

Will You Cultivate Trust?

STEWARDSHIP IS A MATTER OF TRUST

Jeremiah 17:5-8; John 6:25-36

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Christianity in its essence is a broken relationship with God that is restored and trusting. Trust is critical. Two weeks ago we addressed the question, "Can you trust God?" and last week it was "Can God trust you?" Today, we consider how to *cultivate trust*.

We begin with someone's story. Listen as I read the testimony.

At first I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did right or wrong so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I died. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized his picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know him. But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride. But it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back, helping me pedal. I don't know just when it was that he suggested that we change places, but life has never been the same since. When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but it was predictable. It was the shortest distance between two points. But when he took the lead, he knew delightful long cuts. Up mountains and through rocky places, at break-neck speed, it was all that I could do to hang on. And even though it looked like madness, he said, "Pedal!" I worried and was anxious; and I asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer. That's when I learned that I was going to have to trust him. I forgot my boring life in every adventure; and when I'd say, "I'm scared," he would lean back and just touch my hand. He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. He gave me gifts to take on my journey. And off we were again, and he would say, "Give the gifts away. They're extra baggage, too much weight." And so I did to people we met. And I found that in giving I received, and the journey continued and our burden was light. I did not trust him at first to take control of my life. I thought he would wreck it. But he knows bike secrets. He knows how to make those sharp corners, and how to jump to clear high rocks and do things I could have never done if I were in control. I'm learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places. I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful companion, Jesus Christ. And when I'm not sure that I can do it anymore, he smiles and says, "Just pedal."

Do you get the visual picture of that bike ride? Some don't feel they are on a bike with God. They picture God sitting up in heaven waiting to pick on them. Any time something goes wrong, they think God's getting even. There's a persistent voice telling them that they'd enjoy life better if they'd just ignore God. I call that the BC stage of trust. They believe that God exists. They know about God, but they don't know God. They are in the BC stage. BC stands for "Before Christ." One develops trust in this stage when attracted to Christ by a person or a message. If you're in this stage, you find yourself wanting to experience what someone testifies about. You want to taste what you observe in another. You can even believe everything you've read in the Bible about Christ and be in this stage because he's your hero, not your companion.

Churches are frequently populated with people who are attracted to Christ but have not yet met him personally. Christ for them is a picture they like, not a person they know. They're attracted, but they don't know his peace and presence.

This BC stage passes when the person takes a step in faith and tells Christ, "*I need you, save me.*" At this point, unless there is some unconfessed sin or bitterness, the person tastes Christ's forgiveness. There is a release from guilt. There's a warmth of love felt, and a passion to honor Christ arises in the heart. You feel that someone else has joined you in pedaling. You realize Christ is on that bike. This is the WC stage of trust which means "With Christ."

Many church people are in this stage. They do know Christ. They have felt his presence and love. They can tell different ways God has cared for them. Christ is very important to them. At this stage you cultivate trust as you increasingly recognize Christ's character and passion for you. But there is a danger. You cannot pedal long with Christ before he asks to steer. Conflicts arise as you excuse and rationalize your control and behavior. You may feign closeness with Christ, your hero, rather than yield control to him in trust.

We only come to a truly healthy trust in God when we are at the IC stage of trust. The IC stage is the "In Christ" stage. When you are in Christ, he does the steering. We pedal with him, take risks and go in directions we'd never choose. It's an incredible journey where we grow in confidence through the many experiences into which he leads us.

Which stage of trust describes you? If you don't move into the IC stage, you will shrivel spiritually. Much of your faith confession will be dishonest. You will call Christ Lord, but it won't be real. Until he directs your activity, he is no more your Lord than your family pet. You may feed the dog, give him a few treats, take him on some walks and pet him, but the dog is not in charge. Is Jesus in charge of you? That's what it means to be *in Christ*.

Jesus understood that the most crucial work any person has, is the work of trust. When asked, "***What must we do to do the work God requires?***" Jesus answered, "***This is the***

work of God: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:29). What does it mean to believe in the one He sent? What's involved in trusting Jesus? Consider the acrostic *trust*, T-R-U-S-T.

"T" stands for *Take A Fearless Inventory*. Trust begins with honesty. You never develop faith by faking it. Jesus always commanded people to first repent and then believe. Belief makes no sense unless one becomes honest and repentant. A courageous, personal inventory is critical. For example, tithing is returning 10 percent of your income to God. Most believers who receive income and admit they don't tithe, say it's because they don't have enough money. However, if you earn a dime, you have enough money to tithe because a penny is 10 percent. A dime, however, is not enough money to live on, but it is enough money to tithe. Most believers that fail to tithe do so, not because they have insufficient income. They have enough income to tithe. They just don't believe that God will honor their tithe. They don't trust God's call and promise in tithing. A fearless inventory recognizes that. A fearless inventory admits unbelief. That's honesty. Repentance says, "I'm falling short, God. I don't believe. Help me. Help my unbelief." To cultivate trust you absolutely must begin with "T" and TAKE A FEARLESS INVENTORY. Otherwise, you will live in deception, claiming that Jesus steers the bike while all the time you actually steer it and put your trust in other things.

Jeremiah said in the 17th chapter of his prophetic book.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jer. 17:9)

We wrap our hearts with so many excuses, that we actually fool ourselves and become incurably deceived. Only with courage and God's help can we be honest. That is why the Psalmist said:

Look deep into my heart, God, and find out everything I am thinking. Don't let me follow evil ways, but lead me in the way that time has proven true. (Psalms 139:23-24)

Like the Psalmist, ask God to help you know your heart and become honest.

To cultivate trust, "R", RECOGNIZE WHO IS YOUR BREAD. You have life because of God. Christ is your bread. Recognize your source. *Don't just think of who butters your bread, think of who is your bread!* Jeremiah was right when he said, *"Cursed is the one whose heart turns away from the Lord... but blessed is the man who trust in the Lord"* (Jer. 17:5, 7)

Then there is "U". UNDERSTAND GOD'S PRINCIPLES! Remember who is the owner and who is the manager of all you have. Your vision of that will direct your actions. Check your vision and change your vision so that it aligns with the truth.

Fourth, "S", SURRENDER EVERYTHING NOW TO GOD. That's the critical decision of trust. Two weeks ago, I told you a little about J.C. Penney. He was content to be a butcher. However, when he surrendered it all to God, God took it. He obeyed God rather than do what was best for his business, and he went bankrupt losing his butcher shop and his life savings. God then led him into relationships that birthed the chain of Penney stores. This step of surrender was critical to J.C. Penney's future and fortune.

Fifth, "T", TEST GOD'S PROMISES! You'll only personally know God's faithfulness when you're out on a limb. Stop hugging the trunk. The fruit is out on the limb. If you trust God's word, you'll do things that will take you out of your **safe zone**. But God only leads you out of your **Safe Zone**, so that you will enter another zone where your life will make an impact, where your life will have **Significance**.

Remember that the work of God is this: to believe in the One God sent to you. Will you take that inventory? Will you recognize who is your bread? Will you understand God's principles? Will you surrender everything to God right now? Will you test God's promises? Only then will you cultivate the trust necessary to embrace Christ as Lord! Will you?