

In Ourselves?

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[0 : 00] Now, if you've been with us for the last two Sundays, then you would know that we've covered ground on how it's not possible or wise, actually, to put our trust in human authorities first week and then trendsetters, that was last week.

Because well-intentioned though they may be, and sometimes they're not even that, they'll still let us down and we're left disappointed or worse, badly hurt or deceived.

And although we haven't really talked about every other possible option, we know that in the end, people let us down. They're only human and when push comes to shove, they'll always protect their own interests ahead of ours.

And so the question becomes, who can we trust when all else fails? I guess what's left is in ourselves. If we're going to succeed, then it's up to us.

If we don't look after ourselves, then nobody else will. And so that's the question we're going to look at tonight. Can we trust in ourselves? And it appears that many people are saying that we can.

[1 : 10] We actually live, I think, in an age of self-belief and self-actualization. So two mentors, I think, define this philosophy and they're there on the outline.

The first is, back yourself and you will succeed. Trust your own abilities or instincts, back yourself and you can achieve your dreams.

Perhaps not fly, but pretty close. So take MasterChef for an example. It's not just a cooking competition, is it? Because such great focus is given to self-belief and motivation.

George, and he's always doing this, is constantly telling the contestants and consoling those who break down, like this one, yes, what's her name? Nicole, I think. That if they push themselves, you know, they can do it.

And afterwards, in their interviews, the contestants talk about how they achieve their food dreams, if only they never give up. And that's the same motivational narrative, I think, that we hear in schools and at workplaces today.

[2 : 17] That self-belief and hard work will get you anywhere. We can all do it. We just have to put our hearts and our minds to it. It's rather different, isn't it, to our parents' or grandparents' era.

For them, it was simply to put food on the table. Some got lucky and became successful, but most just settled for a comfortable life, if they could get it.

Now, to this mantra is added another related belief, which is that in trying to define your dreams and goals, you need to be true to yourself. Don't let anyone else define who you are.

Don't work to please others or conform to their expectations. Rather, follow your heart and be true to yourself. Now, at one level, with all these things, there's always a grain of truth about them.

So peer pressure and doing something just because others want you to, yeah, that's not good. And yes, we each have our unique talents and interests.

[3 : 20] So reacting against this conformity and uniformity can be a helpful corrective. Likewise, having lofty goals, that isn't bad in itself.

A lot of medical and scientific breakthrough occur when people refuse to give in, to give up. Hard work and grit are good disciplines to have.

And success rarely comes without them. Now, if nothing else, they're at least character building as well. Now, I can testify a little to this myself.

At my Pilates class each week, there's this one exercise that really challenged me for a while. Now, you're meant to do it in two by ten reps.

But I wanted to see if I could do all 20 in one go. So I've got some... These are Alyssa's, by the way.

[4 : 17] Mine are much bigger. And so it was something like this. You know, you have to do 20 of these. Okay. Big weights. All right. I don't laugh.

All right. I'm not a hunk. But for a long time, all I could get to was 17. You know, week in, week out, 17. Take a rest and then three more.

But one day, I decided to channel George Columbaris. And I said, I can do this. It's mind over matter. If I push myself hard enough, I'll be able to push through.

And so I did. And guess what? It worked. It actually worked. This mental stuff. You know, 17. I could really feel, you know, the arms going to jelly.

But I said, I can do this. And I did three more. And I, you know, ever since then, 20. Piece of cake.

Now, if you speak to other elite athletes, they'll tell you...

[5 : 17] Sorry. Did I say other? Anyway. They'll tell you the same thing. Succeeding is as much about mental toughness as about physical training.

Hard work and grit is often the difference between success and failure. But I guess the question is, is self-belief and being true to yourself all that it takes?

If we just trust ourselves, then success and fulfillment is guaranteed. Is that really true? Well, I think the trouble is, we're not actually that trustworthy.

It may sound inspiring, but the reality is, we're not actually as reliable or as strong as we think. And I give you two reasons what the trouble is.

First of all, the trouble is, we're actually finite. Now, it seems obvious once I say it, but we're actually limited in what we can do. And no amount of self-belief can actually overcome that.

[6 : 17] In fact, we often think people who think like that are delusional. We all realize, of course, that there may be certain situations in life that are outside our control. But often, we're sort of foolish enough to think that if we have the strength or the intellect to overcome, then we can do anything, that we can overcome any obstacle that's thrown our way.

Some people think, for instance, that they can always trust their judgment or instincts. I wonder whether that was one of the things you thought about earlier with that discussion question.

Or that they had the ability to size up each situation and work out what's right or wrong every time.

To work out what's true and what's false in order to determine what the right action is.

But the reality is, even that, and I tend to think that myself, I'm always right. But I actually have to admit that we're more biased than we care to think. I'm actually currently reading a book by a psychology professor.

It's called *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt. He's a moral psychologist. And one of the main things that he asserts in his book is that humans are inherently self-righteous. That is, our default is to think we're morally right.

[7 : 32] That our moral view about certain things is the correct one. Even when we're unable to explain ourselves or to justify them. And so it turns out that we actually use our logical faculties less to engage in reasoning, you know, reason and then form a view, but more actually as a way to justify our choices after we've already made up our minds.

In other words, we're good at forming judgments instinctively and rationalizing about it to others afterwards. So Haidt gives an example. It's actually at the start of his book where he gives this story and he asks whether you think that this is morally wrong or not.

So I put it up on the slide. And this is the scenario. A family's dog was killed by a car in front of their house. They heard that dog meat was delicious. So they cut up the dog's body and cooked it and ate it for dinner.

Nobody saw them do it. Is that morally right or wrong? Nobody sort of shouted out loud, but I can probably feel the disgust that you're probably reacting to right now.

And instinctively, we all say it's wrong. But when you're pushed about it, it's actually quite hard to come up with moral reasons for it. Now that's a rather revolting example, but the point is we're less objective than we think.

[8 : 51] And often our choices are not as objective as we like to admit. So for example, when we choose someone to marry, we often, when people ask, oh, why did you marry that person?

And I'm probably the only exception here, but we often will come up with reasons about how kind and caring that person is, how noble their character is. But if you're really honest, we've probably been aroused, we've probably had our interest for that person aroused by their sex appeal or attractiveness.

And then we attribute it to these qualities afterwards. We just kind of look at the person, we like them, and then after we think, oh, they're also kind and noble and gentle and all that kind of stuff.

Of course, for Alyssa, that's actually true. Now, we see this clearly in others, don't we? But we don't really like it when others say it of us. And that, to me, is actually the greater problem.

Not so much that we're finite, but as I say in the next point, we're actually fallen and therefore self-deceiving. It's that self-righteous tendency in us, which makes us think our goals are noble and our motives are pure, when really they're not.

[10:00] Again, we can see it clearly in others. But then, why is it that we're any different? You know, if everyone else in the world has fallen, why do we think that we're not?

Well, the Bible pulls no punches when it comes to an assessment of us. If you read through it time and time again, we will see that the Bible's view is that all of us, all humans are fallen and sinful by nature.

One example is actually found in the book of Jeremiah. He's an Old Testament prophet. And in chapter 17 and verse 9, God declares, and I've got it on the slide, that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.

Who can understand it? Now, two things to notice is that the heart is deceitful above all things. That is, of all the things that could be wrong with it, deceit sits at the very top.

We think we're better morally than we are. It's otherwise known as pride. But secondly, the verse also says that it's beyond cure.

[11:07] You see, the problem isn't just that we're deceitful, it's that we believe that we can fix it ourselves, that we can trust ourselves to correct our faults, when the Bible says that actually it's beyond cure.

And that has been the way throughout humanity, ever since Adam and Eve fell into temptation.

Now, I'm not sure whether you're familiar with that story, but when Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent, or Satan disguised as the serpent, do you recall what was at the heart of that temptation, what the lie was?

In Genesis 3 and verse 5, Satan tempted Eve to eat the only fruit prohibited by God. But his motivation for them is this, for God knows that when you eat from it, you will be like God, knowing good from evil.

Now, if you were there with Adam and Eve, you would be able to see clearly what a blatant lie that was. That there was no way Adam and Eve could become like God, much less by eating a fruit.

And yet, such was the self-deception, Adam and Eve believed it. And if we were there too, and given the choice to eat it, I bet that we would actually believe that ourselves.

[12:32] And that's the tragic thing about sin. We're not only morally corrupt and fallen, but we're actually blind to it ourselves. We can't see how bad we are.

That's why Jeremiah laments at the end of that verse, who can understand it? Who can truly understand the black hole that is at the depth of our hearts? We are unrighteous, and yet self-righteous.

All at the same time. Now, is this someone, if you knew that this was someone who is unrighteous and self-righteous, is this someone you would place your trust in?

Someone who not only hides their flaws from others, but actually also from themselves. And they're so good at it, that they end up believing their own lie. Such a person is not worthy of our trust, is it?

So really, is following our heart, trusting ourselves, being true to ourselves, really a mantra we want to live by? When our heart is anything but true?

[13:41] Well, in our first reading tonight, the psalmist gives us another more secure way. And that way is to put our trust, not in ourselves, but in God.

We can put our trust in Him, and we should, because firstly, He created us. He's the only one who knows our hearts through and through, and because He created us, He knows exactly what we need.

So if you look down at Psalm 139, or look up on the slide, the psalmist says this in verse 1, You have searched me, Lord, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise.

You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down. You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You, Lord, know it completely.

You hand me in behind and before, and You lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Nothing is hidden from God, because nothing can.

[14:45] He knows not only what we've done, but even the thoughts before we think it. And this is a great comfort, because we actually have someone who knows us better than we know ourselves.

We spend so much of our lives and our time trying to work out who we are, our identity, and what we're here for. But as Brian Rosner, who is the principal of Ridley, says in his book on personal identity, the key to self-discovery, to finding our identity, is actually not to know ourselves, but to be known by God.

And that's the title of his book, actually. It's a bit like I've observed this with children growing up. I find that the most self-assured and well-adjusted kids aren't the ones actually that spend their time as they get into their teenage years trying to work out who they are, searching out their identity. Rather, the most self-assured and well-adjusted kids are the ones who are loved by their parents. Parents who guide them and help them to grow up.

In other words, they're children who are deeply known by their parents. And that knowledge by their parents actually frees them from the anxiety of having to know who they are.

[16:07] And that's the same with God. To be known by God is actually a key to understanding ourselves. Because you've got someone who is external and loving and objective who can reveal that to you.

Now, you may feel like as you were growing up that you never got that opportunity from your parents. But we all actually have this opportunity now to be known by God when we enter into a relationship with Him.

When we allow His Word, what we've read in the Bible, to reveal that to us. As we read further in that Psalm in verse 13, God knows us because He's created us from even the very time we are in our wombs.

For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. I know that full well.

And then verse 16, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. So from the moment we're conceived to the very last day that we have on earth, God knows who we are and where we're headed.

[17:22] And so when we trust in God and not ourselves, we overcome that first problem with us. Even though we are finite, God isn't. Even though we are unreliable, God is dependable.

And so we can entrust our entire lives to Him. Well, what about the second problem? That we are fallen and self-deceiving. As Jeremiah says, Who can understand the deceitful heart?

Well, the answer again is God can. When the psalmist asks God to search His thoughts, it includes even the most deceitful of our thoughts. That's why at the very end of the psalm, the last two verses, He asks humbly, Search me, God, and know my heart.

Test me, and know my anxious thought. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. Well, God already knows the offensive ways in each of our hearts.

And He knows that actually it's beyond cure, beyond self-cure. But you know what? He doesn't then use it to put us to shame or to expose us to ridicule.

[18:37] Instead, because He loves us, He does what we're unable to do. He sends His Son to die for us, to take away the guilt and shame. So that when we trust in Him, when we trust in His Son, Jesus, we are saved and not shamed.

So that when we look at our hearts, we can admit the deceit that is in it, and yet find that we're not condemned, but instead us rescued by God.

And in our second reading tonight, that's the attitude that Paul has when he writes to the Christians in Philippi. So chapter 3 and verse 4, Paul writes, If someone thinks, someone else thinks they have reasons to be confident in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Now, at one level, this looks just like a CV of Paul's earthly achievements and credentials. You know, something that would impress the people of his day. But when we look at it carefully and study it, it's actually a very specific list.

[19:55] It's a list of the criteria which he's used in the past to justify his own righteousness before God. He wasn't just listing something to impress us.

Rather, he was showing how he thought he could impress God as well. But now, Paul realizes that it's worthless before God, and so he counts it as loss or as garbage.

So he says, But whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, for whose sake I have lost all things.

I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that is, which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

The key to what Paul is now saying here is that he's put his trust in God's Son, Jesus. He wants to be found in him. That's the phrase he uses.

[21 : 02] Not having a righteousness of his own, but a righteousness from God. And the way to have that is to put his faith in Christ. He knows, Paul knows, that his heart is beyond self-cure, and so he cannot trust in himself.

All the things about him in that list, which he thought he could rely on, none of them deal with the deceit in his heart. In fact, that list only increases his self-deceit because it makes him think he's righteous when he's not.

And that self-deceiving, self-righteousness meant he was deserving of death and punishment, but God provided the way out for him, the way everlasting, as the psalmist says, through faith in his Son, Jesus, the only one in this world whose life is perfect and true.

And that's why Paul finishes in verse 10 saying, I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow attain to the righteousness that is eternal life from the dead.

God. And so, if tonight you're here and you want to know more about this Jesus and the power of his resurrection, then, as I've invited people over the last two weeks, come along to our Christianity Explored course, which we're going to start in a couple of weeks.

[22 : 31] Devin will say more about that after this. But as I close tonight and for the series, let me just share with you what it means for me to trust God as a Christian.

Well, first, for me to trust God means that I entrust my thoughts and my judgments to God. It's not that I no longer have my own thoughts or my own judgment. Rather, I realize that God's thoughts and judgments, as revealed to us in the Bible, are weightier and more perfect than mine.

And so, I submit my thoughts to God. I ask Him to search my heart so that if my thoughts are different to His, I will align mine to His.

I will trust that God's thoughts are better than mine. Second, when I trust God, I also entrust my plans to Him. Now again, it doesn't mean I cannot have my own dreams or goals, but I place them in submission to God's plan and will so that His plans take precedence over mine.

And if it happens to take a, my life happens to take a different turn and I have more suffering and difficulty than I expected or want, then I trust that I'm still in God's plan and therefore, it will go well with me even if I cannot understand it fully.

[23 : 55] And thirdly, for me to trust God means I trust in His Son for my righteousness. I rely on Jesus' death in order to be forgiven by God, in order for me to have a relationship with Him.

That is, I trust in not what I've done or I can do, but what Jesus has done. That will be my defense when I go and see the Lord on the last day.

And that is the defense that I will have against my own deceitful heart. As Paul says, I want to be found in Jesus, not having a righteousness of my own, but the righteousness of God.

And friends, to live like that brings great peace and assurance when we trust God like that. Because I'm no longer filled with this fear or anxiety or having to depend on my own strength and my success.

You know, always wondering, if I make the wrong move in life, you know, my whole life will crumble because of it. Instead, I'm assured that nothing or no one can undermine God's plan for me.

[25 : 06] Rather, it is secure because of what Jesus has already done by his death. It is secure because God loves me and he's watching over my life.

So as we end this three-week series, let me make a final appeal. Will you put your trust in God and in his son? Will you entrust your thoughts, your plans and your righteousness to him?

And if you're willing to do that right now, tonight, then please, as we pray, pray this with me. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for loving and creating us.

Thank you that you know our weakness and our inability to save ourselves. Thank you for sending your son Jesus instead to suffer the penalty for what we've done.

I now commit my life to you in Christ. Help me to trust you. Search my heart and my thoughts and rescue me from my own wicked ways.

[26 : 13] Accept me into your presence because of Christ's righteousness. In his name I pray, we pray. Amen.