

Wednesday, February 28, 2018: Discussion Guide for “Learning to trust God: He is ‘for us’”— Sermon preached on Sunday, February 25

Text: Romans 8:31-39 (ESV)

Brief summary (what’s the point of this text/sermon?):

In the sermon from a week and a half ago we studied the importance of trusting God: it changes everything about us, from the way we face tragedies to the way we handle successes to the consistency with which we obey.

All of us want to trust God more, but how do we? That was the point of the message on Sunday. Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful and most-loved chapters in the whole Bible. In the culminating paragraph at the end, Paul encourages the Christians at Rome to know that nothing can separate them from God's love.

In the context Paul has emphasized God’s sovereignty: God is in control of everything, and he makes sure that everything works together for good (8:28). Then in the section we studied, Paul walks his readers through a litany of potential obstacles to trust in God: enemies, distress, difficulties, death, etc. Nothing—nothing at all!—can separate one of God’s children from his love.

So here’s the main point again: if God is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing, and if he has promised to work everything out to our ultimate good, and if he always keeps his promises, why would we ever fear anything in this life?

How can we trust God completely? Paul answers in this key verse: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (v. 32). We know God is faithful because of the cross. If he did that, what good thing would he possibly withhold from us?

The sermon emphasized four practical ways that we learn to trust God: **(1) We live with him** (i.e., as we walk with God and experience his presence, we learn to trust him more); **(2) We talk to him** (i.e., the act of talking to God about our struggles invites his presence into our lives); **(3) We listen to him** (i.e., we learn to hear his voice as he speaks into the situations we face: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”—Romans 8:16); **(4) We remember him** (i.e., as we reflect on his death every day—and especially in weekly communion—he reminds us of his sacrifice for us; consequently, we remember that the God who will do that will surely care for us).

How do I live out the implications of this passage? (Discussion starters to help with applying the sermon to our lives)

1. Discuss how each of these relates to our learning to trust God more:
 - a. **We live with him:** How does our walk with God through all of life’s experiences help our trust in him to grow?
 - b. **We talk to him:** How do our prayer lives affect our trust? What does Paul mean when he writes that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (8:26-27)?
 - c. **We listen to him:** Paul writes that the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are God’s children. How do we learn to hear God’s voice in and see his fingerprints on the experiences of our lives? What examples from your own life can you now see God’s work but at the time you struggled?
 - d. **We remember him:** How does reflecting on the cross relate to our confidence that God will keep his promises?
2. If we’re going to trust God completely, we need to have no doubts about two things: (1) God **is able** to guide our lives according to his plan, and (2) God wants to do what **is best** for us. The sermon emphasized how we see both of these qualities in the death and resurrection of Christ: Jesus died, which shows us how much God loves us, and God raised him up, which shows us God’s power. How does our confidence in God’s love and power relate to our learning to trust that he will work everything out in our lives?
3. A famous verse in Romans is 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Do we believe that? Do we live like we believe it? What would our lives look like if we did?
4. What obstacles in your life have tried to undermine your trust in God? Where do these obstacles fall in Paul’s list of things that cannot separate us from God’s love (8:35: “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword”)?