



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone*

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## **“Life Is Hard. Is God Trustworthy?”**

Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

In a brilliant work first published in 1950, psychologist Erik Erikson explained basic steps in psychosocial development we all go through. One of his contributions was describing each of these stages with the use of polar opposites. The first stage an infant faces is the crisis of “trust or mistrust”. Now suddenly born out of a comfortable, warm womb into a world that seems harsh with sharp sounds and light and faceless forces handling him or her, the infant seeks a trustworthy person to meet the basic needs. Most often, that’s the mother. The more Mom understands and meets the child’s needs, the more secure the child feels, and that leads it to an important internal emotional decision, “I’ll be OK out here. I can trust Mom. And if I can trust Mom, then maybe I can trust the world.”

None of us had perfect parents—especially if we were first-born, and our father and mother had no prior personal experience in caring for a baby. There’s a lot of trial and error, so naturally, there’s some erosion of “perfect trust”. If, however, the environment is chaotic, unpredictable, the child feels insecure, and feels deep inside that the world is a hostile place. Since that infant cannot meet his own needs, this judgment of “mistrust” means the child is fearful and anxious, much of the time.

As we continue to grow up, we meet other crises, and we form other hypotheses about the world. These guesses about reality can be revised, but because they start so young, they are difficult to fully undo. And when there is trauma in a young one’s life, the child will likely revert to an earlier developmental level, and move deeper into “mistrust”, propelled by growing fear.

One of the many things we learn from Erikson is that all people have some “trust issues”, to one degree or another. Mistrusting children make for mistrusting adults.

We see a lot of that in recent years, especially in media and politics. Everything is up for debate; there is no authority we trust fully. And as the level of chaos grows, the level of fear grows with it, and we become more and more susceptible to manipulation. With digital media, the Internet, and cable TV, it’s now possible to live in one’s own ideological bubble, and never go through the discomfort of hearing another view on one’s own ideas. I heard a statistic this week that kids are spending an average of (I think it was 10) hours a day using digital media—cell phones, smart phones, and computers. There is less and less face-to-face interaction in their lives. If that trend continues, everyone is going to be curled up in a fetal position, sucking our thumb, and with the other hand, interfacing with the anonymous digital world through a small, glowing screen. Trust will have vanished. Overwhelmed by media, selecting only the sources that comfort me with familiarity, I regress and regress into isolation. Until my loneliness drives me nuts.

Now, if this “trust” was such a big deal, you would think God would have addressed it in His Word. And God has. The Bible word for “trust” is, “faith”. In our readings from Deuteronomy, Romans and Luke, listen for how trust operates in each instance.

First, let’s go to today’s passage from Deuteronomy 26. This passage is a speech each Jew was to memorize so that at the Harvest Festival (“Booths”, they called it later), this ritual would be enacted time and time again, exactly as the ancestors had done it. Listen for God’s voice coming to you through these first verses of Deuteronomy 26. *[text]*

The worshiper bringing his first fruits connects that present moment with the God who acted with his ancestors to bless them into being a blessing. This is the God who heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, and responded with liberation, and a land that would continue to grow food that powers life. Life is hard, but God is trustworthy. Life is hard, but God is trustworthy. This whole speech is based on an attitude of trust.

The second passage centers on Jesus, from Luke’s gospel, chapter 4. Both Matthew and Luke carry an account of Jesus being tested out in the wilderness by the devil. Try to picture this encounter, as I read. And listen for God. *[text]*

Jesus trusted God. He trusted God’s Word, and he memorized big chunks of it, and was ready to make use of those words of God, and not just his own ideas, weakened as they would be by hunger and exposure. The devil quoted Scripture, too—but twisted its meaning to make it seem as though it fit the current situation. Jesus sees through that, and quotes another passage that puts the proper issue on the table—trusting God enough not to keep poking God’s promises.

A side note: why were these “test questions” tempting to Jesus? Because each offer promised a short cut, a seemingly easy and pain-free way to touch the whole world—beginning with the poor (feeding with all that bread), or with the super-religious (a wonder that would win their loyalty), or with the politically-powerful (all the kingdoms of the world). Each time, Jesus turned down the offer because he trusted God’s way, even though it would be much harder and slower and seemingly less effective. Jesus didn’t try to come up with new answers or fresh thinking. He KNEW God enough through his own experience in prayer to lean all his life against the devil’s offers. Jesus is our model, for we are to know God, too, and be able to respond faithfully when the pressure is on and we are weak.

Luke’s version of this encounter has his tag-line, “the devil left him until an opportune time.” (You can almost see the storm clouds rolling in the distance.) And in fact, Jesus faces virtually identical temptations during his ministry, presented by poor people, by the super-religious Pharisees, Scribes, Pharisees and priests; and during his trial by the King of Judea and the Roman Governor. Same temptations. These tests showed Jesus was prepared to now walk into the minefield of ministry. He had proven he could prevail.

Finally, from Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome, chapter 10, verse 8, hear these words. Listen for all the “faith” words—trust, believe, confess, faith—as God speaks to us today. *[text]*

If you ever need assurance of your faith, this is a great passage. What is required—faith, trust. This is not “concepts in the head” kind of faith, a list of certain doctrines; this is a personal relationship that has shown you the heart of God’s love for you. When we say “believe” in English, we tend to think of “verbal or mental assent, or agreement”. But when the Bible uses

“faith”, or “believe”, it’s a more wholistic idea. It’s not “what I understand and agree with”, it’s “where I live”. It’s not “what you believe,” it’s “Whom do you trust?” It’s not information, it’s a relationship with God that transforms us.

Do you trust God? How much?

The world’s shortest test of spiritual growth is a line between “trust” and “fear”. Trust is not a naïve belief that “everything will turn out all right”. (It sure didn’t for Jesus or any of his first followers!) No, our trust in God is that we will not be lost, no matter what happens.

Or, is “In God We Trust” just a slogan on our money?

Other people can help us trust. If we hear other people’s experiences with trusting God (which we get in our congregation when someone shares a “God In My Life” story during worship), we may find courage to trust God, too.

Wouldn’t this season of Lent be a great time to take the risk of trusting God by moving closer to God? It IS a risk; you could be wrong.

Listen to this song about the risk of faith, and see if it speaks to you.

**[“Open Up” song CD, 4:47]**

It’s not “What do you believe,” it’s “Whom do you trust?”

Please don’t let this season of Lent pass by this year without spending extra time just sitting with God, asking God to speak to you in a way you can experience—a sensation, a “voice in your head”, a key word from another person, a small portion of Scripture, or any other way. And take the time to listen to notice, to wonder. At the end of the day, ask God what you might have missed from Him that day. Measure your devotion in time—in minutes each day—you spend consciously listening for God.