

Life and Death

Carolyn Wilson



Psalm 52

TRUSTING GOD LEADS TO LIFE SO TRUSTING HIM IS IMPORTANT

People say, “Show me and I’ll trust you. “ But God says, “Trust me and I’ll show you.” From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture admonishes us to trust and obey God and tells us that where we put our trust is a matter of life and death. Our psalmist paints a starkly contrasting picture of one who trusts in wealth and riches versus one who trusts in God. The one who trusts in wealth and riches is self-centered, chooses lying and deceit for his own gain, and treacherously devours others with his words and actions. His end is utter destruction and ridicule. The one who is good trusts in God, recognizes that all good things come from him, and is grateful and gives thanks for his blessings. She waits on God for her deliverance, meaning she trusts God to help her through the sticky wickets of life rather than depending entirely on her own know-how and resources. She wisely implements the advice in Proverbs 3:5-6 which tells us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.” The one who trusts God is truthful and honest, faithful and fruitful like a green tree. There is something about people who trust in God. It shows on their faces and it shows in their actions.

OUR CHOICES DEMONSTRATE WHERE WE PLACE OUR TRUST

In her Bible study, *Believing God*, Beth Moore notes that there is a difference between believing IN God and BELIEVING God. We can believe IN God and yet not really trust him. We can ignore him and make all our own choices as if we are the center of the universe. The Bible calls that “going our own way.” But BELIEVING God

means that we believe that God is who he says he is, we are who he says we are, and we believe that what he tells us in his written Word is for our highest good. It will drive our actions. It will influence our choices, and impact our destiny. We reveal what we truly believe, where we place our trust, by the choices we make in our lives.

Social Psychologist Sheena Iyengar, who specializes in research regarding choice making estimates that people on average make about 70 choices a day. That works out to 25,550 choices per year. By the time we have lived 70 years, we will have made 1,788,550 choices. A short poem by Frank Outlaw illustrates how our small and large choices day after day shape our destiny:

Watch your thoughts; they become wants.

Watch your wants; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

Soong Mei-ling was the wife of Generalissimo and President Chiang Kai-shek who was the leader of the Republic of China from 1928 to 1975. She was a fluent English speaker and a Christian who lived to the age of 105. Echoing our psalmist, she said:

If the past has taught us anything, it is that every cause brings its effect, every action has a consequence. We Chinese have a saying: “If a man plants melons he will reap melons; if he sows beans he will reap beans.”

And this is true of everyone’s life; good begets good and evil leads to evil.

True enough, she says, the sun shines on the saint and sinner alike, and too often it seems that the wicked prosper. But we can say with certainty that, with the individual as with the nation, the flourishing of the wicked is an illusion, for unceasingly, life keeps books on us all.

She continues: In the end, we are all the sum total of our actions. Character cannot be counterfeited, nor can it be put on and cast off as if it were a garment to meet the whim of the moment. Like the markings on the wood which are ingrained in the very heart of the tree, character requires time and nurturing for growth and development. Thus, also, day by day, we write our

“...God will always, eternally, prove faithful. Trusting God leads to life.”

own destiny; for inexorably ...we become what we do.

The Bible puts it this way: “Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. Whatever a person sows that shall he also reap.” Our choices demonstrate where we place our trust. Trusting God leads to life. Trusting anything else leads in the opposite direction.

WHAT DOES TRANSFORMATIONAL, LIFE-GIVING TRUST LOOK LIKE?

So what does this transformational, life-giving trust in God look like and how do we get it? It looks like people we know. People we know in the Bible, people we know from work or school or in our neighborhoods, even people we know right here at Church of the Palms.

For example, it looks like Noah. In Genesis we read that in Noah’s day the earth was corrupt and full of violence in God’s sight (sound familiar) but Noah was a good man who found favor with God. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, it was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood, just as God directed him. He trusted God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. In so doing, he not only saved his family and many animals from the flood, he became an inspiration for all subsequent generations. As evidence of this, just this past week, Fox News reported on statements released by the University of North Carolina and Baylor University, that archaeologists have unearthed stunning mosaics depicting Noah’s Ark and the parting of the Red Sea during the excavation of an ancient synagogue in northern Israel. The mosaics were found on the nave floor of the synagogue in Huqoq, a village in Galilee, that dates back to the fifth century when the area was part of the Roman Empire. Noah

trusted God and it changed his life and countless others.

Transformational, life-giving trust in God also looks like 6 year old Joshua Garza. On June 20th, after completing his morning swim lesson, Joshua and his mom, Kelly, stopped for breakfast at Bob Evans -- Joshua’s favorite. While there, the restaurant manager stopped at a table of officers from the St. Petersburg Police Department, shook their hands and thanked them for their service. This inspired Joshua to find his own way to say thank you. When Joshua and his mom got up to leave the restaurant, Joshua marched over to the table where the officers were dining. This amazing 6 year old asked them if he could pray for their protection. Though she hadn’t expected this move, Kelly said it wasn’t surprising behavior for her son. “He likes to pray at church, he’s a big prayer warrior,” she says. The proud mama stood back, so as not to interfere. Her heart melted as her precious son concluded the prayer with, “And please help us all to live a good life. Amen.”

Closer to home, transformational, life-giving trust in God looks like our own Esther Tyson. Esther is 90 years old and knows that God is not finished with her yet and still looks for ways to help others. She had been wondering about tutoring and thought that she could help out in our summer tutoring program. So she got in touch with Judy Armitage, our awesome Tutoring Director, and Judy encouraged her to come. Esther went to tutoring the next day and helped one of our 2nd grade boys. When asked later what she thought, she said she was very impressed with the program and really enjoyed it. She said she would be back on Thursday and she’s been coming ever since.

HOW DO WE GET THIS KIND OF TRUST?

That's what life-giving trust in God looks like. Now how do we get it? How do we grow the kind of transformational, life-giving trust in God that helps us make the best choices in our lives that lead to fruitfulness and a life of significance, at the end of which Jesus might say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant?" You all know the story about how there is a good wolf and bad wolf living within each of us and they are always fighting for supremacy. The one who wins is the one you feed the most. The Bible says to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and to diligently guard our hearts. How we feed our minds and hearts is as important as what we feed our bodies. How do we do it? It is done by intentionally practicing the spiritual disciplines exemplified by the PALMS acronym that is printed on the inside cover of our bulletins every single week.

The "P" stands for Praising God in Worship, both corporate worship when we gather together weekly and on special occasions and personally spending time with God on a consistent, daily basis. Our primary purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We glorify him in our music, liturgy, the Word proclaimed, in prayer and silently listening for the still small voice of Almighty God whispering in our hearts, "This is the way; walk in it."

The "A" signifies Aligning Ourselves with Christ. Anyone who has trusted Christ is a new creation – forgiven, beloved, cherished. To become more like Christ is our goal. He trusted and obeyed God all the way to the cross. To become more like him, we need to know what he is like, what he said and did, and what he told us, his disciples to do. We learn this through reading the Bible. Hebrews says that the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. God says to us through the prophet Isaiah, "The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it."

The "L" denotes Loving One Another in Community. God made us to be in relationship. From the very beginning he said it is not good for a person to be alone. It is life-giving and life-changing for us to spend time building relationships with each other – relationships where we can be real – and not have to put on our "everything is wonderful, I've got it all together masks" – relationships in which we are known and loved just the way we are and yet encourage us to be the best that we can be. When we do this, we weave for ourselves a safety net of support amongst brothers and sisters in Christ that will sustain us in those moments that we all face at one time or another when we need help to even put one foot in front of the other, when our trust is weak and we need to lean on the faith of another. God did not make us to go it alone.

The "M" stands for Ministering with Our Time, Talent, and Treasure. Jesus said that he came not to be served but to serve. He said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is in losing ourselves and our own concerns by giving ourselves and our treasure away that we find meaning and purpose and significance in life. That IS the abundant life. There is nothing more satisfying than knowing you have made a positive difference in someone's life.

The "S" signifies Sharing My Story in order to connect others with God's Story. When you share what God has done for you with someone who needs a friendly word, who is going through a difficult time, or you invite someone to church or your Bible study, you are Jesus' witness. You are living the Great Commission and you are planting a seed that God will use to draw people to himself. Though you may see no immediate change, you are impacting someone's eternity for the better. Doesn't your faith, your trust in God, grow a little more each time you hear a God story – how God has done something amazing in someone's life? Mine does.

Trusting God leads to life. Trusting anything else leads in the opposite direction. When we feed our faith through consistently practicing the spiritual disciplines outlined in the PALMS, our trust in God grows and is reflected in

our daily choices. We begin to think more along the lines of Paul F. Barnett's poem:

*I may never see tomorrow, There's no written guarantee,
And things that happened yesterday belong to history.
I cannot predict the future, I cannot change the past;
I have just the present moment--- I must treat it as my last.*

*I must use the moment wisely, for it soon will pass away,
And be lost to me forever, As part of yesterday.
I must exercise compassion, help the fallen to their feet;
Be a friend unto the friendless; make an empty life complete.*

*The unkind things I do today may never be undone.
Any friendships that I fail to win may nevermore be won.
I may not have another chance on bended knee to pray,
And thank God with humble heart for giving me this day.
I may never see tomorrow, but this moment is my own.
It's mine to use or cast aside; the choice is mine, alone.
I have just this precious moment in the sunlight of today,
Where the dawning of tomorrow meets the dusk of yesterday.*

The choices we make today demonstrate where we place our trust. Money is nice and necessary even, but riches won't love us, won't dry our tears, and they won't give us peace. We need other people but they will let us down occasionally. The government won't save us, no matter who is elected. And we will fail ourselves at times. But God will always, eternally, prove faithful. Trusting God leads to life. What is your next step to grow your own life-giving trust in the God who loves you so much that he gave his only begotten Son for you?



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