

In God We Trust, Or Do We?

By Steve Schmutzer

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I often tell the class that I teach each Sunday, “What God repeats, we should revere.” It’s my way of reminding all of us that we need to pay attention to those elements of God’s Word which are divinely-inspired to be restated.

I’m not suggesting there’s a formula at play here – as in the more something is repeated the more important it is. After all, “born again” is only mentioned three times in the Bible (KJV), and that’s a crucial concept! “Rapture” emerges only as an English derivative of an obscure Latin term, and “trinity” isn’t mentioned once. For that matter, “Bible” never even shows up in the Bible.

This doesn’t mean that the Rapture won’t happen or that the concept of the trinity is untrue. The doctrines of the rapture and the trinity are both taught within the canon of Scripture we call the “Bible,” and the Bible remains complete and inerrant. I know of no responsible “born again” believer that has challenged the veracity of any of this.

But if God *does* choose to re-emphasize something in His inspired Word, I think chances are He wants us to take notice of it. At least that’s a safe bet by my way of thinking.

So why do we struggle with “trusting God” so much? Throughout the Bible we’re exhorted over and over to place our trust in God. It’s one of the most ubiquitous themes in Scripture. It’s not possible to overlook this straightforward instruction apart from willful omission.

In an opposite respect, we are also warned against trusting in things apart from God – things like wealth (1 Tim. 6:17), people (Jer. 17:5), plans (Prov. 19:21), material goods (Matt. 6:19), and family and friends (Micah 7:5-6). For the independent and “DIY” types, we’re even warned against trusting in ourselves (2 Cor. 1:9). Many of these cautionary passages highlight the foolishness of placing trust in anything *but* God.

Point made. So why is it so hard to do the right thing?

I’ve been thinking a good deal about trusting God as of late. I don’t necessarily know why that’s the case, but it’s something God has placed on my heart for me to ponder during this season of my life. As I’ve done so, I’ve been reminded of the beautiful words of Proverbs 3:5-6 which state, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will direct your paths.”*

These two verses qualify as ones to live by, and they constitute a command as opposed to an option. They are charged with great insight, and they help us unpack the operative question as to why it’s so hard to trust God. Let’s look at some basic applications from these verses.

First, real trust is *full* trust. There is no such thing as partial trust. That's like saying one is "partially pregnant." You're either pregnant or you're not; there is no other state between those two conditions. Partial trust amounts to nothing more than mistrust.

Few of us trust God fully because we generally fail to know Him fully. Skepticism naturally wells up in any of us when we have exhausted our own means and we are compelled to depend on something or someone we are unfamiliar with. Those situations spawn uncertainty and suspicion, and it's really no different with God. When we need to depend on an infinite God that we've chosen to define by finite measures, we're going to have challenges trusting Him fully. That's our problem – not His.

Secondly, it's the heart that's called into accountability here, not the mind. That's an important distinction. A mind can accumulate a great deal of knowledge, but unless that person is properly applying that knowledge via the conduit of a heart that is fully trusting God and is obedient to His standards, they do not have wisdom. Because plenty of very knowledgeable people have their heart's passions in the wrong trajectory, it is impossible for them to fully trust God.

Therefore, the expression "*all your heart*" takes on special significance here. The heart is our spiritual pivot point. It's the very hub of our emotions and desires, and there can be no reservations with it. It's not possible to ration one's heart and fulfill this command to "*trust in the Lord.*" One cannot quarantine any portion of their heart from a right relationship with God and expect to discover what it means to fully trust Him. Proverbs 3:5-6 outlines an all-or-nothing proposition.

This ties directly into the next part of the passage which challenges us to get rid of our crutches. That's a good way to think of the concept of "*leaning on (our) own understanding.*" If you take the crutches away from someone who needs them, they're going to hit the floor. We depend on our crutches to hold us up, and God wants to be the one to support us that way.

Face it, we all need a crutch from time to time. A basic takeaway from these verses in Proverbs is it's inevitable that we'll face the need to lean. That's guaranteed. It's not possible to be human in this sinful and fallen world and not need to lean – at least once in a while. The bigger issue here is not *when* we lean or *why* we need to do it, but rather *what* we will lean on when we do.

Really – it's about *who!* The challenge Proverbs 3:5-6 lays out for us is our need to upgrade our crutches from all the "*what's*" we have to a single "*who.*" Most of us have many crutches we depend on more than we would like to admit. There are just as many names for them, including, but not limited to: alcohol, pornography, money, tobacco, friends, prescription meds, "sick" days, pets, secret affairs, family, food, hobbies, jobs, experience, and education.

Our crutches can be good things and they can be bad things. In and of themselves, they might be vices or virtues. Either way, Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us that they all have the potential to occupy the affections of our heart and to numb our capacity to fully trust God.

If we are honest with ourselves, we like our crutches. They are familiar to us. We've formed habits and patterns with the crutches we employ, and part of our identity is formed around the ones we choose to lean on the most. The way we choose to lean displays our values and priorities, and Proverbs defines this dynamic as being our "own understanding."

The toughest part of this passage for me is the next one that instructs me to consciously place God front and center in every aspect of my life. The phrase "...in all your ways acknowledge Him" is easy to say but hard to do. I'll be candid – I'm still figuring this part out.

I *do* know it's much more than offering a trite prayer before every activity I undertake or before commencing with every decision I've already resolved to execute. It's much more than wrapping an artificial enthusiasm around my unknowns or prescriptively stating "I'm trusting God" through clenched teeth.

Right now, I think it has much more to do with faithful obedience in one direction. It's staying the righteous course when self-centeredness and integrity are clashing. It's being consciously aware that the eyes of God are on me all the time as I put one foot in front of the other along the narrow path. It's about finding contentment with God as my portion (Ps. 119:57), and it has everything to do with nurturing the hope I have in Him (Lam. 3:24). In basically every respect, it has something to do with not having the answers I want to have. These are the principles I am settling on as I refine my understanding of what it means to "acknowledge God in all my ways."

And finally – all this leads to God "*directing (my) paths.*" It's harder for me to appreciate those translations which say He'll "...*make my paths straight.*" I've never really seen a straight path; even the good ones meander a bit. That's why they are "paths" and not sidewalks.

My larger takeaway here is God will be the one doing the directing and not me. It's the end result that comes from satisfying the previous conditions. It's my full trust in God that enables me to see things for what they really are in both the earthly and heavenly realms, and to stop striving against His sovereign will for my life.

It's seeing the bigger picture and being convinced that this moment, too, is part of eternity. Again, my obligation is to faithfully do my part with the terms and conditions I find myself in, and to not worry about the elements which I cannot see or comprehend and which are out of my control.

My guess is I'm a lot like you. Most of us are learning what it means to live out the wonderful truths of Proverbs 3:5-6. That learning process is likely to be a life-long exercise, but my prayer for all of us is that God will extend His abundant mercy and grace to us as we diligently seek to trust Him, to lean on Him, and to acknowledge Him in all our ways.

