

2

Trusting God's Words

I trust in Your word.

Psalm 119:42

Inner peace. An internet search of that phrase turns up over twenty million results. Everyone wants it. The most popular sites list five, or seven, or seventeen steps for attaining this coveted yet elusive condition. Most of these steps orbit like moons around the planet Self—loving yourself, valuing yourself, being good to yourself, being proud of yourself, doing things that make you happy. Self is the sinner's substitute for God. You are your own biggest idol.

In a sense, this is a book about inner peace. It would probably sell better if I had put those words in the title, but that would create a misimpression. Because important as our inner peace is—not just to us, but to God—it is a by-product, not an end. The end is something far more grand and satisfying.

What Does It Mean to Trust?

The Bible is God's own testimony to past occurrences, present conditions, and future events. It is our only window into God's perspective of reality. When we talk about the concept of the trustworthiness of God's words, the theological term for this is the Bible's *infallibility*. Put simply, infallible means un-fail-able. God's words never misinform us about past occurrences, they never misrepresent present realities, and when it comes to future promises or prophecies they will never malfunction.

Infallible—unfailing;
unable to fail.

The assertion that God's words are trustworthy is only a clinical canon in a catechism, however, until it impacts my personal *response* to those words. God's trustworthiness means that I am invited, obliged, and compelled not merely to *believe His* words but also to *trust* them. What does that mean?

Learning from the Reformers

Protestant theologians understood that all believing is not the same—a conclusion that is both intuitive and biblical.¹ Sometimes they used Latin words (in brackets below) to distinguish between different components of faith.²

Faith is, first of all, a kind of knowledge [*notitia*]. The assumption that faith is the opposite of knowledge is demonstrably mistaken. Everyone, down to the most anti-supernaturalistic atheist or evolutionist, believes things he has never personally witnessed, experienced, or calculated out—and operates on those beliefs as a form of knowledge. The reliability of that knowledge depends on two things: (a) the accuracy of the evidence itself, and (b) the correctness of one's interpretation of that evidence. Many legal court cases demonstrate not only that 'evidence' can be planted, twisted, or partial but also that juries and judges weighing the same evidence can come to very different conclusions.

In the case of biblical faith, the content of belief is not what I desire to be true, nor is it defined by my personal imagination of what is or ought to be true. The content of biblical faith is defined by the words of God, the Scripture itself. Paul implies this component of faith as he recollects the beginning of the Thessalonian church, 'when you received the word of God, which you heard from us' (1 Thess. 2:13). Faith begins with knowledge: acquaintance with certain necessary facts. In Jesus' parable of the soils, the first kind of hearer—the hardened wayside soil—doesn't even make it this far. He 'hears the

1. There is a kind of faith that justified Abraham (James 2:23), a kind of faith that that does not save (James 2:14), and even a kind of faith possessed by demons (James 2:19).

2. Cf. Turretin 1994, pp. 560-64; à Brakel 1993, pp. 263-66, 270ff. For a more accessible summary, see Sproul 1995, pp. 75-91.

word' but 'does not understand it' (Matt. 13:19) because it lies atop an unreceptive, uninterested heart and penetrates no deeper. So 'the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved' (Luke 8:12).

Second, biblical faith doesn't stop with merely knowing what God says; it also acknowledges (assents) that what God says is so [*assensus*]. Paul implies this component of faith when he adds that the Thessalonians who heard God's word from the apostles 'accepted it not as the word of men but as ... the word of God' (1 Thess. 2:13 ESV). You can see the progression from knowledge to acknowledgement, from awareness to assent. Another example of this level of response is the second kind of soil in Jesus' parable, represented by 'the ones on the rock ... who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away' (Luke 8:13 ESV). There is an immediate and even emotional reception of what they hear. The 'rock' is a reference not to stony soil but to a shelf of stone just beneath the surface; that's why they 'have no root,' no depth of commitment.³ The response, though emotional, is shallow, superficial, and temporary. Jesus indicates that this kind of response falls short of genuine or lasting faith.

A third component of biblical faith is a personal persuasion that acts [*fiducia*]. Full-grown faith is confident in the reliability of God's words to the point that it operates on the basis of what God says. That's why Paul caps off his Thessalonian reminiscence by noting that the word of God—which they heard [*notitia*] and acknowledged as divinely authoritative [*assensus*]'—'performs its work in you who believe' (1 Thess. 2:13 NASB). That's *fiducia*, when one acts on what he has both heard and acknowledged, by putting his faith in (entrusting himself to) God and His word. (That's why older theologians used to refer to a genuine Christian believer as a *fiduciary*.) Returning to Jesus' parable, the fourth example is 'good soil.' These, Jesus says, are 'the ones who, after hearing the word, cling to it with an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with

3. The translation 'rocky' (NASB, NIV) is unfortunate. The text literally reads 'the ones upon the rock [singular],' describing a thin layer of soil sufficient for the seed to sprout initially but not to survive (Cranfield 1985, p. 149).

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD'S WORDS

steadfast endurance' (Luke 8:15 NET). Personally and whole-heartedly embracing God's words—that's trust. And that's life-changing.

In the context of salvation, it's not some higher sense of complete trust [*fiducia*] that saves apart from knowing truth [*notitia*] and acknowledging its truthfulness [*assensus*]. 'None of these elements, even *fiducia*, taken alone or separately, is a sufficient condition for saving faith. All three are essential to it' (Sproul 1995, p. 75). All three are necessary components of a faith that saves.

Components of Biblical Faith

Knowledge	Assent	Trust
<i>Notitia</i>	<i>Assensus</i>	<i>Fiducia</i>
One can have knowledge without assent or trust	One can have assent without correct knowledge or personal trust	One can have trust without correct knowledge or complete assent

So is faith intellectual? Or emotional? Or volitional? The answer is yes. Saving faith is more than just knowledge or even assent; both knowledge and assent must find their way to *activating the will to choose to trust* what is known and assented, 'to cling to it with an honest and good heart'. In that sense, faith is ultimately seated in the will (à Brakel 1993, p. 278). The will is like the third number to the combination lock of the human heart. It is possible to dissect the process of faith in order to isolate and differentiate between our faculties of intellect, emotion, and volition, so that we can better understand the individual role played by each; but they cannot be 'fully distinguished when man is operative' because in reality they all function together.⁴

How is a field tilled? By the farmer, the plow, or the horse? (Or, if you prefer a more modern image, by the farmer, the disc, or the tractor?) None of them individually, nor even any two of them together, can till the field; the field is plowed only when all three work in unison.

4. 'Applying this to faith, this means that the believing soul is engaged in understanding, willing, and desiring. When a man believes, all his faculties function simultaneously' (à Brakel 1993, pp. 270-71).

Moving from Saving Faith to Sanctifying Faith

Theological discussions of the nature of faith have historically focused specifically on defining saving faith. The same is true, however, of what might be called sanctifying faith. Understanding the components of faith is just as important for Christian living as it is for becoming a believer in the first place.

Sanctification—set apart to God and made more like Christ.

Unfortunately, becoming a believer doesn't mean that I automatically now fully trust everything I read in the Bible. I should; but often I don't. Believers still struggle with coming to trust all of God's words and living out that trust in their daily experience. Because even as a believer I still carry around inside me a fallen nature (what the New Testament calls 'the flesh') that is incurably disinclined to trust God. Faith is not a static, inanimate commodity. Faith needs to grow (see Luke 17:5; 2 Cor. 10:15; 2 Thess. 1:3).

Trust is defined by our choices and revealed in our behavior.

Believers never permanently plateau so that they always make decisions and react to situations in a way that displays a steady, unbroken trust in God. Even the mighty Elijah tumbled from the summit of an intrepid trust in God (1 Kings 18) to bolting at the impotent threats of an irate queen (1 Kings 19).⁵ When Elijah fled for his life into the wilderness, God's response was frank and succinct: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' The question was pregnant with innuendo: *You can trust me to rescue you from hundreds of pagan prophets but not from one wicked woman? You can trust me to deliver a bolt out of the blue to ignite wet wood and lick up ditchwater, but not to douse a little pagan indignation?* How could Elijah fall so far so fast, from fearless trust to fright and flight? Because, as James reminds us, he was only human just like us (James 5:17).

We have an internal barometer that measures our trust (or lack of it). Its reading registers the condition of our spirit on a spectrum

5. For a different take on this chapter in Elijah's life see Davis 2007, pp. 253-70. Davis' thoughtful and text-focused exposition is a good corrective to some excesses, though I don't find all of his analysis convincing.

ranging from peace to panic, revealing our soul's sense of security or anxiety. Those internal readings inevitably transmit to our attitude, our demeanor, even our countenance. Consider two brief illustrations.

The first illustration comes from the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, on his way to Rome as a prisoner, was convinced that any attempt to sail on into the tail end of the year would be fraught with danger, damage, and probably loss of life (Acts 27:10). Sure enough, the ship sailed into a storm so terrific that 'all hope that we would be saved was finally given up' (27:20). But the Lord sent an angel to assure him that though the ship itself would be lost, no lives would be (27:23-24). Paul's personal belief in those words from God (27:25) had a powerful impact not only on his own spirit, emotions, and actions, but on those of the ship's crew and passengers as well. On the basis of his own confidence in God's words, he urged them not to be afraid (27:24) but to take courage (27:22, 25). After two tempestuous weeks at sea, Paul pressed them to eat some food and assured them that 'not a hair will fall from the head of any of you' (27:34). Then, giving 'thanks to God in the presence of them all,' Paul began to eat (27:35), as though they were in no more danger than if they were sitting safely ashore. The basis of Paul's trust was the words of God. The effect of Paul's trust? 'They were all encouraged, and also took food themselves' (27:36). The whole passage is richly colored with the emotional impact of trust; it shows up in hues of confidence, security, relief, and reassurance.

When we are truly trusting God's words, it has a transforming impact inside and out.

The second illustration comes from the Old Testament. When the barren Hannah went to the tabernacle to pray for a son, she was miserable, tearful, grieved, and in bitterness of soul over her childlessness (1 Sam. 1:6-8, 10, 15). But when Eli the high priest blessed her with the assurance that God would grant her petition (1:17), she 'went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad' (1:18). Hannah did not merely believe that God *could* (i.e., was able to) give her a child; she was persuaded that God *would* hear and grant her prayer for a child, based on bona fide word from God's priestly spokesman. Her trust totally transformed not just her spirit

but even her countenance, *even though nothing in her circumstances had changed*. When we are truly trusting the words of God, it has a transforming impact inside and out.

'Believing' and 'Trusting' the Bible

The fact that even English uses two different words with distinct nuances—sometimes interchangeably, but sometimes not—confirms our innate understanding that there *can* be a difference between belief and trust. Believing and trusting are twins; and like twins, there are distinctions as well as similarities.

Nuance—shade of meaning.

As in English, the Hebrew Old Testament has two different words to highlight the potential distinction between believing and trusting. The Greek Septuagint recognized and preserved the difference between those two Hebrew words. It routinely renders the primary Hebrew word for *believing* (*'āman*) with the primary Greek word for *believing* (*pisteuō*). But the Old Testament word for *trusting* (*bātach*) God

Septuagint—a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

is always rendered with the Greek word for *hoping* (*elpizō*)—a word that the Bible usually uses to denote not just optimism but confident anticipation (Oswalt 1980, I:101-02). The Greek New Testament collapses the ideas of *believe* and *trust* into a single word (*pisteuō*).⁶ The fact that the New Testament routinely merges both nuances doesn't mean that the emotional component of trust is dropped but, rather, that it is folded into what becomes the primary New Testament expression for our response to God's words.

Believing (*'āman*) is predominantly an act of *thinking* and deals with processing information (facts or claims). Trusting (*bātach*) is the choice to act on that knowledge; in that sense it is an exercise of the

6. Though the NT predominantly relies on *pisteuō* to convey both *believing* and *trusting*, it also occasionally employs distinctive language for trust including words for *hope* (*elpizō* and cognates—John 5:45; 2 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 1:12; 1 Tim. 4:10, 5:5; 1 Pet. 3:5) and *persuasion* or *confidence* (*peithō* and cognates—Luke 18:9; 2 Cor. 1:9, 3:4).

will, as I mentioned earlier. But trusting also denotes an emotional experience, 'that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence,' and 'stress[es] the feeling of being safe or secure' (Oswalt 1980, I:101). That's the inner peace I talked about at the beginning of the chapter.

You can genuinely believe something factually and yet refuse to trust it personally. It's not at all uncommon to use 'believe' in a technical, impersonal, creedal sense that doesn't match my actions or attitudes. Some people believe that airplanes can and do fly safely and successfully every hour of every day, but they would never dream of actually getting on one. Their refusal to set foot on an airliner does not mean that they don't *really* believe that planes can fly; they *know* they can. It's an issue of trusting personally what they believe factually.

Greek scholar Daniel Wallace describes how his once vibrant, personal relationship with the Lord was gradually replaced by a kind of clinical orthodoxy.⁷ He got in the habit of approaching the Bible from a purely professional and academic perspective that eventually depersonalized his relationship to God's word and, consequently, to God Himself. It took the providential piling up of painful trials in his family life for Wallace to discover that there was no solace in the mere technicalities of the biblical languages. God graciously used affliction to reawaken in him a thirst for a relationship with God Himself. That relationship is the heart of genuine Christianity; and the heart of that relationship is the Scripture. The Bible is a profoundly relational document. But when it is isolated from God as an object for icy exegetical dissection, he says, 'our stance changes from "I trust in" to "I believe that"' (Wallace 2005, p. 9). Believing and trusting are not necessarily the same thing. And the difference can be life-altering.

So, is believing inferior to trusting? No, that's not the point. But it is possible to believe without trusting—like the guy who sees planes overhead all day long yet refuses to fly, or the housewife who fusses

7. Wallace describes this personal experience in his preface to *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit?* See Wallace 2005.

and frets over the bills even though she believes that God provides for His own, or the father who subscribes to the doctrine

Trusting completes believing.

that God sovereignly rules over the affairs of men and yet is constantly out of sorts over the prosperity of the wicked in society. Believing is incomplete without trusting. Trust *completes* belief.

Trusting is a willingness to *rely* on what is believed that produces a sense of *confidence, safety, security, optimism*. In fact, those are the very words used to translate the Hebrew noun *trust* (*betech*). They are all words of *feeling*; but they are feelings that are properly grounded in thinking and believing the right things. Our sense of confidence, safety, security, and optimism registers the degree to which we not only believe the word of God but trust the words of God.

So, trust is both an action and a result. It is deciding to lean all your weight on a word from God; that's the action. And it is the serenity, security, and confidence you experience when you do; that's the result.

Trusting What, Exactly?

This sense of security or optimism is not, however, merely an abstract, subjective, nebulous, indefinable 'mood.' Our ground for trusting God is not what we think Him to be, or assume He should be. Our only ground for trusting God is what He says He is like and what He says He will do. The process works like this, from the bottom:

Trust/Confidence/Security in God



Belief in God



Revelation of God



Character of God

Trusting God is the fruit of believing God; and the only way to believe God is to believe His revelation—what He says about Himself and about everything else. And the ultimate basis for

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD'S WORDS

believing and trusting God's words is His character (ultimately, His trustworthiness).⁸ 'Unlike pagan religions where unremitting anxiety was the rule, the Hebrew religion knew a God whose chief characteristic was faithfulness and trustworthiness' (Oswalt 1980, I:102). The Christian religion is the sequel and heir to the Hebrew religion, authored by the same God. That's why this book is focused on finding your safety and security, your confidence and optimism, in the God whose *words* are trustworthy because He is.

Soteriology—
what the Bible
teaches about
salvation.

It may help to return to the context of salvation for an illustration. In soteriological terms, believing God's words secures salvation, whereas trusting God's words produces *assurance* of salvation.

SALVATION	
Belief → <i>Deliverance</i>	Trust → <i>Assurance</i>
Result: Factual Security	Result: Felt Confidence

Someone objects, 'Belief isn't really belief if I'm anxious or apprehensive about the proposition I say I believe.' If that's true, then anyone who ever wrestles with assurance of salvation cannot be saved, because 'belief isn't belief if I'm anxious or apprehensive'; and if they don't believe, then by definition they aren't saved. But both Scripture and experience suggest that something else may be going on in such cases; and often it is a disconnect between belief and trust.

Yet the objection makes a valid point because, as I argued above, saving faith *does* involve trust. Sometimes, however, such faith can develop a hairline fracture between trusting the propositions of the gospel (that God *can* save and this is how He does it) and trusting the personal effect of the gospel (that God really has saved *me*). Hairline fractures are slight, but they can still be intensely painful and debilitating. Also known as stress fractures, these fatigue-induced fractures are caused by repeated stress over time. That's a pretty

8. This is explored in detail in Chapters 3 ('God's Jealousy for His Integrity') and 5 ('The Theological Foundation for God's Trustworthiness').

accurate way to describe the spiritual phenomena that can contribute to doubting one's salvation.⁹

That's why some people who truly believe the gospel can wrestle with doubts about their salvation, sometimes for years. John Bunyan did; just read his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Lots of things can contribute to this, but one is a failure to *trust* in the truth of the Gospel despite *belief* in the facts of the Gospel. It is one thing to believe God's Word—mentally, intellectually, and quite genuinely. It can be quite another to trust God's words, to lean all your weight on the specific statements of God about what He has done, what He will do, and what He is like. When you do that, you experience the rest, security, confidence, and peace that comes from the persuasion that He truly is what He says and that He will really do what He says. Both of those are wrapped up in a biblically robust understanding of faith. But it is possible to have one without the other. Put another way, it's one thing to believe that God *can* but another thing altogether to believe (trust) that He *will*. We'll explore that concept further in a later chapter.

The larger point here is that the ultimate object of belief and trust is God. But the crucial link between my belief/trust and God is the *words* of God. Why? Because they are the only means by which I can know God Himself.

So the ultimate object of trust is the person and character of God; but the immediate object of trust is the words of God by which He communicates His person and character. This book is devoted to fleshing out that idea. For the sake of present illustration, however, one passage will serve: Psalm 56.

A Madman's Trust in God's Words

While hiding from King Saul, David decided to hole up in the Philistine city of Gath (Goliath's hometown). It was a brilliant strategy because it was the last place Saul would ever expect David to go. But it was

9. Those phenomena, usually patterns of action or thinking over time, may include tolerance of sin, an excessive tendency towards introspection, a misunderstanding of the total grace of the gospel, or any number of other causes.

also risky; he might be identified as the guy who knocked off their champion. Sure enough, someone recognized him.

David had to react in a heartbeat. 'So he changed his behavior before them, feigned madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard' (1 Sam. 21:13). It was a crazy idea (literally). But it worked!

We might be tempted to credit David's hair-breadth escape to quick wits and consummate theatrical skill. The narrative makes no attempt to interpret David's deliverance to divine intervention, direct or indirect. That interpretation is left for Psalm 56. And David had no doubts about it: it was God.

The ancient subtitle to Psalm 56 links this Davidic poem to the time 'when the Philistines captured him in Gath.' Listen to the refrain he folds into this hymn of praise for God's protection:

When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. **In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust;** I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? (56:3-4 ESV)

Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. **In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust;** I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? (56:9-11 ESV).

David blends his trust (the word is *bātach*) in God with his praise for God's words. What's the connection? The *object* of his trust is God Himself, but the *content* of his trust is God's word (Kidner 1973, p. 203).

Trust replaces fear.

Because God is known for keeping His promises, 'to praise God's word is to praise the very attribute that the one praying is depending on for his deliverance'—His trustworthiness to do what He has said (Tanner 2014, p. 484). And the praise he trumpets for God's word in 56:4 he repeats *twice* in 56:10.

By the way, notice what his trust replaces: 'In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD whose word I praise, in God I trust; **I shall not be afraid.**' Fear is not primarily an intellectual experience but an emotional experience. Why will he not be afraid? Because he doesn't

just believe in God, he *trusts* God. And the emotion of trust replaces the emotion of fear.

Putting his fear aside, the psalmist praises the promises of the Lord. After all, trusting in the Lord requires a prior commitment to the revelation of God in his Word. ... He rests on the promises of the Lord, as he praises the Lord of promise (VanGemeren 1991, 5:399, 401).

You can hear the explicit connection between trust and God's words—'the revelation of God in his Word ... the promises of the Lord'. What promises? At the very least, David had God's promise that he would succeed Saul as the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-13). It was God's words that informed and fed his trust in God.

'You just need to trust in the Lord,' someone may exhort. Fine, but how do I do that? What about Him do I trust? Who is He? What is He like? What has He done? What does He promise to do? There is only one way to know and one place to find the answers to any of those questions—the words of God Himself. We trust God by trusting His words. Trust in God that is not grounded in the words of God is fantasy.

What Does It Mean Not to Trust God's Words?

What is the alternative to trusting God's words? The opposite of trusting God is not trusting nothing. No one trusts nothing. Life is not livable without trust. Everyone trusts someone or something—it's either God, or self, or someone else. The opposite of trusting God is trusting the wrong thing.

C. S. Lewis captures the spirit of self-trust in *The Last Battle*. Jaded by a series of charades, the dwarves are determined never again to be 'taken in' by (in other words, trust) anyone. They've even become agnostic about the reality of Aslan himself, withdrawing like turtles into a shell of inflexible skepticism. Their mantra is, 'The dwarves are for the dwarves!' There is hardly a sadder image in Lewis's final chronicle of Narnia than the dwarves' self-willed blindness that mistrusts everything and everyone *except* their utterly blind and erroneous selves.

No one trusts nothing.

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD'S WORDS

'You see,' said Aslan. 'They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out' (Lewis 1970, p. 148).¹⁰

'Cunning instead of belief.' The Bible has a great deal to say not only about trusting God but also about the wrong things we are inclined to trust instead of God. The potential objects of misplaced confidence are legion. Some of them we can relate to immediately—like trusting in wealth (Mark 10:23), or your own righteousness (Ezek. 33:13). Others, at first glance, may not seem to apply to us.

For example, the Bible prohibits trust in Egypt, chariots, idols, swords, and bows. Trusting in these is not a big temptation for us. Or is it? The reason that these seem so exotic and inapplicable to us is because God was making very direct application to His original audience in their time and culture. The details may differ for us, but the underlying issues are still the same because people are still the same; so we're inclined to put our trust in, not the same things, but the same *kinds* of things.

These days you'd be crazy to put your trust in Egypt (Isa. 36:9), but we can still be inclined to put our confidence in the weaponry (Isa. 31:1, 'horses and chariots') and military might of countries that seem to us to be invincible (Hosea 10:13 ESV, 'the multitude of your warriors'). You've probably never felt convicted about trusting in 'fortified' cities (Deut. 28:52). But what about other things you've put in place to protect yourself from physical danger or material loss? Locks and bolts, state-of-the-art security systems, the Glock 9mm in the bedside table drawer, salary, employment, bank accounts, insurance

10. Not all failure to trust takes the form of 'cunning instead of belief.' But if you want a biblical example of that same phenomenon, read Isaiah 7. King Ahaz, a wicked king but under the protections of the Davidic covenant, was in danger of a conspiracy to dethrone him. God graciously promised him deliverance, and offered Ahaz his choice of a miraculous confirmatory sign. The king's reply was 'cunning' cloaked in the garb of humility: 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test' (7:12). In reality, he had no interest in trusting God. He already had his own strategy for dealing with the threat; he was trusting in a bribed military alliance with Assyria.

policies, retirement investments. None of these are wrong. But relying on any of them as the basis of your confidence and security is wrong. That's what God is saying when He challenges the locus of our trust in a passage like Deuteronomy 28:52.

Locus—the place where something is situated.

Probably no one in our Western culture thinks of himself as an idolater; that's only for pagans in poverty-stricken, education-deprived foreign countries. But trusting in idols (Isa. 42:17) is merely shorthand for finding our security in anything other than, or more than, God—especially anything devised, created, and guaranteed by fellow fallen mortals to protect us and provide our needs. In the end only God does that. We in the educated, industrialized West are just as idolatrous as anyone else anywhere else. Our idols, where we ground our trust and find our confidence, are just more sophisticated and less obvious.

Scripture has a great deal to say about trusting in the wrong things. As in all application, therefore, the key is to identify the point(s) of contact between the historical particular

The opposite of not trusting God is not trusting nothing, but trusting the wrong thing.

and the modern parallel. In the list of passages below, the concept of trust is central; God warns people about the things they tend to trust instead of Him and His words. Can you identify with any of these as things from which you derive your security or peace of mind?

- Wealth—Ps. 49:6, 52:7; Prov. 11:28; Mark 10:23; 1 Tim. 6:17
- Successful business practices that are shady or extortive—Ps. 62:10
- A 'cancel culture' mentality that shuts down those who speak truth and practices deceit—Isa. 30:12¹¹
- Slick excuses and self-justification of sin—Isa. 59:4
- The absence of chastisement that makes you think that your sin is okay with, or overlooked by, God—Isa. 47:10

11. The context of Isa. 30:12 is both religious and political, and surprisingly modern. See Isa. 30:1-11.

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF GOD'S WORDS

- Lies of prophets, preachers, or anyone who contradicts God's words—Jer. 7:4, 8, 28:15, 29:31
- Influential people—Ps. 118:9, 146:3
- Powerful nations—Isa. 30:2, 36:9
- Military might—Isa. 31:1
- Your own plans or assets—Hosea 10:13
- Your own skill or strategies—Ps. 44:6
- Your own idols and ideas—Isa. 42:17; Jer. 13:25; Pss. 115:8, 135:18; Hab. 2:18
- Your own righteousness—Ezek. 33:13
- Your own understanding—Prov. 3:5
- Your own gifts, success, or prosperity—Ezek. 16:15; cf. Jer. 49:4; Amos 6:1
- Your own self-protective measures—Deut. 28:52; Jer. 5:17
- Yourself—Prov. 28:25-26; 2 Cor. 1:9
- People—Ps. 118:8; Jer. 17:5; cf. Jer. 9:4, Micah 7:5

A few of these objects of trust are evil in themselves, but most are not. The point is not that it is always wrong to make use of any of these things, but that it is always wrong to ground your trust and find your security in any of them.¹²

Any decision to trust anything or anyone other than God is a decision to mistrust God. Any decision to mistrust God's words is only a decision to trust someone else's words instead. And no one else deserves that honor.

What Does It Look Like to Trust God's Words?

In Psalm 56, David sketches out the concept that trusting God means trusting God's words. In Psalm 37, he inks it in with color and action. What does the life of a person trusting in God's words look like? How

12. '[T]he fact is, all trust, except that reposed in the Lord, is trusting that which is without rhyme, reason or reliability' (Motyer 1993, p. 485).

does it impact not just his choices and actions but his attitudes and emotions?

Remember, *trusting* God and His words is inherently emotional. That doesn't mean that trusting God is just a 'feeling' we conjure up. But truly trusting God will have a powerful, settling impact on our emotions and attitudes, especially when we are threatened or battered by life in a fallen world.

David's verbs in Psalm 37 capture trust's emotional dimension. When confronted, frustrated, or even threatened by the apparent success of evil and evil men, three times David counsels against a very natural emotional reaction: 'Don't fret' (37:1, 7, 8). That's easy to say. But how? By choosing to 'trust in the LORD' instead (37:3, 5). Trust replaces the instinct to fret. What does that look like? What practical steps move your soul in that direction? David fills that out with a number of other actions.

Trusting the Lord means *delighting* in the Lord (37:4) rather than agitating over all the surrounding sin. It means *committing your way* to the Lord (37:5) rather than trying to manipulate your circumstances. It means *resting* in the Lord (37:7) rather than ruminating over evil, and *waiting patiently* for Him to act in His way and time (37:7) instead of rashly taking things into your own hands. It means *ceasing from anger* and *forsaking wrath* (37:8) rather than stewing over wrongs and injustices.

Delight, commit, rest, wait patiently, cease from anger, forsake wrath—do you hear how emotionally oriented all these actions are? They all describe that 'inner peace' I talked about at the beginning of the chapter, the sense of well-being, confidence, and security that come from trusting God. And the only way to trust God is by trusting His words. The psalmist's five-step program for real inner peace beats anything you'll find on the internet.

Believing God's Word is the general. Trusting God's words is the specific. Learning how to move our souls from the general (believing God's Word) to the specific (trusting God's words) is a choice but also a process. Learning to trust God's words is the path to the peace and security we crave, and to giving God the full glory that He deserves.

Just how serious and invested is God in defending the reliability of His words? Keep reading.

Review & Reflect

1. What are the three components of biblical faith?
2. The fact that we have two different words—believe and trust—which do not always mean exactly the same thing indicates that there can be a difference between believing and trusting. How would you describe that difference?
3. What is the relationship between believing and trusting?
4. What is the specific object of a believer's trust?
5. What is the opposite of trusting God?
6. What are some of the things you tend to trust rather than God or God's words?
7. Do you relate to anything in the list of objects of misplaced trust? What do the connected passages (and their context) contribute to your understanding of how God feels about trusting in those objects, and why?
8. What are some of the terms that Psalm 37 uses to describe what trusting God looks like? What are some of the opposites of trusting mentioned in the psalm?