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How Do You Know God Can Trust You?

Matthew 21:43: (NASB) *Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.*



Trust is a tricky thing. In some instances it comes to us with ease - as children we typically trust our parents above all others. As we become adolescents, we often lose that trust because we have replaced it with trusting our friends who are “obviously” much cooler and smarter than our parents. When we are adults, the door once again opens to trusting our parents because they have somehow become smart again! Now, let us look at trust from the other side - parents will or will not trust a child based upon what they see in them regarding maturity and integrity. A child really must earn their parent’s trust and that usually takes time and evidence. It is the same way with God. We obviously should trust Him at all times and for all things. The real question here is, can - should - God trust us? What must we do or be to warrant our Father in heaven truly trusting in us?

To address our trustworthiness before God, we will use the Parable of the Landowner which appears in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Matthew introduces this particular story as a second Parable Jesus uses to make a vital point about the shortsighted and untrustworthy actions of the Pharisees. We will view trust from God’s eyes by looking at those God could *not* trust. By understanding what continually was wrong, we will know how to avoid falling into the same traps.

The context of the Parable is the day after the cleansing of the Temple and after the cursing of the fig tree. The crucifixion experience is getting close. Matthew 21:23-27: In other words, they asked Jesus, “Who do you think you are?” Jesus begins teaching about spiritual authority by asking *them* a question. The Pharisees immediately huddled together to figure out what the best way would be to answer. Jesus knew this was a question they could not process with honesty or integrity. He was showing them by their question they had issues being trustworthy - this was a brilliant lesson! They concluded the answer was, “We do not know,” not committing themselves to either position. Since they would not answer Jesus’ question, he would not answer them either.

The “Trust Pillars” titles shown throughout are taken from David Horsager’s article called, *The Trust Edge: How Top Leaders Gain Faster Results, Deeper Relationships, and a Stronger Bottom Line*. We have enhanced these with a spiritual application.

Pillar 1 - Clarity: Clarity always fosters trust - for us to be worthy of God’s trust, we must not only think and profess but live a life of clarity in His service.

Matthew 5:33-37: (Source: Biblical commentary by Albert Barnes) It appears...that while they professedly adhered to the law, they had introduced a number of oaths in common conversation, and oaths which they by no means considered as binding. For example, they would swear by the Temple, by the head, by heaven, by the earth. So long as they kept from swearing by the name Jehovah, and so long as they observed the oaths publicly taken, they seemed to consider all others as allowable and allowedly broken. This is the abuse which Christ wished to correct.

Trustworthiness Test: When asked the hard questions do I try to squirm out of giving an honest answer by seeking that which would be considered politically correct or expedient? Can God trust my clarity?

Jesus was looking at some of the ways the Pharisees made themselves look to be important. He was telling them they all knew it was nonsense - they would make the promise knowing they could break it. Power and prestige went to their heads.

Continuing with the context, here is the first Parable presented plus its meaning all in one: Matthew 21:28-32: This short story was directed to the Pharisees. In answering the question, they condemned themselves, as they were pictured by the second son who was unreliable and not a man of his word. The first man did what he said but complained. He did not want to do what was right at first but eventually did. That is why the sinners of that day, those who were not following the Law, were described by Jesus in a more positive light, “They may not get it now, but they WILL get it.”



Why did the Pharisees feel no remorse? They had no repentance for their position. They did not care about "sinners," the people who came around to do the will of God.

Pillar 2 - Compassion: To have compassion is to care about others. It is - at your own expense - to make room in your heart for embracing the hardships and failures of those whom you may not normally even notice. Can God trust ME? If you are a person with compassion, you have the potential to be trustworthy.

Matthew 5:43-46: The kind of love and compassion Jesus directs us to is not natural - and it is certainly not easily attainable - because it requires a *commitment to be a willing target of ridicule*. That is where compassion shines - when others are *not* compassionate. You reach out to draw them higher, to do something for them. Having compassion for your enemies is even more difficult.

Trustworthiness Test: Do my observations of others in their hardship often provoke me to respond with a helping hand and an open heart or do my observations often result in harsh gestures and a closed heart? Can God trust my compassion?

Compassion can be misplaced. Sometimes people purposely do wrong and expect compassion and a continual helping hand. Sometimes compassion involves showing someone the right way to get out of the situation without enabling them to continue their wrong actions. God does not want us to contribute to someone else's wrongdoings.

Now the main parable - let's begin by identifying some of the characters:

Matthew 21:33-34: Landowner = God.

The previous parable already explained who the landowner represented: Matthew 21:28:

Matthew 21:31: God is the Father in the first Parable and this second one immediately follows. The theme of both Parables is God is in charge. His hired help takes care of the vineyard.

Vineyard = (Spiritual) Israel: Isaiah 5:7: Israel is often represented as a fig tree, representing the natural or earthly house of Israel. The vineyard represents the spiritual part of Israel. (The faithful followers of Jesus who receive their promised heavenly reward. Originally this path was offered to the Jews, but they rejected the message as a nation, and it went out to the Gentiles.)

Vineyards were important and generally set up with a similar layout. They had watchtowers, a wall built around them to keep out animals and competent people were needed to tend them.

These are among the last teachings Jesus would give to the Pharisees before his death. They had not been worthy of God's trust. They were supposed to be responsible stewards but failed again and again. (Please see the Bonus Material for an Old Testament parable of a vineyard.)

Matthew 21:33-34: Vine Grower/Husbandman = The Pharisees (easy to figure out - Jesus tells us in verse 45.) Matthew 21:45: (NASB) *When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they understood that he was speaking about them.*

To have such a position as this is to be engaged in a work that requires great trust, which can only be fulfilled when one has the character to earn that trust.

Pillar 3 - Character: Your character reflects your heart. A godly character reflects that attitude of heart that does, is and thinks in terms of the needs of those around you and does so with selfless and humble energy.

1 Samuel 16:6-7: Samuel was looking for the next king, as Saul was rejected (1 Samuel 15:26). Eliab had the look of a tall, powerful man. But God wanted the right heart, and David had a character God could trust, for God knew his heart. David made a lot of big mistakes but always found his way back to God, because his heart was sound. His character was trustworthy in spite of those mistakes. That should be a great encouragement for us.

Trustworthiness Test: Is my character driven by that attitude of heart that translates my inner thoughts of godliness into the outward actions of Christ-likeness that see challenges, engages in solutions and build others up? Can God trust my character?



Matthew 21:35-36: In this Parable, the owner checks up on those he put in positions of responsibility for his vineyard, but they have no character whatsoever. They are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. This brings us to another area where the Pharisees were wrong.

As an example, Stephen was given an opportunity to speak before he was stoned to death: Acts 7:51-52: Stephen prophetically speaks to his audience just like Jesus did to the Pharisees before his crucifixion. They were not godly and therefore God would not be able to trust them.

Pillar of Trust 4 - Contribution: To contribute is to bring results...and this is a sound proving ground for the building of trust. Contribution on a consistent basis indicates an "all in" kind of attitude.

Compare the contributions of Elijah and the people of Israel: 1 Kings 19:10

Trustworthiness Trap: What and to whom am I contributing on a regular basis? Do I use "the cause" as a cover for contributing to "my own cause"? What growth does my contribution foster? Can God trust my Contributions?

Matthew 21:37-39: The vinegrowers not only wounded and killed slaves who came from the landowner to get a report, but now they even killed his son. Their reaction was of disdain instead of respect. This pictured the Pharisees having Jesus crucified.

Just a few weeks after Jesus performed his greatest miracle, the raising of Lazarus, the effects upon the "vinegrowers" of Jesus' day were sadly predictable: John 11:49-51,53: Caiaphas the high priest led the way for the trapping and extermination of Jesus! He was untrustworthy because he had his own agenda and not God's.

Just the day before telling the Parable of the Landowner, Jesus had cleansed the Temple, resulting in a strong reaction from the Pharisees: Mark 11:15-18

Pillar of Trust 5 - Competency: Competency is much more than knowing the right answers or knowing the objectives or understanding the vision. Competency is implementing those answers, performing the objectives and living the vision.

Galatians 6:1-2: We all make mistakes and need to be compassionate when others make theirs.

Trustworthiness Trap: True competency is easily confused in our thinking with ambition, especially selfish ambition. Why do I see myself as competent - is it because of how I feel or is it because of how I apply what I have learned to the glory of God? Can God trust my competency?

What do the Pharisees think should happen to the vinegrowers? Matthew 21:40-41: *He will bring those wretches to a wretched end* - The Pharisees revealed their own future.

Here is the end result of not being worthy of God's trust: Matthew 23:37-38

Pillar of Trust 6 - Connection: True connection can only happen when real communication is working both ways. Connection is established through respect and interest in another and it builds an environment where trust absolutely flourishes.

The Pharisees were connected to their own pride and hypocrisy. God cannot and will not trust us if we do the same.

An example of a real connection - Paul leaving Ephesus: Acts 21:10-14: With connection and trust comes a fierce loyalty.

Trustworthiness Trap: Are my connections genuine? Do I have a traceable respect and interest in the appropriate people for appropriately godly reasons or am I just connected to what is ultimately my own agenda? Can God trust my connection?

Matthew 21:42-43: Jesus here gives the Pharisees prophetic reasons and warnings as to their fate resulting from their decisions. Notice how he is not simply relying on the works he did in the Father's name but is heavily relying on the inspired words of the prophets.



Psalm 118:22-23: (NASB) ²²The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. ²³This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.

John 1:11-13: God seeks those He can trust. If He cannot trust me, He will find someone else to do that job. It is not about ME; it is about God and His will.

Pillar of Trust 7 - Commitment: Commitment is standing true through adversity, doubt and failure. It is being willing to step up one more time, being willing to be challenged one more time and being willing to get up off of the mat one more time. Commitment attracts trust.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28: Paul was attacked by personal enemies and remained trustworthy to God. He was not boasting by telling his experiences. He wanted to explain what he had been through so we could trust him and draw strength and faith from those trials.

The Apostle met with danger in every turn of life. This was the proof he was committed and worthy of God's trust, which is why he was trusted with writing half of the New Testament! His mind was one dimensional in what he did - serving God. Even after making mistakes, he kept moving forward.

He had personal enemies, physical challenges and spiritual responsibility. He felt the weight and necessity of performance with the churches. This is why he was worthy of such deep and abiding trust from God.

Trustworthiness Trap: Commitment is similar to competency in that it can easily be misdirected towards selfish ambition. Such misdirection can blind us to truth and therefore blind us to what should be our true purpose - being humble followers of Christ. Can God trust my Commitment?

It is way too easy to be committed to selfish ambition and tell ourselves it is commitment to God.

It can happen not only on a personal level but on a congregational level as well. Look back at the reign of Papacy during the Dark Ages. Their commitment was to the church papal system. In that commitment, they scared, tortured and killed people. That was not following the footsteps of Jesus. It was not godly...but it WAS being committed...to the wrong thing! The terror was driven by the selfish ambition of power. Do we fall into that trap?

Even good people God uses can fall into this trap, like Saul who became Paul. He persecuted Jesus' followers and did vile things in the name of God.

Back to the Parable: Matthew 21:44-46

One more prophetic allusion: Daniel 2:34-35: There is a deep sadness to the consistency that the Pharisees continually displayed.

Pillar of Trust 8 - Consistency: Consistency is the battleground of the everyday choices that we make. For good or for ill, what we consistently say, do and think will form who we are and what we stand for. A constant rebooting of our conscience and retooling of our desire will unlock our everyday spiritual potential for consistency.

Philippians 3:12-14: The Apostle Paul showed us a model of consistency regardless of what was happening around him. He kept his attitude focused on his objective.

Trustworthiness Trap: What truly drives my consistency? Is it a selfless and spiritual focus or is my consistency driven by ego or laziness or expediency? Does my consistency drive me towards God or towards my own futile and spiritually fruitless endeavors? Can God trust my consistency?

Learn to be worthy of God's trust. What am I doing today so God can better trust me so I can be a better representative of Jesus to those around me?

*So, how do we know God can trust us?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*