Trust, Faith and God

What is the difference between faith and trust? Do we need both? Do we need either? How is trust built? How does faith grow? Just how much trust and faith do we need? How much trust does God ask of us? How much of our faith is based on our trust in Him?

So many questions. Are they questions that really need to be asked? After all, it seems as if the answers are obvious. You need to have faith in God and trust Him. If you believe that God exists and that Jesus came to earth to become the eternal sacrifice for our sins, then you have faith and you trust Him. Right?

Wrong! I have seen a lot of people who believe that God exists. They believe that Jesus came to forgive sins and save the lost. But they don't trust God. They don't trust people in general, the church, Christians or church leaders and, by default, they don't trust God.

Why is that? I found myself struggling with that very question. Over the years, I have been hurt by the church, by friends and family, by people in general and I don't trust people very much. I make friends slowly and cautiously. But I noticed something else happening as I distanced myself from people around me. I was also distancing myself from God. I finally realized that I wasn't trusting God. Not like I used to trust Him. When had I slipped away?

I was reading in Genesis 24 one day and something struck me. This is the story of Abraham sending his servant back to his home country to find a wife for his son Isaac. It is a simple story, filler in the timeline really. Abraham tells the servant to go back to his home country, find a wife for his son and bring her back to Canaan so that Isaac won't marry a Canaanite woman. The job is simple: go, find, bring back.

But something jumped off the pages at me. It was the amount of trust that was required of everyone in this story. The servant was asked to trust Abraham’s wisdom in making this decision. He had to trust God that he would be able to make the journey safely, that the right woman would be provided, that he would recognize her when he found her. He prayed for wisdom and guidance but he had to trust that he would receive that guidance.

What about the woman? How much trust did it take to believe that this man was telling the truth? How much trust was required to agree to a marriage arrangement with an unknown stranger in an unknown land on the word of an unknown servant claiming he had been sent by a distant relative? Can you imagine the amount of fear she must have been battling? In an age when women had few rights and fewer choices, how much trust must it have taken for her to agree to travel to a far-away place and become a wife to a stranger.

And how much trust did her family have to have in this situation? I have a problem letting my daughter travel across town without knowing where she is and who she's with. How much harder must it have been for this young woman's family to allow their daughter to leave her home and travel to a land so far away that they would never see her again. Odds were that they might never even hear from her again; maybe two or three messages over the rest of their life-time. The trust they must have needed to believe that their
daughter would survive this trip, would be well received, loved and cared for, wanted and protected. They probably would never see her children, never hear if she passed away, never know if she became widowed and alone, never know if she was struggling. So many things to worry about and so much trust required to believe that this was God's will.

After reading that story, something else occurred to me. We have dozens of stories about our "heroes of faith". Abraham is one such story; his willingness to offer Isaac on the alter at God's command got him labeled a hero of faith. And there is Enoch who "walked with God", or Noah who built an ark in a time when it never rained, or Joseph who maintained his faith through twenty years or more of captivity, Gideon and his three hundred battling an army of thousands, David battling Goliath, or how about all of the prophets boldly speaking God's word. How about twelve men who, by faith, believed that the prophet and teacher they were so loyally following was the Messiah, the only Son of God?

Finding examples of faith in the scripture is easy. Understanding the amount of trust required to live that faith is another story. So what exactly is the difference between faith and trust?

Trust is defined as "an assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something; or to place a confidence in someone." Another definition is "to commit or place something or someone in one's care or keeping or to permit someone or something to stay or go or do something without fear or misgiving."

The key words here are assurance, confidence, commitment without fear.

So what is faith? Faith is defined as a belief and trust in, and a loyalty to, God; a firm belief in something for which there is no proof; complete trust.

Did you catch that? Faith is based on your trust of someone or something. If you don't trust someone, then how can you have faith in someone?

Understanding that; it occurred to me that in our culture of distrust and disbelief, having faith in God is almost impossible. And yet, without God, there is no hope. No hope for a better life after death and no hope of anything good here on earth. How could God ask us to have faith in Him when we can't even trust our fellow man who we can see and interact with? How does one maintain a faith in the face of so many disappointments, so much disillusionment, so much hurt and pain?

As I began looking for answers to this question of how to trust God in a distrustful society, something became quickly apparent. Trust is a choice. David in his psalms says over and over, "in you I trust, O Lord". This was a choice that David made. It was a choice that all of our heroes of faith made. Each one chose to trust in God, despite the circumstances. Abraham trusted God to provide a sacrifice, even if it was his son; David trusted God to provide victory with a stone that went straight and true; Noah trusted God to close the door of the ark and bring rain, even though he didn't know what rain looked like. Each one of these people made a choice; a choice to trust.
The second thing I quickly noticed is that many references to trust included consequences. Moses lost the chance to enter the promised land because he lacked enough trust in God (Numbers 20:12). Isaiah 12, verse 2 says, "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation." The choice to trust brought strength, defense and salvation. And I see this over and over in scripture. If you trust, then this will happen. But it is still a choice that one must make.

Romans 4:5 says, "to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." That choice to trust brings righteousness. That is the reward.

So how do I know that I can trust these promises of reward for my trust? That one is simple. David in the 105th Psalm, verse 8, says, "He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations." I don't know about you but most people can't remember back three or four generations. God remembers for a thousand generations! And Paul in his letter to Titus tells us in Chapter 1, verses 1-2 that his is "a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness - a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.

So I can trust God because He remembers what he promises and he doesn't lie. Setting aside all of the other benefits of trusting in God, such as protection, safety, provision, salvation, etc.; we choose to trust Him because He remembers His promises and He doesn't lie to us. That should be reason enough. But even more than that, He promises hope. Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

Is there really any more reason to place our trust in God? He remembers, He doesn't lie, He give hope and He is faithful. And as we choose to trust each and every day, our faith grows. As our faith grows we find trust comes easier. As we trust more our faith grows more . . . and the cycle continues.

As a very wise man one said, "The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does, (Psalm 145:13b). I'm going to make that be enough for me and I am going to choose to trust, even when I face unbelievable difficulty.