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TRUSTING GOD

As we journey through life, we make many directional choices. Some are short term and have little impact. Things like what we'll do this Friday night, where we might vacation next summer, or whether we'll eat a second Krispy Kreme donut right now (admittedly, too many donuts may have long-term impact, but one more won't hurt, right?). Even things as important as where we might live or whether we'll take that new job aren't completely permanent. They can normally be reversed or corrected in months or years if we get them wrong.

Then, there are major decisions that carry decades-long implications. Likely the biggest and most life-altering decision we'll make on this earth is who we will choose to marry. In my case, boy, God led me to really get that one right. My wife is faithful, loving, fun, and hardworking (to mention just a few things). That was the best decision 'I' ever made.

Yet, there's a choice that trumps even that one.

Who will we trust with our life and our death?

Let's consider three questions as we explore this topic:

- Who will we trust?
- What does trust look like?
- How do I know if I'm actually trusting?

WHO WE WILL TRUST

If you're like me, you're a believer in Jesus Christ. You'd say, 'Sure, I trust Jesus. I trust Him for my salvation; and, I believe that beyond death I'll live with Him forever.'

Good answer! However, do you ever wonder if this trust is shining through in your day-to-day life? It's one thing to trust Him 'for the end,' but it's another thing to trust Him all along the way. Every step, good or bad, easy or hard, fun or frightening.

Let's look within the Bible at this trust issue. First, within the Old Testament, and then in the New. We will begin in the last days of Joshua, one of Israel's great leaders.

You may be familiar with this verse:

But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Josh. 24:15).

Before we press on, please read Joshua chapter 24. It'll just take a few minutes.

(Now, this is your time to go and read that chapter – if you pass this point without reading it, can you really be trusted?!)

Alright. With that chapter in your short-term memory, consider what Joshua did right before making this front-door-plaque-worthy statement in verse 15. He covers roughly 600 years of history in ten verses.

In verse two, Joshua says, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of Israel says ...’ He’s clear: this recap isn’t my version of history – it’s a word directly from God.

Here’s what God did in the five hundred years preceding Joshua’s address (notice who the ‘hero’ is):

- Joshua 24:3 – He led Abraham out of the land, gave him many descendants.
- Joshua 24:4 – He gave specific tracts of land to Esau.
- Joshua 24:5 – He sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, then afflicted the Egyptians.
- Joshua 24:6-7 – He protected Israel, opened the sea, destroyed their enemies.
- Joshua 24:8 – He gave the Amorites into Israel’s hand.
- Joshua 24:9-10 – He turned Balaam’s curse into a blessing.
- Joshua 24:11 – He pounded a lotta other enemies along the way.
- Joshua 24:12 – Oh, and hornets – that one was special, it deserves its own verse (‘... it wasn’t your own swords and bows ...’).
- Joshua 24:13 – To recap: all you have I gave you – you haven’t earned a bit of it on your own accord.

Then, as a capstone, Joshua says (and I paraphrase), ‘So now, given all that, fear God, serve Him, and chuck your idols overboard. But hey, if you don’t like that idea, fine. Pick some other god. But, me and my house? We pick Him!’

Boom. Drop the mic.

Joshua’s message resounds: I don’t serve God just because my dad did, or because I’m supposed to, or because I have no other choice. I serve God because He is The LORD. He is for us, and always has been. He’s delivered us and fought for us and loved us. I’m His forever.

Do you trust God? If so, why?

Fast forward in your Bible to the New Testament. No shocker here, we’ll focus on placing our trust and faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. We could cover many aspects, but for our purposes, let’s dive into two verses in Romans 10:

If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Rom. 10:9-10).

Is Jesus Christ your Savior? If so, consider a Joshua-style recap of all Jesus has done for you (this is a mere sampling):

- So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many ... (Heb. 9:28 NKJV).
- ... having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Rom. 5:9 NKJV).

- In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins ... (Eph. 1:7 NKJV).
- ... who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed (1 Pet. 2:24 NKJV).
- And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb ... (Rev. 12:11 NKJV).
- ... that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:12-13 NKJV).

We could list dozens more.

In summary: the Father God has demonstrated His love for us time and time again. Most amazingly, through the sacrifice of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Have you chosen to trust Jesus for your earthly affairs and your eternal destiny?

WHAT TRUST LOOKS LIKE

If you're like me, the information above was a great recap. It's a welcome reminder of why we placed our trust in God and Jesus in the first place. It may not be brand new information.

But it leaves me with some questions. Notably, what does trusting God look like? Practically speaking? Can this internal conviction be externally observed?

In part, we'll explore that throughout the rest of this book. But, let's be on the lookout for trust landmarks we can spot along our journey. Then, we'll take a quick assessment of how we're doing.

I'd like to focus on three core activities we engage in if we're trusting God:

- Reading His Word.
- Praying regularly.
- Submitting to His plans.

READING HIS WORD

He says that His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105); that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for us (2 Tim. 3:16-17); that we must do what His Word says (James 1:22); and, that we live by every Word that comes from the mouth of the LORD (Deut. 8:3).

God's Word is not just information, inspiration, or correction. It's all those, and more. It's nourishment, sustenance, spiritual food. If we're reading it, we're not just gathering facts and learning things. It's not just a roadmap, guidebook, or life skills encyclopedia. It feeds our inner man. Through His Word, He's not just showing us what His character is like, He's actually affecting what our character is like!

More than just a mind-expanding exercise, it's a heart-shaping boot camp. It doesn't only promise to inform; it promises to transform.

More on this in the next chapter.

PRAYING REGULARLY

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we see the famous phrase, ‘pray without ceasing.’ It’s a command, not a suggestion. And, in verse 18, we see Paul reminding us that these things we are to do are God’s will for us in Christ Jesus. If we’re not praying frequently, it shows us that we’re not obedient to this command. It hints at a lack of trust that God is listening to us and cares for us.

I’ll address this more in Chapter Four. Sneak preview: I think we ask a fundamentally wrong question about prayer. For now, let’s agree that praying to God on a frequent basis is a piece of the trust puzzle.

SUBMITTING TO HIS PLANS

This is really the crux of the matter, isn’t it? Are we in submission to God’s will for our lives? Do we believe He has the ability to steer us safely along life’s path and beyond?

One summer – through the miracles of a friend’s vacation home and frequent flyer miles – our whole family spent ten days vacationing in Costa Rica. We deep-sea fished, whitewater rafted, relaxed by the pool, and tanned on the beach. One day, we went ziplining. And, by ziplining, I mean, ZIPLINING!

These were big-girl and big-boy ziplines. Some of them spanned 1,500 feet stretched above the dense Costa Rican forest below. We would be speeding across the valleys hundreds of feet above the treetops. We were pleasantly surprised to learn our whole family could go, even our three-year-old son, Titus. They had a (safe-enough-looking) harness just his size! The helmet, well, not so much. We all strapped on our gear and headed out.

We were further surprised to discover – after it was too late to turn back – we wouldn't be accompanying our young boy across the canyon. Instead, that would be Jairo, a friendly guide we met fifteen minutes before we arrived at our first line. Read that again: only fifteen minutes. Jairo clipped himself on, motioned to our son and said in broken English, 'I take the baby.'

So, we did what any responsible parent would do. We handed our pride and joy to this guy and watched as they both flew off into the misty forest.

What in the world?!

My wife and I looked at each other, mouths open. We were both thinking the same thing, 'What did **you** just do?'

In the end, it was thrilling, safe, and breathtakingly scenic. I'd highly recommend it.

Regarding this experience, we could be accused of many things. Here's one we could not be accused of: that we did not trust Jairo. No, we trusted him alright. We handed him our little boy and let them soar hundreds of feet above the ground. This was one of our sons we'd promised God we would protect, guide, and disciple. Within that solemn responsibility as parents, we handed young Titus off to our new friend and watched them float away.

Why did we trust Jairo so quickly? There are at least two reasons.

First, we were convinced of *his competence*. He appeared to have the right skill to properly work the equipment and traverse the wires safely. We didn't think this was his first day on the job. Even so, we didn't have video proof or investigate the number of runs he'd made.

He simply exuded expertise and confidence. He seemed entirely capable.

Second, we believed he had *our best interests* at heart. We didn't get a vibe telling us to be afraid of this man. He smiled. He was kind. He didn't come across as the careless type. We concluded, after only knowing him for a few minutes, he had the right character to be trusted.

Well, he was mostly kind. Later, he called me chicken in Spanish (look pal, I know what 'pollo' means and I see you guys flapping your arms) when I wouldn't flip over and go across upside down. His sense of humor made me like him even more.

The question is this: if you're not trusting God right now – which of these two is the bigger stumbling block? Capability or character?

Do you wonder about His capability? Are you concerned that He doesn't have sufficient skill or power to navigate you through life and death? Are you skeptical of His ability?

Or, do you question His character? You know He can help, you just don't know if He will. You believe He's capable, you're just not sure if He cares. You aren't convinced of His benevolence.

Let's explore those together.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M ACTUALLY TRUSTING GOD?

In that story, any casual onlooker could see we trusted Jairo with our son's life. We handed him our baby! Case closed.

I think it's generally easy to see if we're trusting God. Sure, there are some exceptions.

To get to the bottom of this, I propose an exercise. I'll share some 'if-then' statements below. If we believe thing A, then we take action B.

See if you agree with the logic. No harm if you don't. I'm not perfect. But, try to connect the trust-to-action dots. Once you do, ask yourself if they accurately describe you:

- I trust God to provide for my financial needs; therefore, I joyfully tithe 10 per cent of my income to my church (Mal. 3:10).
- I trust God will guide my adult children; therefore, I only offer my opinion of their choices when asked, and even then, give room for dissention (Rom. 14:5).
- I trust that – even though my every desire isn't filled daily by my wife – God is bigger than my sex drive; therefore, I don't turn to illicit material or people to meet some perceived 'need' (1 Cor. 10:13).
- I trust God is bigger than my city, state, or country; therefore, my hopes will not rise or fall with every election cycle (Ps. 146:3).
- I trust God can redeem even my worst mistakes; therefore, I serve and lead confidently without the burden of guilt from my past (1 John 1:9).
- I trust God can teach me how to be a godly father through His Word, His Spirit, and other mentors; therefore, I quit blaming my own mother and father for my current parenting inadequacies (Ps. 119:24).

You can probably think of other statements, and that's great! Go for it. We'll consider these again at the end of the chapter.

The point here is to see if our alleged trust is paired with an action that is the evidence of that trust. Do we hand God our baby?

FINALLY, CONSIDER ASKING THOSE CLOSEST TO YOU

Perhaps the fastest (yet, most painful) way of learning where you are on the God-Trust-O-Meter is to ask those around you for their insight. Ask your wife, children, or even co-workers: 'What would you say I trust in? Where do I place my confidence and security?' After asking a question like this, some of us would need to brace for impact.

That will produce great insights. However, the question itself can cause their answer to become biased. If you'd like to dig deeper, ask them these two additional questions:

- What makes me really angry?
- What do you think I'm afraid of?

What do these questions have to do with trust? I think they go straight to the heart of the matter.

For example – if I get angry when...

... my kids fail at school. Then, perhaps I've placed my trust in good grades?

... I get passed over for the promotion. Then, maybe I'm trusting in my income or job title?

... my wife doesn't respect me. Then, I might've anchored my trust to her opinion of me?

Or, if I'm afraid of ...

... a certain political party gaining power, I might be trusting too much in my government.

... not being able to put food on the table, I may be letting money become my source of hope.

... getting this 'being a Christian' thing wrong, I'm not trusting enough in His grace and power.

I think these 'angry or afraid' questions are an efficient way to discover where we've placed our trust. In some areas, we may learn our trust is well placed in the right One! In others, we may see a need to repent and ask God to help us trust Him more.

Jesus shares the parable of the builders in Matthew 7. The foolish builds his house on the sand, while the wise builds on the rock. The storms come. The foolish man's house lies in ruins as the wise man's home stands as a testament to its firm foundation.

Dear dad, leader of your home, and disciple-maker for future generations: you are a home builder! Maybe not a physical one, but definitely a spiritual one. The biggest need your future generations will have is that you've built that home – your life – on the rock, not on the sand.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Ps. 18:2).

Go trust God and build on the rock!

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Have you taken time to list out all God's done for you and your family? Have you ever tried a quick 'recap' of His provision and protection over the years? Reread the example from Joshua 24. Consider doing a similar exercise with your family. Few things build trust like past examples of reliability.
- 2) Take another look at the 'if-then' trust statements. Can you list more? Can you think of areas in your life – parenting, finances, career, sexuality – where your trust might be misplaced? First, repent. Then, find a scripture connected to this area and replace it in your mind so your trust becomes firmly anchored in God's promise to you.
- 3) When was a time you demonstrated total trust in someone? Like Jairo on the zipline, have you ever placed your complete trust in another individual for either your own life, or the lives of those you love? What was that experience like? Why did you trust that person?