

# GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY

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## Resting in the Refuge of God

*Discovering God (Part 3)*

**Text: Psalm 62:5-8; Matthew 6:9-13**

I began this series by quoting A.W. Tozer's famous contention that "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." The picture we have of God – what we believe his nature or character to be -- profoundly influences the way we move through life, approach relationships, manage resources, or handle the difficulties we encounter along the way. In the past two weeks we've considered together the Christian belief that God is SUFFICIENT and that he is also GOOD. Today we're going to reflect on the conviction that God is TRUSTWORTHY. Hear the Word of God as it's found in Psalm 62:5-8. *[Dan reads scripture text]*

### I

Can any of you remember a time when you were counting on your mom or dad to be there for you at some critical moment, but they failed to show up? Did you ever give your heart to some girl or guy, only to have that person drop your heart on the ground and walk away? Have you ever invested in a business arrangement where the other parties proved untrue? Or shared a secret with a friend, but they gave it away? Have you ever put your faith in a doctor, financial advisor, or counselor of some other kind only to have their "wisdom" prove disastrous? Have you ever believed in some authority figure; but rather than doing you good, they abused you instead?

Few things are more sacred than trust between people, and few things are more savaging than to have that trust failed. When you've had your trust broken many times, it is easy to start seeing *God* through the lens of these experiences as well. "Can God really be trusted?" we wonder sometimes. "If he is so sufficient and good, then why did he let me lose that baby, or my job, or that opportunity I so needed? God, my kids are messed up and I don't know what to do. My marriage is in trouble or my finances are desperate. My body is letting me down now or my friend is dying. I'm honestly trying to do right, God, but I'm scared. Will things turn out OK? Are you really *trustworthy*, God? Have you ever wondered this?

### II

If ever there was a moment when someone would be understood for having such doubts, it would have to be Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion. The Bible says that Jesus went there with his disciples to pray and that his heart was "**deeply distressed and troubled**" (Mark 14:32-34). Of course it was. Jesus saw the storm clouds gathering over him and the agony of what lay ahead. He

would soon be arrested and thrown into chains. He would be tried and tortured by his enemies. He would be splayed out upon a cross and have cold nails driven through the flesh and bones of his hands and feet. Every human being who had ever appeared faithful to him was going to prove untrustworthy to him. All the friends who'd claimed devotion to him were going to find that they had other appointments. All the people of the crowd who'd cheered him when he fed and healed and entertained them were going to turn against him.

Two things are particularly striking to me about what Jesus said to God in his prayer that night and the first we find in these words: **"Going a little farther, [Jesus] fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 'Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me"** (Mark 14:35-36). I love this prayer, don't you? I have prayed prayers like this many times in my life. I've come to moments of trial or tragedy in my life or the people I love and I've said to God: "Look, I believe you are all-sufficient, just like your Word says. Why, if you could create this Universe in the first place, then this problem I see here is not a problem for you. You have the power to do whatever you want. You can stop the earth in its orbit. You can heal this person. You can raise people from the dead. You could give the Cubs the World Series! Everything is possible for you! So change these circumstances, God. Find a Plan B, God. Take this cup of bitterness and exchange it for a cup of blessing. You can do it. I know you can. You are the all-sufficient God."

Sometimes we are afraid to talk to God this honestly. We think it disrespectful to tell God what we want. It seems a lack of faith to question the way things are unfolding. But Jesus shows us that it is not. It is not a sign of lack of trust in God to beg him for a Plan B. Jesus shows us that prayers like these are the natural behavior of someone who sees himself not as some conglomeration of atoms in a blind and insensitive Universe, but as a beloved child of the Heavenly Father. 1 John 3:1 declares: **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"** To NOT talk honestly with God would be the actual failure of faith, the break of authentic relationship.

### III

But it is also very important to notice the second part of Jesus' prayer. **"Abba, Father,"** he said, **"everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. YET not what I will, but what you will."** Do you know what the most important word in that prayer is? Do you know the one that is the key to understanding the cross of Christ or the cup of bitterness that you may be asked to drink? It is that Aramaic word, **"Abba."** It is a word of intimacy and respect that is perhaps best translated as "dear Father." Jesus had taught his disciples what his Father was like when, long before, he had instructed them in how to pray.

As James Bryan Smith so helpfully observes, the Lord's Prayer is aimed at giving his disciples the right ideas about the God who runs this Universe. **"This, then, is how you should pray,"** said Jesus. Start by saying, **"Our Father who art in heaven..."** Sometimes people say that phrase "in heaven" and think it is telling us that God is way out there someplace staring down at us from the balcony of heaven, but it actually means just the opposite. To the Jews, the word "heaven" meant "the invisible plane all around us." you say, "My Father in heaven," you are reminding yourself that God is present to you, as near as here.

Then say to God, **"Hallowed be your name..."** You are saying, "God is holy – as in completely pure-hearted. That means there is nothing darkened, distorted, deceitful, or double-minded about him. He will never act in any way toward you that is not completely pure. Say also, **"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."** Remind yourself in this way that God isn't struggling to get his will done, hoping that maybe it might happen. He is the King of this Universe. He is unthinkably powerful. There are people who resist, defy, or miss his will at this stage of history but, in more places than are visible to you, his will is being accomplished and, in the end, it will be fully done.

And then comes a series of petitions that tell us even more about his heart. **"Give us this day our daily bread,"** we're told to pray. Why? Because God is concerned with providing for his children. He cares for us. He wants us to have what we need to make it through today and share our bread so that others make it through their day. **"And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors,"** we're asked to say. It is a reminder that God is a graciously pardoning Father. He wants to repair broken relationships. He shows his goodness in his giving and in his forgiving. **"And [finally] lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,"** says Jesus. Remember that God is your protector and rescuer, your shepherd and your redeemer. He does not wish to see evil triumph in your life.

Do you see the composite picture here? This is the "dear Father" Jesus personally knew. He is a Being always out for his kid's best interests. It's why Jesus knew it was OK to ask if there might be a Plan B. But the reason that Jesus concludes his Gethsemane prayer by saying, **"Yet not what I will, but thy will be done, Father,"** is because He knew with perfect clarity what it is understandably hard for us to remember: If God is as the Bible says and I believe -- utterly SUFFICIENT in his power and completely GOOD in his character -- then there is only one possible explanation for why he sometimes lets those painful Plan A's go forward. It must be because he knows something that we don't yet know about what ultimately advances our best interests.

#### IV

I will never forget being in the pre-op room with our eighteen-month-old son many years ago as the doctor readied him for surgery. He did not understand what was

happening to him and he was very scared. There was no way to adequately explain to a child of that age that this operation had to be done. The doctor needed to go inside of his head and implant some tubes so that the terrible motion sickness and constant ear-infections might finally stop and he would be able to truly hear again. As the hospital staff tried to put the anesthesia mask over his face, he began sobbing hysterically and fighting the physician. With tears on our own faces, Amy and I pinned his arms down. He looked from one hand to the other hand and then up at us through tear-swollen eyes with a gaze of horror and sadness I will never get out of my mind. I saw his mouth move beneath the clear plastic mask now pressed to his face. I'm not sure what words he spoke, but the message was obvious: "I thought you had power sufficient to save me. I thought you were good and actually loved me. Why have you betrayed me?"

Hours after that night in Gethsemane, a crowd of soldiers took Jesus to a hillside outside of Jerusalem, and pinned his arms down to a cross. In an act of courage greater than any child of man, the Son of God had *chosen* to lay himself on this table. He went there voluntarily to heal a world that had lost its hearing. Courageous though he was, the agony of the experience eventually overcame him. At one point, he cried out to heaven in the Aramaic of his childhood, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*" "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me**" (Matt 27:46).

And then something seemed to settle in Jesus as he hung there. Maybe the anaesthetic of the wine vinegar they then gave him dulled the pain a bit. Perhaps the tears in his eyes cleared for a moment and he was able to see beyond the faces of the jeering crowd and into the invisible place where Someone else had drawn very near. The Bible simply says: "**Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Abba, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.**" (Luke 23:46)

There will be many times when we find it very difficult to understand why God allows one of us or our loved ones to endure the agonies we do. It is OK to cry out, to ask God if there might be a Plan B. Sometimes there is. But when there's not, remember the words of the Psalmist and the example of Jesus: "**Trust in the LORD at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge**" (Psalm 62:8). Remember also that one day the operation of his grace will reach its final fulfillment and the work of healing Jesus began will be completely done. On that day, all of God's children will rise from the table utterly and wonderfully whole. We will see our Dear Father, the Great Physician, the Holy Spirit, God Three-In-One, standing by us. We will see the scars in his hands and the love in His eyes and we will know then with total assurance that even in our darkest hour He was always with us, fully trustworthy, at work for our good, as He is even now.

Let's pray together...

## Benediction

When you look at that picture, what do you see? Did you answer "An ink spot"? Most people do. Only a very rare person answers, "I see a page that is mostly clean, mostly wide-open, clear, and free." What is it about us that tends to see the *mess* when the vast majority of the picture of our lives carries the *message* of God's widespread mercy to us?

Last week I encouraged you to spend some time in silence and solitude out in God's creation, looking for evidences of God's goodness. The week before I asked you to spend a bit more time sleeping as a way of resting in God's sufficiency. Here's the Soul-Training exercise for this week, suggested by James Bryan Smith.

Go home this afternoon and start a list of all the things God has blessed you with. Add to it as additional mercies and graces come to your mind in these next days. See if this does not help to deepen your confidence in the trustworthiness of God and strengthen you for whatever you are facing.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God your dear Father, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit, go with you this week and until we meet again. Amen.