

Encounter T is for Trust Levels (Part Two)

Towering or Teetering?

We know that many of you have been finding the Encounter series helpful, not least the section on Trust. I have certainly found it challenging to think about “scoring” my trust levels. Some of us may trust the Lord very actively in some areas, but have much more difficulty in others. Just before Tim left primary school, we finally managed to get him properly tested for the dyslexia that we had long known he was struggling with. The tests revealed one specific ‘mid spectrum’ weakness which dipped way below their minimum mark. It centred around the action of copying from a whiteboard onto paper. In other words, he was finding the coordination between eye brain and hand particularly difficult. The way to get some idea of the scale of this problem would be to imagine copying not a simple sentence in English, but rather a series of Chinese characters!

It is much the same in matters related to listening to God. Many of us hear the Lord regularly and reliably in some areas, but may be far more prone to illusions and delusions in other areas (the affective emotions for example). That is why it is so helpful to check our track record honestly and carefully. It is good to recognise those areas we are gifted and regularly used in: it gives us more confidence to step out in the power of it. Likewise, where experience has shown that we are vulnerable, we are wise if we exercise particular caution in what we take on board.

In this second part of our article, therefore, we will explore some more areas that are closely related to trust. May the Lord use it to challenge areas where we are regularly scoring low, and help us to grow in confidence.

Trust in the face of Obstacles

Now you will see what I can do. (Exodus 6:1)

It is a great wonder that the Lord invest so much in us, and *chooses* to trust us. In Hannah Hurnard’s delightful allegory, *Hinds Feet on high Places*, the Shepherd leads Much Afraid

to the foot of an impossibly steep precipice, which she considers to be far beyond her ability to climb. She is flabbergasted and indignant that the Shepherd should have brought her to such a place – but He knows exactly what He is going to do to help us up and over the problems that we face.

Throughout this richly insightful book, the Shepherd demonstrates in the most unlikely ways the beauty as well as the power of His leading. The Lord is *unflinchingly determined* to develop in her that trust that will cause her to develop ‘hind’s feet.’ He knows perfectly well that the only way to achieve this is by ascending the paths that the hinds themselves use. When Much Afraid protests that His commands and solutions are simply too preposterous for words, he replies:

“I love doing preposterous things. I don’t know anything more exhilarating and delightful than turning weakness into strength, and fear into faith, and that which has been marred into perfection. There is nothing more I should enjoy more doing at this moment than turning a jellyfish [which is how Much Afraid has said that she is feeling] into a mountain goat. That is my special work.”

Think of times when the Lord has allowed your path to appear completely blocked, but has managed to find a way forward, enabling you to reach some new “high place.” Our desperate cries this week are next week’s testimony to answered prayer – and how grateful we are as a result.

Much Afraid cannot begin to work out why the Lord should lead her to such impossible situations, but the Shepherd shows her that it is *necessary* for her to go times of being reviled and hated and persecuted in order to advance further along the ascent of Love up into the high places of His Kingdom. The realization that it is the Lord Himself who chooses these experiences for her is itself a considerable comfort to her.

Sometimes I find myself driving on roads my Sat-nav fails to recognize (usually because they are too new). It looks for all the world as though I am driving through the middle of an unploughed field. The Lord delights to *make* tracks for us, *as* we go forward. As most of you know, we faced a seemingly impossible situation at the start of the year: having to move house when we did not have the resources to fund a deposit because of not having sold elsewhere. Amazingly, the Lord has made a way where there was no way.

One other point to remember in this context is that trust does not depend upon us having great ability. Moses felt quite certain that God must have got it wrong because he wasn't cut out for the kind of role that God had been sketching out for him. Why? Because he stammered and was lacking in eloquence! (Exod. 4:10). God thought differently:

The Lord said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." (Exod. 4:11-12)

The promise of Scripture is that *"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* (1 John 4:7; 5:14) We do not even need to know what to do ahead of time, or even how to pray. As Way beautifully translates Romans 8:26-27:

For His compassion matches our yearning and is ever taking our human frailty by the hand. We are not even sure what boons should rightly be the object of our prayers, but His Spirit – His very Spirit – is ever pleading for us with sighings such as no language can shape into words. His Spirit intercedes for His hallowed ones in just the way that God desires.

Lord, I give you now the matter of my trust levels.

Strengthen them wherever hope and trust have worn thin, or are in danger of collapsing. Bring them up higher and stronger than ever – and may there be joy in Your heart as You see me trusting You despite the pressures and the problems.

In Jesus' name, Amen.¹

¹ Amen is derived from word for faithful and firmness. It means "It is firmly, truly so!"

Yielding

Unless an ear of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds . . . What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. (John 12:24; 1 Corinthians 15:36).

How can we trust without yielding? But how can we yield without trusting? I shared in the chapter on Yielding in *Intimacy and Eternity* that hidden acts of surrender lie at the heart of so many of the finest callings. There comes a time when the Lord requires us to hand back to Him all our gifts – maybe even our original calling – so that nothing ‘sticks’ to us in inappropriate ways. Do we have sufficient trust to do this – or are we trying too hard to hang on to what we have? You might find this chapter helpful to read or to reread:

<http://ruachministries.org/intimacyandeternity/thegraceofyielding.htm>

In *Hinds Feet on High Places*, the Shepherd comments,

I must tell you a great truth which only a few understand. All the fairest beauties in the human soul, its greatest victories and its most splendid achievements are those which no one else knows anything about, or can only dimly guess at. Every inner response of the human heart to Love, and every conquest over self-love is a new flower on the tree of Love. Many a quiet, ordinary and hidden life, unknown to the world, is a veritable garden in which Love’s flowers and fruits have come to such perfection that it is a place of delight where the King of Love Himself walks and rejoices with His friends.

Some of My servants have indeed won great visible victories, and are rightly loved and revered by other men, but their greatest victories are like the wild flowers: those which no one knows about.

Identify an area of your life where circumstances are not fitting in well with your hopes and expectations. It may even seem to be placing the Lord’s plans in jeopardy. What effect is this having on your trust levels?

Remember Paul's wonderful reminder in Ephesians 5:16: *"make the most of every opportunity"* (literally: "redeem the time"). Pray that into action today, and tomorrow, and every day until it becomes the habit of our hearts!

Lord, I cannot sort this situation out. I certainly can't sort it out better than You can, so I yield it specifically to You now. I resolve that I will do all I can *this* day to make the most of every opportunity that comes my way, or that I can shape and create for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Trust is beautiful

Though the Lord is on high, He looks upon the lowly, but the proud and haughty He knows from afar. (Psalm 138:6)

It is not work that kills men; it is worry. Worry is the rust upon the blade. It is not the revolution which destroys the machinery but the friction. Fear secretes acids; but love and trust are sweet juices. Henry Ward Beecher

Where the Lord sees trust it is beautiful in his sight. We could say that it *attracts* Him to us. As surely as pride and haughtiness hold His presence at a distance, trustfulness, like lowliness and meekness, ranks high in His sight. It is the very opposite of a puffed up independent spirit.

It takes particular grace to keep trusting when people disagree strongly with us. I recently reread Phyllis Thompson's biography of Madame Guyon. This remarkable seventeenth century French woman was accused of all manner of things she had neither said nor done, and was obliged to spend many years in prison as a result of these false charges, many of them in the infamous Bastille. The pathway to vindication proved extremely lengthy. What amazed me as I read the account was that she virtually never let her trust levels slip during these long years of degradation. She even came to believe that the many bad things that had been done against her had promoted greater purity in her soul.

Others who have suffered intense injustices have made the same discovery. May the Lord help us to handle adversity with trust and grace when circumstances are daunting and

people are treating us unfairly. Hold on to Merlin Carother's important reminder to keep praising God in the midst of our trials. That is wisdom, not naivety!

Thank you, Lord, that a soul that truly trusts You is beautiful in Your sight.

Attend to our trust levels, because they are the unseen forces that govern how we respond to situations, and how we relate to others.

What helps our trust to grow – or decrease – in trust?

Don't worry about genius. Don't worry about being clever. Trust to hard work, perseverance and determination. The best motto for a long march is: "Don't grumble. Plug on!"

Sir Thomas Treves

We get new ideas from God every hour of our day when we put our trust in Him – but we have to follow that inspiration up with perspiration . . . The bee that hangs around the hive never gets any honey.

Albert Cliffe)

Four qualities above all will help us to grow in trust: humility, flexibility, prayerfulness and courage. Each one of these contributes something important. We may often feel as though we are being tried and tested beyond our ability to endure, but God has promised that He will never allow this to be the case. He weighs the circumstances that come our way, and will not permit anything that He and we together cannot handle. But we may well need to be more flexible than we had believed possible. Our body becomes less elastic with age: may the same not be true of our spiritual life.

Nothing of eternal worth is achieved without courage. May we be highly courageous and diligent in seeking God.

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are His house if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (Heb. 3:6)

For those who feel as though their trust has been "holed" beneath the waterline, it is easy to fall into the way of assuming that it is God who has let you down. The problem with blaming Him is that it leaves you with nowhere to go. Every year many people abandon

seeking God wholeheartedly because of the way they have been treated in the body of Christ. Don't make the mistake of associating Jesus with the way members of His body behave!

Where our trust levels have been seriously damaged, may I recommend attempting the exercise I have described in a chapter of *The Vale of Tears: 'The Power of Writing to Heal'* You can find this at:

<http://www.ruachministries.org/articlesandpublications/thepowerofwritingtohealCC61.pdf>

If we listen more than we talk, and instead of making sure our voice is heard, we make sure we hear their voice, and if . . . instead of filling silence with words, we fill ourselves with silence, the world would be a better place. Anon.

The Landscape of our Minds

The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because He trusts in You.
(Isaiah 26:3, New American Standard Updated)

I love that translation 'perfect peace.' It is an excellent rendering of the Hebrew, which literally says 'shalom shalom.' As often in Hebrew, words are repeated to denote special emphasis. It denotes every possible kind of peace. May the Lord calm our agitation and give us *shalom shalom* as we go through the many trials of life.

The powers of darkness can do almost anything when we are irresolute; it is very much harder for them to be able to shake someone who is clear in their mind about both the Lord's *willingness* and His *ability* to help them.²

The Hebrew people were carted away to a distant land, and stripped of all their worldly roles and possessions. Just imagine how they that must have felt. (cf Psalm 137). No more

² In the Hebrew tongue, the "mind" is anything that is formed by thoughts and imaginations. The verse in question tells us that perfect peace will come to the one whose mind is 'stayed' or 'supported.' It does not actually add the words "on the Lord," but these are clearly implied. Isn't this where so many of our troubles spring from? You might find it helpful to explore See my Pilgrim's Guide on this subject: *Landscapes of the Mind*

<http://ruachministries.org/pilgrimsguides/landscapesofthemind.htm>

now than prisoners, captives and exiles, there were many who *continued* to trust in God and to believe that He would deliver them. Look at Jesus' own attitude in the face of hostility and misunderstanding:

When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted himself to Him who judges justly.
(1 Peter 2:23)

Father, please bring a special touch of Your presence now to all who are suffering events and circumstances that, without faith, would dent their hope and trust. We take up cudgels on their behalf that they may not be robbed! Come especially close now to . . .

and . . .

and . . .

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Finally a few thoughts to ponder to help us be trustworthy people!

A faithful companion is a sure anchor. Anon.

I have seldom known a person, who deserted the truth in trifles who could be trusted in matters of importance. Babe Paley.

It is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust. Samuel Johnson.

God bless,

Robert & Rosalind

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