

“Living Right Side Up”

Proverbs 3:5-6

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Introduction:

We are living in a world that is upside down. As we think about what that means, I need to let you know that there is a reason why I do not ride roller coasters. Some of you know that I grew up less than an hour from one of the largest amusement parks in the Midwest, and yet I have never been there. Not only that, but when our family went to visit my in-laws in Ohio, they all went to Cedar Point (a huge amusement park on the shores of Lake Erie), and I went by myself to an Amish hardware store; literally, in the middle of nowhere! It all goes back to when I was very young and went on the Octopus and the Tilt-a-Whirl with some good friends at the county fair. For now, let's just say that it did not go well, and my friends were not very happy with me that day—especially on the long and winding trip home. We know that when we are spun around in all different directions, it is sometimes difficult to get all straightened out again! We come off those rides, and we do not always walk in a straight line. We sometimes have a hard time getting our balance, and it does not always end very well.

I would suggest that this is what has happened in our society in general. It seems that everything has been turned upside down. Biblically speaking, it seems that nothing around us is right side up, and certainly that makes it so much harder for those of us as Christians to live as we should.

- Society says that sin should be an acceptable choice, and that we have no right to offer even a gentle word of correction.
- Society says that right may not always be right and that wrong may not always be wrong.
- Society looks at the murder of an unborn child and describes it as “freedom of choice.” In fact, surveys have shown that 45% of American adults find it morally acceptable to abort an unborn child.
- Society has no problem voting on the definition of marriage. In fact, some even within the Lord's church are pushing to redefine scriptural marriage.
- Even some within the church are working to change worship from God-centered to being man-centered.
- Others are working to redefine the distinct roles of men and women in the home and even within the Lord's church.

We are certainly reminded of the words of Isaiah in **Isaiah 5:20**, as Isaiah condemned the world of his time by saying, ***“Woe to those who call evil good,***

and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” Like Isaiah, we are also living in an upside down world. And yet this morning, even if the whole world is upside down, the Bible teaches that as children of God, we can live right side up.

This past week I read the words of Martin Luther King Jr., in a speech he delivered in Atlanta on January 27, 1965. These words were obviously spoken at a different time and in response to a different problem, but they certainly remain appropriate for our circumstances today. Mr. King said, **“History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the bad people, but the appalling silence and indifference of the good people. Our generation will have to repent not only for the words and acts of the children of darkness, but also for the fears and apathy of the children of light.”**

This morning, as the children of light that Mr. King referred to, I would like for us to study a passage from the book of **Proverbs**—a passage that was listed as a favorite Scripture of one of our members, a passage that will encourage us to keep on living right side up in an upside down world. The passage is **Proverbs 3:5-6**, and it is found in our pew Bibles, starting on **page 1004—Proverbs 3:5-6. » PPT »**

We know that the book of **Proverbs** was written by the wisest man who ever lived. You might remember that as Solomon became king, God let him ask for anything—wealth, or power, or anything, but we know that King Solomon asked God for an **“understanding heart.”** King Solomon asked for wisdom so that he would be able to make the right decisions as a leader of God’s people. We know that God answered that prayer; but we know that God was so impressed that He went ahead and gave Solomon everything else as well—not only wisdom, but also great riches and power. And here in the book of **Proverbs**, Solomon is now writing as an older man (many years later), and he is now trying to pass along some of God’s wisdom to his son. Some have suggested that out of all of the wise things that Solomon ever wrote, this passage that we are about to consider here this morning may be the wisest. So if you will, please look with me at **Proverbs 3:5-6**, a favorite passage of one of our members, and some of the wisest words from the wisest man who ever lived; the words of King Solomon, **“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 your paths straight.”**

This morning, let us think very carefully about what Solomon wrote here. And as God’s people living in an upside down world, let us allow the word of God to change our hearts.

I. One of the first things we notice Solomon saying is that WE ARE TO TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL OUR HEART. » PPT »

Certainly we have trusted many people, but so many times we have been let down. Perhaps we have put our trust in a member of the family. Perhaps we have put our

trust in the government. Perhaps we have put our trust in friends. Perhaps we have put our trust in an employer. But we know from experience that people will let us down.

We have learned, therefore, to be skeptical. Some of you know that we always get some interesting calls on the church phone line—people with elaborate stories asking for money. This week we got a good one—this guy was creative, he was convincing! But the more we checked into it, the more we realized that he was not a trustworthy individual. And it's sad, because the more dishonesty we see in the world, the more skeptical we become. People will let us down.

This past week I read about a woman who was driving through the mountains west of Denver when she ran into a terrible snowstorm. She was completely lost, just crawling along, when she finally saw a snowplow. So she decided to follow that plow. She stayed as close as she could through all of the turns and curves—that was her only chance of making it through that blizzard. That snowplow was her faithful guide. After about half an hour, though, the snowplow stopped. The driver got out and came back and asked the woman, **"Where are you going?"** She responded by saying that she was on her way to Denver, at which point the plow driver said, **"Well, you will never get to Denver by following me, because I am plowing a parking lot!"** There is yet another example of the danger of putting our trust in a person, and so we notice here that King Solomon tells us, instead, to put our trust in the Lord.

And Solomon tells us to do it with **"all your heart."** In the Old Testament, the heart was considered the center of the mind, and body, and emotions. And so trusting God with all the heart means that it is more than just a feeling, but it means that we trust God with all that we are—with all of our thoughts, and feelings, and with every decision that we make. There are no exceptions here, but we are to trust the Lord in everything. As Solomon says, we are to trust in the Lord with all our heart.

II. As we go back to Proverbs 3:5, we see a second idea. As we try to live right side up in an upside down world, Solomon gives a warning as he says, "DO NOT LEAN ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING." ➤ PPT ➤

To lean on something means that we put our weight on it, that we use it for support. Back in Solomon's time, the word he uses here for **"lean"** was used to refer to leaning on a cane. If we put our weight on a cane, it means that we trust it—it means that we are counting on it—it means that if it were to suddenly vanish, we would fall over. Solomon, then, is telling us that we are not to **"lean"** on our own understanding.

Most of us would like to think that we can figure things out on our own. And yet when it comes to spiritual matters, we remember the words of Solomon in **Proverbs 14:12**, **"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."** Trusting in God means that we have to admit that God is wiser than we are. That can be very hard to do. In our society, in our upside down world, even in

matters where God has spoken, we hear people say, **“Well, every person is entitled to his or her own opinion.”** And then, based on that statement, once the Biblical standard has been removed, the doors are opened up for just about everything. Someone will say, **“I think Christians need to be more tolerant of other world religions. I think that gays should be allowed to get married. I think that we should not make such a big deal about baptism, or instrumental music, or divorce, or the role of women.”** And yet all of these statements have two words in common—two very dangerous words, **“I”** and **“think.”** **“I think...this way or that way.”** We understand, though, that we can make mistakes in the way we think about something.

As human beings, we are not always as bright as we think we are. This past week, I read about two men who went out fishing, and one man asked the other if he remembered to mark the location where they caught all those fish. The second man responded that he had marked the spot, that he had put a big **“X”** right there on the side of the boat. The first man got upset and said, **“But what if we take out a different boat next time?”** Solomon, then, warns us that we are not to lean on our own understanding. We are not to put our trust in human reasoning, but we are to lean on the Lord instead. We are to allow God to have a leading role in the way that we live.

This past week, I read about a couple who were celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. At the party, people were asking the husband, **“What is your secret? How have you managed to stay married for so long?”** The husband replied, **“When we were first married, we made an agreement: I would make all the major decisions and my wife would make all the minor decisions. And in 60 years of marriage, I have never needed to make a major decision.”** Well, it seems that a lot of people do the same thing with God. They make all of the minor decisions, they leave the big decisions up to God, but then they never seem to get around to making any big decisions. In the book of **Proverbs**, Solomon is telling us to include God in the decision-making process. We are not to lean on our own understanding.

III. As we look back at Proverbs 3:5-6, we find a third basic idea here as we are told by Solomon to ACKNOWLEDGE GOD AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT. »PPT»

The word that we translate here as **“acknowledge”** refers to knowing God. The Hebrew word is **“yada,”** as in Seinfeld, **“Yada, yada, yada.”** The word was used in the Bible when a man went in and **“knew”** his wife—nine months later, a baby would arrive on the scene! It refers, therefore, to intimate knowledge. In everything we do, then, we are to know God. We are to look for God’s direction. We are to keep God in mind. We are to know God at school, we are to know God at home, we are to know God at work, we are to know God on the weekend, we are to know God on vacation.

And Solomon says that if we acknowledge God in all our ways, there is something in it for us. He does not promise to make us wealthy. He does not promise to give us a life of constant pleasure. He does not promise to keep us healthy. But we find in **verse 6** that, **"...He will make your paths straight."** The word we translate here as **"straight"** refers to something that is smooth, agreeable, straight, or right.

We might say that God will be with us. God will help us navigate. God will make the path obvious. God will make the path as smooth as possible. We remember the words of Jesus in **Matthew 7:13-14**, **"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."** The way may be narrow, but the Lord has promised to show us the way.

We think about the interstate system here in the United States. We are thankful that we are able to travel so well. A long road trip may not be easy, but it is so much easier than it was a hundred years ago. All along the interstate, we can see where roads have been lifted up through the valleys and where roads have been cut through the mountains. In a few days, we will be traveling to Tennessee, and it is so obvious down there in southern Illinois, and Kentucky, and along the interstate down near Nashville. Someone has gone through a great deal of effort to make the path as smooth as possible. I believe Solomon is saying the same thing about God. If we acknowledge God, if we put God in first place, if we make God our pilot, Solomon tells us that He will make our paths straight. The straight path is not always easy, but it is a path that leads away from sin and back to God.

We remember this principle from the book of Daniel. Back in **Daniel 3**, Daniel's three friends are told by the king that they will either bow down and worship a huge golden statue, or they would be thrown in a fiery furnace. Their response is recorded in **Daniel 3:16-18**, **"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."** We remember that as a result of their commitment, God made their paths straight. Not only were they saved from the fire, but the king ended up praising God and promoting those three young men in the kingdom. The lesson for us is that in our upside down world, God can see through the confusion, and if we acknowledge God in all our ways, He will make our paths straight. We can travel safely, because the hard work has already been done. The way has already been prepared.

Conclusion:

This morning, then, we have looked at what is the favorite scripture for one of our members. I hope that we have been encouraged as Christians to keep on living right side up even when the world seems to be upside down. As we think back over these

two verses, I would just like for us to think about this idea of trusting God, and I would like for us to ask ourselves some questions:

- Are there any areas in our lives where we are not trusting God as we should?
- Are we trusting God with our careers?
- Are we trusting God with our finances?
- Are we trusting God with our families?
- Are we trusting God with our relationships?
- Are we trusting God with our service for those who are less fortunate than we are?
- Do we have any reservations about our Christian faith?
- Are there ways we are holding back from God where we should not be holding back?
- Are we making all the minor decisions and only leaving the big stuff up to God?

I hope we can take a few moments over the coming week to reevaluate the way that we are living and to change our attitude and to change our behavior as might be necessary.

The Bible teaches that God sent His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice with trust. We trust that God knows best, and so we do what He has asked us to do. We turn away from sin, as difficult as that may be. And then we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will talk to us after the service this morning. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org