



placed in God, not human beings. “You can’t trust anybody” is not a negative statement in the psalmist’s mind. It is simply a basic spiritual truth: only God can bear our trust.

Trust is a very special word in scripture. It can be translated also as “faith.” It means an act of our whole being. Faith, in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures, doesn’t mean something in our heads—what we think or beliefs that we hold. Faith is an act, an opening up of our whole being, from the inside out, toward God. In the Gospels, when Jesus upbraids his disciples for their lack of faith—something he does quite often! —he means that they don’t trust. They haven’t yet learned to entrust their lives to the great and deep movement of God’s spirit in the world, the dawning of God’s kingdom, the reshaping of life toward life that Jesus proclaimed and called people into. Their lack of faith, of trust, had nothing to do with what they thought in their heads, what they believed as dogmatic truth. It had to do with their holding back, their fear of letting go of the old and entering the new. It had to do with clinging to structures and rules and old habits of thinking and acting that prevented God’s spirit from erupting in their lives and creating new life. Trust in scripture means letting go of everything that stands in the way of God’s creative movement in our own lives and in the world. That includes our dependency upon other human beings, our insisting that they meet our expectations or measure up to our needs, that they fulfill us. Trust is a word that fits only our relationship with God, not other human beings.

Now the psalmist gets to the reasons why trusting God is a no-brainer. “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.” The psalmist is all for our happiness, and true happiness is not grounded in other people and our expectations of them. True, deep, unshakable happiness flows from grounding our lives in God, when we stop looking to human beings to fulfill us and begin seeking fulfillment in our relationship with God.

The psalmist presents a litany of reasons why God is worthy of our trust:  
God, who made heaven and earth, the creator of everything  
God, who is steadfast and unshakable in faithfulness  
God, who works for justice for the oppressed and food for the hungry  
God, who works for the freedom of people and for their healing  
God, who watches out for those who are strangers and takes care of them  
God, who takes the side of the most vulnerable of people

Those are pretty good credentials that the psalmist thinks we need to remember as we live our lives. True happiness, true living unfolds as we open up more and more in trust of God, rooting and grounding our lives in God. And when we re-establish that relationship of trust in God, we find unfolding in ourselves the very creativity, freedom, compassion, desire for justice and healing, and identification with those who are vulnerable that are part of who God is. We begin to find God everywhere, in the creation that surrounds us and into which our lives are intricately woven, and in the lives of people in whose needs and vulnerabilities God is present and calling to us. We recover in ourselves the “image of God” in which we were made.

So, you see that trusting in God, not human beings, is not after all a negative thing about human beings but a positive thing about God and about who we are. It means we remove from others the demands, the weight of expectations that will never be fulfilled. We become more accepting of others and ourselves. We can move from bemoaning our own and others’ imperfections to having compassion and kindness toward them. We stop idolizing people and putting unrealistic expectations on them and ourselves.

But what about those people who are so bent, it seems, on paths that are destructive to life? The psalmist doesn’t spend many words on that: “The way of the wicked God brings to

ruin.” There is a very deep wisdom in scripture at this point. The “way of the wicked,” to use the psalmist’s words, simply has no future, precisely because it is not connected to God. Jesus was very concerned about people doing evil things, but he never advised people to launch a frontal attack on evil. He told a parable about good and bad seed sown in a field (Matt. 13:24-30). The field hand came up to the farmer all anxious about the weeds that had grown up with the wheat. He asked if the farmer wanted him to go out and pull up the weeds. But the farmer said no. Let them grow up together. At the harvest it will all be cut down and sorted out. Jesus did not ask or want his followers to defend him or his cause with force. Jesus trusted completely that God’s ways would always emerge, that life would always overcome death, that peace would always triumph over violence, that God’s kingdom would grow and grow, in secret and hidden ways, to fullness. The life bent toward evil, greed, violence, and hate would wither away, sooner or later, for it was not grounded in that which lasts, that which is life itself.

This doesn’t mean we are not to be concerned about or to confront evil. But it does mean that our own living must be done consistent with who God is and what God is about. In confronting evil we risk becoming evil ourselves. In confronting violence we can become very violent in our words, attitudes, or actions. In confronting greed we can become very greedy for control or power. Paul’s words, that we are to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21), hold very true in light of this psalm and of all scripture. And it is the same message as we began with: we are to place our trust in God, not other people, not our own powers or hopes for the results of our own efforts. We are to give our lives to God and the flow of God’s spirit in justice, compassion, caring, and healing.

The work of our inward journey, our spiritual life, is to awaken in ourselves this trust in God that frees us from the slavery of seeking from others what they cannot give us and needing their approval. It is about opening up, more and more, our sense of connectedness to the Power that is at the heart of the universe, which we call God. It is about coming home to who we really are and how we are meant to live. For us as Christians, it is by centering ourselves in the living Christ that we grow in this capacity to trust God and life as God has made it. And when we are growing in that way, deeper into God, then we also become those through whom God’s own compassion, love, care, and healing power flow. We find out what it means to be made in God’s own image.