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SERMON TOPIC: DIRECTIVES FOR THE NEW YEAR

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE: PROVERBS 3, 5-6
PROVERBS 25, 25
PROVERBS 25, 22
PROVERBS 26, 14
PROVERBS 28, 6

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DIRECTIVES FOR THE NEW YEAR

PRAYER

Gracious and eternal **God** we have come now to hear a word from you. And we ask as always oh, **God** that you would speak to us and speak through us. Teach us to love you more that we may learn to love each other and **Lord** help us to serve you better that we may be willing to serve each other. For it is in thy son's name that we pray, amen.

SERMON

For just a few moments this morning, I want to direct your attention continuing in Proverbs to Proverbs chapter 3, verse 5. Proverbs, chapter 3, verse 5 reads simply as follows:

“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.”

I want to talk for just a few moments about some directives for the new year, some directives for the new year. This is the year 2002. As I say that, and as I said it to myself earlier, all I could think about was all my life all I've ever known was 19 something. I mean, everything I wrote, every paper in grade school it was 19 this, it was 19 that. But here we are in the year 2002 or 20-02 and **God** has brought us a mighty long way.

As I've said so often when we reflect at the end of the previous year, many names that could have been called in January would not be able to respond in December so the same starts out all over again. We are here now in January of a new year and there is much that lay ahead of us. I often say to people you don't have to worry about tomorrow because if you know who holds tomorrow then He who holds tomorrow will also hold your hand.

Another reason for not worrying about tomorrow is simply because **God** has already been there. If you know that **God** is already there and **God** is still with you at the same time, He can work it out. You can get up in the morning and say **Lord** there's nothing that you and I today can't handle together.

Too often we start our days off with the wrong frame of mind. Maybe we get a phone call or just the fact that we had to get up gets us started on the wrong foot. So we

come downstairs and as my mother used to say if she didn't get her cup of coffee in the morning, she wouldn't be right. For various reasons we start our day that way.

But I say to you my brothers and sisters, that not only as we start the day as we start out on this beginning of a new year, there are some things that **God** would say to us that I think would help us to get it right. You see for those of us who are still here, for the things we did not get right last year then consider yourself as being given another opportunity. **God** has simply said I'm still giving you time to work it out and get right that which you didn't do and work out last year.

So now we have a new year. As I prayed about it I said **Lord** what would you say, what would you have me to tell your people. He simply directed my attention to "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."

Proverbs is one of those books we only read every now and then and sometimes not all the way through. It's one of those books we like to pick out sayings or sometimes we attribute sayings if we can't remember where we got them. Folk are always saying the **Lord** helps those who help themselves or **God** helps those who help themselves. I know it's in Proverbs or something, somewhere in there.

No, it's not in the bible at all. I don't know where you're quoting from but that's not in the bible that **God** helps those who help themselves. It may have become tradition for us to say it, but it's not reflected in scripture because sometimes **God** has been known to help folk who could not help themselves.

Solomon is often credited for being the author of the book Proverbs but it becomes clear as we read other chapters that he was not the only one who contributed, if you will, to these sayings of the wise. Indeed my brothers and sisters, in the largest section of the book most of the Proverbs are two lines long. Chapter 10, verse 1 to chapter 22, verse 16 and those in chapter 10 through 15 are almost always expressing a contrast of some kind.

Sometimes the writer simply makes a general observation such as "A bribe is a charm to the one that gives it", Proverbs 17 and 8. But usually he evaluates human conduct "but he who hates bribes will live", Proverbs 15, 27. Many Proverbs in fact describe the consequences of a particular action or a character trait "A wise son brings joy to his father", Proverbs 10, 1.

Since the Proverbs were written primarily for instruction often they are given in the form of commands "Do not love sleep or you will grow poor", Proverbs 20, verse 13. I bet yall didn't know that was in there. Even where the imperative form is not used, the desired action is quite clear.

A common feature of the Proverbs is the use of figurative language. For example, "Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land." Proverbs, 25 verse 25. In chapter 25 alone there are 11 verses that begin with the word like or as. These are called similes and these similes make the Proverbs more vivid and more powerful.

Occasionally the similes show no discretion or it may provide something in a humorous way or sarcastic way. For example, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautify woman who shows no discretion." Oh, that's a good one. Amen. That's Proverbs, chapter 11 for those who want to look it up later. Or "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed", Proverbs 26.

Equally effective in the book of Proverbs is the use of metaphors. For example, “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life”, Proverbs 13, 14. “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life”, Proverbs 15, verse 4. According to Proverbs 16, 24 “Pleasant words are as honeycomb”. The figure of sewing and reaping is used in both a positive and a negative way in Proverbs.

In order to develop a proper set of values, a number of Proverbs use direct comparisons “Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse”, Proverbs 28, verse 6. This better than pattern can also be seen in Proverbs 15, Proverbs 16 and Proverbs 17.

Indeed the reposition of entire Proverbs when you compare chapter 6, verses 10 through 11 with 24, verses 33 and 34 or parts of Proverbs may serve a poetic purpose. A slight variation allows the writers to use the same language in the image to make a related point or to substitute a word to achieve greater clarity or emphasis or a different emphasis.

At times the book of Proverbs is very direct and very earthy. This is the nature of wisdom literature of which Proverbs is attributed. Psalms is also a part of the wisdom literature. Job also and Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Those are the wisdom books or constitute wisdom literature in the Old Testament.

According to the prologue or the beginning of Proverbs the book was written to produce or to give prudence to the simple knowledge and discretion to the young and to make wise men wiser. The frequent references to my son that you will find throughout Proverbs emphasizes instructing the young and guiding them into a happy and prosperous life.

Acquiring wisdom and knowing how to avoid pitfalls of folly will lead to health and success. Although Proverbs is a practical book that deals with the art of living, its basis wisdom solidly on the fear of the **Lord**. Proverbs 1 and 7 reminds us that the fear of the **Lord** is the beginning of wisdom.

Indeed my brothers and sisters, we find throughout the book this reverence for **God** is set forth as the path for life and security. People must trust in the **Lord** and not in themselves. The references to the tree of life throughout Proverbs recall the joyful bliss of the Garden of Eden and figuratively say that the one who finds wisdom will be greatly blessed.

But our passage begins ““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.” Indeed when we talk about trust, trust is to have confidence in. Certainly if we ought to have confidence in somebody it ought to be to the **Lord**. “Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart”.

In other words, commit your way to the **Lord** just as Israel’s forefathers committed their way to **God**, just as our grandmothers and grandfathers and our forbearers from slavery on up to the present day committed their way to the **Lord** so we too in this generation and in the generations following must trust in the **Lord**.

He doesn’t say do it half-heartedly. He says “Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart”. That means everything within me all the way down to my DNA ought to trust in the **Lord**. If it could be encoded, if you will, on my DNA it ought to be there here is one who trusts in the **Lord**.

In spite of everything else that goes on around me, I can face the day with confidence because I trust in **God**. I don't worry about what's going to happen throughout the course of this year because I trust in **God**. I want to start the year out right and therefore I want to know that my hope is in **God**.

You know we used to sing that song I will trust in the **Lord** until I die. I will trust in the **Lord** until I die. The stanza goes father I stretch my hands to the. No other help I know. If thou withdraw thyself from me oh, **Lord** wither could I go. In other words, it's suggesting that if **God** pulls His hand back, I've got nowhere else that I can turn. There's no one else that I can depend on that will trust me and do me like **God** can do me.

What's the song they sing? Can't nobody do me like **Jesus**. Can't nobody do me like the **Lord**. Can't nobody do me like **Jesus**, He's my friend. I will trust in the **Lord** until I die. So as you move out into this new year, this exciting time, this time of great prospect and this time of starting over, if you will, you ought to make it your business to begin by trusting in **God**.

You trust in the stock market, it will crash. You trust in money, it will burn up. You trust in your new house, it can fall in on yourself. You trust in your car, somebody can steal it or destroy it. You trust in the clothes on your back, moths can eat them up. You trust in all the food that you've got on your table but there may come a day when you've got no food on your table.

I tell you trust in the **Lord** with all of your heart. You trust in your husband or your wife, that's a good thing but every now and then we let each other down. Why? Because we're human. But if you trust in the **Lord**, **God** will never let you down. "Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart".

Then he said "lean not on your own understanding". Now this tricks people sometimes because they think well then are you saying then that I can't plan and think things through. No, that's not what I'm saying. But I'm saying that sometimes the things that we desire -- and I want to thank Charles Stanley for this. I got this insight from him. I like to give credit to the source. Sometimes the things that we desire are not the things that **God** desires for us. Then what we start to do is manipulate circumstances in order to get what we want.

Now as I just got finished saying what you want and what **God** wants for you may be two different things. So now if you're going to manipulate to get what you want, you want to stir up mess to get what you want, you're going to say a word here or there to get what you want. You know we can find all kinds of ways to manipulate stuff.

Well let me tell you something, Brother Stanley said when you manipulate things that are outside of the will of **God** three things will happen. You will go through disappointment, pain and suffering. Those three things happen because we manipulate to get what we want. Oh, how many marriages have busted apart because somebody wanted what somebody else had and thought that they could manipulate and maneuver? Oh, pastor why do you have to go there now.

Well we're talking about life yall. See Proverbs is a book that deals with life in the raw and how folk are. So we start seeing that man or that woman and we've just got to have them and we're just so convinced that's who **God** wants us to have so we start manipulating and we start doing our little tricky things. Yall know the little tipping here and there and all the stuff we can do that go against the word of **God** to get what it is that we thought we wanted.

Then after we've gotten it our -- what do they call it? Our little house on the prairie becomes a nightmare on Elm Street. Great **God** from Zion. All because we did not want to trust in **God**, all because we thought we had it all figured out. But there's a song that says **God** has got it all under control.

I want you to know this morning, **God** has not advocated His throne. **God** has not given up on His authority. **God** has not stepped down and said yall take over for me now. **God** is sovereign and **God** can do whatever **God** wants to do whenever **God** gets ready to do it. It's getting warm up here now. I feel good now yall. Amen.

But we've got to lean -- now it's all right to plan. We ought to plan for some things. It's good to do that. You're crazy if you don't plan some things. But in your planning, **God** ought to be in the midst of it. **God** ought not to be an afterthought to what it is that you thought you wanted.

Jesus said to everybody seek ye first the kingdom of **God** and His righteousness and then all these other things will be added later on. He said don't worry about tomorrow because tomorrow has enough trouble of its own. So worry about what's going on today. In fact you really don't need to worry if you trust **God**.

Let me say that again, you don't need to worry if you're really trusting **God** because you see if I know that **God** is all powerful, if I know that **God** is omni present, which means **God** is everywhere present at the same time, if I know that **God** is omni-ant which means that **God** is all knowing and has all wisdom then I can trust **God** and I can put my complete confidence and faith in him.

If I'm going to do that, I don't need to worry. I don't need to develop ulcers in the pit of my stomach. I don't need to have stomach acid working overtime. I don't need to develop migraines in the back of my head that pound and look like my eyes are going to roll right out of their sockets. I don't need to feel my ears pounding so hard and my pressure going through the roof if I trust in **God**.

So when I feel myself in a situation like that because now life will drive you to that point. Folk in the church will drive you to that point. Christians get on other Christians' nerves. I said that before we do that to each other because we're people. But when we feel ourselves getting to that point when we're like that pot on the stove that's boiling and starting to boil and soon the lid is going to blow off of it, you need to open the word.

You need to go to the word and let the **Lord** speak to you. Maybe this is a good verse to begin with "Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart" and then ask yourself **Lord** am I trusting you in this situation. Am I really trusting you **God** or am I trying to treat this situation as if as though I don't think you're moving fast enough and I've decided I'm going to give you a little help.

See that's when things really get messed up. The fight that's going on right now between the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Jews go all the way back to what Abraham and Sarah did when **God** told Abraham you're going to have a son. Sarah didn't believe it, she laughed. Then Sarah said well here take Hagar my handmaid. You know Abraham said hey that's all right with me, you know he wasn't complaining. The next thing you know Hagar had Ishmael but later on Sarah had Isaac and the two of them have been fighting ever since.

Every time we try to do the work that **God** has already ordained He would do, we mess it up. Every time we try to accelerate **God's** timetable, we mess it up. Then we

wonder why things fall apart. We wonder why our best-laid plans don't seem to go anywhere. Maybe **God** is telling us to wait.

Oh, I know we don't like to hear that word. It only sounds good when we're praying you know **Lord** help us to be more loving, **Lord** help us to be more patient. Then as soon as we finish praying all right reverend come on, we've got to get out of here now. I thought you were just praying **Lord** help you to be more patient.

As I always say if you're going to get good at something don't you have to practice it, which means you have to be in a situation whereby you get to exercise it. So now if you're serious about more patience, watch out, it's coming. **God** is going to put you in a situation where you're going to have to exercise your patience muscles, if you will. **God** is going to put you in a situation where you have to exercise your love muscles and become more loving toward your brother or your sister.

"Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart." Do you want to know how to start the new year out right? I'm not saying by saying start it out right that you'll start it out trouble free. I'm not saying that as you go through the year you won't have heartache and heartbreak. Sickness is down the road waiting on somebody.

I don't know what may happen by the end of this month. Something is going to happen to somebody by February. Something is going to hit somebody else in March. Somebody else in April. Somebody else, it's going to hit them in May. Somebody else in June. From now until December of this year trouble, sickness, death, pain and suffering is going to touch somebody's life.

But if you want to know how to get through the suffering and the pain --see the songwriter said I've been through the fire and I've been through the storm. I've been talked about and broken into pieces. Seen lightening flash from above. But through it all I remember that He loves me and He cares. He'll never put more on me than I can bear.

Oh, I know it gets rough sometimes. But the songwriter said I've had many tears and sorrows. I've had questions for tomorrow. There have been times when I didn't know right from wrong. But in every situation **God** gave me blessed conciliation. He let me know what faith in His word could do. So I've learned that through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in **Jesus**. I've learned to trust in **God** through it all.

I tell you through the heartache and through the pain, through sickness and death, through tears watering my pillow at night, through pain rocking my body, through sickness and salvation. I tell you I've learned to trust in **Jesus**. I've learned to trust in **God**.

No, it does not mean my brothers and sisters that because I've got **God** in my heart that I'm exempt from all of this stuff. But what it does let me know is that when the storm clouds rise on the horizon as they surely will or when I find myself in the midst of a storm and I wasn't even aware that it was coming up on me because you see every now and then a sudden storm can hit.

You know I admire Doppler Radar. But yall remember last year there was a storm, a snowstorm that hit and Doppler Radar wasn't able to catch it. You see every now and then some storms will go under the radar. While you're watching as best you can, you're looking out as sharply as you think you can, you've got some folk that are praying for you and they're looking out too to see if any storms are on your horizon, every now and then a storm will come in under the radar and you weren't expecting that storm.

But guess what? I've learned to say I will trust in the **Lord** until I die. "Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" Because see you can't figure your way out of a storm like that. Every now and then -- I feel all right now because you see that's the kind of storm that can hurt you the most. That's the kind of storm that will sucker punch you. It will hit you in your gut. It will knock the wind out of you and you don't know what happened and you say **Lord** why did this happen to me.

But somewhere I read He who dwells in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the almighty. Somewhere I read the **Lord** is my shepherd, I shall not want. Somewhere I read the **Lord** is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear. Somewhere I read I will lift up my eyes into the hills, where does my help come from. Somewhere I read **Jesus** said come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yolk upon you and learn of me. For my yolk is easy and my burden is light. I tell you I heard **Jesus** said let not your heart be troubled. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world.

"Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will" -- oh, yes, He will. He'll come in the midnight hour. Yes, He will. He'll come when the sun is burning down at midday. He'll come when nobody else wants to stand with you. He'll come when you feel all alone and forsaken. He'll come into your sick room. Oh, He'll come and sit at your dinner table. He'll join you in your living room and He'll make your paths straight.

Thank **God** I tell you. I thank **God**. I thank **God**. I thank **God**. "Trust in the **Lord** with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in everything you do acknowledge **God**, and **God** will direct your path.

The doors of the church are open. The invitation for Christian discipleship is now extended.