

## LOVE WE CAN TRUST

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Series: **LOVEFIRST**

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Love, Trust, Temptation, Wilderness

Mark 1:9-15, Matthew 4:1-11, Psalm 25:1-5

So, I took stock of my life the other day - of my current existence - and I've decided I'm just *way to trusting*. I trust people I know and a lot of people I don't. I trust people with my *life*. In fact, there are people I trust with *my* life and the lives of people I love, whom I've never even met. And if I were to meet them, I might trust them *less*.

Take, for example, the guy who made this tent - let's call him Peter. So, Peter made this tent - welded these poles, sewed this canvas, made sure things go together just right so that this tent doesn't collapse, trap us all under it, wrapped in canvas and unable to breathe (lovely thought, isn't it?). And as horrible as that image may be, it highlights the fact that, at some level, not only do *I* trust Peter the tentmaker, but you do too. If you didn't trust him at least a little bit, you wouldn't be sitting here.

Now let's say Peter has a cousin named Tony. Tony designed the chair you're sitting in. You and I have never met Tony, but we trust him just the same. We trust him because we sit down in these chairs. Now, if you've ever sat in a chair like this on a slight incline and ended up on the ground, you might trust Tony a little less. Still, the fact that you are sitting in these chairs means that you have *some* trust in Tony.

Now let's say Tony has an uncle named Phillip. Phillip works at the garage that put brakes on the vehicle that brought you here this morning. You trust Phillip, too. You trust that when that brake is depressed, the vehicle will slow down and will eventually stop. If you didn't have some trust in that fact, you wouldn't ever get into a vehicle at all. You would just walk everywhere you went.

OK, so let's say you did that. You walked here. Guess what? You still trusted uncle Phillip because you trusted that all those cars, trucks, pikis, and tuk tuks had the ability to slow down, to stop, to turn, and to generally stay on the road and not run you over. And let me tell you, that's a LOT of trust.

So, whether you realize it or not, you are an incredibly trusting person...just like me.

I was trying to think the other day of all these examples of trust that I exhibited in just a single hour. Here's the short list of people I realized I put my trust in in just one hour:

The person who designed my house  
The people who built my house  
The people who designed my car  
The people who built my car  
The people who designed and manufactured every single part on my car  
Everyone who has ever owned my car  
Everyone who has ever worked on my car  
All the people walking and driving around me on my way into town  
The security guards at Nakumatt (after all, they could, if they wanted, make my life very difficult)  
The servers and cooks at Java (that they didn't poison my food)  
The people sitting in the booth behind me at Java (after all, I have my back to them. They could do anything. They could stick me with a poison dart or something - I've seen those movies!)

You see? And there are many more that I didn't list. And that was just in one hour. One trip from my house to Java for coffee. Even the most cynical among us are actually incredibly trusting of other people. My question this morning is, do we have that same kind of trust in God?

Last week, we started a series called **LOVEFIRST** and we talked about Love that Restores - how the love of God has the ability to lift us from our lowest point and restore our lives and our relationship with him. Today, I want to look at Love We Can Trust - how God proves himself trustworthy, even through our darkest days.

But before I go any further, I want to pray that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts to what he has for us this morning.

## **Prayer**

During this season, churches all around the world are celebrating Lent. I talked a bit about what Lent is last week, so if you want a little more info, you can grab that talk on our website - [www.trinitynakuru.org](http://www.trinitynakuru.org) - but in short, Lent is the 6 weeks leading up to Easter when followers of Jesus have traditionally spent time trying to focus more intentionally on spiritual things, and it's often coupled with fasting - denying ourselves of some physical thing like a particular food.

Another piece of the Lenten tradition is that there are traditional readings from the bible that are used. And I used to think this was kind of hokey - kind of uninspired - that some guys a bajillion years ago decided what my talk was going to be about this morning. What if God had different plans?

Well, I'm always open to God changing the plan, but I think there's something really exciting about knowing that today, all over the world, in many different languages, many different cultures, many different church styles and denominations, people will be studying the same part of the bible. All over the world, people will hear these words from the book of Mark and reflect on them.

In the book of Mark, the 2<sup>nd</sup> book in the 2<sup>nd</sup> portion of the bible, which we call the New Testament, we read this (chapter 1, starting in verse 9):

*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

*At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

*Mark 1:9-15*

Now, there's something you need to understand about the book of Mark. This book is like the abridged version of Jesus' life. The author is not so interested in details, but he gives us the outline. So, what's going on here?

1. Jesus is baptized, and there is an interesting encounter with God.
2. Jesus is sent into the wilderness to be tempted, and manages to win that battle.
3. Then Jesus comes back to town and starts making some noise about the kingdom of God.

OK, that's what Mark gives us. Not much more than that. And that's a good start, but fortunately, we have three other accounts of Jesus life - the books that we call "the gospels" - that we can look to for more details. In regards to the baptism itself, there's not much to add. Each of the four accounts adds a little detail here or there, but Mark pretty much captures it.

But the piece I want to spend most of our time on today is the piece that Mark nearly skims right over.

*At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.*

Now, I think that's kind of a big deal, and fortunately, so did a couple of the writers of the other gospels. In the book of Matthew, chapter 4, and the book of Luke, chapter 4, we read nearly identical accounts of what happened *while* Jesus was out in the wilderness.

Here's Matthew's telling (Matthew, chapter 4):

*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you,  
and they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*

*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*

*Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.  
Matthew 4:1-11*

So here, Jesus faces 3 different temptations. The truth is, he probably faced many more over the course of those forty days, but these three are highlighted, and I think, for good reason.

You see, the first thing Jesus was tempted with was food. He was out in the desert, he was hungry, and he knew he had the ability to create bread. And who would have faulted him for it? It actually would have been really easy to rationalize why he needed to create some bread.

But you see, this temptation to turn rocks into bread was a particular type of temptation that many of us face on a regular basis. It was the temptation to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

There's nothing wrong with eating food. Nothing bad about bread. Not even anything wrong with Jesus turning a few stones into bread. But the temptation was essentially to deny God what he was trying to do for Jesus there in that barren place. It was to hijack the system, and say, "I don't trust God to meet my needs, so I'm going to do it myself."

Have you ever been there? The funds are low at the end of the month, bills are due, and maybe you start to think, "Where can I just skim a little money from my employer or from another person? Maybe I can overcharge someone a bit. After all, I need to feed my family, to put my kids in school." But if God's asking you to rely on him (or if he's asking you to get off your rump and work to earn some money) then a temptation to cheat is a temptation to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.

The second way Jesus was tempted was with spectacle - to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, and see if the angels came to rescue him. Again, Jesus could have done this, and there could have even been some benefit in him doing so. Starting his public ministry off by being rescued by angels would have brought him some serious street cred. But Jesus knew that wasn't God's plan. He knew that if he threw himself off that building, that sure, in a way, he would be trusting God to save him, but that ultimately, he wouldn't be trusting God's *plan* for his life and for the world.

The third way we're told Jesus was tempted was with power. He was taken to a high mountain and basically told, "You can rule all this. I'll give it to you, if you'll just bow down and worship me." Now, what was this deal with the devil all about?

To understand that, we have to understand what God's kingdom and sending Jesus is all about - the overarching story of the bible - what's called the meta-narrative. And the meta-narrative of the bible is this. God made the earth and everything in it, including humans, to be perfect and without fault. We messed that up. We messed up ourselves, other people, and all of creation, and we began a death by a thousand cuts for humanity, for the earth, and for everything that's in it.

But God, rather than leaving us to our self-inflicted demise, has a plan to not only save us from death, but to restore all of creation to its original perfect state. And what that means is that not only do things like pain, disease, sickness, and abuse go away, but so do the power structures, the rigid borders, the politics and egos and authorities that run our current world. God's going to remake it all!

So here, when Jesus is tempted to become ruler of this world, it sounds kind of like what God already wants to do. But the problem is, it's a bit of a shortcut. And it's a bit of a facsimile. It's like the difference between guava juice and guava *flavored* juice. It's similar, but not the same. You see, God doesn't want Jesus to be installed as king in the current authority system. He wants to destroy the current system, and replace it with a perfect system.

If Jesus had taken this offer, he would have been making a statement that he thought it would be better to be in charge under the current, wicked regime than to overthrow it and establish a loving kingdom. It would have gone against everything God wanted to do. It would have meant that he didn't trust God's plan to succeed.

Did you hear it in there? All three temptations - what did they come down to? Trust.

Jesus trusted God to sustain him. He trusted in God's plan to save the world. And he trusted in God's way of establishing his kingdom on earth. Jesus, in the midst of one of the worst times of his life, certainly up to this point, leans on his trust in God to help him not only avoid temptation, but to defeat his ultimate enemy.

Trust is a powerful thing. But you know, for most of us, trust doesn't come easy. Every one of us was born with an innate trust of certain people. A newborn baby trusts that her parents will take care of her needs - that when she cries, there will be food available, that when she is uncomfortable, someone will be there to comfort her.

But as we grow older, our experiences in life begin to dictate the amount of trust we have in people. People who are abused, neglected, or taken advantage of naturally become less trusting. Even people with good childhoods begin to learn that there are people you can trust and people you can't, and even from an early age, we start trying to protect ourselves from being hurt by trying to judge who is trustworthy and who isn't.

Gone are the days of blind trust. We now become informed, and eventually, for most of us, our default moves from trust to distrust. Instead of saying, "I'll trust this person until they give me reason not to," we start saying, "I won't trust anyone until they prove their trustworthiness to me."

But proving trustworthiness takes a lot of time and a lot of effort. It takes commitment to a relationship. It doesn't come easy. And that's why I think some people don't really trust God.

Have you ever known someone who just put's all their trust in God? No matter what their situation, they know that God will come through? I've known a few people like that, and almost always, if you ask them *why* they have that kind of trust, they'll begin to tell you about all the ways God has proven himself in their life. They'll tell you how he's always come

through for them. They seem to file away those moments in their life so that when challenges arise, they can go back to that mental file and say, “I know I can trust in God, because he’s never given me any reason not to.”

But for a lot of us, we haven’t had that kind of relationship with God our whole lives. Some of us are just beginning to warm up to the idea of God. Some just haven’t been that serious about God - haven’t sought him out all that much. Some of us, even though we’re trying, we don’t see how God is making a positive impact on our lives. We feel maybe a little like Jesus after his baptism.

I mean, did you catch that series of events? Jesus comes down to where John is baptizing people, asks John to baptize him, and then as he’s being baptized, this voice calls out from heaven and says, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” I mean, that’s a good day!

But then, God’s like, “Hey son, I’m pleased with you. Now, head out into the wilderness to be tempted.”

Now, Jesus was a guy - a human, with human emotions. If I were Jesus, I would be like, “Really, dude? I mean...God. Like, really? You’re pleased with me, so now my reward is you want me to go out into the wilderness without any food to be tempted by the devil? Man, I can’t imagine what you’d do to me if you *weren’t* ‘well pleased’ with me.”

God’s like, “I love you son. Now, go do the hardest thing you’ve ever had to do.”

What’s that about? Pastor Andy Stanley points out that later, when Jesus’ disciples ask him how they should pray, he includes in his prayer, “and lead us not into temptation.” Like Jesus wants to tell his guys, “Hey, this one’s important, because, this one time, I was led into temptation, and it was NOT FUN. You don’t want to go there. So, be sure to pray about that one.”

All of a sudden, Jesus’ good day - with the baptism, and the dove, and the voice from heaven - turned into a nightmare. And in a way, you have to wonder why Jesus, having just had the experience he had, would willingly walk out into the wilderness. You know, it doesn’t say the Spirit “drug him” into the wilderness, or “forced him” in to the wilderness. Mark says the Spirit “sent him” and Matthew and Luke say the Spirit “led him”.

Jesus, for some reason, willingly went to this place. Could it be that he did this simply because he trusted God?

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Now I’ve got a job for you.

Because, you see, God knew what he was doing. He knew what he was doing because he spoke these words of encouragement and life to Jesus, then he sent him out to do what needed to be done. God knew Jesus was ready for this moment. God knew Jesus could handle himself. God knew Jesus trusted him enough to not give into temptation. God knew Jesus was ready for his first big battle and that he would return from that wilderness victorious over temptation and evil.

God knew. Jesus trusted.

And what did Jesus do after returning to from his time in the wilderness?

Mark says,

*After John was put in prison, [John the baptist, who baptized Jesus] Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

*Mark 1:14-15*

Jesus, after spending that time in the wilderness, trusting God, defeating temptation, was pumped up. He came back to town and got to work. This was the beginning of his public work. It was his coming out party. But it awaited him *after* going through the wilderness. He had to trust God to take him through the darkest days in order to come out on the other side emboldened by the experience, changed by the confrontation, and ready to walk out God's plan for the rest of his life.

So, what about you? Maybe, like Jesus, you feel like you're out in a wilderness right now. Like Jesus, maybe you feel like you're starving, you're weak, you once had a vision for the future, but now it's nowhere in sight. Maybe you've been tempted to take shortcuts - to meet legitimate needs through illegitimate means. Maybe you've been tempted to use God for your own ends - for your own fame or power. Maybe you've been tempted to give into the authorities of this world - to play by a devious set of rules in order to gain influence in this temporal place.

But when we look to Jesus, what do we find? We find a person who trusted God.

He trusted God as he was led into the wilderness. He trusted God for his provision. He trusted God's plan for his life. He trusted God's big plan for all creation. He trusted God.

And so can you. Like Jesus, you're life will be full of ups and downs. It may have even been a lot more downs than ups. But the love of God is a love that is there for you in the wilderness.



God is there. His love is there when he leads you into the wilderness. It's there when a wilderness is thrust upon you, caused by the brokenness of another person or of our worldly systems. God's love is even there in the wilderness of your own making - when your own decisions isolate you, decimate you, and seek to finish you off. God's love is there. And it's a love you can trust.

Last week, we talked about a guy named David - an imperfect guy, but a guy who tried to follow God - to trust him. And in the book of Psalms, chapter 25, about midway through the bible, that same guy David records these words:

*In you, Lord my God,  
I put my trust.  
I trust in you;  
do not let me be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.  
No one who hopes in you  
will ever be put to shame,  
but shame will come on those  
who are treacherous without cause.  
Show me your ways, Lord,  
teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long.*

God's love is a love we can trust.

Maybe you're here and you have trouble trusting God. Or maybe you have trouble trusting other people. Maybe there's something in your past (or your present) that keeps you from being able to trust. If so, would you just do this right now where you are. Just say, either out loud or to yourself, say, "God, I trust you." Even if you don't really mean it. Fake it 'til you make it. "God, I trust you." Let those words begin to sink in. "God, I trust you." Think about the truthfulness of God. "God, I trust you." Think about the faithfulness of God. "God, I trust you." Think about the trustworthiness of God. "God, I trust you."

God is a God you can trust. His love is a love you can trust.

We're going to close today by giving you an opportunity to respond to what you've heard and experienced here. And there are 4 ways we would ask you to consider responding:

## **1. Singing**

We're going to sing a few songs that help us reflect on God's trustworthy love.

While that singing is taking place, you will also have the opportunity for prayer.

## **2. Prayer**

If you want someone to pray for you, we have some people here who are eager to do that.

Also, while that is going on, you'll have a chance to take communion

## **3. Communion**

Communion is a symbolic act, instituted by Jesus. It's the way he chose for us to remember him. The unleavened bread serves as a symbol of Jesus' body broken on the cross. The wine or juice symbolize his blood that was spilled for us.

We offer communion each week for anyone who wants to take it. There's no membership requirement or hoops to jump through. You are guests at this symbolic table of Jesus, so please feel free to partake.

## **4. Giving**

Lastly, during this time, you will have an opportunity to give financially to the work of this church. If you're a guest with us today, we don't expect you to give anything. This celebration is our gift to you. However, for those who consider this your church home, this is our chance to give back to God a portion of what he has given us, and to support the work he has called this church to in Nakuru.

So those are the four ways to respond: Singing, Prayer, Communion, and Giving. All will be happening simultaneously. There's no order or pattern you have to do them in. You don't have to do them all. You don't have to do any of them. This is your time to respond in whatever way you desire.

## **Closing Prayer**