidence that He'll keep us up. By fully trusting Him I have nothing to fear or be anxious about. **What one thing today will you trust Him for?**

Trust Him when dark doubts assail thee,
Trust Him when thy strength is small,
Trust Him when to simply trust Him
Seems the hardest thing of all.
Trust Him, He is ever faithful,
Trust Him, for his will is best,
Trust Him, for the heart of Jesus
Is the only place of rest.

Psalm 27:1 “The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear. The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

Psalm 34:4 “I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.”

Psalm 56:3 “When I am afraid I will trust in you.”

Life is filled with many things that can make us fearful, but in which God is asking us to trust Him: getting older, health, school, college, marriage, a new job, changing jobs, losing a job, teaching a class when I've never taught before, getting up and going where God leads when God says to go, even when it doesn't logically make sense, or when I'm uncertain of the destination. The destination though isn't so much a place as it is a position – spiritual maturity.

In the middle of the 1970's recession two childhood friends worked on a venture that would revolutionize the world and literally propel us into what otherwise was at that time more science fiction

than reality. Today that company and its principles of application for computers is the global leader in operating systems and has made Bill Gates one of the richest men in the world. He did it in his own understanding.

A number of years ago this church trusted God enough to move forward with the purchase of a piece of property with the intent that someday it would rebuild and have a greater impact in this community. Many of you were in on those discussions and decisions. You prayed about it and believed that God was leading, that He was asking you to trust Him in this venture. It was voted on and approved and just a few years ago it was paid off. But there it sits, a vacant lot that gets mowed a few times a year to feed some cows. **We use it occasionally for some activities, but is it being developed for what you believed for ministry?**

Now don't misunderstand, I'm not standing here telling you we're moving forward on a building project that we are neither prepared nor committed to really trust God in. We can rationalize and justify that while we believe it was still the right decision, with the downturn in the economy it was a good thing we haven't yet moved forward especially when we aren't meeting our current budget.

It didn't make sense to move toward the sea.
It didn't make sense to march around a city.
It didn't make sense to tell a widow to use up the last of her flour and oil.

But if a guy can build a business in the middle of a recession without trusting God, how much more should we be willing to trust the infinite, omnipotent God who built the whole universe from nothing? So, are we willing to walk by faith or by sight? And if we are willing to walk by faith how big is our faith? If He has asked us to trust Him with all our heart, how much do we trust the One who can do more than we ask or think? He wants us to trust Him for big things. He wants us to see that we can live confidently in Him even when as we look around there is plenty of reason to doubt or fear. He will not let us down.

Now, I have spent a whole lot of time on this one point, but it's the most important point, because what we come to believe about trusting God will

dictate how we live our lives. We'll either be anxious and fearful depending more on ourselves or we'll do some pretty remarkable things for God because we took Him at His word. Trust means that we can live confidently in God.

When we learn to live confidently in God, we'll learn to live carefully after God.

II. WE ARE TO LIVE CAREFULLY AFTER GOD – v. 6

In verses 5 and 6 we see three conditions for the benefit to come to pass. We must trust the Lord. We must not lean on our own understanding. We must acknowledge Him. The more I trust the Lord, the less I lean on my own understanding. The more I lean on my own understanding the less I lean on the Lord.

Whenever I shop at the local Wal-Mart I am always greeted by an individual just inside the store. "Hello" or "Welcome to Wal-Mart" is the typical greeting. I hear the voice and turn my head in the direction of the individual and when I make eye contact I nod in their direction and return their greeting with my own. I am acknowledging their presence.

That is not what Solomon means here. It is a word that means to have thorough knowledge of or to have intimate fellowship with. It is a deep relationship. Here's the point. When we truly know God, we learn that we can completely trust Him. **Can I have a witness?** Moses was not prepared to trust God until He had come to fully know Him.

Joshua is another great example. He couldn't lead the people into the Promised Land without first having had spent intimate time with God. You may remember back when they were wandering in the wilderness that it was Joshua who was at the Tent of Meeting spending time with God. Joshua was given a hard task to get the people to the Promised Land and the first task was to cross the river Jordan,

while it was at flood stage. Now Joshua didn't get the tribal leaders together and calculate how long it would take to make a really solid bridge to cross. He didn't ask all the craftsmen to cut down trees and build some big barges to ferry the people across. There were no Board meetings to discuss options. God said this is how it's going to happen. In three days you're going over, so get ready. The priests assigned with carrying the Ark are going to lead the way. They're going to carry the Ark into the water and the rest are going to follow.

Now it's important to note at this point that God told them to go and stand **in** the river, not **next** to the river. I'm here to tell you that the guys in the front probably had a lot more faith than the guys in the back. Remember the water was moving fast because the river was flooded. I can just hear them calling back, stop pushing. **If you have ever been the guy at the end of a sofa sleeper going down the stairs it can feel like the guy on the other end is pushing. You're like "hey, take it easy."**

But off they marched and we read in **Joshua 3** that as soon as their feet touched the water, the waters parted and the ground became completely dry. They walked out into the middle of the dry river bed, the whole nation crossed and when they did 12 leaders came back in the middle and picked up some big boulders, hoisted them on their shoulders and plopped them on the bank in a pile. God wanted those rocks to remind them that He can be fully trusted to do what He says. The more we know the one who leads us, the greater our trust and willingness to obey and follow.

When we live carefully after God, having an intimate relationship with Him, **Proverbs 3:6** says that He will direct our paths. It means He will make our paths straight. It means He will remove the obstacles that keep us from knowing His will and His way. It doesn't mean the way will be easy, but it does mean that we'll know the next step He's taking us. All we have to do is trust Him and

willingly obey what He wants us to do. He will then bring us to our appointed goal.

We must be careful to walk in His ways and that does mean knowing and trusting Him. There is something else He requires that I believe is essential if we are to both know God and then know the path He wants us to follow, it's also part of trusting Him. Note vs. 7.

III. WE ARE TO LIVE CORRECTLY THROUGH GOD – v. 7

Again Solomon is giving instruction to his son to put aside any tendency to rely on himself and fear the Lord. Trusting the Lord not only leads to godly peace as we walk in His ways, trusting the Lord also leads to a godly practice.

Proverbs 16:17 “The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life.” (NIV)

The road of right living bypasses evil; watch your step and save your life.” (The Message)

We are encouraged to keep away from sin that also means avoiding company with those who would lead us to do wrong. **“Blessed or happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mocker.”** (Psalm 1:1)

One day a farmer grabbed his shotgun to shoot at a flock of pesky crows. Unfortunately, he didn't see that his sociable parrot had joined the crows. After firing a few shots, he walked over to the fallen birds and was surprised to find his parrot badly ruffled with a broken wing. When the farmer's children saw the injured bird, they asked, “Daddy, what happened?” The farmer simply replied, “Bad company.”

Time and again in Scripture we find as we do in this verse that we are to avoid evil and the company of those who do evil. **I Corinthians 15:33** “Do not

be deceived, bad company corrupts good character.”

We avoid evil when we are near God. When we are near Him He will help us to recognize the influences around us that are wrong. The question is this: will we walk away or will we stay? Avoid people, places and positions that may lead you to do wrong.

We can think we're strong enough to not give in. Don't be fooled, there is false security if we try on our own. It is a way that leads to doing wrong, but if we follow the Lord, His way will lead us right. If we reverence God we will avoid sin. To say it another way, if we do not acknowledge the Lord we will not avoid evil. But if we fear the Lord we will depart from it.

Job 1:8 (2:3) “Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.’”

One author noted that “when the path is clear the priorities are right.”

Only through trusting God do we have the ability to reject evil. Try as we may, in our own strength we can't overcome it. We need to live in the power of the Holy Spirit who works to help us develop the character of Christ who will help us live correctly.

We will see time and time again throughout Proverbs this very important principle that following God leads to life while following our way, only leads to death. So there is a benefit for living correctly through God. We live cheerfully by God.

IV. WE LIVE CHEERFULLY BY GOD – v. 8

The KJV says that such godly living will bring health to your naval. Consider that prior to birth the naval is the route by which nourishment is brought

to the infant from its mother. Without that necessary link, nourishment cannot hope to get to the growing infant. Fearing God and avoiding evil give the same kind of spiritual nourishment to the growing Christian as the umbilical cord does for the infant through the naval. Our link of spiritual nourishment is God's Word.

You may find that eating certain foods disagree with you so to avoid being miserable you stay away from eating them. To stay spiritually healthy we know that we must avoid sinful practices that will harm us. Bones makes reference to the whole body although medical evidence supports that the bones are directly affected by one's health.

When David confessed his adultery with Bathsheba he spoke of the bones which God had broken. God did not physically break his bones, but rather it suggests that even physically we can feel the effects of sinful actions. We also see from medical research that our mental state can create damage to the bones. Solomon writes that envy dries up the bones, but a good report brings health to the bones. And of course we all know the physical ramifications of stress on the body. God is asking us to trust Him, to put aside our anxieties. It will not only bring physical health, there is spiritual wellbeing that results as well. Such trust brings a peace that literally soothes the mind and helps the body and keeps it from the damage that can come otherwise.

When we depart from evil we are not only free of the many harmful effects that can come through disease, we are also free of the guilt and sin that is associated with it. And that is good for the body. It all begins with trusting the Lord, trusting Him with all our heart, rather than trusting our own instincts or relying on our own wisdom.

There is so much God wants us to trust Him for, are we willing to let Him lead the way? Are we willing to put aside our fears and trust Him? Fear and trust cannot coexist. As the song writer has so eloquently penned "the Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all we have to is follow."

Today is there just one thing that you are willing to trust God for? Will you right now give it to Him?

Today is there one thing that you know is wrong and you are willing to walk away from it because you know it's not right and you know that you can't follow God by continuing down that road?

If we want to be strong in the Lord, we need to develop the core strength of trusting Him. Let's get out there and really exercise our faith each and every day.