

Trusting God
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My sermon today is titled “Trusting God.”

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to trust God when everything is going your way:

when your dreams are coming true,
 when your husband is doing what you ask him to do,
 when your children are obedient,
 when you have money in the bank, everyone is healthy and you are getting along with all your friends and you just feel so close to God?

Man, during times like this it is so easy to trust God.

BUT...what about when times are tough?

When your dreams aren't coming true,
 when your husband is unfaithful or abusive,
 when your children are rebellious
 and your broke or sick and your friends betray you and God is silent and seems so far away?

Man, during these times it can be so hard to trust God. Maybe we question God or wonder why God isn't doing what we think He should do.

Times like this show us what's really in our hearts.

Do we trust God or not?

Do we believe He is with us in our difficulties even when we don't see any evidence of His presence or His power?

I love the words of the song Pastor Michelle sang.

When you don't move the mountains, I'm needing you to move.

When you don't part the waters, I wish I could walk through.

When you don't give the answers as I cry out to you.

I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in you.

Times like this can be so painful. And none of us want to be in a difficult or painful situation:

Paul asked God three times to take away his thorn in the flesh.

Joseph begged Pharaoh's cupbearer to get him out of prison.

The disciples woke Jesus and asked Him to save them from the storm that was about drown them.

Hebrews 12:11 says no discipline is pleasant. It's painful. No one wants to have pain in their life. Even Jesus asked God to deliver Him from the cross...but ultimately, He submitted to the will of God.

It's very natural to ask God to deliver us from painful or frightening situations. But sometimes it's these situations that reveal if we really trust God.

When I was younger I worked for Southwest Airlines. In the 5 years I worked there, Pastor Joe and I took close to 50 trips. I loved to fly...the second I boarded the plane I would feel relaxed and I looked forward to hours of uninterrupted time. I had absolutely no fear of flying.

UNTIL...I was diagnosed with a brain tumor and had to have an MRI. The MRI caused me to be claustrophobic. I'll never forget the first flight Pastor Joe and I took after my MRI.

As soon as we stepped onto the plane this gripping fear came over me. With everything in me I forced myself to take my seat. Pastor Joe sits down next to me, opens his book, and begins to read...He had been looking forward to this moment for weeks. And simultaneously I freak out. I bolt out of my seat saying, *"I have to get off this plane."* He's like *"What? - What are you doing?"*

After flying fearlessly hundreds of times...I was terrified of flying. It took me a year to overcome this fear. How did I do it? One of the main things I did was to arm myself with the word of God. Literally for one-year every time we would get on a plane I would recite Psalm 56:3 –

When I am afraid, I will trust in you.

I would say that verse over and over and over in my head. Eventually my trust in God became greater than my fear of flying. I no longer doubted that God was in control and I could trust Him.

In John 20:24-29 we read the account of Thomas, who was one of the disciples. After Jesus resurrected, he appeared to the disciples but Thomas was the only one who was not there. So, the other 11 disciples told Thomas that they saw the Lord. Here's Thomas' response in verse 25:

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it."

This passage earned Thomas the title "Doubting Thomas" to this day. Even though all 11 disciples said they saw Jesus...Thomas still doubted. He disbelieved the testimony of 11 men that he knew were disciples of Jesus...men who walked with Him and were willing to die for him and who had nothing to gain by lying. Wouldn't you think this was plenty of proof?

But he remained unconvinced. He wanted bodily proof of the resurrection. Thomas wanted to see for himself.

Keep in mind, Thomas was not a wishy washy unstable unbeliever.

Listen to what he said in John 11:16:

Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

This doesn't sound like the words of an unbeliever to me. When someone is willing to die for someone, they believe wholeheartedly in them.

In John 14, on the night before Jesus was crucified, He said He was going to prepare a place for the disciples. Thomas spoke up in verse 5 and said this:

"Lord, we don't know where You are going, so how can we know the way?"

That is, we want to follow you, but aren't sure how.

These are not statements made by a doubter.

These are statements made by a follower.

Thomas was, above all, a follower of Jesus.

But in the course of events, he became discouraged.

He needed more than the experience of others to have faith again.

But guess what? The other disciples needed a personal encounter with the risen Jesus JUST AS MUCH AS THOMAS DID. Thomas was no different from the other disciples; he was just a week late! Thomas gets a bad rap but did you realize that the other 11 disciples all doubted too? They believed only AFTER seeing Jesus.

Mark 16:10 says that Mary Magdalene tells the disciples that she saw Jesus alive. Verse 11 says...

When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen Him, they did not believe it.

Mark 16:14 says...

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

You see Thomas wasn't the only one who doubted. At one point they all doubted. And at one point or another we do too. We've all been Doubting Thomas' at some point in our lives. But it is into our doubts Jesus breaks through the closed doors of our searching hearts and reveals Himself to us. God knows we need a first-hand encounter. He knows we need to experience Him for ourselves.

Maybe that's also why a week later John 20:26-27 tells us that Jesus appeared again when Thomas was there.

A week later His disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them.

Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe."

It's pretty obvious that Jesus appeared just for Thomas – to dispel his doubts. Maybe when we are willing to ask the tough questions, He is willing to do what it takes to answer them.

By the way - since when are questions bad?

Since when is it wrong to admit that we don't understand everything? Since when is it wrong to ask God to clarify something? God does not forbid questions.

That's why we can say:

I believe – help my unbelief.

I believe – but I still have some struggles.

I believe – but I still have some uncertainties – some questions.

God hears those prayers and delights to answer them.

Read the account of Job, or the Psalms. Both are filled with uncertainties, complaints, and questions of God. Thomas is just one in a long line of faithful people who have raised their voices to ask the hard questions.

Doubt is a humble mind asking real questions & seeking real solutions. There are Biblical examples that faith and doubt can exist together. Not faith and unbelief – but faith and doubt. Thomas still believed in Jesus he was just struggling with some doubts.

If you look at the Greek meaning of the word doubt – It has to do with uncertainty or trust. His confidence was being shaken. He couldn't trust that what the disciples were saying was true. Some commentaries say that he may have been feeling very deep grief. The kind of grief that happens when a long-cherished hope is taken away. So, he was having a hard time trusting at the moment.

In fact, there are many biblical examples of people doubting or having a difficult time trusting – even those we consider biblical heroes experienced trust issues from time to time. Yet even during their doubts, they stayed connected to God.

Abraham was called the father of faith – Yet in Gen. 17 he fell on his face and laughed at God's promise. He doubted that Sarah was to be the mother of the promised child.

Moses doubted his ability to lead. Elijah doubted whether God knew what He was doing. We already saw the doubts of the disciples and John the Baptist. There were doubts in the early church.

Mark 9 tells the story of a man whose son was demon possessed and the disciples could not cast it out. So, Jesus had them bring the boy to him. He told the father that all things are possible to him who believes. Verse 24 says:

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

Do you trust God? Not just believe in Him, do you trust Him? Really?

The test of whether or not you really trust God is that you can go through the darkest times of your life without turning on God!

One of the darkest times in my life was when my children were teenagers and rebelling, the first church we had planted was dying a slow death, we were broke, I had a falling out with my best friends. During this time – and many more like it since then – I had lots of doubts... but I never turned on God and by the grace of God I never will.

When you truly trust God - you will not turn on God – no matter what happens.

Why? Because you know Him!

You know He is good all the time.

You know nothing can separate you from His love.

You know that He will work all things out for your good.

So, when everything around you says God has let you down or abandoned you, or failed you...you turn to Him and His word and you tell yourself God's word says:

- He can't let me down because His word says even when I'm not faithful He is faithful.
- He can't fail me because His word says His love for me never fails.
- He can't abandon me because His word says He will never leave me or forsake me.

When you tell yourself this, then trust just starts rising up.

You see the more you know God – the more you will trust Him. Psalm 9:10 says:

Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.

Trust is the key to any relationship, but it isn't just given automatically. Trust must be earned. In fact, as parents, we often teach our kids not to be so trusting. We warn them about the danger that can come from putting their faith in someone they don't know. And we're right to be cautious.

Even as adults, trusting the wrong person can cause pain. So how do we determine who we can trust? By getting to know them! We look for clues that someone is trustworthy before we trust.

This also applies to trusting God. Fortunately, He's easy to get to know.

We can just open our Bibles and pray to learn who our God really is. This is how we get to know Him.

And His word also tells us how to develop a life of trust in God.

Here are seven things we must do if we want to trust God.

1. Don't trust in yourself or others instead, trust in God.

Psalm 20:7 - Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

2. Choose God's way and not your way.

Psalm 37:5 - Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this.

3. Worship God and not idols.

Psalm 40:4 - Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

4. Trust Him because He loves you.

Psalm 52:8 - I trust in God's unfailing love...

5. Don't be afraid of man, instead trust God.

Psalm 56:4 - God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

6. Don't trust in your own understanding but look to God for direction.

Prov. 3:5-6 - 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.

7. Don't be troubled. Instead trust God.

Jesus said in John 14:1 - Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.

Of course, this list is not all inclusive.

It's also not possible to do any of this without a personal encounter with Christ. Remember how Jesus appeared a second time to the disciples when Thomas was there. He knew Thomas needed to see Him and touch Him. After which Thomas says in verse 28: *"My Lord and my God!"*

The moment Thomas has an encounter all his doubt is gone!

Suddenly the resurrection is true, Jesus is the son of God, salvation has come to all, and Jesus is Lord.

Yes, Thomas always believed this but now any doubt he had just vanished as Jesus appeared. Then in Verse 29 Jesus says,

"Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus isn't rebuking Thomas because he needed to see Him to believe. We all must encounter Jesus to believe. Thomas was no exception. Jesus was saying Thomas believed because he saw Him in bodily form. Thomas saw his actual body.

Then Jesus goes on to say blessed are those who have not seen My actual body, yet have believed. That's us and others like us. We don't see His body. We see Him in the spirit, in our hearts and minds.

Jesus was saying that even though we don't see Him in bodily form - still we believe - and because of this we are blessed. Thousands of years have passed after the resurrection - but that doesn't diminish the blessings we receive when we believe.

I close today by reminding you that God is able to change doubt into trust - to overcome it with an irresistible encounter with Jesus. For the disciples, trust began only after Jesus made Himself known personally to each of them. And it's exactly the same for us.

God breaks through our doubting hearts, causing us to say like Thomas, "my Lord and my God."

So, will you trust Him?

When everything seems hopeless... will you trust Him?

When He doesn't move the mountains you're asking Him to move... will you trust Him?

When He doesn't part the waters... will you trust Him?

When He doesn't seem to be answering your prayers...will you trust Him?

So, I encourage you today:

Trust God in the good times and the bad times.

Trust Him every moment of every day.

Remind yourself that no matter how bad things look - God is always good - and you can trust Him to work everything out for your good!