

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRUST GOD?

Stephen & Karen Blandino



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**W**e throw the phrase “Trust in God” around like free cotton candy at a carnival. It’s the thing to say when we don’t know what else to say. But when we’re the one called to trust, it’s a different story.

Then it’s not so easy.

Fear is the dominant emotion that dismantles our ability to trust God. Like a monster lurking in the closet of our minds, fear makes its presence known when the unexpected shows up.

In 1989, I [Karen] was robbed when five young men broke into my home and dragged me out of the shower at gunpoint. Everything I understood about peace was replaced with overwhelming fear. Loud noises still startle me and send my heart racing. Suspicious people put me on edge. Safety and security became my greatest comfort.

In 2014, I [Stephen] suffered heart failure when my mitral valve ruptured. Just nine days earlier my cardiologist gave me a great report, but in a very short time my condition went from flu-like symptoms to fighting for my life. I was taken by Care Flite to the Heart Center at Harris Hospital near downtown Fort Worth. In the next 48 hours, the doctors would drain two liters of fluid from my lungs, and I would undergo open-heart surgery and have a mechanical valve installed in my heart.

I [Karen] remember driving home from the hospital, dazed by the events of the day. How I made it home I still don’t know. When I arrived home, I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. At midnight I woke up and emotionally fell apart. Fear crept back into my mind. I called my mom and said, “Is he going to be alright?” She did her best to comfort me and assure me that things would be fine. After I hung up the phone, I called my friend Jennifer to ask the same question. I was sobbing so hard that I could barely speak. Jennifer, and her husband Derek, held their breath as they wondered the worst. Finally I asked her the same question: “Is he going to be alright?” Jennifer assured me he would.

Suddenly the phone disconnected and Jennifer turned to Derek and said, “I’ve got to go over there.” She rushed to our house and stayed with me through the night. We talked and cried. Finally she said, “Picture what it’s going to be like. This is the



worse day, and every day after this is going to be better. And one day, you know Stephen's going to write a book about this." Jennifer is a true friend. She stayed the entire night, sleeping on a chair in our living room while I slept on the couch.

### **Replace the Question with a Period**

During those first couple of days, God prompted me to change my perspective. Rather than asking, "Is he going to be alright?" God prompted me to drop the question mark and replace it with a period: "He's going to be alright...period." A simple shift in punctuation was the fragile beginning of a shift from fear to faith.

Less than two hours after Stephen went into surgery, somebody came to get us. "Mrs. Blandino, the doctor wants to meet you," he said. Then he asked everyone to follow him to another waiting room. He gave no explanation and had little expression on his face. Everybody feared the worst as we waited for the doctor to arrive. It was the longest 30 minutes of our lives.

God prompted me to drop the question mark and replace it with a period: "He's going to be alright...period."

I remember turning to a friend and saying, "If it was bad news they would have asked me to step into a small private room, right?" Again, fear was looming. I looked at Stephen's mom and said, "I just want him home. I just want him in my bed again. I just can't live without him." Fear was mocking me like a nightmare. Finally, at 3:42 pm, exactly two hours after the surgery began, the surgeon emerged with the news: "The surgery went great. The next 24 hours are critical."

An overwhelming sense of relief flooded the entire waiting room. Dozens of people waited patiently for the news, and finally a glimmer of hope poked its head over the horizon.

That doesn't mean I never struggled with fear again. It was (and at times still is) a daily battle. I remember telling Stephen after being home for a couple of weeks, "I feel like I'm walking a tightrope, hoping neither of us fall off." Fear is a terrible thing. It grips you with a vengeance as it sets up shop in the recesses of your mind. It produces questions that haunt you. But fear was never meant to define us, or our relationship with God. Trust is the journey God calls all of us to walk.



## Facing My Trust God Gap

If you're like us, you probably bump into a certain "gap" in your life from time to time...perhaps more often than you'd like to admit. It's the gap between what I *expect* God to do and what He's *actually* doing. This gap is common when life disrupts your plans. I [Stephen] call it my "Trust God Gap." My "Trust God Gap" shows up when I ask myself, "What does it mean to trust God in *this* area of my life?" — *This* representing whatever I'm struggling to trust God with at that particular moment.

The "Trust God Gap" looks different for all of us. If you're trying to figure out what your Trust God Gap is, just answer this question: What does it mean to trust God in \_\_\_\_\_? Whatever you put in the blank is the label (or name) on your Trust God Gap. You might have answered the question like this:

My trust God gap is the gap between what I *expect* God to do and what He's *actually* doing.

- What does it mean to trust God with my relationships?
- What does it mean to trust God with my job?
- What does it mean to trust God when someone mistreats me?
- What does it mean to trust God when somebody lies to me?
- What does it mean to trust God with my health?
- What does it mean to trust God with my money?
- What does it mean to trust God with my time?
- What does it mean to trust God with a really big decision?

I don't know what you put in your blank, but the good news is that God provides direction to our question. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil." What is Solomon saying in these three simple verses? Let's unpack it.

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart*** – The word "trust" implies the idea of submissive helplessness. It's actually a picture of a servant who is waiting for his master's command so that he can respond in full obedience. In other words, the focus of trust is submission. Solomon's advice is to submit your heart in full obedience to God.

***Lean not on your own understanding*** – To *lean* is to prop yourself up against something. According to Solomon, man's wisdom (or understanding) cannot support the weight of our lives, challenges, pain, or disruptions. God's wisdom, on the other



hand, is like a firm tree with deep roots, able to support the weight of our lives as we lean against Him in full trust. Man's wisdom is like a thin piece of balsa wood. It's simply too flimsy to prop up our lives. While it's immensely easy to lean on our education, success, experience, and know-how, those are the very things that often lead us out of God's will when they're not aligned with His Word.

***In all your ways acknowledge Him*** – When Solomon says to “acknowledge Him,” he's not telling us to give God his Sunday morning hour, or to say “grace” over our meal. Instead, God wants us to invite Him into *every* area of our lives. All means all. Acknowledgement is an act of recognizing God's full Lordship in our lives.

***He will make your paths straight*** – Our temptation (and our tendency) is to pick a path with the expectation that God will approve of it. That's not how God works. God has already chosen a “bless-able” path. When we choose to trust Him, lean on Him, and acknowledge Him, His path becomes clear. God doesn't bless “our” path. He blesses “His” path, reveals it to us, and invites us to walk on it.

***Do not be wise in your own eyes*** – It's as if Solomon says, “I'm not sure you got what I just said, so I'm going to say it again. Listen up! Don't lean on your own understand...*don't be wise in your own eyes.*”

***Fear the Lord and shun evil*** – Solomon concludes with a challenge to “fear the Lord.” Fear doesn't imply being scared. The word “fear” means to revere God, His wisdom, and His ways. To “shun evil” means to avoid everything that brings a wedge between us and God. Proverbs 16:6 shows us a direct link between fearing God and shunning evil: “Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided.”

One of the best examples in Scripture of somebody who trusted God is Job. Job was a wealthy man who lost *everything*—sheep, children, health, and possessions—even though he was faithful to God. In fact, if Job answered our “Trust God Gap” question, he might have said, “What does it mean to trust God when you lose it all?” When he lost everything, like many of us, he started asking “Why?” “Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?” (Job 3:11). That's a bad day!

Yet, despite everything that happened to Job, what was said of him in the very first verse of his book remained true throughout his life: “In the land of Uz there lived a

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man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1).

Job came to the realization that knowing God is better than having answers to all of his questions. In the end, God restored Job and made him twice as prosperous as before. When Job faced his own “Trust God Gap,” his response was to ultimately fear God and shun evil. So, we could interpret Proverbs 3:5-7 to mean:

*Submit your heart in full obedience to God. Don't prop yourself up with human wisdom and understanding. In every area of your life, acknowledge God and act according to His wisdom, and He will make the right path—His path—clear to you. Don't be wise according to your own wisdom. Instead, reverence God and His ways and avoid every kind of evil and sin.*

What a powerful description of trust. Is it easy? Of course not! Nor does it mean we're never tempted to revert back to our natural way of thinking. So what do we do when we face our “Trust God Gap?”

### **How to Respond to Your “Trust God Gap”**

According to Proverbs 3, our response to the “Trust God Gap” is clear: To trust is to *acknowledge* then *act*. Let that sink in...*to trust is to acknowledge then act*.

Sometimes we reverse the order...*we act then acknowledge*. We act in our own wisdom, then acknowledge that we messed up, seeking God's forgiveness and redemption. Other times we act, and then acknowledge God by asking him to bless our action. True trust doesn't reverse the process. True trust begins by acknowledging God, His wisdom, and His ways, and then choosing to act on what we've acknowledged.

To trust is to  
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To acknowledge God without acting on His wisdom is nothing more than arrogant lip service. To act without acknowledging God is nothing more than self-reliant trust.

So, What does it mean to trust God with whatever you wrote in your blank? When you “acknowledge then act,” you put *trust* in your Trust God Gap.



*Acknowledging* God and His Wisdom and then *acting* on God's Ways is how we ultimately close the gap.

Again, this isn't easy. I [Karen] can see God at work and still have this unsettled feeling in side. "When's the other shoe going to drop?" pecks at my mind like a woodpecker chipping away at a tree. Trusting God doesn't mean you understand it. In fact, that's when trust is needed the most...when you *don't* understand. When life doesn't make sense. When life disrupts your plans. But if we don't trust God, we rob ourselves of victories. Testimonies are only experienced on the other side of trust.

### **Building Trust on Truth**

In both of our experiences, certain Scriptures have served as the foundation for greater trust. During those moments of discouragement and setback, God used truth from His Word to encourage, strengthen, and sustain us.

For me [Stephen] that process began before my crisis ever hit. On March 12<sup>th</sup>, four days before my heart failure, my mom sent me a message that said, "Stephen, I feel impressed to have you read this chapter in Jeremiah chapter one. I am sure you are familiar with it, but it will be an encouragement to you." While my mom is a very spiritually minded person, she normally doesn't send me Scriptures like this. The very last verse of Jeremiah one says, "'They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the Lord."

I can't tell you how many times I thought of that Scripture while I was in the hospital. Although things were very difficult, I had this overwhelming peace that everything was going to be okay. Pre-crisis truth built my trust during the actual moment of crisis.

On another occasion, a friend visited me in the hospital. While he sat by my side, he asked, "Stephen, is there anything you'd like me to read to you?" Philipians 1:1-6, I said:

*Paul and Timothy, both of us committed servants of Christ Jesus, write this letter to all the followers of Jesus in Philippi, pastors and ministers included. We greet you with the grace and peace that comes from God our Father and our Master, Jesus Christ. Every time you cross my mind, I break out in exclamations of thanks to God. Each exclamation is a trigger to prayer. I find myself praying for you with a glad heart. I am so pleased that you have continued on in this with us, believing and proclaiming God's Message, from the day you heard it right up to the present. There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God*





*who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears. (MSG)*

Those final words were deeply encouraging. God started a work in me and he had plans to bring it to a flourishing finish. His plan wasn't done. Paul's words infused strength into my ability to trust God as I was lying in a hospital bed.

Perhaps one of the most memorable trust-building moments came from two friends, Shawn and Michelle, and their kids Natalyn and Cason, as they entered my hospital room with a plaque. After a kind greeting, Michelle explained the significance of the plaque during her own battle with breast cancer.

The summer before she was diagnosed, Natalyn went on a mission trip. During the trip, a lady gave Natalyn a rubber bracelet that said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13, NRSV). She told Natalyn, "I really think you're going to need this in the months to come." Little did she know how much she would lean on that scripture when her mom received the doctor's report.

After the diagnosis, Natalyn gave her mom the bracelet to encourage her faith. Weeks later, Michelle shared the story with some friends at her "Pink Party." After sharing the details, a friend gave Michelle a plaque with the same Scripture on it.

Michelle's friend said to her, "I believe I need to give this to you. It was a constant reminder and encouragement to me after I lost my 16 year old son in an ATV accident." Then she said, "When you don't need it any more, or you feel led to give it to someone else, pass it on." Then Michelle looked at me and said, "During this process, I felt God wanted me to give it to you." I'm the third recipient. And when the time is right, I'll pass it on to somebody else. Again, truth built my trust.

After I returned home, another friend told me she was praying Proverbs 11:25

"A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."  
*Proverbs 11:25*

over me: "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." She reminded me that I had been generous with others, and her prayer was that God would refresh me as I healed. The very next day another friend posted this same passage of Scripture on a social media site. God was using two

different people, who don't even know each other, to speak the same truth into my "Trust God Gap."

When I [Karen] was robbed, fear was the greatest emotion I had to deal with. I was annoyed that my security had been stolen. Psalm 91 got me through it. The passage begins, "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow



of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (v. 2-3). Not only were these words a constant reminder of where to place my trust, they reminded me where to find my rest. Verse five was also comforting: “You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day.” Darkness was unsettling because the robbery happened at night. I was reminded that God stood with me when the sun disappeared from the sky.

Then there was verses nine and ten: “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.” This was another promise that I would cling to. God himself is my refuge. Disaster doesn’t happen in his tent. Finally, the chapter concludes with these comforting words: “‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.’”

In the years following my storm, another passage of Scripture became an anchor for my life. Isaiah 32:18 (MSG), says, “My people will live in a peaceful neighborhood—in safe houses, in quiet gardens.” This verse obviously spoke life to into my insecure world. Once again, it was a promise I could hold onto after my plans were disrupted by the unexpected.

You can’t build your trust on anything shaky. Trust needs a firm foundation or it will crumble with every crack of insecurity. God’s Word is the greatest source for building trust. It’s fully reliable. It’s a fountain of constant comfort, wisdom, and support. It’s not just a book of stories or a historical account of men and women used by God. It’s a redemptive story. It’s living and it’s active.

## Your Next Step

So where do you go from here? When life disrupts your plans, the best response is clear: **Trust God by *acknowledging* Him and *acting* on His wisdom.** It’s easy to say we trust God when life is going our way. It’s even easier to tell others to trust God. The true test happens when life falls apart. When our “Trust God Gap” is magnified, we discover how much we really do, or don’t, trust Him.

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wisdom.

If your plans have been sidetracked, God is calling you to trust Him more. Maybe you like security like me [Karen], or perhaps you like plans and strategies like



me [Stephen]. Or maybe you have your own nemesis that puts action ahead of acknowledgement. When the things that matter to you most, or the things that you take for granted, begin slipping through your hands, who do you trust?

The longer I live, the more I realize that all of life is really a journey toward greater trust. God designed it that way. When I've taken a step toward trust, God invites me to take another. When I trust Him with my money, He wants to know if I'll also trust Him with my time. When I trust Him with my career, He wants to know if I'll also trust Him with my family. When I trust Him with my relationships, he wants to know if I'll also trust Him with my emotions. Every step toward trust in God reveals yet another step to take. That's life. That's what following Jesus is about. How much do I trust Him?

We're not suggesting it's easy to trust God. You'll often have more questions than answers. But would you rather face your questions, hardships, and circumstances with God or without God? You may not have answers, but you can find comfort in the God of comfort. Let your pain push you *to* God rather than *away* from God.

Author Mark Batterson said, "Most of our emotional problems are symptoms of one deep-rooted spiritual problem: lack of trust in the sovereign God. It's our lack of

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It's our lack of trust in Him that results in high levels of past-tense guilt, present-tense stress, and future-tense anxiety."

*Mark Batterson*

trust in Him that results in high levels of past-tense guilt, present-tense stress, and future-tense anxiety." Even though your mind is swirling with questions, rest in God. Let the peace that passes understanding fill your soul. When fear knocks at your door, take a deep breath, and replace the question mark with a period. Remind yourself of Solomon's words. They are just as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths

straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil" (Proverbs 3:5-7).



## **A Prayer of Trust**

*Heavenly Father,*

*I don't understand everything that is happening to me,  
but today I choose to place my trust in you. I surrender my life  
fully to your Lordship and to your control. Cleanse me of my sin. Restore  
my broken soul. I confess you as my Lord. Help me to acknowledge  
you, and then to act according to your wisdom and your will,  
in every circumstance I face. Help me to close my "Trust  
God Gap," replace my questions with a period, build my  
trust on your Truth, and lean fully on you.*

*In Jesus' name I pray, amen.*



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## Personal Reflection

1. In what area of my life am I struggling the most to trust God?
2. In what way am I currently leaning on my own wisdom?
3. How can I acknowledge God, His presence, and His wisdom in my situation?
4. What Scriptures can I lean on during this season?
5. How is God leading me to act in my situation? Is there something He is leading me to do?
6. What should be my first action step to express my trust in God?



## What Does It Mean to Trust God?

Is adapted from Stephen and Karen Blandino's book,

### ***Unexpected: What to Do When Life Disrupts Your Plans***



Everybody Encounters the Unexpected! Whether it's losing a job, receiving a bad report from a doctor, a late-night phone call, a relationship ending, or a dashed dream, "unexpected" shows up in unwelcome ways. Sometimes it feels like it's raining rocks, and we're doing our best to dodge a fatal blow. The question is, how do we respond when life unexpectedly disrupts our plans.

In ***Unexpected: What to Do When Life Disrupts Your Plans*** Stephen and Karen Blandino share their personal stories of pain and disruption. Karen shares how her peace was stolen during a robbery when five young men broke into her house, and then dragged her out of the shower at gunpoint. Stephen shares his journey of simultaneous congestive heart

failure and pulmonary failure despite years of annual check-ups with good reports. From their stories, Stephen and Karen share *seven valuable takeaways* about prayer, trust, perspective, family, community, purpose, and legacy.

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