

The Message for March 4, 2012
Romans 4:13-25
Restoring Relationships Through Trust
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“Burn me once, shame on you. Burn me twice, shame on me.” Ever hear that? It reminds me of the Peanuts cartoon with Charlie Brown and Lucy. Check it out...

(Show this video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5XMT0NrB4>).

Trust is the foundation for every healthy relationship. Without trust there is no relationship. And once a promise is broken – once burned – it’s difficult to trust again. How trusting are you? What do you do when trust is broken?

I googled the words “**broken trust**” and I got 9.5 million hits. There is a lot of broken trust in the world. Here are two quotes I found:

* *It takes years to build up trust, but it only takes suspicion, not even proof, to destroy it.*

* *Trust is like a mirror, once **BROKEN** you can never look at it the same again.*

I googled the words “**broken trust restored**” and got a million hits. 9.5 million hits on “broken trust” but only a million hits on “broken trust restored.” That suggests to me that less than 10% of our broken trust ever gets restored. That says there is a lot pain and hurt and frustration and unresolved conflict in people’s lives. How do we learn to trust again?

We’ve probably all experienced broken trust in our relationships in one form or another, at one time or another, in one degree or another. Many of you have shared your broken trust stories with me. Thank you for trusting me with your story. Like Charlie Brown, many of us may feel like the football has been pulled away too many times, leaving us frustrated and flat on our backs.

That’s what makes the story of Abram and Sarai in the Old Testament so remarkable. They wanted children, but were unable to have them. Some couples suffer that pain today with bitterness and sadness in their hearts.

I imagine Abram at 99 and Sarai at 90 had given up any hope of having children. But, as all good stories go, God makes an outrageous promise to them. They would not only have a child, but God would make them “exceedingly fruitful.”

God promised that they would be the ancestors of many nations. Would you trust a promise like that?

Even more outrageous is that Abram and Sarai did trust God. They trusted God and God’s promise. Trust can change everything. It changed their names from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. They trusted God. And God delivered.

That brings us to our reading from Romans. Paul says that our relationship with God is a matter of trust – trusting in God’s promise of love in Christ Jesus. It’s a love that will never let us go. Both *promise* and *trust* are gifts from God. Both *promise* and *trust* are needed for restoring our broken relationships with God and one another.

(Read Text Romans 4:13-25)

Paul is telling us that Jesus is God’s living promise of love and forgiveness for us. Jesus fulfills God’s promise. And Jesus can help us fulfill our promises too. When we fail to keep our promises, Jesus can help us restore those broken relationships. Maybe not to the point they were before but hopefully to the point where we can forgive ourselves and each other and move on. Whatever moving on looks like.

The cross of Christ is God’s proclamation that you and I are loved. That you and I are forgiven. That you and I can dare to trust in God’s promise for life. That you and I can be the new creation we were created to be. In Christ Jesus, we are set free – free from sin, free from guilt and shame, free to trust, free to live again everyday.

We can forgive one another when promises are broken because we have been forgiven.

Kathy just couldn’t forgive her husband Don. He messed up in a big way, which just about cost them their marriage of 22 years. Don begged for her forgiveness. She said she forgave him. They went for counseling. They tried to work things out but it proved much harder than they thought.

One day Kathy took their 7 year-old daughter to swimming lessons. The lessons were not going well because their daughter was deathly afraid of the water. The instructor tried to get the little girl to float on her back. “Honey,” she said, “you have to relax, and trust that the water will hold you up. It will. I promise.” But the little girl was too afraid. She struggled and fought it, and would sink every time.

As Kathy watched, her mind drifted to Don, and she became frustrated at her own lack of trust. It dawned on her that she was afraid to get hurt again. Her pride would not let her trust again. Her pride would not let her forgive. Her pride would not let her move on. She realized that if she didn’t change, their relationship would sink.

Kathy prayed, asking God to forgive her and take away her pride and give her the strength to do what she could not do for herself. As tears ran down her cheeks, she sensed God’s loving embrace and heard God’s voice whisper to her, “You can trust me.” And she did.

Things didn’t change overnight, but slowly Kathy’s heart changed. She leaned on God’s love, fought less, and trusted more, and kept her pride in check. The more she trusted Don, the more trustworthy he became. It wasn’t all fixed. It wasn’t all perfect. They still had their days. But the broken trust was slowly being restored.

How does your broken trust get restored?

When it comes to your relationship with God consider this story.

A little girl and her father were crossing a bridge. The father was worried so he said to his daughter, "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river."

The little girl said, "No, Daddy. You hold my hand."

"What's the difference?" Asked the puzzled father.

"There's a big difference," the girl replied. "If I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are, I may let go of your hand. But if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go."

In every healthy relationship, in every life-giving relationship, the essence of trust is not in its bind, but in its bond. My hope is that you will find a way to hold the hand of the person who loves you rather than expecting them to hold yours.

As we walk through life over one bridge after another, may we trust that God will never ever let go of our hand. Amen.