

Devotion for August 3, 2020

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“Trust is the Hardest Part”

The Christian faith is formed by three main ingredients; knowledge, acceptance, and trust. Knowledge and acceptance, I may talk about another time but for today we will focus on trust because trust is the hardest of the three ingredients for a Christian. For now, let’s just say, we may know Jesus and the Bible. We may accept Jesus as Savior and His Word as truth. But trust requires action and a willingness to put ourselves in the Savior’s hands. All three ingredients are integrated and dependent on the other ingredients for faith to be healthy. All three ingredients are essential to following Jesus and all are directed by the Holy Spirit.

So, what happens when trust is strained or maybe even broken? What do you do then? To consider this question let us turn to Mark 9:14-29. ¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

¹⁹ “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”
“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

²⁹ He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

The boy’s father expresses a line I have used myself. “Lord I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.” Doubts creep in because trust has been eroded. I believe this father has worked hard to help his son long before we meet him at this scene in Mark 9. Perhaps, as long as this father noticed the boy’s symptoms this father likely has done anything within his means to help his son. Nothing has worked and no solution has come from the religious leaders, the teachers of the Law, who only wanted to argue about the sinfulness that must have brought this about (See John 9). The disciples prove nothing either because they couldn’t drive out the demon. Everything seems to have flopped. This father is full of doubts and Jesus literally becomes his last hope.

“Help my unbelief” comes usually after many disappointments, some of them self-inflicted—imagined outcomes like I shared last week only to be punctured by the reality. Who could blame us for doubting? What do we actually trust in the news, especially in the realm of politics? Will science really flatten the fear of Covid? We hear about solutions to Covid but how many vaccines have cured a cold or flu? Or on a normal day how many unknown numbers pop up on our phones that we actually answer or trust? How many things that promise us better health actually want to help us or are we just getting another false advertisement? Recently I have been hearing about Johnson and Johnson being sued because their baby powder causes cancer. Baby powder? What!? That’s been on our shelf since I was a baby. Good grief! Can anything be trusted? Thankfully Jesus is not just anything.

As I share this with you, I have been given the sad news that my old Ford F150 has ended its 215,000-mile career as my faithful workhorse. That means we are looking for a different car. As I begin my search for a different vehicle (someday another truck) I am left with the same feeling I get every time I seek to buy a car. I

wonder if the vehicle I end up buying will actually perform or will I just inherit someone else's problems. Research always finds the horror stories and they plague my mind like peanut butter on the roof of a dog's mouth. I can't afford to be one of them. But here we go again. Doubt. My old truck was a trusted vehicle. I knew its problems. I was familiar with its issues and knew how to deal with them until I couldn't anymore. A newer car is fun but also for me filled with uncertainty until I have driven the thing for long enough to feel it has proven itself.

The father of the boy has most likely made an investment of money and time to help his son to no avail much like the woman in Matthew 9. (Consider the woman with the bleeding issue. She went broke trying to get better. Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34, Luke 8:43–48). Ironically, the disciples couldn't heal the boy either it seems for the same reason. Jesus seems frustrated by it when He says, "You unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" The disciples seem to doubt too. And when Jesus says, "only with prayer" we get a little inside scoop. The disciples may have relied too much on their own skills and their own authority to cast out the demon. We believe in Jesus but a little extra money won't hurt. We believe in Jesus but more exercise will make me healthier. We believe in God's Word but certain passages don't really fit our lifestyle. We believe in Jesus but my future feels more certain with a good 401k. I believe in Jesus but working hard to be a "good person" will ensure I have a place with Him. We believe in Jesus but often try to subsidize our faith, help God help us, as Abraham once did with Hagar. In the end trust is a hard thing to have. But let us remember after the resurrection trust in Jesus was unshakable for those same disciples.

So, what's the key to trust? It's not a secret. Trust is built on relationships and reputation. The depth of our relationship with Jesus has the greatest effect on trust. While everything else that lets us down is of this world and flawed Jesus is not of the world and neither is the kingdom He is offering us. Jesus never tries to sell us anything nor force His will upon anyone. He simply invites us to follow Him and makes and hides nothing about the cost of being His disciple. Yet Jesus says, "Trust in me" to His disciples and to all His followers in John 14. The actions of Jesus on the cross and in the way He loved people of all angles of life reveals a person who wants us to trust in Him. His reputation is a 2000 year old message of love. The grace of God is unique from all messages or religions of the world. Jesus came to give His life for our sin that we might also come to know the resurrection. There is nothing like it.

After almost 25 years of marriage one of the most defining parts of the relationship I have with my wife is one of trust. She has demonstrated nothing but faithfulness to the care of her family, her devotion to me, and in the way she strives to expend her energy for all of our sakes. I watch the way she handles crisis and frustration and see the character of a godly wife. She is lovingly sacrificial and naturally puts us before herself. If I am to brag, I brag about her. I strive to do the same for her but she makes me feel like I am always getting the better end of the deal. I am literally the man I am today because of the relationship I have with her. She has chosen to trust in me and I in her. Love is certainly a big component to our marriage but trust is essential. Trust has been built through a life together.

Like a marriage, a life together with Jesus is what builds trust; built on the thick and the thin and in the better days and the worse. It's the milestones and the epic falls. If you want to trust the Lord consider leaning in more than you have. The closer you get to the Lord the better the chance to overcome our unbelief. Start with prayer and be as honest and open as you want to be in those prayers. Start with the way you love others; try something sacrificial, something that is generous. And perhaps stop trying to define how God is supposed to behave and Let Jesus do what Jesus does. Let Him lead for a while and let the Word of God have a voice in the way we follow Jesus. Remember the disciples trusted Jesus with their lives and they went through a lot worse than most of us in the way they suffered for Jesus and died for the Gospel. They literally depended entirely on the Lord for the things they needed and received the kingdom of heaven. They trusted in God and so can we. So, if your trust has waived in Jesus I invite you to please try again. In Jesus. Amen.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace. Amen.

Pastor Matthew Woods
John 3:30