

Trusting God's Word: Character

Psalm 119:97-104
Romans 11:35-36

October 21, 2018
Faith Community

There are four key words in our mission statement that are displayed symbolically in our logo, and then briefly described on the back of the bulletin. The four words are:

Hearing
Trusting
Acting
Sharing

We're spending two weeks on each one, starting at the top and working our way down, knowing that in reality a lifetime wouldn't be enough.

All this is designed to help you pray for your Pastor Nominating Committee and the eventual arrival of your new pastor. Hopefully he or she will see that you have a firm grasp on who you've been called to be and what you've been called to do.

Today we begin our two week look at the second word, 'trusting.' Your mission statement says,

"Hearing God's Word in itself is not enough. God's Word demands commitment. Therefore, as a church we will continually strive for deeper commitment throughout our life. We realize our faith will make demands on our time, our abilities and our money. In doing so, we will apply our faith in our daily lives...being reformed, we will grow."

One of the ways trust at that level is expressed is in how we build character. Do we believe what we say we believe? Do we trust God enough to build our lives along godly lines?

During Senator John McCain's memorial service, Barack Obama described him like this:

"By his own account, John was a rebellious young man. In his case that's understandable; what faster way to distinguish yourself when you're the son and grandson of admirals than to mutiny. Eventually, though, he concluded that the only way to really make his mark on the world is to commit to something bigger than himself." (September 1, 2018.)

“When you do that, it means you are no longer the center.

“Your most frightening and fulfilling power is placing something other than yourself at the center of your life. Otherwise, it's a very small universe.”¹

When our kids were small, I remember standing in front of the bathroom mirror getting ready for the day, combing my hair, shaving, routine stuff.

My son David would wander in sometimes, wondering what I was up to and then he'd just hang out awhile. We'd have our small talk, of course, but the memorable part of those times always came when he would say, “I'm gonna be just like you.” He always said it with a smile. Part of me would think, oh, that's the last thing you should want to do, and another part of me would think, well, I've got my work cut out for me, and the best part of me would soak in the wonder of such love and trust.

Whoever you are, and whatever station of life you may be in, someone is looking at you in the same way that David looked at me. And how you apply and express your faith in your daily life will not just shape your own character but will influence the lives of those around you as well.

Psalm 139 has a part that can be more than a little unsettling:

***Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.***
(Psalm 139:23-24)

If David knew me at that level, would he still want to be just like me? Do I even want to be searched like that: Do I want anyone, let alone God, to know my heart, and see if there's any wicked way in me?

We're talking about character today, and it's so much more than personality, reputation or quirks or eccentricities. Instead it's all about God honoring values, priorities, and relationships. It's how we make decisions and choices, how we spend our time and our money.

¹ Dan Rockwell, <https://leadershipfreak.blog/2018/09/02/the-most-important-person-in-your-organization/>

A passage in the New Testament book of Philippians puts it together for me:

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. (Philippians 1:27) That's character.

I've also heard that character is who you are in the dark, when no one is watching or listening. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Know my heart at that level, and lead me out from my self-imposed wilderness.

Have you ever heard of mission drift? Sometimes it's called the "28 Day Rule." It applies to a team, a business, a nonprofit, even a church, perhaps especially so. The mission of a team, a business, a nonprofit or church must be repeated, reaffirmed, or specifically expressed at least once every 28 days in order to stay on course. Otherwise, mission drift will set in. And it can be so insidious, so sneaky. You may be just one degree off course. Big deal, I can take care of it later. Over the long haul, however, without recalibration or redirection, that one degree can result in your ending up in a different country, nowhere near your original goal.

No one goes into a marriage expecting it to fail, and when it happens, people look back and see that more often than not it was a series of little things that over time built up into big things, and "We just kind of drifted apart."

Churches are born with great enthusiasm, but when mission drift sets in it becomes more a matter of paying the bills and maintaining a building because we've always done it that way.

Character is like that. Healthy lifestyles require attention and maintenance, like everything else. It's why that wonderful Deuteronomy passage is so critical:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

Or, in other words, be careful little eyes, be careful little ears, be careful little hands.

It's the delight of the daily grind. It's Psalm 119 at work. It's also how character is built.

It's nothing fancy. Instead, it's directed day to day life, even a well-focused routine. But when all is said and done and people think of you, they just might join the apostle Paul in declaring,

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever! (Romans 11:33, 36)