

The Good and Beautiful God: God is Trustworthy

May 15, 2022 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Proverbs 3:5-8

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;*

⁶ *in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

⁷ *Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.*

⁸ *This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.*

This reading from Proverbs is my favorite Scripture in all the Bible. It is what I call my "Life Verse," because it has such significance to me. And it is a verse that I need to hear over and over again. Here's why: When I was in college I was not what I would call a particularly strong Christian. Sure, I had a Christian upbringing. I had been involved in my local church. I had attended regularly and had been involved in the youth group. But I had not really lived a life that was honoring God, especially while in college, when a person gets tempted to live a little on the wild side, away from the perpetual oversight of one's parents.

I had a Christian roommate who kept trying to get me to go to church with him, but I always had better things to do. Or so I thought at the time. One night I had a dream where I was told by a voice I knew belonged to God who told me I was to spend my life using my gift to illustrate a particular Bible verse. I was going to college as an industrial designer at the time, so I figured that meant that I would somehow be illustrating one verse with my drawing skill. Spending my whole life illustrating one verse seemed like a strange and unlikely request, but I nevertheless had to memorize the verse. When I woke up from the dream, I pulled my dusty Bible off the shelf, turned to it on the exact page and the exact position on the page, and found the exact verse I had seen and memorized in my dream. The only thing I could remember about the verse was where it was located in the Bible and that it was written poetically with the word "heart" followed by a comma. I knew immediately it was the right verse when I found it: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart (comma) and lean not on your own understanding." It did not even dawn on me until after I had found it. What were the odds that I would find that exact verse in the exact position on that exact page and in a Bible translation that had the sentence written out exactly as I had remembered it in my dream. It was definitely a message from the Lord and it changed my life ever since. Except that I illustrated it with

my life rather than just with my drawing. I cannot tell you how many times I was approaching life with a "I will trust in my own understanding" perspective and instead got hit again with this verse. No, don't trust in your own understanding, Steve, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." Of course, as many times as I have had to remind myself of that, I need an exclamation point: "Lean not on your own understanding!!!! For crying out loud, already!"

Jesus demonstrated his trust in God through two prayers which we find in Scripture. The first is familiar to us and is found in Matthew chapter 6.

Matt 6:9-13

⁹ *"This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

¹⁰ *your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ *Give us today our daily bread.*

¹² *And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'*

This is well-known to us as "The Lord's Prayer." In his prayer Jesus shows us six characteristics of our good and beautiful God.¹

- 1) **Present** – "Our Father in heaven." Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is near (Matt. 3:2). Jesus, the Son of God, I often referred to as "Emmanual," which means God is with us. God is *present* with us.
- 2) **Pure** – "Hallowed be your name." God is holy. "Holiness has to do with purity. Jesus is teaching us that there is nothing bad about God. God can neither sin nor participate in evil. In one word, God is *pure*."
- 3) **Powerful** – "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." "Kings have power over others, and God is 'King of kings.'" In short, God is *powerful*."
- 4) **Provides** – "Give us...our daily bread." "We have a God who makes rain and sunshine and a great bounty of food for all his creatures—even the birds of the air. Thus, we learn that God *provides*."

¹ James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful God, p. 61.

- 5) **Pardons** – “Forgive us our debts.” “God is one who forgives our trespasses. As Richard Foster notes, ‘At the heart of God is the desire to forgive and to give.’ God loves to forgive, even more than we long to be forgiven. In a word, our Father *pardons*.”
- 6) **Protects** – “Deliver us from the evil one.” “God is present and powerful because he longs to protect us. Though we will suffer problems, accidents or trials, God gets the last word. Nothing can happen to us that God cannot redeem.”

The second prayer of Jesus we will look at today shows us just how much Jesus trusted God, his Father.

Luke 22:39-44

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

“Jesus is facing torture and death. In the gospel of Luke we are told that he was in so much anguish his blood became like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Yet he prays, ‘not what I want, but what you want.’ How can he speak to God in this way at such a difficult moment? The only answer ...is that he trusts his Father.”²

For Jesus, the cup represented the thing that Jesus didn’t really want to do but knew he had to do to abide in God’s will. The question for us is, “What is your ‘cup’?” Your cup is whatever it is you are dealing with right now that you really don’t want to deal with, yet you feel God has put that “cup” in your life to test your faith. So, what is the thing you are facing now that makes it difficult for you to believe that God is good?

In commenting on Jesus’ experience in the garden of Gethsemane Thomas Smail writes this:

The Father that Jesus addresses in the garden is the one that he has known all his life and found to be bountiful in his provision, reliable in his promises and utterly faithful in his love. He can obey the will that sends him to the cross, with hope and expectation because it is the will of Abba [God the Father] whose love has been so proved that it can now be trusted so fully by being obeyed so completely. This is not a legal obedience driven by commandment, but trusting response to known love.³

² Ibid., p. 58.

³ Ibid., p. 65.

I love that phrase, “trusting response to known love.” It is because we have known God for his loving faithfulness, that we know we can trust him with whatever we are facing now. “O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.”

Part of the problem is that we tend to focus on the things that are not right in our lives so much that we miss the blessings. George Buttrick told a story of a man who used a unique illustration to help people see the goodness of God.

A lecturer to a group of business [people] displayed a sheet of white paper in which was one blot. He asked what they saw. All answered, “A blot.” The test was unfair; it invited the wrong answer. Nevertheless, there is an ingratitude in human nature by which we notice the black disfigurement and forget the the widespread mercy. We need to deliberately call to mind the joys of our journey. Perhaps we should try to write down the blessings of one day. We might begin: we could never end: there are not enough pens or paper enough in all the world. The attempt would remind us of our “vast treasure of content.”⁴

James Bryan Smith tells the story of a time when he watched a child open her presents at a birthday party that all of her friends and their parents attended. She especially wanted a certain gift that she did not get. One by one she opened each package, and the child who gave it watched, smiling with anticipation, only to watch her snub her nose and push the package aside. It was painfully embarrassing to all present, especially to the birthday girl’s parents. It was a startling example of ingratitude. She was given gift after gift, and all she could think about was the one gift she wanted. Smith wrote that he found out later that the gift the little girl wanted was neither precious nor valuable, but was inferior to many of the gifts she had received and snubbed.

Smith was alarmed by this behavior and on the way home from the party reflected to himself, “Are you so different?” He thought about the one thing he was focusing on at the time to the neglect of the ten thousand things—often better things—that he had been given and not said thanks for.

“Our troubles are real. But they are small compared to God’s “widespread mercy”... The more we are able to see just how many blessings we have been given—given freely and undeserved—the more we will be able to see that God is out for our good. And when that happens, our trust level increases.”⁵

Our God is good and beautiful, and he is trustworthy. “We know that all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28) for those who trust in Him.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-69.