

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Proverbs 3:5-6 (Romans 7:14-25)

Sermon Title: "Trusting and Staking My Life on God"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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Today is Groundhog Day. Do you remember that movie called *Groundhog Day*? Bill Murray and Andie MacDowell. Bill Murray plays a Pittsburgh TV weatherman, and he is a complete jerk. He is arrogant and egocentric, caring nothing for what others think or say. He and his TV crew travel to Punxsutawney, PA, to see if the groundhog, named Phil, will see his shadow (or not) and predict that winter will last another six weeks (or not). Bill Murray and Andie MacDowell, as weather people, film what they need, but they cannot escape the little village because a huge snow storm has closed all the roads. Much to his frustration, Bill Murray has to stay in Punxsutawney for the night, and the next night, and the next night, and for many more nights to come. You see, he is now caught in a feedback loop. Every day for the Bill Murray character is still Groundhog Day, with the same things happening to him over and over again. It takes several chances for Murray to discover that he is in a feedback loop.

He is confused and angry at first, and then he

decides to indulge in hedonist pleasures, then he tries to commit suicide. Every day he wakes up in the same bed in that same Bed and Breakfast with the same radio waking him up, playing the same song from Sonny & Cher, “I Got You, Babe.” It is still Groundhog Day. His TV crew has no clue that they are also living the same day over and over again, but it is not their place to know. The repeating of the same day is for the Bill Murray character. He has to finally examine himself – his motives, his attitude, his relationships – and reset his priorities and his life. Not until he becomes a reformed person will he escape Punxsutawney, PA, and Groundhog Day.

Doesn't it bother you to read Paul's words in Romans 7? Doesn't it bother you to read him say, “The good that I will to do, I do not do; and the evil I do not will to do, that I practice?”¹ That is frustration, because we are the same way. We know what is good and what is evil, but how do we find ourselves doing those bad, evil things? Why is it that we set aside the things that God wants us to do – those things we find pleasant and doable – and we end up doing the things God doesn't want us to do? We might feel good for awhile but then we discover we are lost, we are alone, we are miserable.

¹ Cf. Romans 7:19

C.S. Lewis tells us in his book *Mere Christianity* that all humans are basically aware of what is right and wrong. We may call it the Law of Right and Wrong, or we may call it the Law of Nature.² It doesn't matter what our ethnic makeup is or what country we come from – we all seem to have this basic understanding of how we should treat each other with respect, and how we want others to treat us with similar respect.

The thing, Lewis says, we are aware of this Law of Nature but we do not obey it all the time. This Law is not like the Law of Gravity, in which objects that fall from a great height must proceed downward until they hit the ground. Birds and stones and people must respond to the Law of Gravity, or they will get hurt. But the Law of Nature is different. We do not obey it like we do the Law of Gravity. The Law of Nature compels us to obey. It convinces us that it is the best way to act and speak and think. There may be consequences if we do not obey the Law of Nature. But sometimes people don't obey it. As Paul says in Romans, they do not do the things they like, or even the things that God likes.

Lewis says that we are “haunted by the idea of a sort of behaviour” we ought to practice, what we might call fair play or decency or morality or the Law of Nature. But an odd thing occurs: we do not, in fact,

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Collier Books, 18.

do so.³ “The good that I will, I do not do; and the evil that I do not will, that I practice.” Frustrating.

Proverbs 3:5-6 doesn't wrestle with the issue of good and bad. It doesn't examine and reexamine the frustrating dilemma we find ourselves in, caught between the good we like and the bad we despise. Proverbs 3:5-6 sets goals. The verses set boundaries for how we may reach those goals. The verses create the process for moving forward toward God, our ultimate Goal.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” This is the beginning of our journey. Trust means having full confidence in something or somebody, feeling completely safe with that item or person. We have full confidence in our banks, believing that they will have our money when we need it. We have full confidence in our insurance, paying out a certain amount of money when we get sick. How full is our confidence in God, the Creator and Lord of all things? Do we trust God? The sentence in verse 5 of Proverbs 3 doesn't just make a statement. It also asks a question: Do we trust in the Lord, have full confidence in our God, feel safe with our Father no matter what is happening around us?

³ Ibid., 26.

The next sentence tests our answer, for it states, “Lean not on your own understanding.” On the one hand we can say that we do trust in the Lord, when life is sunny and full of roses, when we are happy and nothing bothers us. Certainly here in church we would say that we do indeed trust in our God. But on the other hand, what happens when things aren’t going so well? What happens when the storms arise, and we feel isolated and miserable? Our own understanding says, “Why is this happening? Why is God allowing this to happen to me? I thought I could trust God, but now I don’t feel God’s presence.”

Our own understanding tries to work out the problems. That is okay to do, because God has given us brains to think and solve problems. But what we tend to do is solve problems without God. We do things that tend to make sense to us. We do things that seem rational, and then we feel good about ourselves for being so clever. Our own understanding tends to push aside what makes sense to God, and those sensible things that God is trying to reveal to us.

I heard a woman from Colorado lament about the fact that she has been out of work for four years. She is in her forties, and she believes that companies will not hire her because she has been out of work for too long, and she is getting too old (supposedly). She tries not to get frustrated: she has looked every week for a

job, submitting applications and waiting for responses. That would be the logical thing – our own understanding would agree with her efforts. But there wasn't much talk about what she thinks God wants her to do next. There wasn't much to indicate that she is following God's lead, and even as she submits applications that she is trusting in God and relying on God to find her another job.

We who believe ourselves to be faithful Christians may act the same way. When the time limits bear down on us, when we feel the pressure to act, when we feel like we are getting to the end of our rope, our own understanding says that something must be done. Hurry up – move – go now! If we follow our own understanding all the time, we end up doing the things that we do not will. Borrowing Paul's words in Romans 7, the things God wants us to do are ignored, and the things that God doesn't will, those we practice.

If we fully rely on God, then the logical thing will not always make sense. If we place ourselves squarely in God's hands, and feel completely safe with God, our own understanding absolutely gives way to God's understand, and God's will, and God's goals for our lives. We understand that we are not self-sufficient but completely dependent on God.

But we cannot wake up one day and say, "I am

going to give over my understanding for God's understanding. I am going to be completely dependent on God." We cannot do this, because once we wake up and start thinking about what we have to do during the day... once the gears in our minds start operating, we will once more push aside God's understanding for our own.

So this "leaning not on our own understanding," as Proverbs 3:5 says, is a process that is drawn up in the sentence before and the sentence after. "Trust in the Lord" with what? "With all our hearts." One of the greatest commandments in the Bible is, "Love the Lord your God." But with what? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."⁴ In other words, with everything we got we love the Lord. With everything we got, we trust in the Lord, which is a way of showing we love God. With everything that is within us, and everything about us, and with every atom and with every cell, with *everything*, Proverbs 3:5 says, "we trust in the Lord."

We don't wake up one day and choose to do this. We commit our lives to it. We wake up this day and the next day and the next day, and every day we live on this planet; and we commit ourselves to give the day over to God, and give everything we have or could

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:5 and Matthew 22:37.

have to God, and give over every plan and problem we deal with to God, and give every course of action over to God. Give all of it over. Trust God. Don't just say it. Feel it. Mean it. Make it a daily process. Put our full confidence in our God who loves us dearly, feeling completely safe with God no matter where we are.

“In all your ways acknowledge God” is the sentence that helps us put into practice the commitment of trusting God with our full heart. In every thought, in every idea, in every action, acknowledge that such things came from God and not from our own abilities. Recognize God as the Source of all good, and the One who makes us to breathe and move.

We may joke about the football player who scores a touchdown and then points to the sky, as though he is acknowledging God for the points on the board. Whatever the player's motivations, at least there is a recognition that God could have something to do with him being able to evade the tackles and help his team win. We would hope that the player is always acknowledging God, not just on the playing field but also in front of the media, in the locker room, and in his daily living.

Acknowledging God means to give God the credit for everything. We've been talking about this over the last few Sundays: when we give glory to God, we are

giving God the credit for whatever happens. We may give the credit to God for anything, large or small. Not just for touchdowns but also for getting us through difficult situations. We may acknowledge God for giving us a wonderful day to serve others. We might have been able to solve a certain problem by thinking about it for awhile, but we thank God for helping us to solve it. God gave us the answers we needed. We might be able to resist a certain temptation, but we praise God for helping us avoid disaster. When the alcoholic can go one more day without desiring a drink, she acknowledges God by giving God the credit. When the junkie can go another day without yearning for that drug, he acknowledges God by giving God the honor. When the sinner is able to do the right thing that he or she wills to do, he or she acknowledges God with praise.

It is such an easy recipe, which Proverbs 3:5-6 provides for us. It is so simple that we all should be able to master it. Every day should be a piece of cake. Yet, we don't know why we do what we don't want to do. We get frustrated with carrying out the things we hate, and even the things that God hates. As we said before, Proverbs 3 gives us a process to follow. Practicing it every day will help us to feel it, think it, and mean it. Acknowledging God with all our whole

being, and not just trusting God with words but with everything about us, begins to become more natural to us. Soon the paths in front of us become smoother, less rugged and easier to travel. There is healing to our flesh and refreshment in our bones, and life is filled with the goodness of God.⁵

⁵ Cf. Proverbs 3:8-10.