

Can you trust God?

STEWARDSHIP IS A MATTER OF TRUST

Proverbs 3:1-10; Hebrews 13:5-8

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The woman's eyes flamed. Her face flushed. Her neck drew taut and her body shook. Finally, her voice cut the air with the sharpest edge. "I'm not angry!" Every child in the class nodded their head in agreement. As the students later filed out, a little girl whispered to the boy next to her, "I lied. I think she was angry." The boy answered, "I nodded because if that's her normal, I don't want to see mad."

Have any of you experienced something like that? Have you ever had a person tell you he is not bitter or she is not mad, but you know better? Those individuals often can't see what is really going on with them. They may feel anger and bitterness is unacceptable. Thus they won't accept the truth of its presence in them.

Some years ago, I was involved in a program where frequently I was confronted by fellow participants in the following manner: "*Wes, what were you feeling when you said those words or made that gesture? Why did you crack a joke right then? Don't tell me what you were thinking. Tell me what you were feeling?*" Later I would be asked why I felt that way. Slowly, I began to realize that much of my behavior was directed by feelings about which I was clueless. As I dug down and identified feelings affecting my behavior, I discovered the vision that was creating those feelings. I began to recognize motives. I learned why was I defensive at times. At times I discovered that I was more interested in feeling safe or looking good to myself than in hearing the truth.

What I found about myself is true of us all. We are frequently out of touch with what motivates our behavior. Solomon wrote in Proverbs:

The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out. (Proverbs 20:5, NIV)

The Bible reveals that it is easy to be oblivious to motives. They're often more difficult to see than water in the bottom of a deep well. It takes effort and time to draw out what really is going on with us. Yet it is important because our actions are generated by those deep emotions. The very word E-MOTION suggests action. Where does emotion come from? It comes from a way of seeing things. Behind every feeling is a picture. There is a perspective. Everyone sees things in certain ways. Everyone has a perspective from which they operate. Everyone has vision, but **not** everyone knows their vision. If we feel anxious and afraid, we might not know why; but there is an unlikable picture behind that. If we are at peace, there is a tranquil picture behind it. If you are prone to worry, it is because your vision produces those feelings. You may talk about the love of God, but in worry your vision doesn't give that love prominence. Vision **drives** our behavior. Similarly, our vision is revealed by **our behavior**. Our behavior gives us away to others, even if we refuse like that teacher to acknowledge what is going on.

During the month of January we will focus on things that will help you discern the pictures that dominate and drive your behavior. We'll also help you change those pictures so that they include more and more the truth of God's love for you. You will grow as God helps you check your vision and change your vision.

In Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6, God gives us three directives. First, we are to **trust** in the Lord. How? "**With all your heart.**" How do you do that? You trust "with all your heart" when you see God as completely trustworthy. You won't trust whole heartedly until tugging at your heart and flooding your mind, even if your suffering, is a picture of a compassionate God sacrificing for you. The more you embrace and act on a vision of God's love and power for you, the more you actually trust. The more you see God moving heaven and earth on behalf of you as he actually is doing, the more your very heart is filled with trust. Let a vision of God's love dominate your thought life.

The second directive is to "*Lean not on your own understanding.*" Does your vision include a God whose ways are far beyond your understanding? The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans tried to explain how God in a hidden manner was compassionately caring for the Jewish people. At one point, he finds God's ways so beyond his understanding that he exclaims, "*O the riches and depth of God's wisdom, who can explain his ways?*"

Some time ago I heard the story of James Cash Penney. Raised in the home of a Baptist pastor, he became a committed believer. When he moved to Colorado as a young adult, he wired home for his life savings and bought a butcher shop with it. When he discovered that most of the business came from a single hotel and to keep that customer he had to do something that violated his values as a believer, he struggled for months compromising his convictions. Finally, he decided that he wasn't trusting the Lord. He had been leaning on his own understanding. He repented and stopped compromising. The result was what he feared. He lost his biggest customer which was nearly 60% of his business. The butcher shop went bankrupt. James Cash Penney lost everything including his life savings. Penney became penniless.

For many of us what happened to Penney is exactly what we fear. We are afraid that if we go out on a limb trusting God's word, the limb will break and we will fall. If we tithe our income, we will lose everything we hold dear. If we follow God's truth, we'll be rejected by those we love. I understand that fear. I've wept and cried out to God when I suffered some things because of my obedience. I don't know of a single biblical character who wasn't tested after they acted in faith. Jesus warned his followers of such testing. The Apostle Paul reminded believers that we are in a battle. Yet, their words and lives reveal the love and trustworthiness of God.

Agonizing, but still trusting, Penney came upon a store, named *The Golden Rule*. He liked the name so he applied and became a clerk there. Within a few years he became a partner as the store became a chain of three. Finally, he became owner, and using the practices he had learned working there, the chain grew and changed its name to J. C. Penney. J. C. Penney found that God had not abandoned him when he had gone bankrupt. Instead, all the time God was leading him to something better, something rooted in God's greatness and love.

J. C. Penney applied the third directive of Proverbs 3:5-6. He acknowledged God, not just at church, not just at home, but in every facet of his life. Not in some ways, not in a few ways, but "***in all your ways, acknowledge him!***" J. C. Penney discovered after a season that God had made his path straight, that God had directed his steps, that the promise is true.

Can you trust God? There is ample reason. God is **trustworthy**. He is worthy of your complete confidence. His ability and character make him totally dependable. God has **entrusted to us** our bodies, possessions, opportunities, talents and the time we now have. God has placed in our care all these things. God has **committed** himself to be a **companion** at all times us.

Just as love fuels a desire in you to be helpful, God desires to be our helper. We can be content, even in want, for our helper declares: "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" When did God say he would abandon you? Never! When did God say he would reject you? Never! Did he say he'll leave you when you sin? Never! Did he say he'll reject you when you're foolish? Never! Did he say he'll abandon you when you're down? Never. Did he say he'll reject you when others do? Never! "**Never!**" is his **promise!** Is that your vision?

Have you felt forsaken by God? Have you felt alone? You had the wrong picture in your heart. Your vision misled you. God wants you to know that he's committed as your companion. He won't turn away from you.

Can you trust God? Yes! Will you trust God? Will you? Why don't you make a decision right now to trust with him your whole heart and your whole life? If you have made that decision already, reaffirm it right now. If not, commit yourself to him right now.