

## Wise Choices Proverbs 3:1-8

<sup>5</sup>*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup>in all your ways know him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

Proverbs 3:5-6, the verses inscribed in the book Mr Young, the schoolmaster who oversaw our school Christian group, gave me when I finished what was then sixth form, now year 12. Guidance to someone who would face many decisions in the years ahead and had a lot of growing up to do.

[The book was 'Modern Art and the Death of a Culture', by Hans Rookmaaker]

And I have found those verses a continuing help in charting my course through life, in making the myriad decisions that life brings to us and determining how I would act in the changing circumstances of our lives.

A continuing help because they make clear the choice we have to make and keep on making in all our choices – whether to trust the Lord or not by doing what He commands, and a continuing help because with the emphasis on all they place every decision in every aspect of my life in the context of my relationship with the living God.

And as I have found these verses helpful over the 52 years since I finished school I thought I would remind you of them and commend them to you as guidance from God in whatever stage of life you are in.

For we all face many choices every day.

It is not like as a believer you just have to make one choice – to follow the Lord Jesus, and that is it.

That is the foundational choice, but that choice then must be expressed in countless other choices

Some big, some small

Some we only have to make once, some daily

Some choices leading to good, to enjoying and growing in our relationship to God and doing good to others, and others to harm and ruin

Taking to heart these words

<sup>5</sup>*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own understanding;  
<sup>6</sup>in all your ways know him,  
and he will make your paths straight.  
<sup>7</sup>Don't be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and turn away from evil.  
<sup>8</sup>This will be healing for your body  
and strengthening for your bones.*

Will mean you will make good choices, life promoting choices, every day

When I first started thinking about this passage I was planning to preach on vv. 1-12, but there was too much. So I am first going to look at the context, and then focus on vv. 5-8 only.

This is the life of believers in Jesus

*Proverbs 3: My son, don't forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commands;  
<sup>2</sup>for they will bring you  
many days, a full life, and well-being.*

Verses 5-8 words are given in Proverbs 3 in the context of a parent encouraging and exhorting their child to embrace and treasure the wisdom they are teaching them [2:1-12]. The text says son, and in that time and culture the son was the recipient of this formal instruction, but it includes sons and daughters for women are plainly included in the teaching and transmission of wisdom. The instruction is given by a father or mother [Prov. 1:8],

*Proverbs 1: <sup>8</sup>Hear, my son, your father's instruction,  
and forsake not your mother's teaching,*

Wisdom is pictured as a woman [1:20, 8:1-9:12], and the embodiment of wisdom is the wife of noble character in Proverbs 31:10 ff. Then as now, wisdom is for women and men, girls and boys.

And the parent is encouraging the child to embrace wisdom, and especially the instruction they are about to give in chapter 3, because of the blessing it brings

*3:<sup>2</sup>for they will bring you  
many days, a full life, and well-being. CSB*

*3:<sup>2</sup>for length of days and years of life  
and peace they will add to you. ESV*

Wisdom promotes life, but the chief blessing is 'well-being', or 'peace'.

The Hebrew word translated as well being or peace is shalom.

It is hard for one English word to capture the sense of shalom, for in Scripture shalom is a rich state.

It is more than the cessation of war. There may be a cease fire in Gaza, but when they stop the shooting and the bombing they will be a long way from shalom.

Shalom is peace within – no inner turmoil.

It is peace without, harmony with our neighbours.

It is peace with plenty, no fear of want

It is peace with security, because it speaks of peace, of being right with our Creator,

When we are right with him, no enemy need be feared for He is Lord of all those who produce and those who wield weapons of war [Is. 54:15-17]

And the powers of Nature need not be feared, for the LORD rules the wind and waves, the flames and the movement of the earth

Shalom is peace with wholeness, with no fear of decay or sudden loss.

You get a taste of the shalom wisdom brings in 3:21-26

*3:<sup>23</sup>Then you will walk on your way securely,  
and your foot will not stumble.*

*<sup>24</sup>If you lie down, you will not be afraid;  
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.*

<sup>25</sup> *Do not be afraid of sudden terror  
or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes,  
<sup>26</sup> for the Lord will be your confidence  
and will keep your foot from being caught.*

And a picture of shalom can be found in Isaiah 65's vision of the new creation 65:17-25 which concludes

*Is. 65:  
<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
and dust shall be the serpent's food.  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain,"  
says the Lord.*

Shalom, peace in God's world because you are at peace with God, is wonderful, something we can feel the goodness of, something to be desired

And shalom is the great goal of wisdom

But here is a difference between believers in Jesus and the first readers of Proverbs.

For believers in Jesus these verses don't tell us how to attain, to get, that peace and wisdom. They tell us how we live with, express the reality of the peace and wisdom God has already given us, even as we move to their fuller expression in the new heavens and earth.

The gospel tells us believers in Jesus are people who already have peace, peace with God, the foundation and assurance of all that shalom promises

*Romans 5: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

More, that through faith in Jesus we already share in anticipation in the new creation where peace reigns

*2 Corinthians 5: <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

And believers have peace with God because believers in Jesus have already embraced wisdom in embracing Christ through repentance and faith in the gospel.

Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God 1 Cor. 1:23-24. In his earthly life Jesus was the model of the wise life growing in wisdom as He grew to maturity

*Luke 2: <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.*

But he is more. He is the one in whom wisdom is embodied, the one in whom, in His death and rising which reconciled all things to God, is found all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge Col. 2:3

Knowing that we have peace and wisdom in Christ these verse from Proverbs 3 show us what it is to live at peace with God because they tell us how to live a wise life like Christ's. To put it another way, having been adopted as God's children through faith in Christ [John 1:12] these verses give us a picture of the life of God's children, people who are being transformed by the Spirit to be like Christ by living out the wisdom Christ Himself practiced.

What does that life look like? As part of the answer, the part we are focusing on, Prov. 3:5-8 tells us it looks like Trusting the Lord in all in all things, in all the paths we take, the decisions we make.

Choose the way of Christ, not the way of Adam vv. 5-8

<sup>5</sup>*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own understanding;*

<sup>6</sup>*in all your ways know him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

<sup>7</sup>*Don't be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

<sup>8</sup>*This will be healing for your body  
and strengthening for your bones.*

This is how we keep following the Lord Jesus, how we keep growing

Verses 5 and 7 may seem to be saying the same thing, but there is a difference in emphasis

v. 5 says live like Christ, and deals with fundamental attitudes

v. 7 focuses on what to do in specific temptations, and says don't be like Adam

and we will go through vv. 5-8 verse by verse

What is it to trust in the LORD?

It is firstly to believe what HE says.

To believe what He says about Himself

To believe that what He promises is certainly true and reliable

That the warnings He gives are real

That what He commands is good, and for our good

But that believing is not just an intellectual assent – saying in your head – yes, I think that is the case.

It is a believing that entrusts your life into His hands by doing what He says, relying on Him to be the God He has said He is, making your decisions based on His faithfulness to His promises and the reality of His warnings

It is the faith that obeys

For us that is believing the gospel of our Lord Jesus, and trusting Him

It is in Christ who comes to us in the gospel that the LORD most clearly reveals Himself – He who has seen me has seen the Father, said our Lord.

It is from Christ that we receive the promises of God

It is in the gospel that we are warned of the judgement to come

And we are His disciples as we are taught to do all He has commanded.

To trust in the LORD is to live in the obedience of faith in the Lord Jesus we meet in the gospel word, and Proverbs 3:5 reminds us that how we start the Christian life is how we continue to live it, repenting and trusting the Lord Jesus each day.

That trust is to be with all our heart.

The heart is the thinking, willing, feeling centre of our being, the source of our words and actions [Matt. 12:34, 15:18-20]

So we are to trust Him with, our mind, our will, our emotions

No part of ourselves is excluded from trusting Christ

And that is how we start in the Christian life

The total commitment of denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following Jesus, losing our life to find it in Him [Mark 8:34-38], counting all things as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord [Phil. 3:10-11].

Proverbs 3:5 tells us our thinking, our attitudes to people and circumstances, must continue to be shaped by His word

Our actions directed by His word

Our emotions to be brought into line with His truth

And trusting in the LORD with all our heart excludes relying on our own understanding

We need to hear that, because we are always tempted to rely on our own understanding when making our choices, that is to make our thinking and our imagination the standard by which we measure what God says, by which we limit who God can be, what God can say and what He can expect of us.

Relying on our own understanding is talking about a pervasive attitude to God and His word that is the opposite of trusting the Lord for when we rely on our own understanding we are putting our trust in ourselves

This can show in two ways

It shows in not accepting what God has said.

Lots of examples of where people rely on their own understanding

Some will say – embodied life is an affront to God's dignity, so

Jesus couldn't have possibly been God and man

Or people will say God is love, and so no-one will be condemned, despite all Scripture says about the judgement

Or some will say you really can serve God and money and my wealth shows me I am right

We rely on our own understanding when we don't accept what God has said and conform our thinking and acting to His word.

But we can also rely on our understanding when we substitute what we think God should be pleased with for what God says He is pleased with

This can look very religious, and we can fool ourselves into thinking we are worshipping God, and be angry with God when He says no – I won't accept that.

An example of that is Saul in 1 Sam. 15

Saul had not done as God had directed in executing God's judgement on the Amalekites He had not destroyed them completely.

When Samuel asked him why he had not obeyed God he said

*1 Samuel 15: <sup>20</sup>And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. <sup>21</sup>But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."*

Hear Saul – we were well motivated, thinking about what God would like

To which Samuel replied

*<sup>22</sup>And Samuel said,*

*"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*

*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.*

*<sup>23</sup>For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has also rejected you from being king."*

Doing things for God which He has never asked of you – like any manner of rituals, and neglecting to do what He has asked

Like Love your neighbour, to love your brothers and sisters

Is to rely on your own understanding

Another example is the Pharisees in the New Testament.

TO be confident in your judgement of yourself, that you are righteous because you have kept your own rules, while rejecting God's judgement on your life – that you are a sinner, is to be rely on your own understanding, to be putting your trust in yourself, not God.

Since God has made Himself and His will known, to prefer your understanding, to put that in the place of what God has said, is foolish.

Your understanding can't compete with God

WE are so finite – we don't know what will happen tomorrow. God does.

Our understanding is so frail – we have an opinion about something, even a firm one, and then more facts emerge, and we have to change what we think

And our understanding is so flawed – there are some things we just don't want to know, to admit to ourselves, things that put us in a bad light or suggest we should stop doing something we enjoy

Think about the LORD's understanding – He knows the future, He knows all things, He knows the end from the beginning, He knows the why, the purpose of things happening. Being almighty, He knows with certainty because he makes it happen

It makes no sense to rely on our own understanding instead of trusting God

When we rely on our own understanding the problem is not using our minds to think about what God has said.  
 The problem, in those who say they are believers, is a defective repentance which flows through the whole life.  
 The gospel calls for us to repent and believe

To say we are wrong in not believing what God says, wrong in not obeying Him, wrong in living as the Lords, the bosses, of our own lives when we are creatures who depend on God for life, and breath, and everything.

And to confess Jesus, crucified and risen is Lord, and we should trust and obey Him.

And gospel repentance is not a one off, it is a constant attitude to God and His word

Where we have given up telling God what He must be like, or what he can and cannot expect us to do

Instead we say, as Jesus did, not my will, but yours be done – and trusting God commit our lives to Him and do what He says

We rely on Him, not ourselves, so that we live knowing Him in all the paths we take

*<sup>6</sup> in all your ways know him,  
 and he will make your paths straight.*

Notice the emphasis on all – all our heart, all our ways – without exception

To know Him in all our ways means we will go down every path we take, every course of action we undertake, in conscious relationship with the Lord through His word

Every step of the way relying on Him by trusting His promise, obeying His commands, listening to His warnings

Every step of the way, all our lives

So you listen to His word and Marry – a Christian – good

But knowing Him in all our ways means we don't stop there

We live in our marriages every day guided by His word

You get honest Work, that will support you and your family – good

But in your work you know Jesus is your Lord – so you seek to please Him, to work as if you are in His presence  
*and he will make your paths straight.*

Is that saying that the test of your trusting the Lord will be a trouble free life, with the inference that those who have difficulties have not been as good believers as those who don't?

No

In Proverbs there is a contrast between the crooked way and the straight way

Proverbs 2 has spoken of those who

*Proverbs 2: <sup>14</sup> who rejoice in doing evil  
 and delight in the perverseness of evil,*

as

*<sup>15</sup> men whose paths are crooked,  
 and who are devious in their ways.*

Again, Proverbs 21

*21: <sup>8</sup>The way of the guilty is crooked,  
but the conduct of the pure is upright.*

The way of the wicked is crooked, and it conveys two senses. Their way is – not straightforward, obscuring their goal, devious

But it also suggests it is more arduous, less likely to get to their goal

With a Straight path – the destination clear, and it is also the shortest, the direct, way – the way that in the end uses less energy and gets us reliably to our destination

Those who trust the LORD with all their hearts, who know Him in all their ways, will find the Lord will make their paths straight

Make – the way of trusting obedience may not appear that way at first, may seem the more difficult

Like Jesus' way, that met with opposition and abuse, and murderous hatred

But trusting Him – He will make it straight

It will be clearer, easier to follow, for there is only one person to listen to and take direction from, the Lord

And it will reliably bring you to your destination, to what the Lord has promised you – as Jesus' path took Him to the resurrection and reign at the Father's right hand, took Him in trusting obedience on the only path that would take Him there, the way of the cross.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart – be like Christ

And don't be like Adam

*<sup>7</sup>Don't be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

Being wise in your own eyes is relying on yourself, your own judgement, to give you the best life in this world, to promote your flourishing in this life.

When a particular decision confronts you, you evaluate it in terms of your own preferences – does it suit me, how does it make me feel, and not in terms of God's word

That is exactly what Adam and Eve did

It is exactly what our society promotes – you do you, no-one knows better than you what will give you your best life so be true to yourself, your own desires and feelings

And exactly the opposite of the way the Lord Jesus lived

How did Eve make the decision to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3?

*Genesis 3: <sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

She looked to herself – to what pleased her, what she considered would enhance her life, satisfy her desires – for beauty, for food, for wisdom



And she and Adam then preferred their assessment of what was good to God's word, His clear command and warning – in the day you eat of it you shall surely die.

They were wise in their own eyes, confident they knew better than God what was good for them

And they got death, not the life they desired, and not just for themselves.

Why did the religious leaders of Jesus' day think they could solve their problems by killing an innocent man, when God clearly forbids the shedding of innocent blood

*John 11: 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. 50 Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."*

They feared destruction by the Romans and were convinced they knew better than God how they could secure themselves and their nation

They were wise in their own eyes, and their actions ensured in the end the destruction of what they sought to protect, their nation and their capital, Jerusalem

Why does our society not just tolerate but promote all kinds of sexual immorality which God forbids?

Wise in their own eyes, following their desires, they claim sexual freedom promotes human happiness

But it doesn't. It promotes lack of commitment in relationships, instability in families, exploitation of the weak. It enslaves, not frees.

They are wise in their own eyes

To be wise in your own eyes, trusting yourself rather than trusting the Lord, brings confusion [Is. 5:20-23], disappointment – for it does not deliver what it promises, and condemnation.

When faced with a choice, and especially where we feel our desires pushing us to set aside God's word we should instead

*fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

To fear the LORD is to relate to the LORD with believing awe

It is acknowledging the truth of God – that He is the almighty, just holy Creator, the great I am who has life in Himself, the judge of all

And we are creatures, whose life depends on Him

So we tremble to disobey His word

And at the same time trust Him wholeheartedly for we know He keeps His word

There is no fear of the LORD without that whole hearted trust, including trust in His mercy and grace

Fearing the LORD is to give Him the trust and reverence which is His due

And those who fear the Lord are those who tremble at His word – always

For them God's word never becomes domesticated, something we can control and use for our own ends, or disregard when it suits

It is always the word of the living God

And heeding it they will turn from evil

Not just because they fear God's righteous judgment

They see that in Scripture and shudder, knowing there is no escape

That there is no peace for the wicked [Is 57:21]

But they also know that God revealed in His word, revealed in the gospel, is good, kind and gracious

Who reveals His will for our good, to bless

And so they trust that what God has forbidden, He has forbidden for their good

And His way is best, even if for the moment it seems hard to deny themselves

say no to desires the world says we should pursue

to do what doesn't seem to make sense to others

Like being faithful in a difficult marriage, or using wealth, not for luxury and self indulgence but to do good, or power not to promote your own interests but to serve, like our Lord Jesus, or to love your enemy

The Lord Jesus lived trusting His father with all His heart and feared the LORD

In His whole life – from the temptation on, where He looked to God's word for His response, not to what might have seemed right in his own eyes

His fear of the LORD was seen – in His conforming His life to the Father's word

In his determination to do the Father's will

In His setting His face towards Jerusalem

And especially in the garden, where He humbled Himself to drink the cup the Father presented to Him.

To fear the LORD was the incarnate Son's choice

To trust and obey

And it was life, not just for Him, but for all who trust Him

Fearing the Lord and turning from evil

*<sup>8</sup>This will be healing for your body  
and strengthening for your bones.*

That is Not a promise that those who trust the LORD, fear the LORD, will always be healthy and pain free, as we see in the Lord Jesus

It is a way of speaking of enjoying peace

In Proverbs certain behaviours and situations are said to rot the bones, bring a pain you cannot get away from

*Proverbs 12: <sup>4</sup>An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,  
but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.*

*Proverbs 14: <sup>30</sup> A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh,  
but envy makes the bones rot.*

By contrast – *15: <sup>30</sup> The light of the eyes rejoices the heart,  
and good news refreshes the bones.*

*16: <sup>24</sup> Gracious words are like a honeycomb,  
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

Living in fear of the Lord will bring wholeness, inner integrity and frees from shame, it protects you from those behaviours that bring a constant grief and unease.

It makes a life of genuine contentment a possibility – a contentment that includes a sure hope, for Jesus who knew pain and grief, affliction of body and soul on the cross, because He trusted the Lord with His whole heart, feared the Lord and turned from evil, and He has risen, and reigns, and will raise all God's children

*<sup>5</sup> Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own understanding;*

*<sup>6</sup> in all your ways know him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

*<sup>7</sup> Don't be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

*<sup>8</sup> This will be healing for your body  
and strengthening for your bones.*

This is the believers life, the way we grow and make progress as God's children in all things

It is the way vindicated by our Lord Jesus, in His saving suffering and death, and His rising

And that should persuade us all of the rightness of this way of life for us.

But just as some children, despite being told, only learn how dangerous fire is by being touched by the flame and can personally testify, if they survive, of the wisdom of the instruction they ignored

So some of us can speak of how good it is to trust the Lord with all our hearts and to fear the Lord because we know how bitter a thing it is to be wise in our own eyes

And that includes me

A long time ago, well before any here knew me and so the details only concern myself, I deceived myself that I could be an exception to living by God's word

That if what I was doing felt good, that if I could talk myself into thinking it would lead to a good outcome, it was ok to do what God had forbidden.

It seems dumb when you put it like that, but sin isn't smart

Thankfully God in His mercy confronted me with my sin, made it impossible to keep living with my wilful blindness

But I can honestly say being wise in my own eyes brought me, not the happiness I was seeking, but the most miserable time in my life, a most bitter experience that did harm and brought shame

But I can also testify that our gracious God did more than expose my sin

I found the experience of the Psalmist to be true.

He heard my cry for mercy and forgave me

*Psalm 130: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!*

<sup>2</sup> *O Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive*

*to the voice of my pleas for mercy!*

<sup>3</sup> *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,*

*O Lord, who could stand?*

<sup>4</sup> *But with you there is forgiveness,*

*that you may be feared.*

The Lord forgives those who repent and confess their sin, and the proud self trust that lies behind it

A forgiveness that doesn't make you indifferent to sin, but promotes fear of the LORD

And a determination to never again be wise in my own eyes

So when I have said, as I have said to some of you, it would be better to die than continue in sin, I am speaking with knowledge of the pain and grief of disobeying our good God, of treating His grace and truth with contempt

And when I have urged you to turn from it and confess, and find forgiveness, it has been with the conviction born of experience that the LORD is gracious and merciful, generous and patient in His love, and faithful to His word, to His promise of mercy to all who call on Him

So – if you are a believer and sinning – saying you are a follower of Christ but still relying on your own understanding to nurse your pride, or remain unforgiving, or covetous, or grumbling, or sexually immoral

Justifying to yourself your disobedience because it is right in your eyes – persuading yourself you have a right to your anger, or to hold on to your unforgiveness, or that sexual immorality feels good and so can't be bad

Turn back, fear the Lord and turn from evil

The way of Adam is the way of death

Relying on your won understanding, putting your trust in yourself, only leads away from God

But the way of trusting the Lord with your whole heart in all you do, including trusting His promise of forgiveness, is the way of life, the only way

Why die

And If you are not a believer but are conscious of the bankruptcy and insecurity of being wise in your own eyes

That it can't deliver peace, that lasting peace wisdom brings

See in Jesus that paradoxically trusting the LORD, the path of dying, is the way to life

Hear Him when he calls you to entrust yourself into His hands by believing His promise and living by His teaching

And trust Him. Risen from the dead, He lives with the authority to forgive you your determined reliance on yourself, and to give you a new life – the life of God's adopted child, lived in trusting reliance on Him

<sup>7</sup> *Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.*

<sup>8</sup> *This will be healing for your body, and strengthening for your bones.*