*This series is about breaking down the obstacles that block our relationship with God and with others. These walls can only be broken down by you with the help of God. It is our personal Mount Everest. Although we as Christians are called to mature in faith, God promises to guide us and help us conquer whatever we are facing. This series attempts to raise questions and issues that might make us more aware of possible obstacles. It is not an all-encompassing answer. It is a prodding array of reflections to stimulate introspection, challenge change, and foster hope.*

**Breaking Down Walls**

**Trusting God**

Trusting God

 What we believe shapes everything we think, say, and do. For example, what we eat is a daily decision based on what we believe about food, nutrition, and health:

* If we believe that what we eat and drink affects our health and well-being, then we check all food labels, read about nutrition and food, and eat selectively.
* If we believe in the nutritional impact upon our health and choose not to make informed food choices, then we might chastise ourselves for being undisciplined or develop a degree of guilt or shame.
* If we believe in making healthy choices but are unable to access or afford these choices, then we might react to these inequities or feel vulnerable.
* If we believe that what we eat makes no difference, then we eat whatever is available.

 What we believe about God and how much we trust God affects our relationship with God and others. The Greek word πιστευω (pisteuō) can be translated as believe or trust. The word is defined at to be confident about, to think or consider possible, to think to be true. So how much do you trust God?

 If asked do I believe in God, I would respond absolutely YES. Since I was a child I believed in Jesus. I attended Catholic school from Pre-K through High School. What I believed was very clear, I recited my beliefs almost daily in the Apostles’ Creed:

 I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

 I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,

 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

 born of the Virgin Mary,

 suffered under Pontius Pilate,

 was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

 On the third day he rose again;

 he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,

 and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

 I believe in the Holy Spirit,

 the holy catholic Church,

 the communion of saints,

 the forgiveness of sins,

 the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Although I sincerely believed in God, it is taking a lifetime to live into that belief. Although I have experienced God in amazing ways in the little things and in the life-changing big events, I still know that I do not reflect a person who completely trust God. As all humans, except Paul the Apostle perhaps, I have my moments of doubt, stubbornness, lack of discipline, and worldly distractions. Even in the creating of this series and the writing of this guidebook, I believe God is calling me to serve, yet I feel inadequate and easily distracted. If I were to believe that God’s plan is this series, then I would not feel inadequate. I would trust that God will give me the words and wisdom that is needed, just as God has done in the past many times.

Do I believe in God?

Do I trust God?

What is getting in the way of trusting God?

What can I change in order to trust God more?

 Traditionally, Christians would affirm their faith by reciting a creed. One of these creeds is the Apostle’s Creed I learned in Catholic School. A creed is a statement that clarifies the essential beliefs of faith. It boils down the vastness of Scripture, Council Doctrine, and Theology to a few statements that declares what is essential and believed in common by all disciples. Another creed is the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith:

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit,

God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God,

and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being,

create persons in your own image,

 and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will

 declared through prophets and apostles.

 In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior,

 you have come to us and shared our common lot,

 conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,

 creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,

 binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church

 to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,

 to be your servants in the service of others,

 to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil,

 to share in Christ’s baptism and eat at his table,

 to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you

 forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,

 courage in the struggle for justice and peace,

 your presence in trial and rejoicing,

 and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. AMEN.

What in this creed resonates with your beliefs?

What in this creed challenges you?

Who is God that we should trust God?

Another way Christians affirm their beliefs is through scripture. Unfortunately, scripture has been used to justify certain beliefs or judgments that hurt others. This is why I truly endorse that each person not just read scripture but study scripture by themselves and in community. We can all be closed-minded, limited in our perspective, and hearing others discuss the Bible can open our minds to new insights. We should not let the limited, self-serving description of God by one person or group keep us from knowing God and the unconditional and limitless love, joy, wisdom, and peace found in a relationship with God. So, who is God, let Isaiah’s selected verses from chapter 43 and 44 speak to us:

*But now thus says Yahweh:*

 *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;*

 *I have called you by name, you are mine.*

 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;*

 *and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;*

 *when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,*

 *and the flame shall not consume you.*

*For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

*Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you,*

 *Do not fear, for I am with you;*

 *everyone who is called by my name,*

 *whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*

*You are my witnesses, says Yahweh, and my servant whom I have chosen,*

 *so that you may know and believe me and understand that I AM.*

 *Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me.*

*I, I AM Yahweh, and besides me there is no savior.*

*Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One:*

*I am Yahweh, your Holy One, the Creator, your King,*

 *who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters:*

 *Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.*

 *I am about to do a new thing;*

 *now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

 *I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

 *for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,*

 *to give drink to my chosen people,*

 *the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

 *Yet you did not call upon me, but you have been weary of me.*

 *You have not honored me with your sacrifices,*

 *But you have burdened me with your sins;*

*you have wearied me with your iniquities.*

*I, I AM God*

 *who blots out your transgressions for my own sake,*

 *and I will not remember your sins.*

*Thus says Yahweh who made you,*

 *who formed you in the womb and will help you:*

 *Do not fear whom I have chosen.*

 *For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;*

 *I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,*

 *and my blessing on your offspring.*

*Thus says Yahweh, the King, and Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:*

 *I AM the first and I AM the last; besides me there is no god.*

 *Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me.*

 *Who has announced from of old the things to come?*

*Let them tell us what is yet to be.*

 *Do not fear, or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it?*

 *You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me?*

 *There is no other rock; I know not one.*

 *Remember these things, for you are my servant;*

 *I formed you, you will not be forgotten by me.*

 *I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist;*

 *return to me for I have redeemed you.*

 In these excerpts from Isaiah, we are reminded that God knows us from the womb. God knows each and every one of us by name. In the adapted words from the John Legend song “All of Me”: God ‘loves our curves and all our edges, all our perfect imperfections’. God affirms the statement that all of God loves all of you. In return for creating the world and making it possible for us to live, God desires a relationship with us. God does not want to be a dictator. God gave us free will and desires that we freely choose to engage in a relationship with God and with others. God is telling us, like in the John Legend song, ‘I give you all, all of me’. The question from God is will ‘you give me all, all of you”?

 God loves us so much that he adopted us into the royal family. As 1 John 3:1a tells us, “*See what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are*.” And as family, God did not want to be separated from any of us so God made a plan that would show us how much he wanted a relationship that he would show us in the most heart-breaking, impactful, unforgettable way. Lent is the season we carve out in the Christian calendar to remind us that God sent Jesus knowing beforehand all the injustices, pain, and suffering the innocent Jesus would endure in order to create a path to a direct relationship with God. The gift of Jesus’ crucifixion is the assurance of life after death as witnessed in Jesus’ resurrection celebrated on Easter Sunday. As John 3:16-17 records Jesus telling us, “*For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in the Son may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” What a wonderful reminder that even Jesus did not come to condemn so why are Christians today better know for the things they condemn than the lives they save through love.

 We might forget about God, disobey God’s laws, or ignore God. Yet God sent Jesus to be our Savior. So, there is no guilt because Jesus has already paid the price on the cross. There is no shame because as scripture reminds us God knows our human condition and has already not only forgiven but forgotten. In Jesus, the slate is wiped clean. What is stopping us from trusting God who is faithfully waiting with open arms to embrace you with love and gift you with peace, joy, purpose, life, and grace?

 No matter what is happening in life, God is with us. God is not fixing every problem, injustice, battle, or consequence. But God assures us that God is taking us through it, helping us to overcome the struggle and be victorious in the end. Some of us want God to fix everything now. But if God did fix everything now for every person that ask then there would be no need for faith and we would not have free will. There would be no choice. It would be like a dictatorship, even if a benevolent dictator, we would long for freedom of choice. Or God would be like a helicopter parent that does everything for their child out of love but the end result is the child does not learn and grow, does not discern what are their gifts and potentials if they never had to stretch their abilities and imagination, does not practice self-discipline or gain self-confidence. I know the shortcomings of my child is due to my parenting choices. It hurts me more now to know that I made poor choices. We must trust that God is making perfect choices. As Joshua (1:7) is told, “*Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go.*”

 Although we are asked to believe by faith. We also know that God does exist because of the many witnesses—the testaments of the Bible, old and new, are just that—the testimony of witnesses who attest to the existence of God and to the faithfulness of God’s love. As Jeremiah cried out in Lamentations 3:22-24, “*The steadfast love of Yahweh never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘Yahweh is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in Yahweh.’*” The prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the disciples like John, as well as countless of Christians throughout the world testify to the many ways God is working to give us assurance that we are not stupid in believing God. Instead, God throughout history has given us just enough proof, evidence of God’s love and power in the form of unexplained healings, unexpected provisioning, unexplainable protection, surprising opportunities, and loving and caring people. The question of faith is do we choose to believe these are gifts from God or random luck.

 This is the beginning of showing that we trust God. Acknowledging God’s presence in our life. Thanking God for the gifts of love and grace in our life is a step toward trusting God. We open our eyes to look for these things instead of just dismissing them to coincidence. When we start looking for God, you will be amazed how much you will find. Then we will proclaim as our own words Psalm 100:3-5:

*Know that Yahweh is God—God made us; we belong to God.*

*We are God’s people, the sheep of God’s own pasture.*

*Enter God’s gates with thanks; enter God’s courtyards with praise!*

*Thank God! Bless God’s name!*

*Because Yahweh is good, God’s loyal love lasts forever;*

*God’s faithfulness lasts generation after generation.*

Does my life reflect the thoughts, words, or actions of a person that trusts in God?

What does a person who trust God look like?

How can I challenge myself to be more like a person who trust God?

What one area of my life can I begin to change now?

 Jesus is our role model. God knowing our human condition, sent Jesus to show us how to live a life that trust God completely. We will never be perfect like Jesus, God already knows our limits. But God knows our hearts and minds, our intentions and attempts. Even if to the world we seem to have failed, God knows when we tried. Several times in the Gospels, we are told as in Luke 10:27, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*” Do we have compassion and love for the world as Jesus showed others? No social norm stopped Jesus from reaching out and touching all who crossed his path. Whether considered unclean because of leprosy or unwanted because of disability or undesirable because of life choices, Jesus stopped and spent time with them. Jesus did not just acknowledge them but sat with them and talked. Do we have a passion for growing a relationship with God? Do we feed our soul with scripture, prayers, and quiet time with God? Even Jesus found it necessary to go into the hills to separate himself from the world and commune with God. Do we go into the world looking for ways to extend God’s love and mercy? Jesus walked to where people were in need. Jesus did not wait for ministry opportunities to come his way. Do we think like Jesus? What are our priorities? For Jesus, loving others sacrificially was his only priority. What can we sacrifice in order to make ourselves more available to loving others and showing them love by attending to their needs and caring for their body, mind, and soul.

 Sobering words to close with from 1 Chronicles 28:9b, “*Serve God with single mind and willing heart, for Yahweh searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek God, God will be found by you; but if you forsake God, God will abandon you forever.*”

Online Lenten Series: Breaking Down Walls

Part 1: Trusting God

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