

STRETCH YOURSELF: YOUR TRUSTING **Proverbs 3:5-6**

INTRODUCTION:

One of the types of exercise that helps promote physical fitness is stretching exercises. Stretching is designed to loosen stiff muscles and release tense joints. Many athletes engage in a variety of stretching exercises as a prelude to strength training or aerobic exercise.

Have you ever thought that some of us need to stretch ourselves spiritually? We need to loosen up in some areas where we have become rigid. We need to extend ourselves beyond where we have settled in, settled down and settled for something less than what God has in store for us.

One of the areas where some of us need to stretch is in our trust of God. I don't know about you but I feel convicted by the command of Proverbs 3:5-6.

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;*
⁶ *in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

The Message paraphrase puts that sentence this way: "*Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.*"

It can be hard for me to trust God and not try to figure everything out for myself...and try to manage the results and manipulate the outcomes. And I don't think that is a matter of being OCD or being a control-freak. I think that is fairly normal and pretty typical. Most of us have trouble surrendering control over our lives – even to God. But that is precisely what He requires of us. Some of us...perhaps most of us...need to stretch ourselves with reference to our trusting God.

Philip Yancey has written a probing, thought-provoking and insightful book, *Disappointment With God: The Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. Because I am sure you will want to know the three questions no one asks aloud, I will tell you what Yancey says:

- 1) Is God unfair?
- 2) Is God silent?
- 3) Is God hidden?

Yancey did a lot of research before he wrote his book so I don't question that these are the three questions most people ask. But, based on my experience as a person and as a pastor, my top three would be:

- 1) Is God there?
- 2) Is He fair?
- 3) Does He care?

Or, to boil it down to just one question: "Can you trust God?" Proverbs 3:5 says to trust in the LORD with all your heart. That's tough. Do you believe that God is trustworthy? Have you trusted Him with **all** your heart? Would you like to? Let's talk about how to do that.

I. GET TO KNOW GOD INTIMATELY

If you are serious about stretching yourself to trust God even more than you already do, surely the best and first place to begin is in getting to know God intimately. Surely that ought to make sense to any of us, shouldn't it?

Have you ever seen a doting father toss a baby up in the air and catch him? Often the baby wiggles and giggles and has a lot of fun with this game. The game is fun because the baby trusts his daddy. Instinctively, the infant knows that his loving father will never allow him fall.

But let a stranger try the same trick and the baby will often get rigid with fear and cry out in terror. He doesn't recognize this person. He doesn't know his touch and so he doesn't trust him in the same way he trusts his father.

In the same way, it makes perfect sense that we will trust God more when we get to know Him more.

- As we become familiar with His nature, we learn the truth of I John 4:8, which says, "God is love." That is His nature. That is His character. Love is what God is. Love is who He is. As we get to know that, we learn to rest secure and safe in His love.
- The more intimate we become with God, the more we know the truth of I John 1:5, that "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." We come to realize that we walk in the light when we walk with God.
- When we grow close to God, we realize that II Thessalonians 1:6 spoke the truth when it declared, "God is just" and He will defend His own.
- The Word of God reveals that God is spirit, God is truth, God is wise, God is greater than our hearts. It is a wonderful thing to read these descriptions of the LORD. It is a wonderful thing to learn these facts and memorize these passages. But that, alone, will not help you stretch your trust in God.

If you would stretch your trust in God, you must grow to know Him...not just know about Him but know Him: as a loving Father, a personal Companion, a reliable Guide, a trustworthy God.

If it is true that we must grow to know God intimately so we can trust Him, then the question must be asked, "How do we grow to know Him intimately?" Let me suggest some ways:

- A. Get to know God through His written word. There is a reason that the Holy Spirit inspired writers to record the historical experiences of the people of old. In I Corinthians 10, Paul wrote a lot about people who, during the time of Moses, enjoyed the blessings of God but refused to obey Him. They were punished for their disobedience. Paul says that these people are examples to us and that these things were written down as warnings to us so we would learn to obey.

Similarly, the stories of those who obeyed God and who enjoyed the blessing of His presence in their lives, are an encouragement to us and were written down as examples to inspire us to draw near to the LORD.

- B. Get to know God through His Living Word. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus is the very Word of God that took on human form and lived in the flesh among people. Not only is Jesus God's Word in human flesh, he is God in human flesh. If you want to come to know God intimately, get to know Jesus personally. One of the names of Jesus is "Emmanuel" which, the Bible says, means "God with us."
- C. Get to know God through His written word and through His Living Word; and get to know Him through living His word. By that, I mean put Him to the test; try what He has commanded; do what He has said; see if His way is best. You will get to know God intimately when you live out His will. I think that is what Paul meant in Romans 12 when he told the Christians in Rome, "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*"

It is hard to trust a stranger but it becomes easier to trust one whom we know and whom we know to love us.

II. **GROW TO TRUST GOD IMPLICITLY**

To stretch ourselves in our trust of God, we must get to know Him and we must grow to trust Him. Trust is like a muscle that can be developed. It is as we trust God with the small areas of our lives that we learn we can depend on Him in the larger and more important areas of our lives.

There is an old song we used to sing in church. It was a song about The Old Time Religion that is good enough for me. Do you remember that song? One of the verses said, "It will do when I am dying. It will do when I am dying. It will do when I am dying and it's good enough for me."

What about your religion? What about your relationship with God? What about your faith in Him? Your trust in Him? Will it do when you are dying? It will not do in the most trying times at the end of life if you haven't stretched your trusting during the better times of life.

William Barclay tells the story of an old Scotsman in a glen in the Highlands who was desperately ill. One night a great storm arose. His daughter came to his bed to comfort him. With a Bible in her hand, she said, "Father, shall I read to you from the Book?" "No, Lassie," he said, "I thatched the roof before the storm began."

You don't want to wait for a flood to find out that you didn't have flood insurance. You don't want to wait until you are diagnosed with a chronic illness to find out that you don't have medical coverage. And you do not want to wait until you are dying to find out that you haven't learned to trust in the LORD with all of your heart.

At the other extreme are those who say they trust the LORD to take them to heaven but they don't trust Him to get them through life. Doesn't it seem a bit ironic that Christians will often trust God with the big things but not the little things? We trust Him with the big things like our eternal home but we do not trust Him with the little things like our earthly shelter. We trust Him to save us but we do not trust Him with our savings.

If we are to stretch ourselves in our trust of the LORD, we should begin by trusting Him in the small things of our lives. When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray like he did, he taught them to say, "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Do you see the progression? We ask for such ordinary things as daily bread as a prelude to asking for such an extraordinary thing as forgiveness of our sins.

Learn to trust the God of the daily bread so you can grow to trust the God of pardon for all your transgressions.

III. GIVE HIM YOUR LIFE IMMEDIATELY

Are you one of those who say that you will stretch yourself in your trust in God...eventually? Ultimately? In II Corinthians 6:2, Paul wrote, "*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*" What is to be gained by putting off the best decision you can ever make? The best step you can ever take?

And what is the risk of delaying what you know you should be doing? In James 4:13-16, James, the brother of our Lord, wrote,

¹³ Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

And then, in the very next verse, James concludes:

¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

In the context of chapter 4, I understand James to be saying that we do not know what tomorrow holds, nor if there will even be a tomorrow. Therefore, we'd better be doing what we know we ought to be doing and we ought to be doing it now because we do not know if we'll ever have another chance.

A few years ago, an elder asked me if I realized that every sermon I preached might be the last sermon someone might ever hear. I had not really thought about that but once he said it, I could not get those words out of my mind. I even used that as the scrolling screensaver on my computer: "This may be the last sermon someone will ever hear." It still haunts me when I prepare and when I preach.

But let me turn that question back on you: Have you ever thought that the sermon you've just heard may be the last one you will ever hear? This invitation may be the last you ever receive. This opportunity may be your final opportunity to do what you know God is calling you to do.

CONCLUSION:

Solomon told us:

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

That is what Solomon wrote. Here is what Eliza E. Hewitt wrote:

"Give Me thy heart," says the Father above—
No gift so precious to Him as our love;
Softly He whispers wherever thou art,
"Gratefully trust Me and give Me thy heart."

Gratefully trust me and give me your heart. Will you?

INVITATION: #466 in old book – "Give Me Thy Heart"