



FAITH/TRUST/THANKFULNESS

SCRIPTURE VERSES (NIV)

1 Chronicles 16:11

Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.

Psalms 56:4

In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

⁷ “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.”

Luke 12:8-10

⁸ “I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. ⁹ But whoever disowns me before others will be disowned before the angels of God. ¹⁰ And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 21:5

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

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DO LESS—TRUST GOD MORE

Rick Warren — October 10, 2016

The last step to reducing stress in your life is to do less and trust God more.

Why should you do that? Because God can do more in 20 minutes than you can do in 20 years.

Some of you have had some goals and dreams that you've been striving, seeking, working, hustling, hurrying for year after year after year, and you haven't achieved them yet. Why don't you just back off a little bit? Relax. Chill out. Trust God. Watch what he can do. He can do it a whole lot faster and a whole lot better than you can do it.

The only benefit of being stretched and being on overload is that it forces you to trust God. It brings you to your knees, and you realize you're up against the wall, out of steam, out of energy. One time the Apostle Paul hit burnout. He was in Asia, working and serving. And he was ready to throw in the towel!

He says in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9: *"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally — not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead!"* (NIV/MSG)

God can do what you can't do. Jesus did not say, "If you're busy, you can move mountains." He didn't say, "If you work really hard and get really stressed out, you can move a mountain." He said that *if you have faith, you can move mountains* (Matthew 17:20). Faith, not busyness, is what gets the job done.

So what's your mountain? What's the problem in your life that needs moving? Stop doing so much! Do less, and trust God more.

Pray this prayer today:

"Father, I've lived without margin in my life for so long I can hardly remember what it's like to not feel fatigue or pressure all the time. I think fatigue is the normal way I'm supposed to live and feel, but it's not. I'm tired of being rushed and late and exhausted all the time. I've got too many irons in the fire, and I need your help to get out of the mess I've gotten myself into. Help me to recognize and accept my limitations. Help me to put some space in my schedule. I need breathing room and margin in my life. Jesus Christ, I know I can't do it all, and I need your wisdom in deciding what matters most and what I should do. I don't want to waste my life. Please give me the courage to say 'no' to the wrong things and 'yes' to the right things. Most of all, help me to trust you. Forgive me for thinking and acting as if everything depends on me. It doesn't. It all depends on you! I want to have greater faith in you and less reliance on myself. I want less stress and more margin in my life. In your name I pray. **Amen.**"

ACCOMPLISH MORE BY DOING LESS

Rick Warren — October 9, 2016

If you want less stress in your life, you must periodically prune your activities.

One of the things I do to relax is grow roses. I've learned that if I want to have any roses in the new season, I have to prune them back, usually around the third week of January. One year when I got ready to prune, there were still lots of branches with buds waiting to blossom. Do you know how difficult it is to cut off a rose that hasn't bloomed yet? It kills me to do that.

Why do gardeners prune trees and plants? For the health of the plant and for fruitfulness in the next season. If there's no pruning, there will be no fruitfulness in the next season.

Every year of our lives, we sprout new activity branches. You're doing some things now that you didn't do a year ago. You've added them on. But what have you cut out? What have you pruned back? You can't just keep adding and adding to your schedule without cutting back, without pruning your activities.

Here's the secret: When you prune, you don't just cut off deadwood. You cut off living branches that are still productive. You cut out some activities that are still good, that are still bearing fruit. You have to cut them off because you're in a new season. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "*I have the right to do anything, 'you say — but not everything is beneficial*" (NIV).

God's given you a free will. You're permitted to do anything. You can go out and overload your schedule 10 times over, and God's not going to stop you. But it doesn't mean it's the beneficial thing to do. In your life you will have to learn to say "no" far more than you'll have to learn to say "yes." There are more things you can't do than you have the time, energy, effort, and God's desire for you to do. You cannot even do all the good things in life. Have you figured that out? You can't do everything, so you have to determine the right things to do. What does God want you to do with your time and energy?

Selection is the key to an effective life. You'll be more effective if you figure out what you're not going to do as well as what you're going to do. You'll actually accomplish more in life by doing less!

If you don't periodically prune the activities in your life, God will do the pruning for you. It will happen through an illness or crisis or something, because you cannot live beyond your limits month after month.

Proverbs 20:30 says, "*Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways*" (GNT). But no matter how bad things may seem, we can KNOW FOR SURE that God always has our best in mind.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are the good and even fruitful activities in your life that you know you need to cut out to make room for new ones?

WHO CONTROLS YOUR FUTURE?

Rick Warren — November 24, 2015

“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28 NLT, second edition)

One of the great fears we all face is the fear of the future. We fear for the futures of our families, our friends, our jobs, our communities — and everything else in between.

It's natural. We're not in control. But that realization should drive us to trust God more deeply.

We might not be in control of our future, but God is. He created the whole universe. If he wanted to, the Lord could just snap it out of existence in a moment. Yet he is working his plan in history. He is moving history to a climax, a destiny. One day Jesus Christ will come back to Earth. Nothing will stop that. Just as he is working in history to move events toward that day, he will work in your life for a purpose, too — if you'll let him.

The Bible says, *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them”* (Romans 8:28 NLT, second edition).

God's Word doesn't say that everything is good. It also doesn't say that God causes everything. He doesn't cause war. He doesn't cause cancer. He doesn't cause rape, abortion, incest, or molestation. He doesn't cause evil. We do that. God gives us the freedom to choose. Evil is the price of that freedom.

But the Bible does say that God causes everything to work together for good. He can take the dumb, evil, and bad decisions I've made in my life and use them for good if I'll trust him. Romans 8:28 isn't a promise for everyone, though. It's for “those who love God.” It's for those who trust God and say, “Here, Lord, you take all the broken pieces of my life and put them together.”

This is why when I read the headlines each day, I don't worry. Sure, there are a lot of problems in the world today, but God is still in control. God is still moving history to a climax. And God is still moving his people toward his best for them. One day God will work everything out for his purpose.

Because God is in control, we can trust him with everything — including the good, the bad, and the ugly of our lives.

Talk It Over

- ◆ How will knowing that God is in control help you to trust him better?
- ◆ How have you seen God take a bad decision and make something good out of it?
- ◆ What's one fear of the future that you can hand over to God today?

WAITING ON GOD? DON'T FEAR, FRET, OR FORGET

Rick Warren — May 5, 2015

“I will bless the Lord and not forget the glorious things he does for me.” (Psalm 103:2 TLB)

When our dream is delayed, it causes us to forget many things. We tend to forget our dream. We forget what God has done in our lives and his goodness to us in the past. We tend to forget that God is with us. We forget God's power.

This was the fourth mistake that the Israelites made in the wilderness: *“They forgot the many times [God] showed them his love, and they rebelled against the Almighty at the Red Sea. But he saved them, as he had promised, in order to show his great power. But they quickly forgot what he had done and acted without waiting for his advice”* (Psalm 106:7b-8, 13 (GNT)).

It's unbelievable how short their memory was! In Egypt, God sent 10 plagues on the Egyptians just to rescue his people, and the children of Israel forget it just a few days later when they're at the Red Sea saying, “We're all going to die!” They forgot what God had done. Then, God does a miracle and opens the Red Sea. They walk through to the other side and immediately forget that miracle and cry, “We're going to die of thirst!” God miraculously provides water. The Israelites forget that and complain, “We're going to die because we have no food!” They were always forgetting.

But we shouldn't be too quick to judge them, because we do the exact same thing. When a delay occurs in our lives, we start acting like God's never done anything for us. Has God done things for you in the past? Sure he has. And you can count on him to do it again tomorrow and the next day and the day after that.

Instead of forgetting, you need to remember God's promises. There are more than 7,000 of them in the Bible. Whenever you have a problem, find a promise, like 2 Timothy 2:13: *“Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us ... and he will always carry out his promises to us”* (TLB). The promises are always greater than the problems you're facing!

God may not have fulfilled the promise in your life because he's waiting on you. He's waiting on you to learn to not fear, not fret, not faint, not forget. He wants you to learn that before he delivers you. God can do things immediately, but he's working on a larger agenda. The delays that come in your life do not destroy God's purpose. They fulfill God's purpose in your life. *“I will bless the Lord and not forget the glorious things he does for me”* (Psalm 103:2).

Talk It Over

- ◆ What has God done for you that proves his faithfulness?
- ◆ How has God been refining you in the delay of your dream?
- ◆ What do you need to change about your attitude as you are in God's waiting room?

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

Rick Warren

“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9a NLT)

The Bible tells us three things about the importance of faith.

1. God is looking for faithful people.

God is physically, visibly, actively, taking the initiative to look for faithful people that he can bless. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, *“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him”* (NLT).

This has been one of my life verses, and I’ve learned that if you make yourself usable, God will wear you out. If you get blessable, he will bless your socks off! (That’s why I don’t wear socks.) God is looking for faithful people that he can use.

2. Faithful people are hard to find.

The Bible says in Proverbs 20:6, *“Everyone talks about how faithful he is, but just try to find someone who really is!”* (GNT) A lot of people talk the talk, but they don’t really trust God. They trust their credit card instead. They say they believe in God, but they don’t really trust him when it comes to their finances, health, or job.

Psalms 53:2-3 says this: *“God looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!”* (NLT)

3. Faithfulness is the key to blessing and victory.

1 John 5:4-5 says, *“For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.”*

The Bible says in Proverbs 28:20, *“A faithful man will have many blessings”* (HCSB). I want your life to have many blessings. But in order for you to have that blessing, you’re going to have to learn faithfulness. God tests your faithfulness in different ways. Will you let him grow you in this area so that you can be a man or woman of faith?

Talk About It

- ◆ What do you think are some ways that God tests our faithfulness?
- ◆ Who are the people you look up to because you consider them faithful people — people who are full of faith for the Lord? What attributes do they have in common?

WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

Rick Warren

“For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does.” (Psalm 33:4 NLT)

One of the great questions of life is, “Who are you going to trust?” The way you answer that question will determine whether you’re happy or miserable, whether you succeed or fail, whether you make something of your life or you waste your life.

Let’s consider the options. Are you going to trust Congress? Probably not. Their credibility is kind of low right now. Are you going to trust the media? Why would you when you never know if they’re telling the truth? Are you going to trust popular opinion? Not too smart when it’s changing by the second.

Are you going to trust in yourself? That’s actually pretty stupid, too, because emotions lie. If you live by your emotions, you are going to be manipulated the rest of your life by other people and by your changing moods.

If you’re going to entrust your life and your future to someone or something, you’d better choose someone who has your best interest at heart, knows everything, is perfect, and will never lie to you. That kind of limits your options — to God.

No one is ever going to always tell you the truth. They’re going to shade it. They’re going to filter it. They’re going to make it sound nice. They won’t tell you what you need to hear. But what you need to hear is the truth, because it is the truth that sets you free. Lies about yourself, others, the world, and how life really is only keep you in bondage.

To be set free, you must have the truth. As I’ve said many times, the truth will set you free, but first it makes you miserable. We don’t like the truth. We don’t want to hear that most of the problems in our lives were brought on by poor decisions. We don’t want to hear that it’s our own stubbornness and ego and insecurity that causes the stress in our lives, but it’s true.

Psalm 33:4 says, *“For the word of the LORD holds true, and we can trust everything he does”* (NLT).

God said it, and that settles it — whether or not you believe it. God isn’t waiting on your opinion to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong. If God says it, it’s true.

You can trust God.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What will you trust God for today?
- ◆ Why is it often easier to believe the lies we hear from other people or the media instead of trusting in God’s truth?
- ◆ Do you accept all of God’s Word as truth? Why or why not?

ARE YOU AFRAID TO MAKE THE WRONG DECISION?

Rick Warren — August 17, 2016

“He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3b NIV).

Often we’re afraid of making the wrong decision, and that creates stress.

Maybe you’re facing a decision about a major issue: “Should I hold on, or should I let go?” “Should I get in, or should I get out?” “Where should I go?” “Should I move?”

When you can’t make up your mind, you stagger through life. In fact, the Bible says when we remain double-minded, we become unstable in everything we do (James 1). The Greek word for unstable literally means “stagger like a drunk.”

But God says there is an antidote to our indecision. Psalm 23:3 tells us, *“He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake”* (NIV). We handle the stress of decision-making by letting God guide us.

You may be thinking, “But I’ve tried this!” You asked God to guide you, but then you became more confused than before. You still couldn’t figure it out. Now you wonder, “Why is knowing God’s will so difficult?”

Is God playing games with us? Of course not! God wants to guide us. He wants us to know his will more than we want to know it. Our problem is we often look for the wrong thing when we’re trying to find God’s will.

For example, some of us look for a feeling. We want to be swept off our feet by some emotion so we can say, “That’s how I know what God’s will is!” Some of us want a methodical approach to God’s will. We want somebody to give us a recipe or a formula to apply. Some of us take a magical approach to God’s will. We’re looking for God to do some fantastic sign — write it in the sky, call us on the phone, send us a letter.

All of these ways lead to frustration and cause us to miss God’s will. God’s will is not a feeling or a formula or something he wants you to be frustrated or fearful about.

God does not want you confused, and he does not want you stressed over making any decision. He is there, guiding you every step of the way.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What is a big decision you’ve recently been faced with? How did you seek God’s will?
- ◆ Why does God want you to use the Bible to help you make a decision?

GOD HAS YOU WHERE HE WANTS YOU

“Only keep me in mind when it goes well with you, and please do me a kindness by mentioning me to Pharaoh and get me out of this house. For I was in fact kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.” - Genesis 40:14-15

In Genesis, we read about how Joseph was forgotten and had to play the waiting game. Joseph was forced to languish in uncertainty for an extended period of time. But when his wait was over, Joseph was promoted beyond what he could have ever hoped or even dreamed. God not only made a way to provide Joseph his freedom again; God gave Joseph power, authority, significance and joy unlike any had ever experienced. God can do something similar with you if you will remain with Him in both heart and actions during your detours.

How do you know when you are getting close to exiting your detour and heading into your promotion? That would be when God does on your detour what you could never do on your own. During your detour you are trying to find your way to the main highway and simply trying to figure out what is going on. You are not able to get off the road you are traveling. God won't let you escape. But there finally comes a time when He shows you a sign—maybe it's a turn that opens up to the main highway, and you make it.

Often this is done through a way you had tried to do on your own before but were unsuccessful. Remember how Joseph tried to get the cupbearer to remember him? He asked him to remember him. He hoped he would remember him. But the cupbearer forgot him entirely. Only God did that precise thing a few years later. He caused the cupbearer to remember Joseph.

God is the One who is in control. Detours teach us this more than anything.

For His kingdom,

Tony Evans

TRUSTING GOD THROUGH GRATITUDE

Rick Warren

“Sink your roots in him and build on him. Be strengthened by the faith that you were taught, and overflow with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:7 GW)

An attitude of radical gratitude is God’s will for you because it develops your faith.

How does gratitude develop my faith? It happens when times are tough — when things don’t make sense, when you can’t figure it out, when your prayers are unanswered, when everything is going the way you didn’t want it to go. It happens when you can say in those circumstances, “God, I know you’re in control. I know you love me, and I know you can bring good out of this. I’m thankful that you’re bigger than my problem.”

Anybody can thank God for good things. But if you can thank God even in the bad times, your faith will grow stronger as your roots go deeper.

Habakkuk was going through tough times. He said, *“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior”* (Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV).

In the midst of all the bad things that went wrong, Habakkuk rejoiced. What’s his cause of gratitude? “I will be joyful in God my Savior.” When everything else stinks in life, you can be grateful because the Lord is your Savior. He will pull you out. You are not by yourself. He hasn’t abandoned you. Give thanks to God!

That is the ultimate test of the depth of your faith. Can you thank God when life stinks? When you’re going through tough times, don’t look at what’s lost. Look at what’s left, and be grateful for it!

You can be thankful to God just for being God. He has promised to see you through those tough situations, and your faith will grow even stronger because of it.

Colossians 2:7 says, *“Sink your roots in him and build on him. Be strengthened by the faith that you were taught, and overflow with thanksgiving”* (GW).

God’s will is radical gratitude — in all things give thanks. Why? Gratitude honors God, it creates fellowship, and it develops your faith.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What is your usual reaction to difficult circumstances? How do you think God wants you to respond?
- ◆ What does it mean to honor God?
- ◆ How have you seen God strengthen your faith through the difficult circumstances of your life?

WHY GOD SOMETIMES SAYS 'NOT YET'

Rick Warren

“You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, ‘In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.’” (Hebrews 10:36-37 NIV)

If you're discouraged because of God's delay in answering your prayers, understand the delay is *not* a denial. Just because the answer or the miracle hasn't come yet doesn't mean God isn't going to answer or that he's forgotten you or that he doesn't care about you. It simply means “not yet”!

Part of becoming spiritually mature is learning the difference between “no” and “not yet,” between a denial and a delay. The Bible tells us, “*He who is coming will come and will not delay*” (Hebrews 10:37 NIV).

God's delay may be a test of your patience. Anybody can be patient once. And, most people can be patient twice. And, a lot of us can be patient three times. So God tests our patience over and over and over.

Why? So he can see how patient you are? No!

He does it so *you* can see how patient you are — so you'll know what's inside you, and you'll be able to know your level of commitment. God tests you so that *you* can know he is faithful, even if the answers you seek are delayed.

You may be going through difficult times right now. You may be discouraged because the situation you face seems unmanageable, unreasonable, or unfair.

It may seem unbearable, and inside you're basically saying, “God, I can't take it anymore. I just can't take it anymore!”

But you can.

You can stay with it longer because God is with you. He'll enable you to press on. Remember, you are never a failure until you quit. Resist discouragement, and finish the race God has set before you.

Talk It Over

- ◆ If you're discouraged, turn it around by remembering God teaches you patience during delay. Ask him to transform your discouragement into patience.
- ◆ What request did you believe God answered with “no” to which he might actually be answering “not yet”? How will you respond?
- ◆ What do you think God wants you to do in the delay when he answers “not yet”?