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**My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favour and good success in the sight of God and man.**

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.**

**Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.**

**Honour the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.**

**My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.**

**(Proverbs 3:1–12)**

## Introduction

Proverbs 3 emphasises a father's concern that his son live a life of trusting the Lord. Coupled with this is his desire that his son be trustworthy – both to man and God. The person who lives a life trusting the Lord will find much treasure in God's accompanying promises. Atkinson summarises: "Proverbs 3:1–12 focuses our attention on love to God which is expressed in keeping his commands (3), trusting his leading (5–8), honouring him with gratitude for all of our possessions (9–10), and accepting his correction (11–12)."

But the main theme is that of *trust*. Trust in the Lord, because, after all, he is trustworthy. The father knew that God is trustworthy and wanted to pass this on to his son. That is good parenting. Good parenting focuses on the child's faith in God. This, of course, is essential for the salvation of their soul, but it is also essential for the child to become godly. And "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). This, in many ways, summarises the first section of Proverbs 3.

In these verses, the father exhorts his son to trust God and provides incentives to do so. These verses contain several promises (treasures) that attend trust in the Lord. We will study these verses under two major headings: (1) The Command to Trust (vv. 1–4); and (2) The

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Consequences of Trust (vv. 5–12). May we leave our time together more committed to trust. Such individuals will have a character that others can trust.

## The Command to Trust

First, in vv. 1–4, we must consider the command to trust:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favour and good success in the sight of God and man.

(Proverbs 3:1–4)

As noted, these verses portray a wise father exhorting his son to trust God. But, as we will see, such a life of trust in God produces a life that is trustworthy. This is the first promise the we discover in this passage.

## Don't Forget

The exhortation is straightforward: The son must not forget the commandments of God that the father has taught him. “My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments” (v. 1). Newheiser comments, “Forgetting [godly] parental instruction in wisdom is not merely a moral flaw, but a moral evil (Deut 8:11).”

Commentators have noted the parallels between these four verses and the opening four verses of Deuteronomy 6. And since Proverbs is about living faithful to God's covenant, this makes perfect sense.

## The Promise

If the son will not forget God's commands, a glorious promise can be his: “for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you” (v. 2). As in Deuteronomy 6, the trusting and trustworthy son will be blessed with fullness of life (cf. 1 Timothy 4:8).

Eric Lane comments on the concept of “peace” that “shalom includes material prosperity, but is combined with mental serenity and spiritual joy.” This is a wonderful promise. Children, will you experience this promise? Then embrace the responsibility (v. 1). Parents, are you preparing your child for this promise of shalom?

## Don't Forsake

Solomon continues: “Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart” (v. 3). In Deuteronomy 6:5–9, Moses

exhorted fathers to teach their children well by teaching them the word of God. As head of the family the father was to bind the word to the home. Here, the faithful father exhorts his son to bind the qualities of “steadfast love” (mercy) and “faithfulness” (trustworthiness) to his “neck” and to his “heart.” “Love and faithfulness ... these are two of God’s most glorious perfections, at the very heart of his covenant with Israel” (Lane).

The father exhorts his son to remember these truths about God, yet the emphasis seems to be more on the son exercising these qualities. In other words, the father exhorts, “Like Father, like son.” “Your heavenly Father is faithful and trustworthy; you are to be as well.”

Perhaps he mentions the neck to speak of outward obedience, while the reference to the heart speaks to inward obedience. Both are called for.

### The Promise

Another promise is given in v. 4: “So you will find favour and good success in the sight of God and man.” We can summarize this promise as an approved character. Integrity is the fruit of one who obeys God. Though the godly person will have plenty of enemies, the godly will respect her. In fact, the words translated “good success” could also be translated “good repute.” Most importantly, this individual will live under the blessing of God (see Psalm 15).

If we learn to trust God, others will be more prone to trust us. It is in this way that we will find favour/success with people. Those with integrity are in a position, generally, where they will be respected. And such respect will open doors that disrespect will close.

But this verse also informs us that, by keeping our promises, by being covenantally faithful, even God will be favourable to us (see Jesus in Luke 2:52). Paul made the claim that God put him into the ministry because he counted him faithful (1 Timothy 1:12). That verse has different interpretations, but at the least we can say that God found Paul to be a man who was trustworthy with God’s gospel and therefore he was entrusted with it. Is this not precisely what the requirements in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 teach us?

To have the approval of God – the applause of heaven – is what separates the happy from the unhappy.

Earning trust is a hugely important quest in life. But this arises from a character that is shaped by the character of God. Have you received this promised and prized possession? You can. Trust and obey the Lord and watch your testimony improve.

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## The Consequences of Trust

In vv. 5–12, the concept of trust in the Lord remains the dominant theme. But this trust is exercised and revealed in various settings and contexts of life. Let's explore these.

### Trust God in Your Trials

First, God can be trusted in trials: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (vv. 5–6).

These are some of the most well-known verses in Scripture. We often find help here when we are faced with the trial of making decisions that, on the surface, are difficult to make (career, university studies, marriage, etc.). Of course, these verses apply in many other areas as well.

We learn here, first, that our trust must be entire—"with all your heart." No double-mindedness is permitted. How do we do this? What does this mean?

Well, at the very least, the Hebrew parallelism means that to trust the Lord entirely means that we do not lean on our own understanding. In other words, though Proverbs encourages understanding, it must be informed and shaped by God's Word. Worldly understanding is excluded.

Second, we see that our trust must be exclusive: "in all your ways acknowledge him." Literally, Solomon is saying, "In all your ways, *know* God." This is how we *learn* to trust God, and this is how we know that we *can* trust God.

In our various trials—in whatever ways we are tried—we must pursue the knowledge of God. As Lane has well said, "it is not important that we don't know the future, only that we know he knows; It is not important that we don't understand what happens to us, only that we know he does; It is not important that we can't control events, only that we know he does and submit."

If our trust is entire and exclusive, there is a wonderful promise: "he will make straight your paths." The idea of a straight path indicates the promise that you will get where you should. Gary Brady captures a large part of this promise when he writes, "It is a promise of guidance, of entrance onto the narrow road that leads to life, and of God's leading all the way to heaven." Yet certainly included in this promise is that, on our earthly sojourn, the Lord will graciously shine his face on us and keep us. He will not let us down. He will lead us to where we need to be.

I personally leaned heavily on this promise more than 25 years ago when the missionary door to Australia closed in my face. I was sure that God was calling me to be a missionary, but when the Australian authorities would not grant me a visa, I needed to learn to trust in the Lord. As I did so, he directed my paths to South Africa.

## Trust God in Your Temptations

A second major area in which we must trust God is in our temptations: “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones” (vv. 7–8).

These verses speak to the temptations we face as we embark on a life of trusting the Lord. As we walk through this world, we face various temptations that seek to get us off the path, to chase “evil.” But if we choose rather to trust the Lord and his word, we will not succumb. Three trusting responses are required.

First, we must trust humbly: “Be not wise in your own eyes.” We must be dependent on God’s “eyes,” not our own. We must trust someone else – and that someone else is the Lord God almighty.

Second, we must trust reverently: “Fear the LORD.” We must develop a proper view of God and respond accordingly. We must honour someone – and that someone is the Lord God almighty.

Third, we must trust resistantly: “Turn away from evil.” We must take personal responsibility to eschew evil. Do something!

As we trust humbly, reverently and resistantly, we are again given a wonderful promise: “It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones” (v. 8). “Flesh” is, literally, a reference to the umbilical cord. It speaks of that which nourishes life. “Refreshment” could be translated “moisture.” The idea is of bones that are healthy and that have not dried up. The promise, therefore, is that of a life that is healthy. To the degree that we trust, and therefore obey, God, we will enjoy a healthy life. The more we avoid sin, the healthier a lifestyle we will enjoy (cf. Psalm 32, 38, 51).

## Trust God with Your Treasures

A third major area of trust is seen in vv. 9–10: “Honour the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

These verses address an area with which most of us perhaps struggle the most when it comes to trusting God: the area of our personal financial stewardship. But in this passage

dealing with trusting God, and thereby growing in our own personal integrity, being trustworthy with our money is deemed important.

The old covenant Israelite was commanded to bring the firstfruits of his harvest to the Lord (Exodus 23:19). The word translated “honour” means “heavy” or “weighty.” When we give a proportion back to the Lord of what he has given to us, we testify that he “carries weight” in our life. We testify that he is trustworthy.

Notice that this is not merely talking about our “tithe.” He says that we are to honour him with our wealth. Those who trust God understand that God gives *to* us to give *through* us. Are we being trustworthy with what he has entrusted to us?

This will look different in different contexts. At BBC, one way in which this displays itself is in our missions giving. Missions at BBC is sponsored through a faith promise offering. This is an amount that members of the church pledge, over and above regular giving, to give to the missions ministry of the church. It is called a faith promise commitment because it is a commitment, made by faith, by which we further the work of the Great Commission, trusting God to resupply as we create need by our sacrificial giving.

Once again, a promise attends this manifestation of trust: “then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” The agrarian culture sets the backdrop for this metaphor of God’s blessings upon those who trust him enough to be trustworthy with what is his. The picture is of abundance.

This is no prosperity gospel, but neither is it merely something to be spiritualised away. God promises to meet the needs of those who trust him to seek him and his kingdom first. Jesus made this quite plain:

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

(Luke 12:29–34)

## Trust God in Your Training

A fourth, and final, area of trust is displayed in vv. 11–12: “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

The Christian life is one of growing trust in the Lord. And this requires training. It requires discipline. It requires chastening. “To become a Christian is to become a child of God, and that means to come under his discipline” (Brady).

This is what we find in these final verses of this section. We are told that the person who trusts God will sometimes experience pain from God, but this is for experiencing the pleasurable promise of God.

“Discipline” speaks of instruction through chastening. When we fail to trust God, there will be consequences—often painful consequences. But not all discipline is necessarily because of our sin. It is, as with Job, to mature us so that we honour God always. As Newheiser observes, “While verses 9–10 tell us how to honour God during prosperity, verses 11–12 train us to honour God in the midst of adversity.”

How should we respond to “discipline”?

First, don’t underreact: “Do not despise the LORD’s discipline.” Do not treat it lightly; do not treat it as insignificant for God is lovingly at work in your life. Learn from it!

Second, don’t overreact: “not be weary of his reproof.” Don’t let it bring you down. Don’t be crushed by it. Rather, thank God for it and learn to trust him more. As Thomas Brooks wrote, “God would not rub so hard, were it not to fetch out the dirt and spots in his people.” In other words, God has a holy, helpful and happy purpose in such painful training.

A promise again attends this manifestation of trust. The promise here is implied, and like so much of the Old Testament, it awaits fuller revelation in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Notice the promise: “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” The fruit of the painful process is growth in godliness. This results from growth in trust in God. The training has built our trust! And in the light of this passage, this means more of God’s blessed treasures!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of this. Hebrews 5:8 reveals that he “learned obedience by the things that he suffered.” This is both amazing and unfathomable. But thank God that he endured the difficulties faithfully trusting God. For this reason, we have a Saviour. And because we have a Saviour, we have someone that we can trust completely.

## Trust and Its Treasures

Proverbs 3:1–12

Doug Van Meter

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He is the same Lord that this father exhorted his son to trust. We can trust him because he is trustworthy.

Will you trust him?

AMEN