



A Life of Trust & Surrender

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36)

Through his own life, Jesus teaches us that a life of trust entails accepting what God allows to come into our lives, whether we understand it or not, trusting God to “in all things work for the good” (Rom 8:28), even if we can’t see the whole plan. *To trust God is to surrender to God’s will*, and Jesus challenges us to do this across every area of our life. This includes our work, leisure, friendships, family relationships, money, and possessions.

Jesus also asks us to trust him. More, Jesus showed us how to trust by his actions, by the way he lived his life, with the way he demonstrated complete trust in God with every step he took. We have reason to trust because we hear and see the “good news of the kingdom” enacted in the ministry of Jesus. We have reason to trust because we see the love of God demonstrated in the cross of Jesus. We have reason to trust because we see the victory of God over death in the resurrection of Jesus.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “**Your kingdom come, your will be done**” he wanted them to pray that he would succeed in it. Bringing the Kingdom of God to earth was Jesus’ mission, and being trustfully surrendered to the will of the Father is what he demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross.

Jesus also wanted his disciples to succeed in *continuing* this mission. When we pray this prayer we must recognize that we are saying we want to model our lives on the life of Jesus — his humility, his servanthood, his love, his unwavering trust, and his uncompromising obedience and surrender to the will of the Father. Because Christ is King, the model for our actions must be his will, not our own. God has good and loving intentions for each one of us, and through a life of trust and surrender we allow God’s will to shape our choices, relationships, and life’s work.

Teachings on Trust

Matthew 6:19-33. Jesus teaches us that freedom is not found in *having* and *doing* but in *trusting God to provide all that we need* and *keeping his will close to our hearts*. To live in pursuit of the Kingdom of God means that as Christians we are a community within broader society that is aligned with a different values system. We do not strive or worry endlessly about our needs. **Rather, in entrusting our life to God, we look to our good heavenly Father to provide them for us, as he does for all of his creation.**

We can obey the command, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (6:19). We can live lives focused upon stockpiling “treasures in heaven” (6:20). **We can be free from worry, because we entrust our lives to a God who cares for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.** With focused eye and centered heart we can freely “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,” knowing that all things needed will be provided (6:33).

Mark 9:14-29. From beginning to end this story is about faith and trust. The father expresses a **cautious hope** that perhaps Jesus might be able to help; Jesus responds with a resounding call to **confident trust**. And Jesus will later express the same affirmation in a different form: “All things are possible for God” (10:27). But here the emphasis is on the human capacity to open the door to God’s powerful work through faith and trust.

In the father’s response we hear him stretching his faith to its limits: **“I do believe, help my unbelief!” (v. 24).** The very fact that he asks Jesus to cure his unbelief already shows a radically deepened trust: he understands that Jesus is capable of transforming him and deepening his faith. The father confesses faith but humbly acknowledges his doubts. Here we see that faith is never perfect; it is always a mixture of doubt. **But imperfect faith is sufficient. The kingdom of God does not come through perfection but through faithful trust—even a weak, doubting one.** The power does not reside in faith but in the God who responds to our faith.

Matthew 14:22-32. While still far from shore, the disciples’ boat gets caught in some wind and waves. In this moment of fear, the disciples see Jesus walking to them on the water and think it is a ghost. But he reassures them, and Peter challenges Jesus to tell him to come out onto the water to meet him. Jesus invites Peter to “come!” Peter gets off the boat and takes a few steps; then the wind and the waves frighten him, and he begins to sink. ‘Lord, save me!’ he cries, and Jesus takes him by the hand and says to him: ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ We should note that Jesus is not deterred by Peter’s lack of faith and trust, and neither does he exclude him. He continues to apprentice him and the others in the ministry of the kingdom of God.

Trust means that in the midst of the storm, keeping our hearts turned to God, to his love, to his tenderness as a Father. Jesus wanted to teach this to Peter and his disciples, and also to us today, in moments of darkness, moments of storms. This episode is an invitation to empty ourselves in trust to God in every moment of our life. When we feel strong doubt and fear and we seem to sink, in the difficult moments of life, where everything becomes dark, we must not be ashamed to cry out, like Peter: ‘Lord, save me! Jesus is the one who immediately reaches out his hand and pulls us from the water. It is the hand of the Father who never abandons us; the strong, faithful, and trustworthy hand of the Father, who always and only wants our good.

“Not What I Will, But What You Will”

Read Mark 14:32-36. It is here that Jesus is most human, most vulnerable, and most courageous. And it is here that Jesus demonstrates what it means to live a life of trust and surrender. In Gethsemane, Jesus himself is caught up in the struggle of a willing spirit but the weakness of flesh. So he prayed to his Father. He prayed for

another way out. He prayed in anguish. He prayed as a man who could feel pain. He prayed as a man who knew that if he would follow God's will, he would be mocked, humiliated, abandoned, and nailed to a cross.

Knowing all of this he prayed, **“Not my will, but yours.”** Jesus' prayer moves from praying for deliverance from death, to **surrender** and **trust** and **commitment to God's will**, using the identical words he had taught his disciples (“Your will be done” Matt 6:10). The conclusion of the prayer reminds us that Jesus has been devoted to doing the will of God from the beginning. Strengthened by his prayer and with the power of the Holy Spirit he stood, and he went to the cross. He went as a man who had decided to follow God. He went as a man that would endure a punishment he did not deserve. He went as a man that would heal and forgive and love even to the very end.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane presents a powerful model for us. Jesus demonstrates that the Son of God will surrender to the will of the Father and offer his life for others. He obeyed the call to give his life for the sake of others, and in so doing, he made it possible for us to find life. It is as we embrace his gift of love and trust that we find our own lives. It is as we follow his example and give ourselves away in love and compassion for others, trusting in God as he did, that we find life.

Robb McCoy writes, “Gethsemane reminds us that Jesus chose his fate, but more importantly, it reminds us that we choose our own as well. When we see Jesus in agony in the garden, we know that we will face our own Gethsemane, but we will never do so alone. Every day we have the choice. We can pray to God, ‘Not my will, but yours,’ and mean it. We can know that we are always struggling, like Jesus in the Garden, to do God's will. And we can do it trusting that as we struggle, as we fail, as we triumph, Jesus is with us.” **When we stay on the path of trust, the Spirit in us allows us to confidently surrender:** *There's a reason for this. God is in this, too.*

Trusting the Catcher¹

As Jesus was nailed to the cross, everyone he once counted on had deserted him. And from all appearances, it would seem that even God had proven himself unworthy of Jesus' trust. Despite this, Jesus prays a prayer of child-like faith. Though faith has every reason to be absent, in this petition it is present. Jesus prays a prayer of tremendous trust.

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)

The trust is rooted in Jesus' deep and intimate knowledge of the competency and character of the Father's hands. In the Old Testament, the hands of God are synonymous with the greatness and might of God (see 1 Sam 5:11; Exod 32:11; Deut 3:24; Joshua 4:24). Jesus knows these hands are greater than the hands which placed him on the cross.

Scripture not only speaks of God's hands as mighty and magnificent. It also speaks of God's hands as caring and compassionate. The psalmist appeals to this character when he cries out: “Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted” (Psalm 10:12). This is not a prayer about God's might. It's a prayer about mercy. The psalmist sees God's hands as the source of help and kindness for the afflicted. Later, the psalmist praises God's hands for a similar reason: “For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (Psalm 95:7). God's hands are the hands of a shepherd: kind and compassionate, a safeguard.

¹ This section is adapted from a chapter in Chris Altrock's book, *Prayers from the Pit*.

It's not hard to imagine that Jesus has these images in mind when he prays his prayer. After all, his prayer is a quote from the Psalms. Jesus knows how the psalmists celebrate the kindness and mercy of the hands of God. Thus he does the same on the cross. And because of this trust, rooted in his conviction about the competency and character of God's hands, Jesus was able to place the most fundamental part of himself into them.

When we genuinely understand the competency and character of God's hands, we are able to entrust those hands with what is most important. Not just the superficial. Not just the merely significant. But those matters around which our life revolves, those matters we live and die for, those matters which give meaning and purpose to our existence.

Henri Nouwen writes of attending a circus performance in Germany. He particularly enjoyed the trapeze artists called the Flying Rodleighs. After the performance, Nouwen asked the leader of the troop about their craft. Rodleigh said:

“As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think I am the star, but the real star is my catcher...The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me. The worst thing I can do is to try to catch the catcher. A flyer must fly and a catcher must catch and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that the catcher will be there for him.”

Jesus has complete trust in his catcher. He knows the Father will catch him. There is no doubt in his mind. Sometimes there is nothing we can do but trust that those hands still hold us today. We may not be able to change a thing about our situation. We may have no control over the source of our suffering. We may not be able to pause the pain. But one thing we can do: fall into the Father's hands. We can, as Jesus taught us, entrust what is most valuable into the Father's hands.

“Everything Is Yours; Do With It What You Will”²

In the sixteenth century St. Ignatius of Loyola wrote his *Spiritual Exercises* and urged the praying of a prayer that urges us to trust that God is enough. It's a prayer that in times of plenty reminds us that joy is found in God, not in the vehicle in our garage or the size of our home or the achievements of our work. It's a prayer that in times of poverty reminds us that we need nothing but God to discover contentment in our difficult condition. Ignatius believed that the repetition of these words would shape us and form us into people who more deeply understood the all-sufficiency of the love of God:

*Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.*

² Excerpt from “God Is Enough” by Christ Altrock.

The most fruit-producing lines are the final two: “Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.” These lines urge us to say that God’s love is enough. God’s love is better than anything else we might have in life. The rest of the prayer is our daily practice of turning over everything else we have in life in trust and professing (and then experiencing) that if we have God’s love, we have enough. We need nothing else.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace,

that is enough for me.

Discussion

1. Among other things, trust means that we relinquish control over something. Share a time when you had to let go of control and trust someone with something important. What was that like for you?
2. What does trust look like in a relationship? How do you know when you fully trust someone?
3. What do you worry about most? Or what is something that currently makes you anxious? As you confront these feelings, how have you learned to replace worry and anxiety with trust in God?
4. What stands out to you in the passages we explored today? What does Jesus’ teaching and example reveal about (1) living a life of trust and surrender, and (2) the trustworthiness and goodness of the Father?
5. What are some key moments in your life that required you to trust in God’s providence and faithfulness?
 - What did you learn about God in these situations?
 - In what ways did the outcomes increase your trust in God’s promise to work all things for good?
6. Multiple times Jesus asked for the cup to be passed before surrendering to the will of the Father. How has surrendering to God’s will given you strength to move forward? How do you accept disappointment when the discernment of God’s will does not lead where you wish it had?
7. Consider how trust and surrender shapes your own witness as a disciple of Jesus. How would you respond to a non-believer if they asked you how they could begin trusting in God? Describe what this process has looked like in your life.