

TRUST ISSUES - Daniel 3:8-18

In premarital of often share this quote by Lewis Smedes, who defined a promise as:
“a small sanctuary of trust within the jungle of unpredictability.”

And then in each ceremony soon after this, I lead them in their vows, which include:
“For better or worse... for richer or for poorer... in sickness and in health.”

Those vows speak to the jungle of unpredictability that life is.
Where the marriage covenant and marriage vows build a refuge, a sanctuary.
But I'd be willing to bet that few if any people have made those vows with "worse, poorer, and sickness" in the forefront of their mind.
Every couple stands at the altar with dreams of "better, riches, and health."

In a similar way when we choose to follow and obey God, we often think the other side will include riches, health and better. We wouldn't readily admit it, but it's a contract faith. I put in and I'll get out. I do what's right and good things will follow. And then life happens. When worse, poorer, and sickness hits, we tuck tail and bail.
Why? We trusted God. And we feel like our trust has been broken.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego certainly had a 'for better or worse' faith.

They were three young Israelite men living in exile in Babylon in approximately 600 BC. These men certainly would have had their faith tested regularly. One specific incident we know of is the one we just read, where the king of Babylon made a massive statue and gave everyone a choice: bow down to the statue or be burned alive.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refrained. They told the king: ***“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”***

This is some serious **"for better or worse"** faith.

They were thrown into the furnace, and yet they weren't burned. They came out unsinged. But I think it is because of the way things played out we often forget a key part of their statement: *“even if he doesn't.”*

“God will rescue” faith. This is championed in the church.

But what about an “Even if” faith?

Because Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were saved, it is easy to forget those two words: “even if.”

We do well to remember WHY they would put that even if he doesn't in that statement. ...and it's because they lived it.

S, M, and A were walking in the same "even if" faith when the Babylonian army first came against the Israelites as it speaks of in the opening verses of the book of Daniel.

No doubt they spoke similar words in faith:

"If we are in conflict with the Babylonians, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from the Babylonians. But even if he doesn't, we will continue to worship Him."

No doubt they had the same faith they displayed at the furnace - that God could have delivered the nation of Israel from Babylon if He wanted to! But He didn't. And so they went into exile.

They'd walked through "for worse, for poorer, and for sicker" before, and their faith in God was still standing. And for this reason I'd assert that that their "even if" addendum isn't indicative of lesser faith, but an even greater faith that had been tried and tested as true.

Hebrews 11

It closes the chapter by saying... ***But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground. All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.***

Hebrews 11 paints this complete picture of the faith walk if you read it front to back.

It reminds us there are mountaintop moments and valley seasons.

There are times where we experience God's deliverance, and times we experience "even if he doesn't"

"By faith" is the anthem of Hebrews 11, repeated over and over as the author gives the various accounts. In Greek it is **"Pistei,"** the dative form of **"Pistis"**

It speaks to faith. It speaks to trusting. And importantly - it speaks to not just faith, but faithfulness. And more specifically in the Greek, not just trust, but ***trustworthiness.***

This means, practically speaking...

for our faith to be full and complete like those referenced in Hebrews 11,

for us to mature in our faith... at some point we will graduate from asking **"can I trust God?"**

To **"can God trust me?"**

Psalm 19 makes the same leap.

It opens: *"the heavens declare the glory of God, and the skies proclaim the work of his hands"*

It speaks to the trustworthiness of creation, specifically the sun's rising, its warmth, and alike.

And David pivots mid psalm to pointing to God's perfect will and how we can trust him...
He answers the Q "can I trust God?" with a resounding yes.

But he doesn't end there. David closes with:

*Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.
May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Full circle, David is in a way saying: **make me as trustworthy as the sunrise.**

An "**Even if**" faith – answers the question – **Can God trust me?**
Am I as trustworthy as the rest of creation?

Daniel 1:2 – "**And the LORD delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand**"

What is this saying? God delivered Israel to Babylon... he handed the Israelites over into exile.

S, M, A, and Daniel had all the ammunition in the world to have trust issues!

If they had a contract faith that believed you'll get out what you put in,

*that God will never let bad things happen to good people,
that the right kind of faith will always mean immediate deliverance,
be it from the fire or the lion's den... it would have crumbled.*

We live in a world gone haywire and is in cosmic disorder due to sin.

*Look no further for an example than Daniel and his three friends caught in the backwash of
God's judgment of the sins of the entire Israelite nation*

And the deceiver's favorite lies get sewn in hard seasons.

God is asleep at the wheel. God doesn't care. God doesn't know what's best.

And seeds of **DIS**trust get sown, and we live with one foot in a warehouse of worries.

God doesn't tap out and abandon us when the worse, poorer, and sickness hit.

Because it's not a contract. It's a covenant. Much like the marriage covenant with its promise
that provides a "**small sanctuary of trust in a jungle of unpredictability.**"

God is a sanctuary and refuge we can trust. Can he trust us?

Does our trust endure when understanding fails?

See: books like Daniel or Job or others don't serve to explain away evil and suffering as much as
it does teach us how to endure it, and how God is present in it, even when he feels absent.

For one – we see that upon exile and admission to this program... they got to work.

Jeremiah's prophecies – Jeremiah 29 - "**This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all
those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens
and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your**

daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Our trust proves trustworthy and faith proves faithful by getting to work.
In the words of Hebrews 11, by faith we do _____.

Again it speaks to the Greek word “pistis” repeated over and over in Hebrews 11.
Where else do we see this word in the New Testament? Matthew 25 and the parable of the talents

Upon receiving his talents, his monetary amount, it says in verse 16 the first servant went at once and got to work...

What does the master say about the two servants who did this? Verse 21 reads:
‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful and trustworthy [pistis] over a little, I will put you in charge of many things; share in the joy of your master.’

You’ve proven trustworthy in doing that... I’m going to put you in charge of many more things.
More work.

We confuse **works** and **work**.

We’re saved by grace through faith! Not by works!

But read the next verse after we’re saved by grace through faith –

- It’s to DO the WORK God has set before us.

See Grace doesn’t eliminate work. It lays a new foundation for work - faith, hope & love.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 - We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope.

In the Greek, that’s the work produced by pistis.

A trust that proves itself trustworthy by producing work.

Too often we assume because we aren’t saved by works that there isn’t work for us to do.

So we fail to put the work in to transform our character within us.

And we fail to put the work in to transform the culture around us.

We do well to remember what NT Wright once said

“the Bible is not about the rescue of humans from the world, but the rescue of humans for the world.”

We adopt a bunker down mentality. There’s no contact. So there’s no impact.

The other side of the coin? There’s a posture of warring with the culture. Some people only know the posture of resisting the culture and its secularization on every front.

But I find it notable that up until Daniel and his friends request not to eat the food and wine and instead stick to vegetables and water... they provided no resistance as they got assimilated to Babylon’s culture and program. And when they did resist – it was private, not public.

Is there a time to speak up and speak out? Absolutely. Don’t get me wrong.

But just as we are called to critique the culture, we're called to create within it.
To work for the prosperity of the place God put you. As it prospers, you prosper.
There is value in your day to day.
There is value in your work.
There is value in your Monday through Friday.

We wonder if our day to day work – be it as a mom, 9-5 worker, student, or alike – has any involvement in Jesus' mission.

Yet we should remember work preceded the fall.
We were designed in the image of a creator.
We were called to create and shape and form and work.
Your talents, your 9-5, the work of your life has value to God.

To treat it as less, to stir our faith on a weekend for 90 minutes and throw it on the backburner doing the week... is to shelf pistis, our trustworthiness.

At the end of Jesus' life in John 17 he says in prayer –
I brought glory to you on earth by doing the work that you gave me to do
At the end of my life, may I be able to echo those words, no matter the work he gives me.

HOW else do we answer “Am I Trustworthy” with our lives?

SLOW DOWN –REST. Rest helps us to actively exercise our trust in God.

Psalm 19... in the MSG version it reads:
Keep me from stupid sins, from thinking I can take over your work

Like Psalm 19 points to creation, rest reminds us
“the sun will rise, to your surprise, all by itself, without your help.”

Rest is a reminder. God is God and we are not. We have limits.
And rest is a gift.

One way we implement it is with finish lines.
God gives us one finish line weekly – the Sabbath.
You also need one daily – an “I'm done” to pivot to our families and marriages.
You need one yearly – a vacation and escape.

And I get it - maybe the makeup of your job doesn't allow for that. Daniel's probably didn't. But we see he did take pauses. Pauses for prayer.

Later in Daniel in the account of the Lion's Den... it says when the decree meant to derail Daniel was published... ***“he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward***

Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

But in addition to slowing down...

FAST – fasting is a multifaceted discipline, but it certainly helps us be trustworthy. Practically speaking - fasting will make your self control sweat.

Take something you return to again and again – like food, or social media – and fight that impulse to turn to it.

I love the title of Richard Foster’s book on Fasting – The Celebration of **Discipline**. Fasting as an exercise and habit teaches us self-discipline. It grows our self control. It makes us trustworthy.

And I don’t think it’s a coincidence there’s a fast specifically named after the book of Daniel.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn’t respond. They didn’t react. They resolved. They disciplined themselves, growing in self control, proving trustworthy.

It’s how years later they could stand and say...

EVEN IF we end up in a furnace, we won’t worship anyone but Yahweh

EVEN IF I end up in a lion’s den, I won’t stop praying to Yahweh.

Steph: **“Even though he slay me, yet I will trust him” – Job13:15**