

Pilgrim Life: Walking with God by Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] We have been looking at the Christian life from the point of view of pilgrimage. Last week we talked about walking with God through Jesus Christ.
- And today we're looking at walking with God by faith. And I've included in the bulletin a translation of those very famous two verses by Dr. Bruce Waltke.
- Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways, not acknowledge him, but desire his presence. And he will make your paths straight and smooth.
- The Bible says we make three kinds of decisions. Things we must do, the Bible gives us positive teaching, positive commands. Love God, love your neighbor, give to the poor, honor your parents.
- The second kind of decisions are things we must not do. Negative commands. Don't worship idols. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie or steal. Don't hoard your money.
- [1 : 0 8] But in between those kinds of decisions is a massive majority of our choices that we go through every day. Probably 85% of decisions you and I make, small and big.
- There's no specific command or ban. And that vast middle area is what the Bible calls wisdom.
- What brand of toothbrush do you use? What job should you have? Who should you marry?
- Where do I send my kids for school? The moral values we have as Christians help. But these are all wisdom decisions. There are commands on the edges.
- But most of the decisions we make are wisdom decisions. And wisdom in the Bible sense is making decisions big and small, being in touch with the reality from God's point of view.
- [2 : 1 4] It's a very different thing than being a moral person or just obeying commandments, following the rules. You can live a good moral life and go to church and try and obey the Ten Commandments and still be out of touch with reality.
- You can be an outwardly very moral person and have vast areas of foolish decision making in your life. And the key picture of wisdom in the whole of Scripture is the path, paths, walking step by step in a particular way.
- In all your ways, acknowledge him or desire his presence and he will make your paths straight or he will direct your paths. It's a picture of life which is very, it's deceptively simple.
- Because we live life one step after the other. We're not leaping mountains. Each decision and choice we make, every single little step, we become a little wiser or a little more foolish.
- Each step we take moves us more in the direction of God or away from God. And the fact that our lives are like a path means that yesterday, you and I were not the same as we were the day before.

[3 : 33] Today we are different. My behaviours and choices and decisions are creating a character in me out of the ordinary things of daily life.

In each decision, I try and reflect the reality as God sees it or I move a bit closer toward the delusion of what I want to believe.

In every decision, I twist my soul toward God or I twist my soul away from God. So what does this look like? What does it mean to walk with God by faith?

And I'm just really going to focus on these couple of verses. And there's a banner headline and then there are three steps spelling out what it means. And you know the banner headline, don't you?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

[4 : 32] I think if we were writing these verses today, we might write it more like this. Trust in yourself with all your heart. Don't lean on anyone else's understandings.

In all your ways, do what's best for you and you'll get ahead of everyone else. No, no. What's quite stunning about this command is the fact that we have to be commanded to trust the Lord.

Shows how foolish we are. That's the banner. What are the three steps? The first step is do not lean on your own understanding.

It's almost impossible to express how odd and opposite the way that is from the way we think about things in Vancouver in 2015.

It's the opposite of the messages we hear every day in the media and education. Imagine you're a Martian and you come from Mars on a mission.

[5 : 36] And the mission is how do these earthlings make decisions? And you live in Vancouver for 48 hours. I think you'd go back saying those people on earth, they live scripted lives.

They live their lives around certain scripts. And here are their scripts. Believe in yourself. Trust in yourself. The only thing stopping you is not believing in yourself.

And then these are other scripts like tolerance is the most important virtue. Or there's no fixed genders. It's only what you choose to identify. Be true to yourself.

Rely on yourself. And then you'd have to have a little addendum at the end of the report saying something like, but there's this very strange group. They're a minority group. And they believe they should not rely on their own understanding.

And they read this long story from a book which says things like, whoever trusts in their own mind is a fool. That's from Proverbs. Whoever trusts in idols will be put to shame.

[6 : 40] Whoever trusts in riches will fail. Whoever trusts in his own righteousness will die. Or again in Proverbs, Do you see the one who is wise in their own eyes?

There is more hope for a fool than for them. And I think you'd have to say as you're reporting back to the Martian high command, that this little group seems to be doing something completely unnatural for humans.

They believe that their God can see all of reality. And for them, humility is more important than hoarding or getting ahead. And worse than that, they follow a man who died by crucifixion.

See, don't lean on your understanding means that the Christian life is more about poverty of spirit than it is about discipline. You can be a very disciplined person and thoroughly religious and live, as I say, an outward life and still be full of prejudice or bitterness or cowardice.

Because of your own trust in yourself and your own inability to see your own blindness. Because, you know, the Bible's basic view of sin is it's preferring my ideas above God's.

[7 : 59] It's not trusting him with all your heart. It's unbelief. Defiance against God comes from reliance on myself. And underneath spiritual ignorance is a heart which is proud and hard.

So do not trust on your own understanding means we have to get over our allergy to helplessness. We have to live as though we're needy in the small decisions of life.

To know I'm unable really to guide my path here, being on my knees, in fellowship with the one who knows all of reality. Proverbs says it's the fool who lives based on their own perspective.

Just think about it. I mean, none of us have the whole perspective. I can see certain things from here. In fact, I can see more than most people think I can see from up here. I know when people are writing shopping lists and that sort of stuff.

You can see other things that I can't see. But there's only one who can see it all and that's God. So do not rely on your own understanding. Trust in the Lord. That means don't rely on your own understanding.

[9 : 09] Step two, in all your ways acknowledge him. So if we don't rely on our own understanding, how do we make daily decisions? And the answer is a comprehensive habit of the heart, something very simple.

And in all your ways acknowledge him. The Bruce Waltke translation shows that's very cold. It's not just ticking a box and saying, yes, I acknowledge you, God, or I recognize your authority.

The word has to do with a deep, inner, experiential intimacy with a real person. It's not following rules again. It's friendship with God.

In all your ways desire his presence. So the way that we stop leaning on our own understanding in this big area of the 85, 90% of the choices in life is that we seek God's presence.

We practice his presence. The fact is, God is far more intimately involved in all your ways than you are. The Bible says he knows our thoughts before we think them.

[10 : 17] Before a word is formed in our mouths, he knows it entirely. And when we desire to have his presence in all our ways, it means a change, not in God, but in us, because he's already there.

You know, what happens, I think, in the Christian life is you get so focused on the next step or the cliff or the, you know, who's with you or who's looking at you or not falling off the path or how am I going to navigate the thing up ahead there?

And we miss the most important thing, and that is that God is right here beside me. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. So to seek his presence in all our ways is a habit of the heart. And in every decision, in every choice you and I make, we're either seeking him or we're not seeking him.

We're either leaning on him or we're leaning on our own understanding. That's how Christian character works. Christian character doesn't come out of force of will, but it comes by turning away from my own desires, my own predilections, and cultivating the habit of seeing God in my daily circumstances.

[11 : 33] And I don't know how that can happen apart from prayer. It's mostly about prayer, I think. Not giving God a long list, but praying for the sake of the relationship with God.

Speaking to him because he wants friendship. We can't see the whole picture, but he does. And what he wants is for us to take his hand so that we seek his presence in all our circumstances.

And that means the whole focus of life is different. It's not just getting through. It's not having a plan. It's not knowing the next step. It's walking with him. It's seeing God in all our circumstances.

It's having the pleasure of God with us. That's the second step. Boys and girls, we have about a minute left. I hear you're working very well here. All right.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Step one means don't rely on your own understanding. Step two, in all your ways, desire his presence. Three, he will make your paths straight and smooth.

[12 : 40] That does not mean your path will be easy. We don't have the Bibles open, but if you look just a few verses down the page, you can do all you can that's right and terrible things will still happen.

In fact, part of the path that God leads us on is through suffering because it's in suffering that we learn he is with us more than anywhere else. There's a Portuguese proverb that says, God writes straight with crooked lines.

The path is straight and smooth, not from our perspective, but from God's. The path of wisdom is made up with daily steps in the presence of God.

And when you're on that path, you'll go through desert places and you'll go through storms. And even then, you'll still have a worm's eye view of the track. But it's only when we see God, who alone is worthy of our trust and love, who alone loves us to death, even death on the cross.

This is the key, I think, that God should be with us. So it means that our faith is not just about receiving salvation. It's the one way to stay on the path as God guides us.

[13 : 57] In all our hearts, in all our ways, laying hold of his presence and abandoning our own reliance. Because as Jesus said, after he'd risen from the dead, he says, look, I am with you, all of you, all of every day, to the ends of the earth.