

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

A message about trust

Presented by Graham Agnew

It was chilling television, seeing the ease with which little children could be lured into the hands of total strangers. I was watching a current affairs programme where they used hidden camera's to show the vulnerability of children when not in the direct care of their parents.

Invitations from total strangers like: "would you like to come over to the car and hold my puppy?" or "I know your mum and she's asked me to take you home" – these were enough to see children responding with frightening ease.

Why? Because small children can be so trusting – it's one of the beautiful character traits of that stage of our lives. But it also heightens a child's level of vulnerability and (in the case of parents) it certainly heightens stress levels. Today we're talking about trust in a spiritual sense...

As we get older, our inclination to be so trusting changes as we experience more and more of life – and this change (for the most part), is both necessary and desirable for our own protection. We come to realise there are people out there who can't be trusted: who don't have our best interests at heart; and provided we can avoid becoming jaded and cynical, a healthy level of distrust and awareness can save us from a lot of hurt and disappointment.

But here's the thing: for many of us, our tendency to become less trusting (less naive) in the broad areas of life is also reflected in a tendency to become less trusting of God – or should I say, less inclined to PUT our trust in God, believing we should be able to work things out for ourselves!

Now that's a sad reality because, when you really think about it, our trust in God should increase as we move further down the pathway of life, because: for a start, life become more fragile; problems become more serious; relationships become more complex.

I mean, there's a world of difference between a little girl in kindy saying: "Ben won't give me back my pencil case" to "Ben doesn't talk to me anymore... Ben doesn't respect me anymore... Ben says he doesn't love me anymore and he's leaving me and the children."

The issues we have to deal with in life, in our adult years can be extremely difficult and heart rending. So you'd think we'd be more inclined, not less inclined to put our trust in God as the source of our strength and the provider of our peace. But that's not always the case, is it?

We struggle at times to put our trust in God, believing we have the ability (or should have the ability) to solve our own problems and meet our own needs. Meanwhile, the clear message of the Christian faith is, we need to trust God more and we should trust God more.

That's the message we've heard all our lives – from preachers, teachers, via Christian books and DVD's and so on. But you know, it's one thing to say we need to trust God more, but there's a prior question: WHY?

Why should we trust God? What is it about reliance on Him that helps us to become the people He intends us to be? I happen to believe we would be inclined to trust God more if we were more cognisant, more aware of why we should! What are the benefits available to us if we learn to trust Him more? How will our lives be more contented, more focussed, more peaceful – if this were to be the case.

Among the many reasons why we should trust God more are the following: Firstly, God asks for it. Like any loving parent, so our Heavenly Father delights in seeing His children respond to Him in faith and trust. It's what deepens the relationship: it's what strengthens the bond.

Those of you who are parents and grandparents, you know how important it is to have the children in your life feel as though they can trust you. You also know the personal thrill which comes from having that absolute trust placed in you.

I visited my grand-daughter in Adelaide recently and to my surprise when the car to pick me up from the airport arrived, with Cadence in the back seat, as soon as the door opened she shot past me and ran about 20 metres up the pathway. With a big smile on my face I called out: "What sort of a welcome is that for Grandpa?"

She instantly replied: "Come on Grandpa, we have to have a run up!" And with that she came hurtling toward me and launched herself into my arms with the power of a Saturn rocket! Now, she's getting taller and heavier and it's becoming increasingly difficult to handle these massive jumps. But what sort of Grandparent would I be if I stepped away at the last second and allowed her to crash into the pavement? It could do irreparable emotional damage. Loving parents and grandparents just don't do that.

The best known Bible reference regarding trust in God is Proverbs 3:5-6: "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." But there are others: Like Isaiah 26:3 "You Lord gives perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you."

But there's another reason to trust God: We're at our best when we do. Not until we reach a point we're prepared to push beyond our own ability to manage our life – not until then will we discover what we're capable of in the areas of service, leadership, generosity, sacrifice and persistence.

Look at the scores of Bible characters who only really discover their capacity and their potential when they reach the point of saying: "Ok God, I can't see how this is going to work out, but I'm putting trust in the belief that you will deliver and get me through." There are many people in this category including: Moses, Abraham, Ruth, David, Esther, Paul, Peter – just to name a few.

So, why trust God? Firstly he asks for it; secondly, we're at our best when we do and finally, He's at His best. God does His best work through individuals and churches who trust Him to act – who believe He has the power to achieve the miraculous - who are confident the One who begins a good work will also bring it to pass (as per Philippians 1:6).

Our God consistently does great things through groups and individuals who allow his Spirit to move freely – whereas very little of any Kingdom significance happens where His Spirit is inhibited, restricted and quenched – where "faith" and "trust" are little more than words on a banner on the stage of the church, or references in a dry and lifeless worship service. Yes, God is truly at His best when we trust Him...

Whenever Christians talk about the need to trust God more, there's usually a huge elephant in the room which very few are prepared to acknowledge. That elephant is in the form of a question – and it's this: What about those times when we put our trust in God, we pray our hearts out, take big leaps of faith – and nothing appears to happen? At least nothing that fits in with our plans, the way we'd like to see things turn out.

In my pastoral experience this would be one of the main reasons for people having difficulty putting their trust in God – an apparent lack of response or a disappointing outcome. But you know, part of the development of Christian maturity is to be able to reconcile our belief and trust in a loving, gracious, merciful and miracle working God and the reality of suffering, disappointment, hurt, pain and injustice.

There are no easy answers but this is the quest, the life long quest of the disciple of Jesus. Among other things, it means seeing suffering, not as an impediment to our faith but as fuel for our faith.

Abraham Wright was a puritan pastor in the mid 1600's who on one occasion wrote: "I'm mended by my sickness; enriched by my poverty and strengthened by my weakness".

Back in the first century Paul put it this way in Romans 5:3: "We know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings Gods approval and His approval creates hope."

In other words, there's a purpose behind the struggles of life and that purpose is to strengthen our ability to endure...our ability to keep pressing on. Someone has said: don't pray for an easy life, pray to be a strong person.

I know when we are really up against it, facing major setbacks and disappointments, health challenges, financial difficulties, problems at work – things just not working out – no amount of words make any difference. It's just really hard to hang on and keep believing, keep trusting. But that's exactly what we need to do and it really comes down to a matter of choice.

But here's a saying that has been of great comfort to me over the years: "If you can't trace the hand of God, trust the heart of God".

Let's be honest, it's not always easy to see the hand of God in our times of testing. But its then we need to remind ourselves of the heart of God, the nature of God and that is seen most vividly in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you can't trace the hand of God, trust the heart of God. And the heart of God is seen most vividly in the life of the One who prayed with the powerless; who restored the broken hearted; who wept with the grieving – the One who today, by means of the Holy Spirit, pleads with God for us in sighs that words cannot express.

There's the heart of God; the One who comes alongside; the One who has promised ultimate victory; the One who's promised never to leave us or forsake and who constantly reminds us that nothing will ever separate us from His love.

I think it's time we all learnt to trust God more...