

Morning Praise @ Home 14th January 2024

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
cf Psalm 51

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading Proverbs 3: 5 – 6

Reflection from John

Trust, lean, listen to God for our way forward Proverbs 3:5-6

How many of you still possess a book that was given to you at an early stage of life – perhaps one with a presentation inscription written in it?

When I was aged 7 my Nan gave me my first Bible. It was the old King James version which was bound in royal blue synthetic leather. I was very pleased to receive it, only very rarely did I actually read it - but appreciated what was written inside..... I offer them as our Verse of the Year for 2024.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.*

These verses are usually read as wisdom for an individual but I think that they are full of equally profound wisdom for the Church - our Church - seeking God's way for its future.

Let's look at each of these in turn:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart....” (Proverbs 3:5a)

The word “trust” here “expresses that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence.” The object of that trust is the Living God.

All of us have varying degrees of self-confidence. We have skills and insights, inclinations, bias and prejudice. THEY CAN BE GOOD OR DESTRUCTIVE and the advice in our text for the year is make sure that we all learn to listen to God - hear from God in his word and look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The extent of that trust is **“with all your heart.”**

The next line is similar, but looks at it from the negative - what not to do. It gives us a powerful mental picture.

“Lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5b)

The word lean has the idea of putting your weight on something, trusting that it will not give way. We are to trust in God, but not put our weight or reliance on our own limited understanding, insight, or discernment. It is so easy for us to miss a key piece of the puzzle and thus completely misunderstand or misconstrue a situation. We seek wisdom! We desire discernment! But we must realize that our understanding is imperfect. Verse 7a underscores this:

“Do not be wise in your own eyes.” (Proverbs 3:7a)

The third line of our passage fills out the idea – **“In all your ways submit to him....”** (Proverbs 3:6a)

In English, “to submit” means “to recognize the rights, authority of someone,” which, in practice, sometimes amounts to giving a nod in God’s direction and hoping for his approval of our choices. But the word in Hebrew is much, much broader and richer than that.

So perhaps it’s better to read this line as, “In all your ways *know* him deeply.” It involves much more than an acknowledgement. Rather, a seeking to know, an earnestness to find his will. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases the idea this way:

“Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go.” (Proverbs 3:6a)

A casual acknowledgement of God by a person and a Church can mask an arrogance that doesn’t really desire to know. We can be a PCC, an eldership or a minister and develop a practiced deafness towards God when we actually only want him to rubber-stamp our own plans and preferences with the word “Approved.” But when we seek to know God and **listen** for his voice, there is a humility, an openness. That very humility allows us to listen to him and discern his way for the future. Without humility we will never have God-given wisdom.

The Promise (Proverbs 3:6b)

If we will **trust, lean, and listen to God**, the promise is grand:

“He will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:6b)

Verse 6a begins, “in all your ways,” referring to one’s path or road, figuratively, one’s way or lifestyle. Verse 6b uses a close synonym – “to make straight, level,” the opposite of “crooked, bent.”

When we patiently and faithfully seek God, he will respond by straightening our paths and levelling them out, so that we find what God wants and pursue it.

TODAY IS AN INVITATION TO EVERYONE seeking the Lord

These little verses are a guide to straightening out our lives. So that we collectively point in God’s direction. In practice what does that mean?

Trust, rely on, cling to the Lord. Do your best to come to him with an undivided heart, a heart that casts all its cares upon the Lord and is not motivated by fear, but by faith.

Surrender your insistence on understanding. Sometimes we demand answers from God before we’ll obey. “I have to understand. After all I am a human being responsible for all my actions.” No. We are servants, foot soldiers, not generals. *He* is the general. Only *He* needs to comprehend the overall plan. We move forward in step with God’s ways.

1. **Seek to “know” the Lord deeply.** Spend time before him listening, silent. So often in prayer we seek some goal, some “thing” -- and that is valid. But so often, we fail to *seek the Lord himself* and become acquainted with *his* ways. Let every path you find yourself on be bathed in prayer and trust. He cares about you and all the details of your life. Don’t seek God’s approval for your plans; rather seek to discern his plans for your life and then follow them.

The promise is wonderful! Yes, he will guide us. But he will also straighten out and level up our paths - our plans - as we stop pretending that we all know what’s best for the Church in Burton - as we consciously seek him and live our **lives together in him. Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him and he will make your paths straight.*

Thank you Father that you know all things and that we can put all our needs and necessities into your hands. Keep us trusting in you.

Loving Father thank you that you are with us to lead and direct us in all life's decisions.
We pray that not only in the difficult times but in every situation of life, we would submit to you.

We know our world wanders far from your ways of peace and justice; with us, war, terror, and injustice are in plain sight. We pray for peace where there is war and violence, praying, in particular, for those working for peace in Gaza and Israel, Sudan and Ukraine.

We pray for those seeking to turn away from spirals of violence which lead to ever more hatred; and for those working to expose injustice that light and right might triumph; in particular we give thanks for those who have worked so hard to fight for justice for post office workers wrongly accused of dishonesty, where the powerful have covered up the truth and now seek to shift the blame.

Lord we pray for all those in our community who are suffering illness or bereavement. Be with them Lord, comfort them, comfort all of us when we feel alone, ill, frail and wondering what lies next for us.
Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**