

**Still Standing, Msg. #3: “Standing Firm”**

**Proverbs 3:1-12**

**July 26, 2009**

**The Summit Church (BCAM, BCPM, CM Campuses)**

Well good morning Summit Church, if you are brand new around here my name is Danny Franks and I'm the Campus Pastor for our Brier Creek AM Campus. We are in week #3 of the Still Standing series, which is our journey through what is arguably the greatest book in the Old Testament. Or at least, Proverbs is *my* favorite book in the first half of the Bible. I feel a little funny saying that, as though a pastor shouldn't play favorites, especially with books of the Bible. But let's put it this way: if Old Testament books were people in a burning house, I'm going after Proverbs first. Then maybe Exodus. And Amos, I'm sorry, but you're gonna have to stop, drop, and roll.

The last two weeks if you missed it, we've been talking about the Hebrew word “Hokma” which is the word for wisdom. *Hokma* simply gives us the connotation of skillfully living in harmony with creation. We talked in week one about the foundations of *Hokma* which is humility before God, fear of God, and trust in God. Last week we covered the path of *Hokma* and how God's will is more like a road that you travel on and not a single door that you walk through.

Today we're going to revisit Proverbs chapter 3, which is where we were two Sundays ago, but Pastor J.D. didn't do a great job covering it. (Just kidding – we planned this together.)

Let me pray as we begin...

**[prayer]**

Eleven years ago, Merriem and I bought a house in southern middle Tennessee, where we were living at the time. This house was fifty years old and was a great little house with lots of potential, and when you say the phrase “great little house with lots of potential” I mean that it was a money pit. There was a lot of work to be done but I had neither the money or time or know how to do any of it. So when we moved out of that house two years later it looked pretty much exactly like it did the day we moved in.

One of the features was a detached utility room. Anybody ever had a detached utility room? What a great invention. There is nothing like

trying to get ready for church and realizing that the only thing standing between you and a clean pair of underwear is a screen door and 42 degree weather.

The part of this utility room that I hated the most was the shelving units that had been put in. They were about three shelves high and about seven feet deep – no kidding. I could have stored NBA players side by side in that thing and no one would ever notice. And to get to the back of the top shelves, there was no other option than to climb a ladder and reach back in there and hope that nothing with teeth had taken up residence.

Well, to do this of course, I had to have a ladder. I had never owned a ladder so I went out and bought one, because Merriem was tired of me dragging her kitchen chairs outside to reach stuff. So one night I went out to my utility room to either put stuff up or take stuff down – I don't remember, and I leaned my brand new ladder up against that top shelf and climbed on up. Now, since I had never owned a ladder, you can understand how I overlooked one small detail. The ladder that I had bought had those little flippy feet on the bottom. You know the flippy feet? The ones that you flip down and they have the rubber bottoms on them to keep your ladder from slipping on a surface like the concrete floor of the utility room? Yeah. I didn't know what those were for, so I left them flipped up.

That worked great for about the first twenty seconds. But imagine if you can me being at the top of that ladder, leaning way back into the back to reach one of the NBA players, and all of a sudden I felt something give. I can't tell you for sure if it was the flimsy plywood shelf or the flippy feet of that ladder, but whatever one did, the other one followed. And all I can remember is grabbing on to the top rung with all the grip and strength that I had, and preparing to meet Jesus.

The bottom of my ladder started sliding backwards and the top started sliding downwards. The top shelf gave way, and I hit the middle shelf, and then I hit the bottom shelf, and then I smacked right down on that concrete floor. But I never lost my grip. My feet never slipped. I was in the exact same position horizontally as I had been in vertically. Olympic judges would have given my landing a 9.8. It was perfect form.

Proverbs chapter 3 talks about ladders. You don't know that, because you won't find the word “ladder” anywhere in that chapter.

But believe me, the concept of that ladder is there. And there are times in my life and times in your life when we lean our ladder against the wrong thing or we set it on the wrong surface or we try to use it the wrong way, and it just does not work. Let me read this passage to you:

**3:1** *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, 2 for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.*

**3** *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.*

**5** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.*

**9** *Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

**11** *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, 12 for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

I want to bear down on just four verses out of the twelve we just read. And two of these verses are no doubt very familiar to you. As a matter of fact, verses 5 & 6 are one of the passages that we are challenging you to memorize as we go through this series. But here's what I would ask that you do: *please do not listen to this message through the same old set of ears.* When we do that, we run the risk of playing a know-it-all before God. I've been there, done that, got the 1978 Bible Drill Champion t-shirt. Please work with me in listening to this passage as if you're hearing it for the very first time.

This is what Solomon says in verse 5:

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

Part of listening to these verses with new ears means that you need to remember who is writing these verses. The guy that sat down 3000 years ago and put pen to paper was the king of Israel. The Bible tells us that he was the wisest man who ever lived. And now Solomon writes this letter to his son. Scholars believe that he wrote this when he was a middle aged man, probably about halfway through his forty year reign. He is in many ways at the prime of his life, he is at the peak of his career, he has become not only the leader of a nation but in many ways a leader of the world – we're told that kings and queens from other nations would come to him seeking advice and seeking political alliance – and as he writes to his son he tells him:

***Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.***

That is a curious statement. Solomon had it all. He had land. He had livestock. He had treasuries of gold and treasuries of grain. In his hand was the power to let people live or execute people to death. He possessed more wisdom than any of his friends, than any of his enemies, and than any of his counselors. He answered to no one, he was accountable to no one, there was no one on earth that was greater than Solomon. And yet, he tells his son,

***Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.***

Let me go back to my ladder. I told you earlier that my ladder was leaning on the wrong thing and it was resting on the wrong surface. Solomon teaches us a very important principle when he tells us that it is a dangerous thing to trust in anything but the Lord. Let me give you four things that we commonly trust in:

- 1. We trust in our opinion.**
- 2. We trust in our preferences.**
- 3. We trust in our past experience.**
- 4. We trust in our future hopes.**

Did you notice the common theme that runs through each of those reasons? It's the word, "our." Regardless of whether the object of "our" is us as an individual or us as a family or us as a church or us as a nation, we typically place our trust in the kingdom of man rather than the kingdom of God. Think about this: how many of you would say that your happiness and your sense of peace is based on the circumstances of your life?

Your children are behaving and not giving you any trouble, so life is good. Your husband tells you that he doesn't love you anymore, so life is devastating. You receive the big promotion at work, so you experience tremendous joy. Your 401(k) takes a nosedive due to the economy, so you suffer depression. All of these things are circumstances that point us to ourselves rather than the truth of God's word. And when circumstances are good, God *must* love us. When circumstances are bad, God *must* be punishing us.

As a people, we have a horrible tendency to lean on our own understanding. We do it in our homes, we do it in our businesses, and we do it in our church. But maybe nowhere is leaning on our own understanding any more deadly than when it happens in every day life. So let's go back and look at those four areas and diagnose where we stand and what we're standing on.

### 1. We trust in our opinion.

We're never short on opinions, are we? People will give you their opinion on how to raise your kids, on how to move forward in your job, on what kind of mortgage to get for your house, on what kind of car you should buy and what kind of health insurance you should purchase.

Listen, opinions are no way to go through life. If I give you my opinion plus a quarter, then you've got 25 cents worth of nothing. And when we spout our opinion, we typically reveal our ignorance. And let's face it, we've met people who are educated beyond their intelligence. Because our opinions are subjective to our emotions, and our emotions are about as fickle as they come. And yet we continue to depend on our opinion and seek out the opinion and advice of others.

### 2. We trust in our preferences.

I had a conversation with an old friend last weekend. He had called me a few months ago and told me that God told him to

take a particular step in his life. Then as the weeks went by, he called me back and told me that God had shown him that he was supposed to do the opposite thing.

Now I don't claim to know the mind of God, but I think it's a pretty rare thing for God to change his mind midstream and to contradict himself. When I had breakfast with my friend, it became obvious that because the direction God was leading wasn't a comfortable direction, his preferences took over.

What happens is we are more committed to our preferences than the fact that scripture doesn't clearly speak to preferences. And what we do is this: when scripture is silent on an issue, we tend to try to help God out by speaking to something that he clearly must have forgotten to speak about.

Some of you are trusting in your preferences and you are missing the greater story of what God wants to do in your life. Don't make that mistake. Our time on earth is too short and the mission of God is too precious to waste time following a path that we were never intended to follow.

### 3. We trust in our past experience.

The Israelites give us a good example of this. In my quiet time earlier this week I read about the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. One of the conversations they had over and over was a running argument with Moses. Exodus 16:3 is one of the most ridiculous statements in all of history:

*"[We wish that] we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."*

Did you hear that? "Hey Moses. We know we were slaves. We know that we had no control over our lives. We know that our grandparents were slaves, our grandchildren were slaves, and we had no hope other than ever being a slave. But hey, now that we're free, slavery is looking pretty good."

What the Israelites illustrate for us is that **our past experience can actually be bondage in disguise**. I talk to

people all the time that are stuck on memory lane. They think about what God did in their lives during their college days or on a mission trip or whatever, and they fail to see what it is that God desires to do *right now* in their lives. But you need to hear this: **when your past memories exceed your present reality, the end is near.**

#### 4. We trust in our future hopes.

There is nothing wrong with hopes. Scripture speaks dozens of times about hope. Proverbs 13 says that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Colossians talks about Christ in us, the hope of glory. But even in something as positive as hope, we can see ourselves eclipsing what God wants to do through our hope. We hope selfishly when it comes to our lives, don't we? We think about our retirement plans, about our dream houses, about our vacation destinations, and there's nothing wrong with any of those things.

But what if God wanted something bigger than you want for yourself? What if his dreams had a better outcome than your dreams? And what if you limited God's work in your life just because you couldn't dream big enough?

All four of these areas – our opinion, our preferences, our past experience, and our future hopes – all of those things are like putting our ladder on a slick floor and leaning them against a shaky shelf. Eventually, the ladder is going to collapse, and we are going to be flat on the floor. For some of you, the ladder has already collapsed. You already know that what you've been trusting in is not the think that brings peace, or change, or accomplishment. And yet we trust in those things anyway, because those are the things that are familiar, those are the things that are comfortable.

We talk a lot around the Summit about the concept of functional saviors – those things that we put in place of Christ. And when we place our opinions and preferences and all these other things in their elevated status, we have created our own false idol known as a functional savior.

This is what Proverbs 3 goes on to say, in verse 6:

**6** *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. 7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your*

*bones.*

That phrase "in all your ways," is a curious little phrase. In the original Hebrew, that word "all" means...are you ready for this?...it means, "ALL." The way we think, what we say, how we act, what we spend our money on, what we spend our time doing, how we interact with our families, how we perform on the job, how we relate to our neighbors, how we treat our enemies, in ALL our ways we are supposed to acknowledge God. We are supposed to acknowledge that his ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We are supposed to seek his kingdom before we seek our kingdom. We are supposed to go to him as our first priority and not our last resort. That's what it means to acknowledge him in all of our ways.

And what is the result? Verse six says, "He will make straight your paths." When we place God first, he goes before us. He leads us. He keeps us on the right path, and he grants success to our efforts.

Look in verse 7: "Be not wise in your own eyes." Anybody here consider themselves wise ("No, I refuse to raise my hand, because you'll make an example out of me.")? When we depend on our own wisdom, we gradually walk away from God. What is the antidote to our wisdom? It is the fear of the Lord. Verse 7 again: fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

#### **[Mike & Kristen's story here?]**

And what are the two results of that? You see them in verse 8: it will bring healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Since we've been talking about this passage in light of your experience in life, let me ask you this question. And I ask you this not as much as a doctor who's trying to diagnose, but as a friend who is trying to help:

Think about your life over the last six months. Do you feel like life brings a sense of refreshment? Do you feel like you are caught up in the flow of God's greater purpose for you in his kingdom, or do you feel like you are hitting your head against the wall? The Bible teaches that trusting in the Lord brings that sense of refreshment and

peace. So the question: have you found that oasis of refreshment?

Some of you could easily answer that question, and the answer is “no.” Your life is not marked by peace. You’ve tried doing things on your own, and it hasn’t worked. You’ve attempted to rule life by opinion and preference, and it’s actually made things worse. You’re trapped in a prison of your past experience and your future hopes, and you can’t see a way out.

So how do you get there? How do we begin to dismantle our functional saviors? How do we center our lives more around God and less around ourselves? How do we check our opinions and preferences at the door and lift high the name of Jesus Christ?

I think the answer is found back at the beginning of Proverbs 3:

*My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.*

This is my point. This is what all of this message has been pushing towards. ***Our functional saviors arise out of our ignorance of scripture.*** Solomon says to let your heart keep my commandments, and that is the message that the Bible continuously proclaims. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he said that “All the law and the prophets can be summed up into two statements: love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.” I think that it’s interesting that he put that word “mind” in there. How do you love God with your mind? You love him with your mind by letting him renew your mind, and he renews your mind through the power of scripture.

Scripture changes the way we think about things. It knocks off our rough edges. It gives us courage to do the hard things. It produces an atmosphere where we repent of our sin and confess our shortcomings. But if we are very honest, we are a people that do not know scripture.

Let me ask you this, again, going back to the four things I outlined a few minutes ago: How quickly do you go to your opinion *before* you go to scripture? How much do you know about your preferences vs. what you know about the clear teaching of God? Do you open your

Bible at a time other than Sunday morning? Over the past two weeks we’ve challenged you to read through the book of Proverbs, one chapter at a time. We’ve challenged you to join us in memorizing two passages of scripture. Have you carved out a part of your day and allowed God to speak to you through his word? Have you memorize these scriptures? Do you meditate on scripture?

This is why this question is so important: because where all of these other things are subjective, scripture is objective. Put another way, we have a hard time giving an accurate assessment of our life or our church because we sit in the middle of our life and our church. But scripture sits **above** those things, and scripture gives a solid, unyielding, unchanging view of how things should function in our church.

We can’t obey scripture until we know scripture, and we can’t know scripture until we study scripture, and we can’t study scripture unless we intentionally set aside the time to do so. So let me ask you: how is your personal Bible study going? Do you walk into each day under your own power, or the power of God as revealed through his word? Do you try to organize and arrange your life by your own preferences, or through the guidelines that God has given us in his word? Do you try to convince people how right you are or how right God is? Do you tell people that “God told me…” when it’s obvious that what God supposedly told you is a clear contradiction to what he says in his written word?

Summit, you will never find success outside of this book. You will never experience healing outside of this truth. You will never see change until you are changed from within by the message within this cover. The Bible points you to your hope, who is Jesus. The Bible directs you to peace, which is found in Jesus. The Bible gives clear instruction for life, life that can only be found in Jesus. Love it. Learn it. Embrace it. But **do not ignore it.** You do so at your own peril, and to your own destruction.

What is your ladder leaning against? And will it hold when everything around you starts to slip? Let’s pray.