

I DID IT MY WAY?
PROVERBS 3:1-35

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

M.I. IF WE HUMBLY SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE BIBLE'S TEACHING, WE CAN SEE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH ... AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS WE LOVE OURSELVES.

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I DID IT MY WAY? PROVERBS 3:1-35

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

If someone were to ask you what the Christian lifestyle was all about, what would you say? Jesus gave us a simple, straightforward answer. He said these two statements could sum up the Old Testament, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, and, love your neighbor as you love yourself.” That seems to be pretty simple, doesn’t it? But how can we express our love to God? How should we express our love for our neighbors? That gets a little more complicated. That is where wisdom tries to help us out in this morning’s text.

The problem with most of us is that we are proud, arrogant, stubborn, and lazy. We would rather make our own rules for loving God and one another. However, we must remember that God has given us the Bible to direct us in these matters.

I know many of you have memorized this verse, but if you have not, this would be a good time. Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” We need to take that verse to heart, chew on it, and let it sink deep into our souls.

Even in church, we often resort to doing things according to our own understanding, our own power, and in our own way.

Let me give you an example of how this arrogance can be played out in church. You remember the church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. How tough was it? It was so tough that it seemed the people were too clever for their own good. One evening I was teaching a lesson on being prepared to face the unforeseen possibility of death. I asked, “What would you do if you knew you only had four weeks of life remaining before you stood in front of Jesus?”

Some said they would use the four weeks to evangelize friends and family that had not yet accepted Christ. Some said they would spend that time with their wife and children. They all had great insights -- except one. And, wouldn't you know it, it had to be one of my deacons. After some considerable thought, the deacon said, "I would go on a four week road trip with my mother-in-law, in a small, compact car, and stay in a Motel-6 every night." Everyone was puzzled. I said, "Why in the world would you do that?" He said, "Because it would be the longest four weeks of my life." This is the type of reasoning we get when we do not trust in the Lord but instead lean on our own understanding.

I want to remind us again that the Proverbs are poetry and poetry is supposed to paint pictures for us. If you look quickly through the passage, you will notice that it is broken down into sections by the intimate appeal of parent to child. Verses 1, 11, and 21 all begin with the intimate appeal, "My child."

Further, you will remember the scene of Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai carrying two tablets. On the tablets were the 10 Commandments. These commandments instructed the Hebrews how to approach God and how to behave towards one another.

This is the picture I think the poet is trying to paint here. Verses 1-10 instruct us how we are to love God. Verses 21-35 instruct us how we are to love our neighbors and sandwiched in between these sections is Lady Wisdom. Moses carried the Ten Commandments with one tablet in each hand and Wisdom also carries these tablets in her hands.

The main idea of this morning's text is: **IF WE HUMBLY SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE BIBLE'S TEACHING, WE CAN SEE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT LOVING**

GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART, SOUL, MIND, STRENGTH, AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS WE LOVE OURSELVES.

If you think about who we tend to admire, we immediately see that it is not who the Bible sets up as one to admire. We admire people who are fiercely independent, people who push the limits, and people who bend the rules and do life on their own terms. We admire these rugged individualists. We kind of stand in awe of people who can sing, “I did it my way.”

However, this passage seems to paint a different picture of who God desires us to be. We are to be people of love, we are to love God, we are to love one another, and we are to love His Word.

I. LOVING GOD (Vs. 1-10)

WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD WHEN WE TRUST AND OBEY HIM.

Verses 1-10 start out describing what a loving God is all about. **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD WHEN WE TRUST AND OBEY HIM.**

Did you ever stop to think that if the greatest commandment is that I love God, how am I supposed to love Him? If you have taken premarital counseling with me, or any sort of counseling with me, I want to know how to demonstrate love for someone.

A. TRUST HIM WITH YOUR LIFE (Vs. 1-4)

If we really want to demonstrate our love for God, then all we have to do is ask Him what He wants. That is spelled out clearly in the Bible. Verses 1-4 inform us that God wants us to trust Him with our lives. Let’s think poetically here. The poet is a parent, a teacher, or a mentor speaking to a young person. Remember, if we want to let the Proverb hit us, then we take the place of the learner. We are the children, and our mentor is speaking to us. But is it really our mentor speaking to us, or is it wisdom speaking to us through our mentor, or is it God speaking

through our mentor? I think this is ultimately God speaking to us since there are so many words that point to God.

We are encouraged to remember the teaching; in Hebrew the word is Torah. We are to remember the Torah and keep God's commands in our hearts. If we do, in general, we will most likely enjoy a long and an abundant life. Look at the last word in verse 2. It is prosperity. Actually the Hebrew word is Shalom. We usually translate it as peace, but peace is not adequate here. We will live a life that is characterized by a calm and confidence in knowing that we are in a right relationship with God. That only comes when we learn to trust God with our eternal destinies. When we trust Jesus and His work on the cross for eternal life, then we ought to be able to face life and death with God-given peace, Shalom.

So far we have seen four words that point to the fact these are words from God. Let me recap those words: Torah, commands, life, and Shalom. But, if we move on to verses 3-4 we run into even more dramatic words. Verse 3 starts by introducing love and faithfulness. It is a good translation, but it is inadequate, love is the word "hesed." It is the word used in describing God's loyalty, kindness, and patient, steadfast love for us. This kind of love is defined when God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," and again when the Bible says that nothing in this world or the next can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, that is the word that characterizes the life we have been given in Jesus.

The second word is faithfulness and that word is "emet." It means truth. When looking at a believer, what you see is what you should get. We are called not only to speak the truth in love; we are to live the truth in love.

Not only should our lives display love and faithfulness on the outside, like a beautiful necklace, they should be part of who we are as we allow God to change us from the inside out.

They should be written on the tablet of our hearts. Did you catch that reference in verse 3 to the tablet? God wrote the Ten Commandments on tablets of stone. He wants love and truth written on the tablet of our hearts. That is one way we can demonstrate our love for God. We can approach Him with this same kind of passionate, steadfast, patient love that He has for us. We can be intimate with Him by being truthful with Him.

Do you remember how the Gospel writer Luke described Jesus? He said that He grew in stature and found favor with God and men. We run around trying to win and influence people in so many crazy ways, but just take a moment to think about this. Wouldn't you want to be friends with a person whose life was governed by unselfish, genuine love? That is the type of person God wants to be loved by. That is the type of person everyone probably wants to be loved by. God sent us Jesus to give us eternal life. God fills us with His Holy Spirit so that we can have eternal life. God wants us to trust Him with our lives.

B. TRUST HIM WITH YOUR WALK (Vs. 5-8)

Further, verses 5-8 inform us that God wants you to trust Him with your walk. Sometimes I think we trust God for salvation, and then forget Him, expecting Him to pick up the relationship with us again when we die. How would you feel if your husband or wife, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your parents or children, said, "I love you," one time, and then didn't speak to you for days? Would that be a satisfying relationship? We need to keep this truth in mind: when we became believers, the fullness of the Godhead, came into our bodies and took up residence through the presence of the Holy Spirit. God did not just save us and sit in heaven leaving us on our own.

Last week we said that God the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth, guides us, and comforts us. The Holy Spirit is our traveling companion through life. Here in verses 5-6 we have the

correct formula to successfully walk through life, and it is a simple formula: Trust in the LORD with all your heart. In all your ways, acknowledge Him. Again, let me draw your attention to the word LORD. It is written in capital letters. This is not any God or any spirituality, or just any religion this is the God of Israel, Jehovah.

There is that word trust again. We demonstrate our love for God when we trust Him. How do we trust Him? Look at the second half of verse 5, we trust Him by not doing things our own way, and by not leaning on our own understanding. What we have experienced is that we often forget about God as we go about our daily lives. But I do know this, the more we intentionally try to listen for God's leading, the more He leads.

I know there are a lot of good people doing a lot of good things in church but how many of these things are God's ideas? How many of them were requested by God? How many of them are being done God's way or with God's power? I think that most of us do most of the things in our life under our own power with our own understanding, and that is why the road is often bumpy. If we follow God's will, our paths will be made straight.

Now this is an interesting picture. When kings or dignitaries would visit a town, they would send out advance warnings that they were coming. The public works people would patch all the potholes, and grade the road so it was smooth and level. There would be no bumps as the king's carriage rolled over the road. In general, we could say that if we are willing to live life God's way we should find the way pretty smooth. However, if we insist on doing things our way, we can plan on wrecking a lot. There are plenty of potholes to hit if we are stubborn, which brings us again to the reason we often fail to submit to God and the Holy Spirit's leading.

Look at verse 7. I think that most of us tend to think we are smarter and more competent than we really are. It is pride and arrogance that trips us up every time. Since we will hit this

theme several times through Proverbs, let me just say in passing that if we want to really enjoy life, we must develop the virtue of humility. Learning to listen to God's leading, and learning to submit to and take guidance from Godly mentors will make life a whole lot easier.

I just want to make one more interesting observation. Look at verse 8. If we humbly submit to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, this will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Actually the Hebrew reads, "healing to your navel and moisture to your bones." If we stop and think about our navel in theological terms, we are reminded that we are children of Adam and Eve. We were born with rebellious natures, and a natural bent toward evil. It is only as we receive Jesus that we can receive new natures that desire to serve and follow God. Dry bones are the sign of the dead, but moist, vibrant bones are signs of the living. Exciting, vibrant life only comes as we live life the way God designed it.

C. TRUST HIM WITH YOUR FINANCES (Vs. 9-10)

Verses 9-10 remind us that we are to trust Him with our finances. Again, let me state this up front as clearly as I can, God does not need your money and He does not need mine. If you or I never gave another cent to church or charity, God's existence and God's power is not threatened one bit. When we give if we think we are good, or in any way, we should be applauded, then we are sadly mistaken.

Look at verse 9. Giving is for our benefit, not God's. The student is encouraged to remember to honor God with the first fruits of all his crops. The festival of first fruits was a harvest festival dedicated to God. The first and best produce was offered to God before any was kept for the people. It was to remind the Israelites they were slaves in Egypt when God met them, they had nothing. No, they had less than nothing. They did not even own their own lives. They were slaves.

God brought them to the Promised Land. He took it away from the inhabitants and gave it to the Hebrews. Everything they had, their land, their crops, their wealth and even their free lives were gifts from God. Giving Him their first and best crops were symbols that they realized this, and they believed this. Every year when they harvested crops they were aware that it was not hard work that produced the crops it was the fact that God sent rain at the right time. We tend to forget that in our industrialized world of today, but even though we forget does not mean it is not still applicable today.

Let me remind all of us what giving is about. It is not about status, power, or thinking we are good. I have actually told people to keep their money and quit giving to the church. Not only does God not need their money, He does not want it. Money cannot buy anything in the Kingdom of God. So if there is anyone who thinks God cannot do His work without our money, please quit giving.

Many churches teach that we should tithe our money. That means we should give a tenth of all our money to the church to do God's work. This is a biblical teaching. However, the problem is people tend to think, "I'll give 10% to God, and the 90% belongs to me to spend as I wish." When it becomes so legalistic that religious people ask, "Is that 10% of my gross salary, or after taxes?" You know, if we are asking these sorts of questions, then we have the wrong idea of giving. 100% of my money belongs to God, all of my property belongs to God, and all my possessions belong to God. My life belongs to God. Nothing I have achieved, nothing I have, nothing that I am, has come as anything but a gift from God.

We should be giving far above 10% so please do not think we are doing God any favors by giving money at church. What we are doing is demonstrating how much we trust God to provide for us and how much we trust in the truth that everything belongs to God.

Now, I think we are ready to give. When you give, look at the amount you are giving and say, “This is how much I trust God.” With that attitude, I don’t think any of us have anything to brag about based on how much we give because we will readily see how little we trust in God. That is sad, because God will take care of us. Trusting God is what adds real quality to life. When we trust God with our lives, with our daily walk, and with our finances, we will start to enjoy life to the fullest. How do we demonstrate our love for God? **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD WHEN WE TRUST AND OBEY HIM.**

II. LOVING WISDOM (Vs. 11-20)

WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD’S WISDOM BY HUMBLING OURSELVES AND LISTENING WITH HEARTS THAT ARE READY TO OBEY.

Verses 11-20 describe what loving wisdom looks like. In other words, **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD’S WISDOM BY HUMBLING OURSELVES AND LISTENING WITH HEARTS THAT ARE READY TO OBEY.** I hope we remember from last week that we must develop patterns of right thinking. We don’t always feel like doing the right thing and too many times our culture teaches us to think with our feelings and we are taught to follow our hearts. If we wait until we feel like following God, we may never act. We must act on God’s truth, even though we may not feel like it then, new and exciting feelings will follow. If you really want to make it successfully through the ups and downs in life, we must immerse ourselves in God’s word. We must study it and seek out good teachers to help us understand it.

A. TRUST GOD IN THE HARD TIMES (Vs. 11-12)

Verses 11-12 remind us to trust God in the hard times. Let me just throw out some basic facts of life. I am a sinner, and you are all sinners. We live in a sinful, fallen world. I am going to hurt others and so are you. We will all face suffering, setbacks, illness, and death. That unfortunately is a part of life.

Now add the fact that God is all-powerful and if He chose to, He could prevent all suffering. In addition to being all-powerful, God is all loving. That is to say He is not the author of evil.

The Hebrews, and certainly the poet felt that when we face difficult situations in life, we should look at them as God's discipline. In other words, even though God is not necessarily the direct cause for our immediate suffering, it would not be in our lives had God not allowed it. The Hebrews had no problem with this and neither should we as Christians.

We face two problems. The first is our confusion of pain and pleasure. We have been taught from a very early age that pain is bad and pleasure is good. So we necessarily think that when suffering comes into our lives that is bad and/or evil. If God loved me, how could He allow me to suffer? Well let me just use a quick illustration to refute that idea. If I have a cavity in my tooth that is left untreated, it could infect and decay my entire mouth. A trip to the dentist to fix this cavity is going to be painful, but the results will be good.

Any athlete or military person knows there is a lot of pain and suffering in the training we undergo. However, on game day, or when the battle begins, the training will produce good results. Pain is not evil and it often produces great results. The poet encourages us not to get discouraged nor resentful in difficult times. We should look at suffering in life as a chance for God to make us more Christ-like, which brings us to our next faulty idea of suffering.

We have this idea of entitlement from society. In other words, I deserve to have good things happen to me. I do not deserve to experience pain or suffering. When bad things happen, people always say, "She did not deserve that. What did I do to deserve this? Nothing like that should have ever have happened to him." In order to put this lie to rest once and for all, in this church at least, Jesus was the most perfect, holy, good person who ever lived in all of human

history. He is God and He deserved to sit on the royal throne. Yet, He was born in a barn, never owned any property, and never had any wealth. His friends betrayed and abandoned Him. He was falsely accused. He was arrested, tortured, publicly humiliated, and executed in the most painful way. Do any of us think Jesus deserved that? In reality, that is what we deserve. That is what we are entitled to, an eternity in hell. Is there any one here this morning that wants what we are entitled to in full? The point is everyone in this world is going to suffer. But if we are believers and trust in God, our suffering will be much more bearable for two reasons. First, we will never go through suffering alone. God has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. Secondly, if we allow Him, God will always use the suffering to make us better people. He will only allow suffering in our lives if He has a plan to use it for good because He loves us. God wants us to trust His promises in the hard times. That may be relatively easy since we do not have much choice in difficult times, but it is much more difficult not to forget God when things are going smoothly.

B. TRUST GOD IN THE GOOD TIMES (Vs. 13-18)

Verses 13-18 remind us to trust God in the Good times. These verses are framed by the word blessed in verse 13 and in verse 18. When life goes smoothly, we tend to forget God getting caught up in our daily routines and going about our business. The word blessed means to be happy. If we want to truly be happy in life, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Wisdom is found in the Bible. If you look at these verses you will see that God's word is better than any riches we can find in this world. Verse 16 reminds us that if we live life according to God's principles, then, in general we should enjoy life both in quantity and quality. Verse 17 reminds us that we find peace when we walk in God's ways. Peace teaches us to learn to enjoy our journey through life.

Again, let me quickly draw your attention to verse 18. Remember we are talking about Lady Wisdom in this section. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her. Eve was the first female but because she ate from the tree of knowledge, good and evil, sin and death entered the world. God kicked Adam and Eve out of the garden and they could no longer eat from the tree of life. Eve lost the tree of life for humankind. But now another woman, Lady Wisdom rediscovers the tree of life. We know that Jesus said He is life: that He is the vine and we are the branches, we find life, as we stay connected to Him. The tree of life will be central in heaven as portrayed in the book of Revelation. I know it is easy for us to get so busy and so caught up in our lives, that we forget that the good life and lasting happiness come only from staying connected to God's word.

C. TRUST GOD IN HIS TIME (Vs. 19-20)

Versus 19-20 balance both the good and bad times, we must trust God in His time. These two verses are packed but I am just going to mention a few things. God creates through wisdom. God spoke creation into existence. John, chapter 1, reminds us that Jesus is the Word and all things that exist are created through Jesus. Genesis, chapter 1, reminds us that the Holy Spirit hovers over creation. So God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all present at creation. This feminine wisdom is somehow connected to God.

But how does this creation talk fit into remembering God in good times as well as in the bad? No matter what situations we face in life, if we are living according to God's word, we can be sure that God is working for our good and in His perfect plan and His perfect timing. Job complained to God bitterly because he could not understand why he was suffering. He followed all the religious rules, yet he suffered. He kept saying, "Bring God here I'll have a talk with Him." Job had all sorts of questions and accusations that he wanted to present to God. The

interesting thing is that God does show up. Yet, He never answers any of Job's questions or accusations. God simply asks Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" to which Job simply responded, "Shut my mouth."

The Bible tells us how to live. The Bible lays out real expectations for life. We will enjoy good times and we will face suffering. We will be able to trust God in the good and bad times if we stay connected to the truth by staying in our Bibles. Let me ask this question. We have a lot of opportunities to study the Bible here at Devon Church. We have Sunday morning Bible study at 8:30. We have Friday evening studies. We have a high school group that meets on Saturday nights, and a prayer meeting group that meets on Friday nights. Do you take advantage of Bible study opportunities? These are all meant to provide opportunities for us.

Because **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR GOD'S WISDOM BY HUMBLING OURSELVES AND LISTENING WITH HEARTS THAT ARE READY TO OBEY.**

III. LOVING NEIGHBORS (Vs. 21-35)

WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR NEIGHBORS BY GRACIOUSLY SERVING THEM.

And finally, verses 21-35 talk about loving neighbors. This is pretty simple. **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR NEIGHBORS BY GRACIOUSLY SERVING THEM.**

A. TRUST GOD'S WAYS (Vs. 21-26)

However, in order to do that we must first trust God's ways as described in verses 21-26. This is the basis for why we do good things. Our goal in life is to be in a right relationship with God as He makes us more like Jesus every day. We will go through life and face the same difficulties that unbelievers face. However, we should have a peace in us that is much different. No matter what we face, even the greatest disasters we can imagine, even something like "911," we will have a peace that passes all understanding because we know we are in a right

relationship with God, we know that He loves us, and we know that our destinies are in His hands. Again, as we learn to trust in God, we will live life with great confidence, but we must continue to dedicate ourselves to living life in a manner that demonstrates our trust in God's ways.

B. TRUST GOD'S COMMANDS (Vs. 27-32)

Verses 27-32 exhort us to trust God's commands. These verses sound a lot like the Ten Commandments in that we can hear the "Thou shalt not." Here we can use the simple rule, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." If you were in need, wouldn't you want your neighbor to help you? I'm sure you would want to just be able to ask for help and not have to beg or nag him or her, right? Therefore, when we have the ability to do good, it is nice to do it.

Secondly, we should not harm our neighbors in any way. We are called to be helpful, not harmful. The sad thing is most of us do not even know our neighbors, or we do not like them. We are commanded to love our neighbors and to do good to them. We are to do everything we can do to be at peace with them.

Finally, we should never be jealous of our neighbors. If we truly believe that God loves us and that we are in His plan for our lives, then we can be genuinely happy for other's success and good fortune. Loving our neighbors really stems from the overflow of love we have with God in our personal lives. If I feel loved by God, it will be easy and natural for me to love my neighbor.

C. TRUST GOD'S PROMISES (Vs. 33-35)

Verses 33-35 remind us to trust God's promises. We will see this over and over throughout Proverbs and the whole Bible. God will curse the wicked, humiliate mockers, and shame fools. God will humiliate those who are proud, stubborn and arrogant. On the other hand,

God will bless the righteous, give grace to those who humble themselves, and give a full life to the wise. Those are promises. We are called simply to trust God and obey Him and in regards to our neighbors, **WE EXPRESS OUR LOVE FOR NEIGHBORS BY GRACIOUSLY SERVING THEM.**

Again, this morning's message is simple and straightforward. **IF WE HUMBLY SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THE BIBLE'S TEACHING, WE CAN SEE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH, AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS WE LOVE OURSELVES.**

As we discussed last week, we can only accomplish this as we submit ourselves to the leading of God's Holy Spirit. We have got to learn to trust in God and stop doing things our way.

T.T. Crabree puts it like this.

"A great missionary to China and later to Korea said, "You cannot do God's work without God's power." This truth is affirmed in the words of the text, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

Have you been trying to do God's work without God's power? Have you been trying to develop a Christian personality without the help of the Holy Spirit? Have you been seeking to teach a Bible class without a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit for God's enabling power? Have you been seeking to speak to those who do not know Jesus as Savior without a sincere dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to make your efforts effective?

Much of the weakness and the failure of God's people today can be traced directly to the fact that we are helpless without the help of the Holy Spirit."

Let me just leave you with this thought, actually God's thought: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)