

Post-It Notes From God: Trust In The Lord
By Jason Huff
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Job 28:20-28, Mark 12:28-34, Proverbs 3:1-12

Friends, our final Scripture reading tonight is from Proverbs 3:1-12. Let's listen to the Word of God. "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. 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. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

"Get in shape!" That's a Post-It Note we have on our refrigerators January 1st. We think, now is the time to get my act together and get healthy. Some of us have worked on that the last couple years. Some of us are doing it right now! We're counting carbs and proteins, fruits and veggies and fats. It's time-consuming to count up the calories you've eaten in a day, let alone the time it takes to exercise enough to truly be fit.

God has placed that Post-It Note on the door of our hearts – "get in spiritual shape"! Proverbs is one of the books called Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, and while we're only spending a couple of weeks with it, it's good to turn to now and again. Whenever we do, we find little post-it notes of godly wisdom. Our passage for today, a portion of Proverbs 3, is exciting for our lives when we take our spiritual health seriously.

Let's put the disclaimer right up front: the spiritual health found in Proverbs 3 is not salvation. Salvation is essential, and it is given to us as a free gift from Christ when we exercise faith in Him. When we trust that Jesus came and lived a perfect life and died on the cross in our place for our sins, when we believe in Him and believe Him, when we genuinely want to turn away from sin and follow Him, salvation is ours. Following Jesus is a lifelong process. Spiritual health is about following God well. We can have salvation but be spiritually flabby and weak, which isn't what God wants. He wants strong believers who receive all the benefits that come with dedication to their spiritual health!

What do all the fitness programs advertised on TV do? They give you all the ways you're going to feel great and look better up front. Then at the end, they tell you how much time and money you have to put into it, usually only fifty payments of \$19.95 and a couple hours a day. We'll do the same thing and go through the benefits of spiritual health first. Thankfully, the good news is, not only will we discover that spiritual health is incredibly good for us, we'll discover that the requirements to get into spiritual shape are blessings in and of themselves.

So, what does Proverbs 3 tell us are the results of spiritual health? A longer life. Prosperity. Favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Straight paths. Bodily health and nourishment. Barns filled to overflowing and vats brimming with new wine. God's fatherly love. Those are amazing! Who wouldn't want those things? It's like hitting the life jackpot!

Now before you think I've become the next Benny Hinn or Creflo Dollar, there's another disclaimer: just like with physical health plans, your results may vary. Proverbs are not promises from God; they reflect typical outcomes when you grow in God's grace. Some are metaphorical – nobody should go out and built a barn or a winery tomorrow because of this passage! Some of them, God will fulfill when His Kingdom comes. Some God may withhold for our own benefit so that we pursue Him for Himself rather than for the good things He has in store.

But when we start spiritually exercising, we can expect to see good things happen. Some of them naturally result from following God's ways; others are counterintuitive and require us to have faith that God will work in spite of what our earthly wisdom says will occur. But there are huge benefits, not just in the next life, but in this one. Being spiritually healthy has rewards.

This isn't just an Old Testament thing! Jesus said in Mark 10:29-30, "I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-- and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life." In Matthew 6, Jesus says not to worry about food or clothes or even our lives. He says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." God provides abundantly for the one who seeks to do His will and be spiritually healthy.

So what are the keys to getting into spiritual shape? There are six, and I've made them easy to remember. They are the six Rs of spiritual fitness according to Proverbs 3. When you're getting in shape, you want a total body workout. These six Rs will give you a full soul workout. Here they are: 1) **R**emember the commands of God. 2) **B**e **R**uled by love and faithfulness. 3) **R**ely on God rather than yourself. 4) **R**ebuke evil and self-wisdom. 5) **R**eturn the firstfruits of your wealth to God. And finally, 6) **R**ecognize the value of discipline. These are established, straightforward ways to pursue God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Let's start at the beginning: *Remember the commands of God*. "Do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart." This is repeated over and over in Scripture. The fifth book of the Bible is Deuteronomy, which means, "Second Law." Moses, at the end of his life, repeats God's Law to the young Hebrews so they won't forget the commands given to their fathers. Throughout history, the Israelites were told, "Return to God and His commands."

The difficulty for many of us in remembering the commands of God is, you can't remember what you don't know! Sometimes, we focus a lot in Christianity on forgiveness. God forgives our sins through Jesus Christ. That's the most important thing we need to know. But what is it that we need to be forgiven for? What are sins? How can we please God if we don't even know what pleases Him? We can guess, but our guesses are often wrong! It's nice if I buy you a cake for your birthday, but if you're allergic to gluten, that cake could kill you! We need to know and remember God's commands so we can delight Him and delight in Him.

Next week, we're starting a series called The Big Ten. We'll discuss the Commandments and what they mean for us today. Maybe you grew up in church and think you know them all. Maybe you've never studied them. It doesn't matter - those who've heard them will remember them; those who've never really understood them will get the big picture. Knowing and remembering them will help us know and remember our savior Jesus.

Our next R is, *be Ruled by love and faithfulness*. The verse says, "never let them leave you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart." Love and faithfulness are to be the core of who we are. I could preach all day on these two, but we're just going with the Post-It Notes. What is this kind of love? It's caring deeply for other people, for their welfare, showing concern and compassion, making time for them, even when we don't know them very well and especially when it doesn't seem they deserve it.

Faithfulness is staying the course. The word in Hebrew means stability and firmness; one translation calls it "constancy." When the going gets tough, the faithful stay put. The faithful are the folks you can always count on. You need them, they are there. They show up for work and do their best. They volunteer at church for the jobs that aren't their favorites but need to be done. They are the ones who make sure, day after day, week after week, they've done what God has asked them to do. Their trust in God is stable even when the world around them is not.

As believers, these should define us. They aren't things we practice here and there. It would be hard to be faithful just part of the time, right? Love isn't love unless we love when it's difficult. To care about others when it's easy is more about us and what we get out of it rather than them.

When these characteristics define us, they set us apart as God's people because we all know people don't live this way. Our society is defined by broken marriages; young people don't marry because they've seen so much unfaithfulness, they don't want to make a promise they can't keep. The idea of working for one company your whole life is a thing of the past. But when we stay loyal to our family, to our spouse, to work, to friends, it shows God's work in us.

The neat thing is, this is the only Post-It note we get that promises us favor from not just God but other people. You live a faithful, loving life, you will have a good name, you will earn respect and favor with others. Even those who have no interest in God will see your love and faithfulness and say, "That's who I want to be."

Third R of spiritual health: *Rely on God rather than yourself*. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him." A couple of weeks ago, we discussed how wisdom isn't just having lots of facts but is knowing God's perspective. Trusting in the LORD means believing that what He says is good, even when our hearts or our minds tell us otherwise. This is relying on the fact that God's wisdom is always right in every circumstance.

The very first sin in the Bible didn't start with Eve eating the fruit of the forbidden tree. It started with not trusting God. Eve knew what God had said – “Don't eat.” The serpent said, “God's holding back. You'll become like Him if you eat that fruit.” Now if she had trusted the LORD, right then, she would have said no. She would have said, “You might be right, but I trust that what He's told me is true.” Trusting in the LORD keeps us from sin.

The pledge tied to trusting the LORD might seem a little weak – “He will make your paths straight” – but it's not. Even contemplating sin is a burden; leaning on our own understanding requires us to do a lot of mental gymnastics that leave us exhausted. It's a crooked path. Look at Genesis 3:6. When Eve thinks about what the snake says, what does she do next? She has to work to justify herself. She looks at the fruit and says, “Well, it will feed me.” Next she says, “OK, it looks good – it's not rotten. In fact, it might be the best looking fruit in the whole garden.” Then she thinks, “I could be wise by eating that fruit.” Then she takes some. Then she eats. She's already twisted in her thinking, thinking that could have been left pure simply by saying, “God says no.”

Friends, many of our worries and fears and problems come from trying to figure out ways around God's simple truths. Some things are complex to understand – nobody's got a quick and easy answer to the issues of race and poverty in Ferguson, and nobody's got a pat solution for peace in the Middle East. But many things are simple. God says X, so do X! It simplifies our lives. We have smartphones and calendars and apps all to make our lives simpler. The best way we can have a simple and joyous life is to trust in God and have His straight path in front of us.

Fourth R: *Rebuke evil and self-wisdom*. These come, the verse says, through fear of the LORD – utter respect for Him and His ways and the proper fear that comes from knowing we will meet this all-powerful supreme being one day. Those things keep us from thinking too highly of ourselves and our own wisdom.

Even the wisest people get caught in stupid traps. Solomon was King David's son, and he's called the wisest man who ever lived. He expanded the Israelite empire and brought peace; he built the first temple. But the move that brought his nation peace also led him to evil. Solomon married his way to peace. Any tribe or nation that wanted to settle with Israel, Solomon married some of their daughters. He had 600 wives and 300 concubines. That stopped people from attacking Israel. Smart move, right? Wrong! Solomon's chief failing, according to God, was that he started worshipping the gods of his wives to make peace in his household. His heart was no longer set on the LORD alone. Even though Solomon wrote a lot of wisdom in the Bible, we still look askance at Solomon because of his loss of faithfulness to God.

Solomon thought, “Because God has given me wisdom, I can avoid evil even when I marry these foreign women. I won't fall into the trap of idolatry.” But he did! His own wisdom got him caught in the lure of evil. We can never think that we can play around with evil and not finding it ensnaring us. It's a law of nature that God established. I went to Lake Erie Metro Park last weekend with my family and we went in their wave pool. I got the last of the suntan spray. Turns out the last of the suntan spray is just the aerosol that brings on a burn even faster. But you know what? It's just a law. Go out in the sun without skin protection, you'll get burned. No questions asked. Play with evil; be corrupted. No questions asked.

The Post-It note version? Stay as far away from evil as you can. Don't think you can get away with it, and stay away from folks who do. Whatever you're tempted to do, stay away from it. If your problem is with drinking, don't keep it in your house, and don't even have a party and invite everybody to bring their own – because you'll wind up with some of theirs. If you struggle with gossip, then it might be time to get rid of Facebook. We are talking about getting rid of anything that causes you to stumble into evil. Honor the LORD above getting your way.

Number five: *Return the firstfruits of your wealth to God.* This is an extension of #3, relying on God rather than ourselves. This one puts #3 into specific action. Not only that, giving our firstfruits back to the LORD who gave them to us in the first place does something none of the other six does – it honors God. When you think of God first and give Him the very best, the very first of what you receive from your job, it establishes that He is the priority of your life.

There's no absolute as to how much these gifts should be. We know they should be firstfruits; we don't write our check for our church or our sponsored child in Peru or the missionaries we support last but first. By doing that, we're showing that we trust God that there will be plenty to spare. But how much? The Old Testament specifies at least a tenth, though with all the tithes it mentions it could have been up to a third of their wealth. The New Testament says that everything we own belongs to God. Where should our giving be?

My strong suggestion to you is to give not until it hurts, but until you actually have to trust the LORD to provide for you. For some of you, giving \$25 a week means that an important bill might not get paid. A couple of you might be able to give \$250 a week and you could still go out to eat every night of the week if you wanted. Be really honest and say, "At what point would my giving put me into someone else's debt?" It should also bring our whole financial picture into perspective. If we're not giving because we have a house payment and boat payment and car payment we don't actually need, then we have another issue. Again, we're going with the Post-It Note version today, so we aren't going to go deeply into that. But how will you know that God has been at work if your giving doesn't leave enough room to say at the end of the month, "I didn't know how it would all work, but God came through"? We should give enough so that God's provision for us is evident.

Last one: *Recognize the value of discipline.* No one likes to have to put these things into practice. We aren't talking discipline in the sense of punishment but the sense of improvement that requires hard work and effort. Sometimes in spiritual training, God will say, "No – you messed up. Do it this way instead." That kind of rebuke smarts. But it's for our benefit.

God delights in us. If He didn't, He wouldn't waste His time on creatures that disobey Him so frequently and have such a hard time learning anything. But He does! He loves us, not just as His creations, but as dearly beloved children. Putting these six Rs to good use is tough, but make post-its on your fridge and stick 'em up there. Commit to working on them. They will pay immeasurable dividends.

The true grace behind these six Rs, these Post-Its of spiritual health, is that we don't practice them all at once all the time to exhaustion. In our Bible study this week, our video pointed out that God doesn't give us \$1,000 worth of grace and then ask us to pay that \$1,000 every day. No, He takes that \$1,000 of grace and He gives us huge stacks of quarters. Then every day, here and there, at the gas station, at work, sitting at home reading, He asks us for a quarter of grace. A good choice here, a kindness there, a step away from temptation here, a loving phone call there.

God grows these things in us little by little, day by day. He doesn't expect us to be spiritual supermen the first day we step into His regimen of grace. But He knows that if we keep working out, if we keep trusting, keep working, keep applying a little every day, we will have spiritual muscles strong enough to deal with the trials of this life and big enough to help others weather their storms too.

Are you ready to get in spiritual shape?