

Trusting God

Jay Abshier
November 2012

Most Bible Studies that focus on trusting God have left me with more questions than when I started. Many seem very similar to the theme of "The Power of Positive Thinking". While this theme may be of value when discussing psychological health, in my opinion these studies are of limited value from a theological perspective.

The most benign studies using this theme are similar to *"Trusting God When Life Seems Unfair"* (www.biblestudytools.com) which gives the story of a woman going through a traumatic event in her life. The author states "Trust Him. Wait on Him, not your circumstance". The author advised the woman to humble herself before the Lord and sure enough everything ended up fine when she did. While this is good advice, does it really explore what it means to "trust God" or just scratch the surface?

Some studies go beyond being benign and can actually do harm in certain circumstances. For example, on www.middletree.com there is a series titled "Like a Child". Part 2 of this series is "Trust God Like A Child" and is built on some very pertinent scriptures, such as;

Proverbs 3:35: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding",*
and

Psalms 56:11: *"In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid..."*

But the conclusions drawn from these scriptures include: *"If there is any one predominant theme that runs throughout the bible, it is the idea that we must trust God, as everything that could go right in our lives comes from Him"* and *"God's word makes it clear that you cannot simultaneously have trust in God and have fear in circumstances."*

I do not question the truth of the assertion that everything that could go right in our lives comes from God, but what about the things that I, personally, think have not quite gone right? Are all the result of not trusting or "being right" with God?

The second quote causes some concern as well. I can think of many Biblical role models including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah and Paul who undoubtedly trusted God but at the same time experienced fear, grief and physical illness. Also, consider the man blind from birth of whom Jesus said in John 9:3 *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned",* said Jesus, *'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life'*

The idea that tragic and traumatic suffering and death being part of God's plan for anyone's life causes concern for many. In fact, the possibility that God not only condones but actually causes illness and tragedy in any life, but especially in the lives of His people, causes many to doubt the existence of God, and if He does exist, His capacity for love.

It is difficult for a Christian to fully consider the impact of suffering on their faith until the suffering occurs. But the earlier we test our faith the better. Randy Alcorn, in his book *"90 Days of God's Goodness"* makes the following observations:

"Believing that God exists is not the same as trusting the God who exists." and

"...if personal suffering gives sufficient evidence that God doesn't exist, then surely I shouldn't wait until I suffer to conclude he's a myth. If my suffering would one day justify denying God, then I should deny him now in light of other people's suffering."

But, what did we expect? CS Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain* observes that *"We want, in fact, not so much a Father in Heaven as a grandfather in heaven...whose plan for the universe was simply that it might truly be said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all'....I should very much like to live in a universe which is governed on such lines. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction."*

If our concept of God's love needs correction, perhaps we should also reconsider our concept of what it means to trust in God. Consider these scriptures:

John 16:33 "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Exodus 4: 11 "The Lord said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'"

In Randy Alcorn's book he gives many examples and testimonials of people who have chosen to trust God in the most difficult of personal circumstances. On page 118 he tells the story of a woman who had a wonderful, healthy life before undergoing severe physical and emotional trauma. After enduring her crisis of faith she observed "I discovered in myself a spirit of entitlement.....Before, I wanted certain gifts from God. Now I want him. "

Perhaps the most relevant and moving example given is that of David O'Brien, who suffers from severe cerebral palsy. On page 105 Mr Alcorn relates what David told a group of Christians: "Dare I question God's wisdom in making me the way I am? If God knew that Christ had to suffer to make him complete, certainly he knows what I need."

Jim Denison, on his web site www.denisonforum.org, tells about a friend who asked, "'Why would God make Canaan the Jews' 'promised land'?" It's been the battleground of superpowers for millennia and has few natural resources. His answer: so that Israel would be dependent on him. As he put it: the greatest blessing God can give us is to put us in a position where we must trust in him, for such dependence is our only path to joy. He will do whatever is necessary to disrupt our self-sufficiency and illusion of control.'

But, if suffering is important then why is the Bible full of scriptures about God protecting us, caring for us and providing what we need. In Jeremiah 29:11 God says "For I know the plans I have for you. declares the Lord., plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." While it is true that there are abundant examples of God providing His people everything they need and sometimes even what they desire, perhaps God's promises are primarily directed toward the safety and nurture of our souls?.

If suffering is important and God is primarily focused on the welfare of my soul, then what does "Trusting God" mean? Perhaps it means learning to have faith that all these scriptures and promises are fulfilled in the lives of every Christian - regardless of their condition of wealth or poverty, health or infirmity, joy or sorrow, life or death. Even in suffering and sorrow God's promise to prosper me and not to harm me is being fulfilled.