



## **Proverbs 3:5-6** **Know Thyself, but know Jesus Better**

**Summary:** Trust the Lord! It is both simple and complex, straight forward and yet nuanced; But it all begins by knowing Jesus better.

Good Morning! My name is Matthew Pottenger, and I am one of the assistant pastors here at The City Gates. Jeff is out of town this week and so I have the privilege of filling in the pulpit. Next week he will continue the study we began last week on 2 Timothy.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Jeff talked about some concerns that we'll be facing as we enter this year. These concerns were pictured in Jeremiah as the "heat" that we will face. We all know that the "heat will come"... some of us are walking through the heat right now in our lives, some are just now getting a reprieve from the heat that has been intense over the last few weeks. Others are anticipating the heat that seems to be just around the corner.

As Pastor Jeff exhorted us from Jeremiah, we want to be like the tree that is planted by the rivers of water, that does not need to fear when heat comes, whose leaf will not wither but will bear its fruit in due season. Today I want to explore this idea more by examining a passage that many of us may already be familiar with, and some have probably committed to memory. But, like the cow chewing the cud, I want us to slow down and dive deeply into this passage and glean even more nutrients to aid us in our spiritual growth.

The passage that we'll be studying today is found in the book of Proverbs chapter 3 and specifically verse 5 & 6.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.*

This verse is something I like to call a warrior verse. I call it that because it has been a useful Scripture to bring up when I am battling temptation or navigating a trial. In fact, the amount of times that this verse has impacted my life and given me

the needed reminder, the needed direction, the necessary warning, and the promise and hope of God's direction I could just as easily call this one of my Life Verses.

These battle verses or life verses can be SO helpful. They are like a light in a dark place, like a handy multi-tool that is always at your belt, they are like the Mary Poppins hand-bag that seems to always have just what you need to meet the need of the moment. BUT, in order for it to be helpful, there are two things that you need first. The first is to commit this verse (or one like it) to memory. By committing it to memory you can have ready access to it day or night, whether you are in need or in prosperity.

But the second thing you need is to understand it and how to properly apply it. Just like having a tool but not knowing how to use it or what to use it to do, it will likely just sit in a drawer collecting dust and fall into obscurity. This is one where careful examination, reading the instruction manual, and beginning to look for ways to put it into use will help you to gain more usefulness and benefit from it.

So, although this verse seems fairly straight forward, and arguably it is, I want us to pick it up like the gem that it is and turn it discover the beauty of each facet as we turn it, allowing the glory of God's light to illuminate it in different ways.

As we consider this verse, I want us to see that there are 4 different sections for us to consider. The first gives us something to do, the second something to not do, the third gives us the nuance of "how" and the fourth is a promise.

Let's take a look at this first phrase, "[Trust in the LORD with all your heart](#),".

The key word in this passage, and the first action that we are called to in this verse is Trust. If you are like me, you appreciate being given an action item, something to do. There's nothing worse than that feeling of helplessness when you are sick or going through a trial and there is simply nothing that you can do. But, in this case, the "to do" though simple, and clear, and very "understandable" is yet something VERY HARD to do.

In the Hebrew language, there are several words that get rendered into our English word "trust". Each one has their own nuance (though they all share similarities as well). The nuance in this word, Batach, means "to run to for refuge; to put your confidence in, to hope in." It speaks of where we place our security.

There are other words that speak more to believing in the Lord as the form of trust that is mentioned. But this word is getting us to action and not just intellectual ascent. If God were like this stool, this word wouldn't be asking us to consider if it looked safe to sit in and to determine, yes, I think it looks fitting to be sat on. Rather, this word is saying to run to this stool and sit on it. Put my whole weight on this stool, trust it to hold me up by putting my faith into action. This is the kind of trust that is in view here.

It is tempting to put our trust in various things. For example, some put their trust in financial assets such as real estate or the stock market. Some put their trust in people such as a spouse, child or friend. Some put their trust in a political party, organization or other institution. Some don't trust anyone or anything and, in withdrawing their trust from all other avenues of life, they find that they can only trust themselves, all others have let them down or are too likely to hurt them.

Now, it's important to distinguish what God IS saying and NOT saying in this admonition to Trust Him. What He is saying is to Trust Him in everything and in every way. He is our highest authority and primary foundation. What is NOT being said here is that it is bad or wrong for us to use common sense and extend trust to one another and to the various functions of society around us, so long as it does not conflict with our trust in Him and also that it doesn't become a primary source of our hope or reliance.

For example, I trust, or rely on my spouse for many things. But I do not expect her to be or do things that are only meant for God. She is not my savior and I should not burden her with that expectation. If I leaned on her to fulfill me in that way I would be let down because she is human and was not created to meet that need in me, which only God can meet. So, in this, we can see that trust is extended to other people and things but in a lesser way than what we ultimately put on the Lord.

In this command to trust the LORD, we can pause to reflect on His Name. Here we see God's covenantal name used; not a title but rather something that speaks of His character and nature and relationship with us. The verse doesn't say "Trust in God" or "Trust in Adonai" or "Trust in the force"... it says, "Trust in Yahweh" the God who made a covenant with you. The One who redeemed you from your slavery and captivity. Trust in the One who brought you into His family by adoption and made you a joint heir with Christ. Trust in the God who formed you in your mother's womb and called you by name.

Lastly, in this phrase we are also told to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart.” The word heart is used here to speak of several things. I think it goes without saying that we know this is a figure of speech. God is not telling us to trust Him with the organ in our chest that is pumping blood throughout our body. Rather the heart is depicting that which is at the center of our being, the core of our life, the image of the heart is used throughout Scripture, and even throughout this book of Proverbs to refer to our heart as the center of our emotion, our intellect and our will.

Our emotions are often the first thing that react to situations, whether good or bad, with some form of expression. Now it is not wrong to ‘feel’ something which is just a reaction to a situation, but we must learn to not always ‘act’ on what we feel. But must instead determine if our reaction is wise, or sinful. A sinful reaction reveals that our heart is not wholly trusting in the Lord.

Beyond our emotions, we must trust the Lord with our intellect, with our thinking. This moves us out of the realm of emotional reaction and puts our conscious thinking and planning under the examination light. Am I trusting the Lord in how I think about things? Am I choosing to hold on to and mull over negative thoughts in my mind? When I am tempted to think about something that God says is wrong, do I still chose to dwell on it in my mind thinking that no harm will come as it’s all “inside” and nothing that anyone else will see or know?

Our thoughts have a powerful way of moving us down different paths and creating thought habits, whether healthy or unhealthy. When we trust the Lord with all of our thoughts, we are choosing to demonstrate our trust in Him by how we think and what we think about. When our thoughts are drawn to things that do not align with the Lord we must work to identify them, take them captive, and to focus our thoughts on something else.

Lastly, the heart is also the center of our will. Our will is something more nuanced than our emotion or intellect. Our will is the action center of our being. We may first “feel” something (emotionally, or reactionary to our environment or to a situation) and then we may quickly think about what we will say or do in response to that situation, but before we act, our Will can act as a final gate that keeps us from speaking or doing something that we’ll later regret.

Our “will” is something we want to have shaped by the Lord and what He says and values. In this way, our character becomes shaped into one who ‘trusts in the Lord’ at all times and in every way. When we trust in the Lord with all our heart, we have all of these avenues to consider in how that looks and plays out in our lives.

We began our examination of this phrase by taking note that it gives us an action step, something to do. As we consider what it means and looks like to trust the Lord, and how that plays out in various ways with regards to our emotions, thoughts and will. I hope you can begin to take in just how much there is to consider in this. Hopefully not in an overwhelming way, but in a “ah ha” these are things that I can begin to DO.

Now, as we’ve been given something “to do,” to “[Trust in the LORD with all your heart,](#)” let’s look at the next phrase and see what we are NOT to do, “[And lean not on your own understanding;](#)”

Here we see an example of a form of Hebrew poetry called “parallelism”. In the first phrase the word that is used is “Trust” but a similar word is used in the second line which is “to lean on”. The ideas of trust and lean are parallel and the repetition of use is meant to help bring clarity and expansion of the original thought.

Now, right off the bat we must say that this is a hard thing to “not do”. Our starting point of thought is to consider all of what we know, all of what we understand and to use it to solve the problem in front of us. In this we regularly rely on our understanding to make decisions and to navigate pretty much every aspect of life. And in the norm this works out for us and seems to be good... except when it doesn’t.

The reason that this is so hard to do is because we regularly do it, and we do it without much thought that we are doing it. In other words we don’t realize that we are trusting in our own understanding. We don’t “think about” how we know what we know, and whether or not it is reliable or not. We just ‘know’ and ‘decide’ and move on. But wisdom shows us another way.

The reality is that our lives are complex, and we can quickly fall into the fallacy of thinking that others are just like us, that they know what we know, and would do what we would do... and then, when they don’t, we don’t “understand” why and react to the situation.

Let me bring up a biblical illustration of this to help us understand what this might look like. According to Matthew 26:31-35, Jesus and His disciples have a conversation between their departure from the Last Supper before they get to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus tells them that they would all be made to stumble because of Him, and they would desert Him. Peter's response to Jesus was that he wouldn't, he was ready to go to prison or even to die with Him. Here we see that Peter did not know himself as well as Jesus knew him, Peter leaned on his own understanding... he knew that he loved Jesus, he had given his life to Jesus and he thought he would be willing to die for Jesus, but what he couldn't see is that the Jesus he loved was headed to death, headed into the hands of the enemies.

His misperception of Jesus, His misunderstanding of God's plan, made him boast in his self-perceived loyalty in the face of Jesus' direct words that he was about to fail. And in his stubbornness, he believed his own thinking and feelings over what Jesus said would happen. He was SO sure that he was right and Jesus was wrong that he could not accept what Jesus was telling him, nor heed the warning that was given.

And what is ironic about Peter's denial was that he caved not before the High Priest or other senior leaders of Israel, nor before Roman soldiers or rulers, he caved before a servant girl. Oh, how weak he was in reality. This is the danger of leaning on your own understanding. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:12 gives us an appropriate warning along these lines when he says, "[Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.](#)"

So, how do we avoid the trap of self-deception that Peter fell into? The danger of deception is that we don't know it when we are deceived. The answer is that we must know Jesus better, and know ourselves more honestly.

Humility is necessary to my ability to properly assess myself. If I think too much of myself I will quickly fall into the trap of leaning on my own understanding. But, if I realize that I don't know things, that my perspective is limited, my understanding may be flawed or incomplete, it will help me to not jump to conclusions.

Meanwhile, I must also grow in my understanding of Jesus. I must examine His character and better understand Him and His ways. The better I see Him the more easily I can see my need for Him, which increases my trust in Him and decreases my trust in myself.

As I continue to study and read the Scripture, I am reminded over and over again that God's plan will look differently than mine own. God says, "[For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,](#)" says the LORD. "[For as the](#)

heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is 55:8-9) And my response should be “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!*” (Rom 11:33) We do well to remember that “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*” (Prov 25:2) May we be those who glory in searching out the things of God and ponder on His mysterious ways!

And so, in order to not lean on our own understanding, we must first remember that what God is doing, or even allowing in our lives, may not make sense in this moment, but that He is still in control, that He is still utterly trustworthy. His ways may not make sense to us, but we don’t have the vantage point that He has. This may not make us “feel better” but it can be the starting point for our ability to rest in Him, to grow in our trust in Him and to allow His peace to enter in and guard our hearts and minds.

It is a normal thing for us to “want to make sense” of things in our lives... and sometimes we have the opportunity to see how things work out to God’s glory. But there are plenty of times where we won’t fully know how God was at work in situations until we are with Him and get to see Him face to face, until we “*know Him even as we are known.*” (1 Cor 13:12)

This leads us to our third phrase of these precious verses. “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him,*”. This phrase gives us more of the nuance of the “how” we are to trust Him.

So, what are “my ways”? And what does it mean to “Acknowledge God” in them? Proverbs often will refer to our “ways” or our “paths” as a poetic way of saying our decisions, plans, habits, actions or thoughts. In other words, it is another way of saying the whole of my life and all that I do, say or think in my life.

To acknowledge God does not mean to give a nod of recognition, but rather it demonstrates an intimate knowledge of God. To acknowledge Him is to submit to Him. So, in ALL that I am, have, or do, I should submit to Him. If I have a plan, I should submit it to Him. My hopes, my dreams, my aspirations should all be submitted to and shaped by Him.

So, what might this look like in our lives? This should play out in the big and monumental moments as well as in the everyday dealings of our lives. We need to

learn to trust God in hard times, in the midst of a trial or crisis, as well as in our successes and achievements. We even need to learn to practice our trust in the mundane moments of life as well. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that, “[whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.](#)”

Let me share an example of how these played out in a particular way in my life. When I was between my Junior and Senior years of High School, I was considering what colleges I should apply to. At that time in my life I had a desire to go into the ministry and so I was primarily looking at Christian Colleges where the Bible was the primary emphasis of their education. In fact, I had one college in mind, Multnomah Bible College in Portland, Organ. I was convinced, that was the only place that I should go to.

Over the summer between my Junior & Senior year, three different men who were all in various mentor roles in my life and from different places, each, individually strongly encouraged me to consider going to a secular school. Their advice made no sense to me as I didn’t see how I would get closer to the goal of serving in the ministry by attending a secular school. About that same time, two friends of mine were going to check out Cal Poly State University, about a 3 hour drive away from where we lived and invited me to come along. Road trip? Friends? Sounded like fun! Of course I wasn’t interested in the school at all, just the fun of the adventure.

BUT, when we got down there and saw the school, met the people, went to one of the mid-week CRU meetings, I left with a strong impression on my heart that this was the place God wanted me to go. I fought God on this and wrestled for weeks over this decision. But God continued to impress on me, through others and in my own heart and mind that this was what He wanted. So... I yielded and decided to trust the Lord. It made No Sense to my own understanding.

This was trusting God in a big moment. But then, the trial came. I was so dead set that this was God’s will, that I only applied to this one school. I knew I would get in... but then, I got a rejection letter. WHAT? This made no sense?! “God, if this was your will, and not what I wanted, why did you have me get rejected???” I was at a loss, it seemed that the Lord had let me down. I trusted Him and it failed. Or so I thought... Remember that His ways are not our ways.

The student that we stayed with on that visit, when he found out that I hadn’t been accepted, he told me that the school was trying to build up their summer school attendance and that, even though I had been rejected, I could re-apply for the summer school term. Well, it was a long shot, but I thought it couldn’t hurt. I



applied and got in! Trusting God in the trial, He showed Himself faithful and had a purpose and a plan.

Being there over the summer gave me the opportunity to be the first of all my friends to attend the school (about 6 or so of my friends were also planning to attend starting that fall). Over the summer, my CRU leader introduced me to the Calvary Chapel Pastor of the church that I would begin to attend. And it was at that church that my faith began to get fanned into a flame. It was at that church that I would attend the local Bible College, it was at that church that I would receive an impactful 1 on 1 discipleship. It was at that church that I would be ordained as a Pastor, meet my wife, and would be sent to the mission field.

God's ways were not my ways, and there was no way I could have planned for the path that God took me on. And as I look back at the way God used that season of my life, and the roundabout way He got me to where He did, I can only marvel at His goodness and His creativity.

I want to bring up one last point on this topic of how to trust God in "every" area of life. As we read through the Old Testament, and specifically the stories of the various kings of Judah, there is one sobering reality that we do well to receive its cautionary tale.

Most of the kings of Judah that started well did not end well, and their end came largely because they did not handle success well. While they were weak, small, poor, and dependent, they often showed great signs of faith and dependence on God, but when they began to experience success, power, influence, and wealth, their faith faltered and they acted as though they no longer needed God.

Be wary of this! Be wary of success! If or when you experience a measure of success, guard your heart from the tendencies of self-reliance. Instead give God ALL the glory and honor for the success you've experienced. Do not see it as the achievement you've accomplished but rather as a testimony of His grace in your life. "He who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

As we come to the end of this verse, God turns us from considering what we should do, not do, and how that should look in our lives to ponder on His promises. The final phrase of verse 6 says, "[And He shall direct your paths.](#)" Or other translations may say, "[He shall make your paths straight.](#)"

Our God is a Good Shepherd. He sees what is coming down the road. He knows what we need. He knows what we can handle. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He is gracious, gentle, and loving. His way is always best. When He is the one directing our steps and we demonstrate our trust in Him by walking as He directs, we will experience Him more and more. We will know His peace that passes understanding, even in the midst of the storm. We will feel His comfort even in the midst of our grief. We will be assured of His love even in the midst of our failures.

When we try to direct our own path, and do so in opposition to or ignorance of God, we can be assured that that pathway will lead to pain and suffering. But the pain and suffering that we experience when we walk in our own way is comfortless and miserable as it is devoid of God's peace. But this absence of peace is a way that God seeks to get our attention and to wake us up to our waywardness. For, if it leads us to repentance and to return to the Lord, then even in that suffering, God will transform our circumstances, our pain, our sin into something glorious, as He uses it for a good that we didn't know. Namely, the good of being brought back to Him and to experience His presence with renewed grace. But also, the good of being useful to Him to help others along the path of following Him.

The promises of God are a glorious thing to hold on to. They are the very things that He encourages us to remind Him of (not that He needs the reminder, but because they reflect His heart and align with His own desire for us). When we trust in the Lord, and God promises to guide our path, we can do no wrong by crying out to Him and saying, "How am I to navigate this new situation? Lord, please direct me where to go. Show me Lord how you want me to act." In praying these things we are both living out our trust in Him and praying according to His will.

Some of the ways that God may "direct our paths" is by removing obstacles that lie in our way. God's desire is to bring us to the appointed goal. In life, our primary goal is to be shaped into the image of Christ, and so, we should not be surprised when the path that God takes us on reveals things ugly in ourselves. It is His grace to do this so that we will see what He wants to begin to work on in us.

Also, God wants to make our paths straight, or to make it more clear, more obvious. He wants us to be able to see the path that He is laying out for us to walk and to have certainty and confidence in our walk in Him. David says in Psalm 18:36, "[You enlarged my path under me, So my feet did not slip.](#)" God makes our path enlarged under our feet. His desire is for us to experience His freedom as we

walk in His path, not His restriction. In Him all His promises are “Yes” and “Amen”. (2 Cor 1:20)

This is truly a blessed assurance that He gives us. And it is foundational to our trust in Him. As we grow in how to trust Him more and more, we find that it is indeed so sweet to us.

My hope today has been to help deepen your trust in the Lord. To help you see both its simplicity and complexity; To see what enemies you will face that will seek to cause your trust to waver. Perhaps one of the greatest enemies to putting your trust in the LORD is you yourself.

As you put your trust in the Lord, as you lean not on your own understanding, as you grow and learn to submit all your ways to Him, may you experience the fulfilment of His promise by His sovereign and loving hand directing your every step. There is no better place to be than resting in the center of His will.

Let's Pray



## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Proverbs 3:5-6

### Know Thyself, but know Jesus Better

**Summary:** Trust the Lord! It is both simple and complex, straight forward and yet nuanced; But it all begins by knowing Jesus better.

1. What warrior verses have you found to be particularly helpful to fight the battles in your life?
2. Do you have a “life verse” or something that has been an anchor to your faith through multiple season of life?
3. Trust is a very nuanced word and has broad application. Here are a few of the other Hebrew words for Trust. Look up the example passage for each and consider how the nuance of each word impacts your understanding of “Trust”.
  - Batach – run to for refuge, to be confident or sure, bold (2 Kings 18:5-30)
  - Khawsaw – to flee for protection, to confide in, make refuge, put trust (2 Sam 22:3,31)
  - Awman – to build up or support, to trust or believe, to be certain (Judges 11:20, Job 4:18)
  - Yachal – to wait, be patient, hope, trust (Job 13:15)
4. What area of your “heart” do you have the hardest time trusting the Lord with? (Emotional response, thoughts, or your will?)
5. How do you “not lean on your own understanding”? Are there any clues you watch for that may help you see when your understanding of something isn’t a good or reliable source of help?
6. What area of life do you find it the hardest to trust the Lord with? (i.e. The big moments, the trials, the everyday, in success, in the mundane, etc.)
7. Do you have a testimony where you did or didn’t trust the Lord (in a big or small way, etc.) and how did it end?
8. How do you trust the Lord in your successes and achievements? (Do you find it easier or harder than to trust Him in trials and difficulties?)
9. Do you have a particular promise of God that you cling to or often call to mind?