

Who Wants a Happy New Year?

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To the best of my ability, I never try to take for granted the opportunity to open God's word and to share it with you and that's especially true on a day like today where everybody is conscious of a new year being with us and we are gladly and rightly wishing everybody a happy new year as we gather together on the first day of January, 2017, and the question that comes to my mind is who wouldn't want a happy new year? Why wouldn't you want that? That's obvious that everyone would desire to have a happy new year and I use the word "happy" not in a superficial sense but that you would know a sense of joy and peace and confidence in your God as you look toward the future. Sometimes I think that when I'm letting my sense of humor get away with me just a little bit too much, someone says, "Happy New Year," and I feel a sense of pressure that now all of the pressure is on me, that in order to satisfy their wishes, the pressure is on me to have a good new year and sometimes I think, well, that's just kind of being silly about it all. We're just speaking in general pleasantries when we say that but you feel a little bit of pressure. Someone wishes you a Happy New Year, you don't want to disappoint them with that.

What I want to do this morning before we return to the Sermon on the Mount next week is I want to give you a passage that in all seriousness lays at the cornerstone of having a good new year, having a good day, and even having, you might say, a good life, the core to all of these things, and having a perspective on life that you can feed upon, having an ever flowing fountain of clear crystal water that you could drink from to refresh your heart, things that are so fundamental that we should go back to them again and again to remind ourselves of their significance. And to do that, I want to turn to a passage in the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 3, a familiar text, yes, but also one that perhaps is easy to look at superficially and not realize the depth at which it calls you to know your God. Proverbs 3:5-6 will be our text for this morning and kind of using this text to set a cornerstone for the way that you would think about the new year and to use this text as that which would call you to a commitment of heart to live in a way that is worthy of your God. If you live in a way that is worthy of your God, stated more specifically, if you trust your God in a way that is commensurate with what this passage teaches you, you will have a good new year. You will have the blessing of God on your life.

Look at verses 5 and 6 with me. Proverbs 3,

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

What we want to do this morning is lay out four principles that would give you the ability to cultivate a trusting heart and a heart that is truly resting in Christ, a heart that is truly trusting in your God, is going to be a heart that is content. And what is so imperative for you to understand this morning, to realize the lofty call that this passage is placing upon you and the life of abundant spiritual blessing that it holds forth before you, is that it is talking about that which is beyond the realm of your circumstances; that this blessing, that this life embedded in these two verses, is available to everyone who would respond to God in the way that it calls you to, in a way that is independent of your material blessing, in a way that is independent of your family circumstances, in a way that is independent of health or illness, poverty or prosperity, joy or sorrow. You see, beloved, to have a happy new year, to live a life that is conscious of the blessing of God and living in a realm of confident trust and security is something that is independent of all of the externals of life. This is a promise that is available to the aging, declining person toward the sunset of life. This is a promise available to the young person who would lay hold of it and say, "I will devote my life to these things." This is available to all of those of you for whom we as elders pray often who are in the throes of heartache in your family and in your closest relationships and you don't know where it's going, you just know that the next day is going to be like this day, hard, difficult to come to grips with as relationships disappoint you or as other circumstances weigh on you again and again. You see, we're here at a text that is not superficial in its import to us and we're not addressing this text from a superficial way that would simply give you a sense of a superficial salve that makes you feel good in the moment of this hour of preaching and then you move on and you're left with life that you still have to live and you say, "Well, what did that just have to do with what now lies ahead?" This is not a message like this, this is a message that embedded in it gives you what is necessary for a happy new year; happy, using that word in its deeper sense of a sense of contentment and confidence and quiet trust as you look to the future no matter what it may be. So we want to take some time with this passage today to realize that it is laying out for us the way that the people of God are supposed to live, the way that you as a Christian are supposed to think about life; that embedded in this passage is the core of what your heart, your mind, your will, your emotions, everything should be oriented and flowing out of this pure and crystal fountain of truth.

So let's take a look at it here this morning. First of all, what I want to do is to consider the context of the passage. If you're taking notes, that's the first point. The context of this passage is a very basic premise and the basic premise in which all of life flows from and your perspective on life should be centered upon is this: is that God honors obedience to him. God honors obedience to him. That's your first point for this morning. That's the context. God honors obedience and for those of you that have been with us on Tuesday nights, I'm going to flashback to Psalm 1:6 because it is such a simple statement, such a basic premise of life, but it is so foundational you can build your life and your expectations and your hopes and your confidence and your dreams and rest and let this swallow up your disappointments as well. Psalm 1:6, "the LORD knows the way of the

righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish." I'm never going to get tired of calling that verse to your attention as long as the Lord gives me breath because in that simple principle, you find that your faith in Christ, that your faith in God, that your trust in his word, that all of the efforts that you make to live a godly life and to trust him through sorrow and difficulty, are not in vain. That is so essential to framing the entire way that you look at life. God honors obedience. God knows the way of the righteous. God does not forget those who call out to him in trust.

Proverbs 3 unfolds the blessings that come from trusting God. Look at the first four verses. We're going to look at four verses before and four verses after the two verses that I read just so that you see the context in which God placed these familiar verses. In Proverbs 3:1, the writer of Scripture says,

1 My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; 2 For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. 3 Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man.

There is a command and a promise built into those four verses. There is a command in there that says, "Set your heart on God's word. Be a kind and truthful man." And in a most basic way, it calls you to a premise of life that sets your heart on the word of God as that which would be your authority in life; that which would be the sweetest thing in life to you; that which you would submit to; that which you would honor; that which you would believe; and that all of your heart would be given over to the holy words of Scripture.

And there is a promise embedded into the one who would do that. The promise is stated for you there in verse 4, "you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man." You see, sometimes it's easy when you're studying Scripture, when you're preaching on both sides of the pulpit, it's easy to get so immersed in details that you miss a big picture point that would give you principles upon which you could shape all of your life. Beloved, what we're about to see, what I'm about to say, is a principle upon which you can build your entire life knowing that it will never fail you. You can trust the word of God. You can trust the 66 books of the Bible to such an extent – I say this to my own heart by way of reminder in my own spiritual life – to such an extent that you can trust the word of God no matter what comes; that the word of God is worthy of your complete devotion, of giving yourself over to believe it completely and entirely, to obey it to the best and fullest of your ability, to believe fully in the Christ which the word points you to and reveals to you, to give all of your life, all of your hopes, all of your aspirations, all of your affections to the word of God with the certain assurance in advance that that will not be wasted, that that will not be in vain that you do so. This passage is promising to everyone who would come to God's word in that way, a productive and peaceful life that brings honor from God and from man; that you do not believe, you do not respond to, you do not give yourself over to the word of God and find yourself a debtor, find yourself

on...what I mean by that is that God has somehow let you down. No. No, it does not work that way.

Look at verses 7 through 10. The context here is that God honors obedience, God honors devotion to his word, God honors those who fear him. Look at verses 7 through 10.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. 8 It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. 9 Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Verses 11 and 12,

11 My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, 12 For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

Summarized you could say this about those verses: that they call you to live a humble life that is set on holiness; that holiness would be the defining aspiration of what you want out of life; that you would know Christ and grow in him and manifest the righteousness that he has called you to as a grateful response to the saving work of Christ in your heart. Set your heart on that. Live a humble life set on holiness and the promise from God is this: he will refresh you. He will give you prosperity. Life will go well for you if you respond to him in this way. So, step back and you say, "Happy New Year," what's the means to happy new year? Who wouldn't want a happy new year? Who wouldn't want a life under the blessing of God? Who wouldn't desire to have the tranquility of heart, the tranquility of mind and the blessing that attends a life like this? Who wouldn't want that? Why wouldn't you want that as the deepest thing, the greatest blessing that God could give you on earth?

Now, let me say one thing here before we go any further. The book of Proverbs is not a book that is designed to guarantee cause-and-effect in each and every circumstance in each and every life. Proverbs simply give you truth from a long-range perspective. Over the course of time, over the course of cultures, over the course of many lives, the general pattern is that God blesses those who serve him and that they have a better life, a more peaceful life, than those who sin against him and give themselves over to a life of sin; that those who know Christ, who follow him, who love his word, who devote themselves to it, who give their minds and hearts and aspirations over to the revealed truth in Scripture as a general pattern, they are going to have a better life on earth than those who reject it.

Now, sometimes the wicked prosper. Psalm 73 is devoted to that. Sometimes the righteous suffer. We see that in the life of Job. But here's the point for us today, beloved, as we recognize those things on the margins, on the extremities: the general pattern is, in general God's people have a better life than his enemies do. Those who love Christ and

follow him have a better life than those who do not. And even if you look at the recent news over the past few weeks and you see celebrities who gave themselves over to a life of sin and debauchery despite all of their immense wealth and all of their immense fame, what did they do? They died in disgrace and they died young as a natural consequence of the things that they gave themselves over to. Having turned their back on Scripture, having turned their back on Christ and giving themselves over to the worst of wickedness that the world had to offer, they found their life ended short and it ended in sorrow and we grieve over that, we pity them for that, but it's important for us to step back and look at the bigger picture, for our lives, to glean that what God's word promises in general to be the pattern is that those who give themselves over to God's word are going to find themselves on the receiving end of his blessing even if there are dips in the valleys along the way.

So the question for you, the question that applies in what you want out of life as a young person, what you're going to give your life to now or maybe in middle age toward the end of life and looking at it with a sense of regret, what are you going to devote this year to? What are you going to devote the rest of your life to? As you look at things with regret, will you at least take this opportunity to say, "In the remaining days that I have, I'll give myself over to this with a freshness of heart that God has not seen from me before now." Blessing awaits. And the question that I always come back to whenever I get the opportunity to say things like this to you is, why wouldn't you want that? When God promises blessing to those who turn to his word, why wouldn't you want that? Why wouldn't you pursue it? Don't you understand that God honors obedience? God honors trust in his word? God honors trust in Christ? Why wouldn't you want that?

The second point for this morning, I want you to see a contrast. We saw the context just in general, God honors obedience and therefore it's worthwhile to give your life over to his word, give your life over to Christ. Let's look at a contrast and ask it in the form of a question. Oh, and this gets so personal. You know, I wore my soft shoes today, not the steel-toed boots, but I'm going to step on your toes today and you need your toes stepped on in light of what's about to come. The contrast is this: who will you trust? Who will you trust? You see, a faithful life, the life that God honors, a faithful life starts with always trusting God no matter what happens in your life but there is something settled in the deepest part of your heart, you who have been redeemed by Christ, those of you that have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, those who claim to know him, those who have your sins forgiven and are on a road that leads to heaven, you must understand that if you are in that blessed position and you have received the benefit of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross applied to your heart, that that means something, that there are consequences to that, to the way that you think, to the way that you feel, to the way that you respond to life. And if Christ has been so good to you to redeem you out of sin and to bring you to himself to fulfill his promise to give eternal life to everyone who believes in him, if Christ has done that for you and your eternal soul is secure and your sins are forgiven and you have been declared righteous before a holy God, then there are consequences to that, beloved, to the way that you think and respond to life. The only thing that you can do that's right is to trust God no matter what.

Look at verse 5 with me, Proverbs 3:5. Scripture says and look at each word carefully. I'll read it slowly. "Trust in the LORD," Yahweh, the covenant-keeping, promise-keeping God, the self-existent God who is the great "I am who I am," the God who is the God of his people, the God who keeps the promises to those who come to him in faith, trust him "with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." Trust him. What does "trust" mean? You know, we throw these words around so flippantly and they become such an embedded part of our lingo that sometimes we forget to stop and think about what they mean and what they say. What this is saying, what does "trust" mean for life here on earth? Well, notice that this is a command, that this is not an optional add-on to spiritual life. This is commanded from God that this is the way you are to be. Trust relates to the basic way that you look to the future. Let's just make it real simple. Let's put, as they like to say sometimes, let's put the cookies on the bottom shelf. Trust refers to the basic way that you look at the future. In other words, beloved, what is your fundamental disposition on life? How do you look to the future? What do you think? What do you think about your day? What do you think about the trials and the struggles that you're going through? What is your fundamental disposition, your basic perspective on them? Do you look forward with confidence that it will come out well in the end because God is sovereign over your life and promises to bless his children? Or are you fundamentally fearful, worried, anxious, buried under a sense of, "What if this and what if that," and your mind is just controlled by fear and anxiety of what's going to happen? Beloved, I want you to see that those are two diametrically opposed, mutually exclusive approaches to life and Scripture makes this plain.

This verse teaches us fundamental dispositions about life through a contrast. In the first part of it, it tells you: trust God. Trust God. Now, look, look, I understand that life is sorrowful for many of you. It's difficult and it is a grind. I get that and I don't diminish that but, beloved, I don't have – listen to me – I don't have the liberty to diminish the call of God and the call of Scripture on your life because of that. The call of God pierces through all of the fog of that and in the midst of it says, "This is how you must think and this is how you must live." So as we prepare to go into what this passage says, beloved, don't excuse yourself in advance from what God's word would call you to. Don't say, "Well, my life is really hard and therefore I'll just mush my way through it." No. Set all of that aside this morning and listen with clarity to what the word of God says with clarity. So this proverb tells you on the first part of the contrast: trust God. Look to the future with confidence because you are looking to the future from the perspective of God is the one who holds it in his hand and that you belong to him through faith in Christ and that God never forgets his children. Trust is confidence that God will bless you as one of his children.

Beloved, you trust God to bless you as you walk with him. Remember the context of what we just saw, the context of this passage is: God honors obedience. God blesses those who follow him. God blesses those who put their trust in Christ. That is an unalterable principle that governs the moral universe. This is who God is and this is what he does for his people. And you say, "I believe that. I believe his word. I believe in Christ. That has implications for the outcome of my life and shapes the disposition with

which I will view it." So you trust God to bless you as you walk with him even if you are walking through an earthly earthquake and tornadoes are blowing all around your life. You say, "No, I will be unmoved. I will trust him. I will not surrender my confidence in the God who has revealed himself and in the Christ who has saved me. Whatever else happens, I will not let go of that." That is the disposition of heart and mind that belongs to a true believer. It's what every one of us is called to be, to do, to live, the way that we are to think, and it is diametrically opposed to the anxiety, the controlling anxiety that sadly some of you live in and God's word comes to you with a promise of blessing, a promise of a better life, a better way of thinking, a better disposition of heart and at the same time says that that controlling anxiety is not where you can stay. We don't have the liberty to do this. Look, think about it this way: you do not have the liberty to break the law of God when it says do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness. You don't have liberty to do any of that. In equal measure, beloved, you don't have the liberty to say, "I'm not going to trust God here."

You're commanded to have a positive attitude, a positive response to these things and that means that...and I realize that this is sometimes going to be a moment by moment, hour to hour, day to day battle in the midst of some of the struggles you're going through, but it means that you refuse doubt, you refuse worry, you refuse anxiety when it comes your way. And the question is: why? "Don't you understand that life is risky? That there are challenges and that this is weighty on my mind?" I get that. God's word comes to you with a different set of questions for you and says, "Don't you understand? Don't you remember certain truths upon which you say you have built your entire eternal hope? Don't you remember the truths of Scripture?" You see, you can trust God to bless you. You can refuse doubt and worry when adversity comes your way. Why? Listen to me as I just walk through some basic truth of God's character in salvation with you. God, your God, is loving and righteous. He is true and faithful. Scripture says that this God knows what you need before you ask him. Scripture tells us that he knows the number of hairs on your head; that he knows you intimately. He knows when you get up and when you sit down. Scripture says that nothing is too difficult for him. Scripture says that this loving Father sent his Son into the world to be the propitiation for your sin. That in your rebellion, in your sin, in your spiritual death and depravity, God sent a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gladly offered his life on a cross and shed his blood so that your sins could be forgiven and God could give you new life, declare you righteous and receive you into heaven forever. That's who God is. That's what God has done. Scripture says for those of us that know him, he has reserved a place in heaven for us never to be taken away, undefiled, unfading, having caused us to be born again through a living hope in the resurrection of Christ. That's who God is. That's what he's done for you. The same God has given us the Scriptures. He has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit. He has promised to keep us until the day of Christ Jesus.

Christian, don't you see? You see, this is where we kind of have to put our hand on our mouth and instead of immediately saying, "But you don't know my life. But what about this? What about that?" Beloved, stop talking that way. Just stop it and put your hand over your mouth and instead of speaking, listen to what Scripture has said about this God and let it sink in without resisting based on your circumstances. Let it sink in that God

really truly is love, righteous, faithful, true, and that that's not just a theory, that's what he manifested in Christ when Christ came into this world when Christ gave himself on the cross, when Christ rose from the dead. Now having ascended into heaven, now Christ at the Father's right hand interceding for you, representing you in the throne room of God with his perfected completed work done, now he represents you. Your brother in heaven representing you before a holy God and says, "That one belongs to me," and therefore the blessing of God is secured in the most holy intimate place in the universe because the Son of God died for you, rose for you, represents you now.

You see, beloved, that's all true. I didn't make any of that up. I didn't think any of that up on my own. It's all independent of life, independent of circumstance for you. And for those of you that I know you've trusted Christ, I know you've put your faith in him but life is still a struggle, look, you must look to these great realities and repose your hope and confidence in them and let the truth of God speak to your meandering weak heart and give strength from the truth to the weakness of your heart when you look to an uncertain future because, beloved, beloved, if Christ has done all of this for you, if all of these things are true in the great eternal perspective of your salvation, it's all true, isn't it? You're not at liberty to deny that so you might as well nod your head and say, "Yes, that's all true," because we don't have the freedom to contradict what God has revealed about Christ and his salvation. Yes, this is true. This is all true. Everything I just said was true. Have you given your life to Christ? Has Christ saved you? Have you personally appropriated these promises from Christ, personally appropriated and received him by faith? Then all of those things belong to you. Your name is graven on his hands, written on his heart. Your name is secure in the books of heaven. All of that is true. Follow the logic of Scripture then in Romans 8. If all of that is true and God has done all of that for you and your eternity really is secure and all of your sins really are forgiven and you really have been born again, then don't you think, beloved, don't you think that the God who has done the greater things for you will do the lesser things as they pertain to your daily life? Would he give you Christ and withhold that which is necessary for your daily existence? Would he love your sinful soul and refuse that which is necessary for life? You see, beloved, there just comes a point where you have to realize that there is a moral imperative on your heart to trust him in response to the great things that you say that you believe; to realize that these great things about Christ manifest and reveal a purpose of God and a goodness of God to your life and character and soul that you should never question him. You should never question the intentions of God in the details when he has done so much for you in the great macro-perspective of the eternal well-being of your soul.

Think about it this way, maybe those of you who are parents you can think about it this way. You give your life over to your children and day by day in faithfulness you care for them, you meet their needs, you comfort them in their sorrow, you bless them even when they are disobedient, you correct them and you just give yourself over and you devote yourself to them. Some of you know the sorrow of what I'm about to describe but you will understand how wrong it is. Isn't it abominable when a child that has been given that kind of care by loving faithful parents, for a child to turn around and rebel and betray them? Isn't that terrible? How could you do that? How could a child distrust a parent who

has never been anything but faithful in their care for them? We understand that on a human level, that there is an element of shame attached to betraying that kind of love. We understand that there is shame in rebelling against it. We get that on a human level. That's with imperfect sinful parents we get that. Well, beloved, you see, we understand that it is right for a child to honor their parents and to obey them in light of the fact that God gave life to them through those parents. We get that. We realize that it's a shame upon that child to distrust the ones who faithfully loved them. On a human level we get that. Beloved, I'm not talking about parents and children here, am I? I'm talking about the way that you think about God, those of you who have been redeemed by Christ. You realize the great way that God has loved you in Christ and has blessed you immeasurably, giving you every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, Ephesians 1 says, and your response to that is, "God, I see your pristine, undiminished, unmitigated goodness to me. You have given me such great blessing in Christ. I have such a wonderful salvation. Do you know what I'm going to do in response to all of this great love you have shown to me, O God? I'm going to trust you. I'm going to honor you. I'm going to love you even in the midst of the contrary tides of life when they come, not because I know how the circumstances are going to come out but because it's right for me to love you with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind. It is right for me to respond to you with trust in light of what you have done so greatly for me." That's the only right way to be.

So you see, beloved, what this does, I realize that in practical life this doesn't necessarily settle every anxiety for all time that you ever face but what this does do is it gives you a disposition, a perspective upon which you should think about life and rather than nursing those anxieties, nursing the fears that you so often have given into in the past and maybe justified, maybe accommodated, maybe made room for in your life and say, "Well, life is really hard, after all. No one is perfect," rather than making a spiritual truce with that kind of anxiety, you shift your perspective and say, "No. I can't think that way. This is not something that I accommodate, this is something that I declare war against. This is something that I work against. This is something that I say is not acceptable in my heart to have unworthy thoughts of my God like that, that I wouldn't even trust him for this life. I recognize the foolishness of saying I'll trust Christ with my eternal soul but I won't trust him with the details of life as shown by my anxious heart."

You see, look back at Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart." With all your heart, that your heart is undivided in this confidence and the goodness of God toward his people; that in all your heart and in all of your ways and in all of life, this perspective informs the way that you think about present circumstances and what they will bring to you. It's with a sense of confidence in the blessing of God however he chooses to define that. All of your heart, your mind, your emotions and your will, your commitment. Beloved, let me state it simply when we talk about trusting God, what that means is this: it means that you have an unconditional confidence. Say it again: you have an unconditional confidence that God will be good to you in the end no matter what your present adversity may be and that's rooted not in a blind faith but in revealed certainties. It's rooted in the reality of your salvation. It is certified to you by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that's the way that you think about life and anything

contrary in your heart is an unwelcome intruder that you drive out because that's what God is worthy of.

Turn to the right in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah 26:3-4, "The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock." An immovable fortress where we can go and find safety, security and serenity in who he is.

Now, in one sense for most of you, I wouldn't expect that anything that I said in the past 15 minutes was really something new. Maybe for some of you that are new to our church or new Christians, maybe these are welcome truths and they are new to you in that sense but for most of us, we get that, we've heard these things before, but the question is then if we know these things, how do we get off track? How is it that we don't live in that constant sense of settled serenity and security in light of everything that we know to be true? How do we get off track? Well, you get off track because you forget the rest of verse 5 of Proverbs 3. Go back to our text for this morning, Proverbs 3:5. Remember the second point that we are answering here is who will you trust? We've said with scriptural clarity you trust God and given you the reasons why. But Proverbs here is teaching by way of a contrast and showing us the negative side of where we fail in trust. It gives us the negative side for us to think about.

Verse 5, look at it with me again, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding." Positive side of the contrast: trust in the Lord with all of your heart. The negative side: do not lean on your own understanding. There is a pivot point, there is a hinge right in the middle of this that points us to the way that we are to think. So who will you trust? Trust God. On the other side, you do not trust yourself. You do not trust yourself. You do not trust your own judgment. You do not trust your own opinions. Beloved, you do not trust your own perceptions about what you see happening in front of you. And yeah, I've got to say it emphatically because we just have to be really clear, precise and definitive because everything is at stake here. If you stumble on this point, beloved, you will not have a happy new year and that wouldn't be good because we want you to have a happy new year. If you're going to have a happy new year, you're going to have to realize that you cannot trust yourself.

The positive command is to trust the Lord, the negative command is do not lean on your own understanding. What does that mean, not lean on your own understanding? Well, the idea of leaning here in this verse has the idea of resting upon and so when I'm up here sometimes I'll lean on the pulpit and I'll rest on it and I'll lean my weight into it; you're leaning on a post to support you from falling. In the spiritual realm, to lean on your own understanding means – watch how all of this fits together – to lean on your own understanding means that your confidence as you look to the future rises or falls based on your perceptions of what you see happening around you. So for example, someone might say in their heart, probably wouldn't say this in a conversation with a fellowship of believers, but in your heart you think this way, "Well, you know, we have our health and we have a good job and a good bank account, this coming year is going to be good," resting on your own understanding, basing it on what you see. "My body is healthy, my

wealth is secure and things are looking good," to which Scripture says, "You fool, don't you understand your life could be required of you tonight? You fool, don't you understand that you don't know what tomorrow will bring, how are you boasting in the year ahead?" James 4.

Here's something else, confidence based on your own perceptions in the negative sense: "Why does God treat me this way? What's going to happen to me? This is too hard based on what I see. It's too difficult. I can't take this." What is that except resting on your own understanding, measuring your spiritual ability by the circumstances and saying, "I can't do this. I don't want this. I reject this," and all of it saying, "I can't do it." What are you doing except saying, "I'm basing my perception of life based on what I see and feel." You're leaning on your own understanding when you do that.

Saying this next thing with sympathy but getting to the point hopefully where a lot of us live: "What will I do if my loved one, my friend doesn't come to Christ? What will I do if they die without becoming a Christian?" And just being wrapped up in that. "What will I do? This is what I see and what am I going to do?" Leaning on your own understanding, beloved. You see, beloved, I know from my own personal experience and I know that you're not that much different from me, you mentally know the promises of God but when it comes to specific circumstances that are close to your heart, Scripture would show you that you're not trusting him as shown by the anxiety or the self-confidence that marks the inner disposition of your heart. And your anxieties betray you, even if others don't see it. Deep in your heart saying, "I've got to see it. I've got to control it or I'm not going to be at peace." You see, Scripture comes and meets you at that level and says, "Stop it. Stop trusting in your own thought processes. Stop trusting in what you see. Stop trusting in your own abilities to handle whatever life is bringing to you." And rather than letting that shape your perspective, go back to the first part of the verse and go back to all of the wonderful spiritual realities of which we spoke just a moment ago and let that inform your perspective. You have to choose, you have to decide what it is that is going to frame the way that you think about life if you're going to have a happy new year.

Christian, does worry consume you? Come back to these two verses. And Christian, let's do this under the authority of God's word, not talking so much person to person here but just gathered together collectively under the surpassing authority of God's word, let's do this: let's love each other enough in this room right now to be honest with each other and to not make excuses and to not say, "But my life is hard." Okay, yeah, a lot of people's lives are hard. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and not lean on your own understanding. "But you don't..." Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. "However...." Yeah, however, Christ has come. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ is coming again.

Let me give you two words that might help. I'm just trying to find a multitude of ways to illustrate and help you with this so that you would think rightly about life and live a life that glorifies Christ, have a sense of serenity and well-being in your soul as you look to an uncertain future and to have a happy new year. I want you to have a happy new year. Two words. Think of all of that truth that we talked about, the coming and death of Christ, eternal bliss awaits those who trust in him, every spiritual blessing given to you in

Christ, and on and on it went, right? And 90% of you in this room would say, "Amen! I believe that." Good. We're on the same page. It's good to be on the same page. The next word that comes out of your mouth in response to that, there are two choices, and the next word that comes out of your mouth will tell you whether you really believe that, whether you're really trusting in it or if it's just head knowledge to you. Two words. All this great truth, right? I know you're dying to hear what the two words are. I want to keep you in suspense. All of this great truth, the one who is trusting in himself, the woman who is leaning on her own understanding, the next word out of his or her mouth in response to that, the one who is leaning on her own understanding uses this one three letter word: but. "But you don't know. But this is happening. But this is hard. But this has been going on for so long. But. But. But. But." And discounting the truth of God by saying, "But let me bring my life perspective into this in a way that will help you understand why I can't just rest and be secure and serene in that." But. But. But. But. "I believe that, but." What do you mean, but? Honestly? How are you drawing a contrast? How are you separating yourself from the truth of God and the glory and the love of Christ? How can you say "but" to that?

The word that you should say is this, it's a little longer word, all of two syllables instead of one. All of these things are true when you say this word: therefore I will not be afraid. All of that is true therefore I will look to the future with confidence. All of this is true therefore I'll persevere without complaint, without fear, without resentment, without retaliation against those that have hurt me. Because all of that is true therefore this has consequences. Therefore when you say "therefore" you are lining yourself up with the flow and saying, "I'm going to let this rush through my mind, rush through my heart, and change the whole direction of the way that I think. I'm going to get on the boat that is going in that stream and flow with it. Therefore I'll be confident. Therefore I'll be at peace." Not "but" and separating yourself from it and standing in opposition to it. That's what you're saying when you say "but." Don't say "but," say "therefore" and show that you're trusting God and not in yourself. You see, beloved, when I wish you a happy new year here this morning, implied in my greeting to you is this question: do you trust God or not? If you don't trust God, you're not going to have a happy new year and there is nothing I can do to make it better for you. If you trust God, you'll have a happy new year no matter what life brings to you because this is the realm in which we are called to live as Christians.

So we've seen the context, we've seen the contrast, let's look at the call. Point 3: the call. The call is this: the call is to an intimate walk with God. The call is an intimate walk with God. Beloved, in some ways it's hard to preach on such simple commands. It's hard not because Scripture is inadequate but it's hard not to talk in a way that just makes people think that we're talking about trivialities or clichés. This is not a cliché. The call is to an intimate walk with God. You see, trusting God is a comprehensive approach to life. It is not simply, "I'll go through life and then when a hard time hits, then I'll trust in God," as if it's a crutch that you pull out out the closet when you're limping along in life and, "I'll trust God then." No. No, that's not it at all. It's comprehensive. It is a comprehensive approach to life.

Look at chapter 3, verse 6, and in the simplicity and the clarity of Scripture, see what it says. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight." In all your ways. In everything that you do. In every aspect of your life acknowledge him.

What I'm about to say is one of my favorite parts of this text. This word "acknowledge," you need to understand what it's saying here. In English, the English way that we use "acknowledge" will probably throw you off. We think of "acknowledge" like, "Well, I'm going to acknowledge that person that I'm passing in the aisle in the grocery store. I'll acknowledge him and I'll nod my head at him. Hello. I've just acknowledged your presence. Hello." You acknowledge a stranger by nodding at him. That's not what this is saying here. In this context, this Hebrew word is expressing intimate knowledge, close, relational knowledge. It's the word that's used in Exodus 33 when God says, "I have known Moses by name. I have known him." He knows him intimately. It's the word used in Psalm 139 when David prays to God, "You know when I sit down and when I rise up. You know me intimately." This is an intimate knowledge, not a passing superficial one. Life is going on, life is going on, I acknowledge God. Life goes on, I acknowledge God. No, it's not like that. God calls you to a thorough intimacy with him. Verse 5 says trust in the Lord with all your heart, verse 6 says know him in all your ways. This is a comprehensive call that all of your affections, all of your priorities, all of your activities, would be saturated with a knowledge of this transcendent God and the course of life would be determined by it. In all your ways know him.

You see, trust in God is not a last refuge. Beloved, I like to say this: knowing God, trusting God, is not incidental to life. Knowing God and trusting God is the reason that you exist. You exist in order to know this God. What is the chief end of man? To no man and to glorify him forever, to enjoy him forever, in the words of the Confession. What's the greatest command? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. This is comprehensive. You see, this verse is not a call to incidental praying when things go out of control in your life, this is for all of your ways and all of your heart, with all of your affection, to give yourself over to know this God who has saved you. This is why you exist. An intimate walk with God.

And what's at the end of this? It brings us to point 4: the comfort, we could say the promise. Let me just review these points with you real quickly. The context is: God honors obedience. The contrast we phrased in a question: who will you trust, God or yourself? The mind of God or the mind that's inside your head between your two ears? The call is to an intimate walk with God. All your ways. There should not be an area of your life that somehow hasn't been impacted by the way that you think in response to God's word written and Incarnate. Finally the comfort is that he will bless you. Look at verse 6, here you go for a happy new year. Here's what I would desire for you this morning. Verse 6, "In all your ways acknowledge Him," here's the comfort, "And He will make your paths straight." God promises to bless you when you walk with him in this way. Why would you not want that blessing of God on your life? Why would you not orient the entire disposition of life so that this would be yours in fullest measure? What does that look like? Matthew Henry says this and I close with this, "In all our ways that prove fair and pleasant, we acknowledge God with thankfulness. In all our ways that

prove cross and uncomfortable, we acknowledge God with submission for I must be ever toward God. Those that put themselves under divine guidance, shall always have the benefit of it." Will you trust him like that in 2017? It's the key to a happy new year.

Let's pray together.

Father, we do trust you. We believe your word to be true. We believe our Christ will never forsake us, never leave us nor forsake us because he is the same yesterday, today and forevermore. So as your people, we set our hearts to trust you in all of our ways, to trust you with all of our heart, to acknowledge you in all of our ways. We say, "therefore we look to the future," not, "but things are so hard." And Father, for those that are here without Christ, we ask you again to lead them to the cross where a blood atonement was made for sinners just like them, just like you as you are listening to me pray. Christ made a blood sacrifice so that sins like yours could be forgiven fully by a holy God and he calls you to believe him, to trust him, to receive him, as your Lord and Savior and he promises that if you come to him, he will never cast you out. He will receive you, cleanse you, forgive you, secure you in eternal life, and bless you now and forevermore. Friend, why don't you come to Christ this morning? Why would you turn away from the only one who can bless you this year and throughout all of eternity? He says, "I'll give it to you as a gift." Receive that gift today. We pray in Jesus' name, Father, and commit all of these things to you. Amen.

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