

Some people assume that the Bible is a guide book on getting into Heaven.

In reality, that is only part of what the Bible has to say to us.

It is equally concerned with living well on this earth.

The Wisdom literature in the Bible is especially concerned with thoughtful and intentional daily living that gives glory to God.

The wisdom writings deal with honoring our parents and raising good children, handling money wisely and living ethically, caring for God’s creation, working hard, and practicing compassion.

They guide us in how to demonstrate holy, thoughtful and God honoring living in all that we say and do.

In our “Saving Jesus” class we are examining the Wisdom writings today, if you would like to learn more about this genre of Biblical literature.

The book of Proverbs deals with this type of teaching more than any other book in the Bible.

Attention to daily life is permeated throughout these writings.

It is a literary anthology of ancient Israel’s traditional wisdom, gathered from many diverse spheres of human life.

In most oral cultures parents and teachers passed on their own learning and ancestral wisdom to their children.

Proverbs is simply a literary gathering of rich oral wisdom.

While it is commonly believed that King Solomon was the author of Proverbs, Biblical scholars now believe that only a few chapters were from Solomon’s court.

Proverbs was compiled over several centuries from a variety of sources, during both the early Persian period after the Babylonian exile, and after Alexander the Great conquered Palestine.

It is a broad collection of ancient human advice collected over the centuries, and it is a great treasure for us.

The third chapter of Proverbs offers a prescription for a life lived long and well.

The author says that to be happy we should cling to love and loyalty.

We should take care of our bodies and our souls.

We should not try to understand everything or know everything.

We should honor God with all that we own, giving God the first and best.

And, most importantly, we should trust in God, “from the bottom of our hearts.”

“Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go.
And God will keep you on track. Trust in God from the bottom of your heart.”

That sounds easy enough, but it is very, very hard to do.

That is why reading a book like Proverbs is so helpful, it reminds us how to keep
the main thing the main things in our lives, which we so often forget.

Essentially faith is all about trust, trusting in God without reservation,
even in the face of great difficulty and uncertainty.

It is about trust in the face of illness, sorrow, life, and death.

It is about leaning on God when you simply cannot take another step.

Trusting in God not only with our minds, but with every fiber of our being.

It means letting go, releasing our tight grip on the steering wheel of our lives.

Saying yes to the universe and trusting that somehow, someday, all will be well.

I always slip into the false illusion that I am in control of things.

I feel like I can manage my life and the lives of several others, as well.

I try to orchestrate both the present and the future on my own terms.

Then life sends me a curve ball and I realize how misguided such notions are.

I really cannot control much of anything, often including myself.

Faith is about the relinquishment of control,

accepting our powerlessness, and cultivating genuine trust.

Faith is about humility, vulnerability, finding our lives by losing them.

Faith is trusting God from the bottom of your heart,

even when that heart is completely battered and broken.

I know it is hard to trust in God when things do not go the way you had planned.

I know it is hard to trust in God when you see so much suffering and heartache.

It is hard to trust God in the midst of violence, brutality, human stupidity and evil.

And I know that some of you see those things day after day.

One of our members is the public information officer for a local police department.

Exactly one week ago, she learned of a the murder of a 30 year old woman
at the Burger King in Arvada.

She has to immediately go to such tragic scenes, talk to the families of the victims,
and then communicate to the public exactly what has happened
and how the police are responding.

Such a huge responsibility in the face of overwhelming tragedy.

Some of you work with the forgotten and abused, and you see horrible things.

Some of you work in the medical field and you see children and adults

who are so sick, and never going to get better.
 You see the anguish of families whose hopelessness has worn them down.
 Just this past week one of our members asked me to pray for a family,
 in which the 21 year old son tried to commit suicide
 by shooting himself in the face.
 He survived, but has lost an eye, has some brain damage, had to have extensive
 facial surgeries, with a very long, difficult road ahead.
 How do you trust in God in a world where such things occur?

If we didn't trust in God there would be no hope for us at all.
 If we did not believe that God cares for all of us deeply and dearly,
 that love is stronger than hate, hope stronger than despair,
 then human life on earth would be unbearable.

Philip Yancey points out that "God refrains from continual interference with what
 takes place on earth, declining to humble every proud person and crush the wicked
 where they stand, for reasons that continue to perplex their victims.

We, like Job, assume that God has somehow arranged all events,
 then draw conclusions that are patently false, like these:

"God doesn't love me. God is not fair."

Faith offers the option of continuing to trust God even while accepting the limits
 of our humanity, which means accepting that we can not answer the
 'Why?' questions at all."

So I think faith in God is not accepting the unacceptable, or believing the
 unbelievable, but trusting in a power of love far greater than our knowledge,
 experience, doubt and despair.

I remember something I read once that said:
 "A sure sign of God is that you will find yourself where you did not plan to go."
 It's true. I doubt if any of us planned to end up where we are right now.
 We would not have dreamed our lives would unfold quite the way they have.
 Nor would we have dreamed that the world would be what it is today.
 So often the sign of God working in our lives is the unexpected, the unforeseen,
 the events that surprise, stretch and challenge us, things like moving a church.
 And being faithful means trusting in God when you are confused and angry,
 when you are led where you did not plan to go.

For some reason I have been thinking so much lately about the women of rural
 Guatemala. In some ways they embody this trust in God in the midst

of great difficulty and hardship.

These women do not have easy lives.

They have no modern conveniences like ovens or microwaves or washing machines, they have to do everything the hard way.

You see them washing clothes in the dirty lake, and cooking over a fire pit, gardening, cleaning, walking miles and miles to get anywhere.

Yet they are some of the most beautiful and contented people I have ever seen.

Our United Methodist Missionary to Guatemala, Eunice Arias is working with these women to empower them and increase their faith in God.

One day each month these women come from rural villages, walking as far as 5 miles, to the United Methodist Conference Center in Lemoa.

They come carrying their Bibles and their babies.

They come with their teenage daughters, wearing beautiful handmade clothes.

They come longing for a closer relationship with God.

Eunice and her husband have a mission to teach the women of Guatemala that God loves them, that they are special.

For most of their lives, these women have been told they are unimportant. They have been told that beyond having children and taking care of others, they have no value, no voice, no rights.

But for one day a month they hear otherwise.

They hear that they are beautiful, special, a reflection of the divine.

They sing and they laugh, they pray and they learn.

One day Eunice brought a box of mirrors and gave each woman a mirror.

She said: "In that reflection you will see God. For while God is outside of you and so much bigger than you, God is also with you and within you.

There is a divine spark within each person created in the image of God."

This was an incredible revelation to these women, who had never heard such a thing ever before.

Now they are finding their voices, uniqueness, and confidence.

They are learning to trust in a God who is finally accessible to them.

A God who cares for them in a deeply personal way.

When their time together has concluded, they walk back home happier, more confident and full of hope than they were before, eagerly anticipating what Eunice will have in store for them next month.

That is the sort of thing we need to convey to people who are so hungry

for a God they can trust, no matter what their circumstances or life experience.
A God who understands our human condition completely and loves us dearly.

Have any of you seen the movie in theaters now called “Evan Almighty?”

It is really one of the best movies I have seen in a long time.

Morgan Freeman plays God, and he is quite convincing.

This scene between Evan and God has Evan finally learning to trust and accept that

God really is who God says he is.

Let’s watch.... (Clip from Evan Almighty)

Faith is about trusting in that which we do not understand.

Faith is believing in the invisible so that you can do the impossible.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of
greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can easily be kept in an
enclosure with just a 3-foot wall.

Do you know why? The impala will never jump if they cannot see where their
feet will fall.

More often than not in this life we have no idea where our feet will fall.

We do not know where we are going, and so we refuse to jump at all.

Faith is the ability to trust what we cannot see, to be liberated from the flimsy
enclosures that only fear allows to entrap us.

May God help us all to live with hope and trust, even in the face of things we
did not choose and do not understand.

Thanks be to God.