



Catalog No. 7263

Proverbs 3:1-12

First Message

Andrew Drake

August 17th, 2008

## LOVING AND TRUSTING GOD

All my life I have been a bit of a worrier. I must admit that much of my life has been driven by fear. Growing up with parents who didn't get along and who eventually got divorced, it has always been easy for me to imagine and expect that the worst-case scenario is just around the corner. It is hard for me to trust God and to live in the freedom of his love. The passage we will look at this morning has been very helpful to me in addressing my fears and my lack of trust of the Lord.

It is one thing for me to live with worry, but I desperately do not want my children to be driven by fear. I want nothing more than for them to experience the love of God and to love him with all their heart. My kids are a gift from the Lord, and I have been given a great opportunity to nurture them in faith and encourage them to draw near to their loving Heavenly Father. I know how much I fall short, and that drives me to the Lord in prayer and to his word.

As I look to the scriptures for wisdom and strength to grow in love and trust of the Lord, I am drawn to the book of Proverbs. In the first seven chapters we are presented with a loving and devoted father who follows the mandate given in Deuteronomy. He is exhorting his son to draw near to God, and diligently teaching him how to live favorably with God and his surrounding community.

The father's curriculum for his son comes in the form of ten separate lessons. Over the next three weeks we will look at three of these lessons. Today, we will look at loving and trusting God; next week, loving our neighbor; and finally, avoiding sexual immorality and loving our spouse.

The instruction given is very appropriate for everyone here. It is not just for young people, but for all who desire to love and trust the Lord God with all our heart and who seek to help others do the same.

In our text the father gives his son four specific and practical ways in which he can express his love and trust for the Lord.

### **We express our love for the Lord by treasuring His Word**

**My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but keep my commands in your heart,  
for they will prolong your life many years  
and bring you peace and prosperity.**

**Let love and faithfulness never leave you;  
bind them around your neck,  
write them on the tablet of your heart.**

### **Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and humankind. (Proverbs 3:1-4 TNIV)**

The first thing the father exhorts his son to do is to put the scriptures deeply into his heart. The goal of Proverbs, and all scripture, is not to encourage moral living but to know and love God. For the biblical writers, the heart is the center of one's emotional, intellectual, religious, and moral activity. A person's decisions and actions follow the condition and leaning of the heart.

It is vital therefore for the son to treasure God's word, to meditate on it and memorize it, to follow and keep it. It is to be etched so deeply and permanently on his heart that he will not forget it and not stray far from it. He will have it in the forefront of his mind and ready on his lips to be applied in any situation. Like a necklace that is permanently fastened around his neck, wherever he goes the word of God is there with him.

I have so much miscellaneous information deeply imbedded in my heart and mind because I believe it to be important. I know my 9-digit Social Security number, 10-digit bank account and savings account numbers, 16-digit credit card number, even passwords for Internet accounts, among other things.

What is truly important is to have more of the word of God deep within my heart to fend off the temptations and attacks of the evil one; to have the scripture ready on my lips, not only to give an account for the hope that is within me, but also to bring a word of comfort and encouragement to those who are struggling.

There are a variety of ways for us to hear the scriptures throughout the week. I listen to sermons on Sunday, radio Bible teachings during the week, devotional readings and Bible study. But I have found that my favorite and probably most effective way of etching the word of God on my heart is listening to worship songs in the car. Something about having the scripture set to music helps me hear it in a new way. It penetrates deeply into my heart, and because I sing the songs repeatedly, they are easy to remember and recall when I need them.

In verse 2 the father tells his son that a favorable result of keeping the word of God is that his life will be prolonged many years and he will enjoy peace and prosperity. Does the father promise too much? He seems to promise more than our life experience validates. We know of many godly men and women whose lives have been neither long nor prosperous.

But I believe the father is highlighting for the son that in contrast to the fool who ignores the word of God, those who keep the word will not have their life wasted away in wickedness and shame.

It is important to remember that the Book of Proverbs considers “life” to be more than just this earthy life, but also life beyond the grave. Death does not have the last word. Longevity, peace, and prosperity are enjoyed as gifts in a relationship with God that lasts for all eternity. The scope of the father’s teaching to his son therefore looks into and beyond this present life.

In vv 3 and 4, the father exhorts his son not only to place the scripture at the center of his heart, but to apply it in all his relationships. He says, “Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and humankind.”

Love and faithfulness are used throughout scripture to describe the character of God. The father is saying that as you keep the word of God let the character of God shine through in all your relationships. Your love and faithfulness will cause others to delight in your presence and bring you a good reputation in both human and divine spheres.

So our first expression of love towards God is to treasure and keep his word, bringing it to the very center of our life, and applying it in our relationships. The second expression of how we can “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind” is given in verses 5 through 8:

### **We express our love for the Lord by trusting Him in all our ways**

**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.**

**Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
fear the LORD and shun evil.  
This will bring health to your body  
and nourishment to your bones. (3:5-8)**

Not only is the son encouraged to place the Lord and his word at the center of his heart and relationships, he is also to express his love for the Lord by trusting him and his word in every circumstance and situation of life.

How is this son able to trust the Lord so completely? It is important to notice that the father transitions from using the more general term “God” in v 4 to the very personal and specific term “Lord” in v 5. The father makes it clear to his son that the One whom he is to love with all his heart is trustworthy because he is the Lord Yahweh, the faithful covenant keeping God of Israel who overcame their enemies and delivered them from bondage and oppression. The Lord never failed them even when his people turned away from him.

To trust the Lord with “all” our heart underscores that we are to trust him completely in every area of life. We are to trust him in times of sorrow and gladness; to trust him with our pain, our doubts, and our fears; trust him with our body and our soul. We are called to trust him with our marriage, our children, our friends; with our job, our finances, and our ministry. We trust

him even with our past, present, and future. Our trust must be total or it is not really trust at all.

One of my favorite memories of total trust in action is when my son Evan wanted to learn how to swim. He desperately wanted to enjoy the deep end of the pool just like his older sister. It became clear early on that when I began to teach him how to swim, I could not help him until he fully trusted me. It wasn’t until he let go of the side of the pool with both hands and clung to me that I was able to give him what he wanted most.

I believe trusting God is like that. It is a letting go of life on our own terms, a letting go of living life in our own strength and clinging with all our might to the One who loves us and seeks to give us himself, our heart’s greatest desire.

In verse 7 it seems the father contradicts himself. How can he suggest trusting the Lord and fearing the Lord at the same time? Often we fear those we cannot trust, but in these verses fear and trust are compatible and complementary. To fear the Lord is not to find him scary but to take him seriously. Proverbs 22:4 puts it simply, “Humility is the fear of the LORD.”

It is no coincidence that command to “fear the LORD” is coupled with the command “shun evil.” They are often found together in scripture promoting godliness and goodness (Job 1:1; 28:28). Proverbs 8:13 makes the same point “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way.”

Adam and Eve did not trust and fear God in this way. They did not take his word or his warning seriously. Instead of trusting God and turning away from evil they did what “seemed right in their own eyes,” and the consequences were severe. Instead of enlightenment and freedom they experienced guilt and shame, instead of life they tasted death.

To trust and fear the LORD is to enjoy a relationship with him that produces the fruit of humble obedience.

Throughout vv 5-8 we read that the favorable results of trusting the Lord include having “straight paths” and a “healthy, well nourished body.” Once again we see the father highlighting for the son that if he follows the way of the Lord he will avoid the unhealthy and deadly pattern of behavior associated with evil and foolish ways. This does not mean that the son would not face conflict or suffering, but rather his path would not be crooked and perverse like way of the wicked whose lives are wasted away stumbling in darkness.

No matter what hardships come our way the Lord is present, and he is the only source of wholeness and peace that nourishes and heals the very deepest part of who we are.

In vv 9 and 10 the father gives a third very concrete way in which this love and trust of the Lord is made manifest.

### **We express our love and trust of the Lord by honoring Him with our wealth**

**Honor the LORD with your wealth,  
with the firstfruits of all your crops;  
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,  
and your vats will brim over with new wine. (3:9-10)**

The “firstfruits” symbolizes the first and the best of the harvest. The father is exhorting his son that when he brings his offering to the temple as an act of worship, he is to demonstrate his love and trust of the Lord by giving his first and very best.

The point of the exhortation is to hold nothing back in devotion to the Lord. This is more than just giving to the Lord from your wealth; it is honoring the Lord with your wealth. The father is not directing his son to give to God from his surplus, after his barns are full and his vats are overflowing. He is saying, give to God first and trust him for what comes next.

Our wealth can be used to honor the Lord and benefit the community, but it can also supplant our trust in God. The temptation of wealth is that we depend on our possessions and savings for security and significance rather than cling to the Lord for our life.

Giving to the Lord out of our abundance can be an act of thanksgiving, but generous giving to the Lord right up front is an act of faith and trust. By giving to the Lord first we are declaring that our trust is not in our wealth; it is in the Lord. It is this kind of faith and trust that brings honor to the Lord.

Do we determine the lifestyle we want and then give God a portion of what’s left over, or do we go to the Lord first seeking his guidance in determining our lifestyle? All our resources come from the hand of the Lord and we are individually and uniquely accountable to him for how we use his gifts.

I’ve had people ask me, “How much should I give? Should I give 10%? Is that 10% before or after taxes?” But this kind of discussion misses the point, because what the Lord wants is 100% of our heart. Jesus himself said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt 6:21).

Writing to the Corinthian church, the apostle Paul on two separate occasions gives helpful guidelines on this issue.

**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made (1 Cor 16:2).**

**Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Let each one give what he has decided in his heart to give; not reluctantly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:6-8).**

Paul suggests that money offered for the Lord’s work is to be set aside first, and the amount given is to be in keeping with our income. I appreciate Paul’s guidelines, and I believe they express our trust in the Lord in a way that honors him.

In verse 10, the father tells his son that if he loves the Lord by honoring him with his wealth, then he will have all that he needs, and more: “then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

The imagery is obviously of great abundance. The life-giving provision of God is beyond measure. The scriptures never promise that we will have all that we want, but they assure us that as

the people of God we have a deep well of spiritual fertility able to produce a bountiful spiritual harvest. We are God’s children, rich in the currency of his kingdom. We have an endless supply of his grace, forgiveness, love, mercy, and peace. Our hearts will never be empty of his presence and his love.

So we see that a third way we can express our love for the Lord is by using the resources he has given us to care for those who are in spiritual, physical, and emotional need.

As we reach the end of the father’s discourse to his son on how to love the Lord, we rather expect a “and he lived happily ever after, never once failing or transgressing God’s law” ending. But the father knows that there will be failure and sin, and thus a need for the Lord’s correction.

### **We express our love and trust for the Lord by submitting to his discipline**

**My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (3: 11-12)**

The father here instructs his son that a fourth way of expressing his love and trust of God is to submit to the Lord’s discipline. The father knows that wisdom and maturity are often attained through correction, so he encourages his son to not reject or rebel against the Lord’s discipline but to submit to it.

How easy it is for our affection and devotion to the Lord to stray. Our passions for the things of this world so easily entangle us and supplant the rightful place of God as our supreme treasure. We are like sheep which have gone astray. What a great comfort to know that the Lord is our shepherd. He uses his rod to rescue us from the path of death and restore us to the path of life. When we stray we have a devoted Heavenly Father who loves us and delights in us so much that he will seek after us and correct us.

His correction can come in many forms. Whether directly from his word, or from someone close to us, or from a circumstance in life that he brings, we can submit to the Lord’s discipline because we know that it is not coming our way from an angry or disappointed disciplinarian who wants to punish us, but from a loving and gentle Heavenly Father who “delights” in us and is at work conforming us into “the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).

These twelve verses in Proverbs make it clear that there are really only two paths in life: to either love and trust the Lord and live his way, or trust in ourselves and live according to what seems right in our own eyes and our own understanding.

Some of us have put our trust in the Lord and feel like he has let us down. We have let go of the side of the pool and yet feel like we are drowning. Is God trustworthy when we lose our job and can’t make the mortgage payments? What about when our teenager is addicted to drugs? How about when a wife cannot get pregnant, or a husband has an affair? Can God be trusted then? We get scared and angry because when tribulations and loneliness come, we wonder if God truly loves us and seeks our best.

When life is painful and seems out of control, everything within us cries out to find security and comfort in whatever source is

available. But it is especially in those times that the Lord invites us to go to him in prayer with all that is on our heart. He promises to hear us and be with us. He is our only true refuge.

I just finished reading the book by Larry Crabb, “The Pressure’s Off.” It’s a wonderful book that has really ministered to me. His reflection on trust and the two paths of life resonated deeply with me. We can pursue either the “better life” or a “better hope”:

Right now, at this very moment, you’re walking one of two paths through life. Either you’ve decided that what you want most in life is within your reach, and you’re doing whatever you believe it takes to get it or you’ve realized that what you most want is beyond your reach, and you’re trusting God for the satisfaction you seek. You want Him. Nothing less, not even His blessings will do. If you’re walking the first path, your life is filled with pressure... If you’re walking the second path, you have hope... You can taste freedom. And the taste brings joy.<sup>1</sup>

We may not all have shining examples of God’s faithfulness in our lives, but the cross of Christ and the empty tomb are reminders throughout all eternity that God is sovereign and that he loves us. He alone is trustworthy. Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. He is, above all, what we are to treasure in our heart. We find favor before the eyes of God not because of anything we have done, but because we are “in Christ.” The same Lord who freed us from the bondage and oppression of sin and death is the One we cling to each and every day for an abundant and eternal life.

Do I still worry and fear? Yes I do, but by God’s grace I am learning to love him more than his blessings. As a result I am growing in my freedom and joy. My trust in the Lord grows not because I accept certain things as true, but because I trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is because of Christ that I believe God is good and that he loves me. No matter how things may look we can trust that he is present with his love and his goodness in every circumstance of our life. I can only echo the word of the apostle John, “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word to us this morning. I pray that it may penetrate deeply into our hearts and minds. For those who have not put their trust in you, I pray that they may see your love and power and cling to you. For those of us who have put our faith in you and yet so easily relegate you to the sidelines of our lives, I pray you would bring us to a place of humility that we might become a people of prayer and of full dependence upon you. Thank you for initiating and sustaining our faith, and for bringing us into an intimate love relationship with you through your Son Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Larry Crabb, *The Pressure’s Off* (WaterBrook Press: Colorado Springs, CO, 2002), 11.

© 2008 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino