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But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. Jeremiah 17:7

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“Who do you trust?” We are in a year of another Federal election, with the next election due on or before 21 May. At this time, and as we move forward, politicians of various persuasions will be asking us to ‘trust in them’ in some way. As part of their messaging, they will also be trying to say in some way why you should not trust politicians of a different persuasions. Some of this will be obvious – through what is now known as ‘scare campaigns’ (and some of these advertisements have already appeared through some of what are known as ‘minor parties’). Other ‘scare campaigns’ will not be so obvious, as they take subtle ‘digs’ and ‘sips’ at one another. Of course, as citizens of Australia, we will want to elect people to parliament in whom we can ‘trust’.

But what does it mean to ‘trust someone’? One of the mistakes we can make is to conflate ‘trust’ with a sense of ‘friendship’. We make mistakenly think we have to ‘like someone’ in order to ‘trust them’. If you have a toothache, or if you are ill, or if you need a computer fixed, you will want to go to someone you know who will ‘get the job done right.’ Here, the ‘trust’ is not in the ‘likeability’ of a person, but in their ‘ability’. Yes, there is a correlation between ‘liking someone’, and ‘trusting their ability. In order to ‘trust someone’, their needs to be a sense of ‘confidence’ in them also. But ‘trust’ is not always about ‘friendship’.

What does the Bible say about trusting others? Trust is foundational to human relationship, but not all people are trustworthy. So how can we know whom to trust and with what? The Bible gives us advice.

First, we must first acknowledge that all humans are sinful (Romans 3:23). More than likely our trust will be broken at some point in several relationships. Perhaps even more sobering to realise, we will hurt others in our relationships and prove ourselves unworthy of their complete trust. But this is not a reason to avoid relationship or decide to never trust. Rather, this understanding helps us reset our expectations.

Second, Psalm 118:8–9 says, "It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in people. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes." Proverbs 3:5–6 says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." When our trust is first in God—not in others or in ourselves—we are free to trust others. An understanding that God is sovereign and that He works on behalf of His children (Romans 8:28–29) removes much of our fear in relating to others. We know that even if we are betrayed, God will never forsake us. Hebrews 13 gives some instructions for Christian living. In part, it reminds followers of Jesus that God has said, "'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can anyone do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Trusting others is not always natural or easy. We are wise to take time to get to know others and not heedlessly give them our complete trust. Jesus did this when He withdrew from the crowds at times (John 2:23–25; 6:15). But sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between being wise about our trust and being overly self-protective out of past hurt or fear. If we find ourselves reluctant to trust anyone to any extent, we are wise to do some introspection and, if necessary, ask God to heal our wounded hearts.

The Bible gives advice about trusting others after we've been hurt. Trusting God is the first, most important step. When we know that, no matter what another person do to us, God will always be there, faithful and true and trustworthy. Reading God's Word with attention to the ways He describes His own faithfulness and trustworthiness will be helpful to us. Prayer is vital. Particularly if we feel like God has betrayed our trust by allowing us to be hurt, we need to be reminded of His truth and comforted by His love.

The second step after being hurt by trusting others is forgiveness. As Jesus told Peter, if a fellow Christian sins against you 'seventy-seven times', and comes back asking for forgiveness, we should forgive (Matthew 18:21–22). The point is not that we should not forgive the seventy-eighth offense, but that we should be people who seek to continually forgive. If a person repeatedly betrays our trust unrepentantly, we do not have to continue to associate with them, or to make ourselves vulnerable to them. Yet we also should not harbor bitterness or allow that person's actions to impede our relationships with other people (Hebrews 12:14–15; I Corinthians 13:5). If the person is truly repentant—even when it involves betrayal and exploited trust—we are to seek to fully forgive and even pursue restoration and a rebuilding of trust over time. As part of Jesus' lesson on forgiveness, He told the parable of a servant who was forgiven a huge debt and then went out and immediately became judgmental and cruel with another servant who owed him a small debt. The heartless actions of the unmerciful servant should remind us of our need to forgive. We have been forgiven by God a much greater debt than anything other people owe to us (Matthew 18:23–35).

Finally, it bears repeating that, as we learn to trust others, we should continually strive to be trustworthy ourselves. This is good and godly. We should be a safe place for others (Proverbs 3:29) and keep confidences (Proverbs 11:13). We should be known for our honesty (Proverbs 12:22) and a willingness to suffer with a friend (Proverbs 17:17). Everyone goes through hard times, and we need our friendships even more when the sun is not shining. At times, we all let others down. But we should always strive to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (Eph.4:1–2).

"Who do you trust?" In our Bible Reading for today we hear Jeremiah say "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him." The word 'but' here is important. It implies a context. Jeremiah 17 is among Jeremiah's oracles of judgment against Judah. It probably comes from a time between the failure of the religious reforms under king Josiah (see 2 Kings 22-23) and the attacks on Jerusalem by Babylon, the beginning of the exile. Jeremiah had seemingly supported Josiah's reforms, remaining silent through most of that king's reign. But now he has to deal with the apparent failure of Josiah's reforms. Judgment has come after all.

In the verses prior to our Bible Reading this day (Lectionary Reading is Jeremiah 17:5-10), we hear these words in Jeremiah 17:1: ""The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved on the tablet of their heart". When people of that era wanted to assure the permanence of a message, they engraved it on stone with an iron stylus. An iron stylus with a diamond point was the premier instrument for engraving, making it possible to inscribe the letters deeply and permanently.

There are a number of instances in the Old Testament that speak of something engraved. God commanded Israel to engrave the names of the sons of Israel on twelve stones, one for each of the sons of Israel (Exodus 28:9, 11, 21)—and to engrave the words, "HOLY TO THE LORD" on a rosette of pure gold (Exodus 28:36). God

engraved the law on the tablets of the covenant that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:16). In each of those instances, that which was engraved was sacred—intended to bring to remembrance the covenant relationship that Israel enjoyed with God. But now that which is engraved is “the sin of Judah”—and it is engraved, not on stone, but “on the tablet of their heart” (v. 1a) ---the innermost part of their being. We also find that phrase, “on the tablet of your heart,” in the book of Proverbs, where God commanded Israel to engrave loyalty and faithfulness—and God’s commandments—“on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3; 7:3). If the people of Judah had done that, there would be no record of their sins engraved upon their hearts.

In verse 5, we read, “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals.” Now we read, “Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.” “For that person shall be as a tree planted by the waters, who spreads out its roots by the river” (v. 8a). The tree planted alongside water is a metaphor for a life lived under excellent conditions. Plants need water to survive. A tree planted alongside a body of water will always be able to find the water it needs to grow and produce fruit.

In Jeremiah’s description here, the antithesis to the tree that has deep roots is the “desert shrub” that suffers in a wasteland where there is not enough rain and no stream nearby. The shrub inhabits “the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.” (v. 6) Who is the person that is likened to the desert shrub? It’s the one who places trust in people rather than the LORD. It is those “who make mere flesh their strength.” (v. 5) The implication is clear—those who rely on human resources and wisdom are like a shrub with roots that reach nowhere. The Prophet has a pessimistic view of human nature apart from covenant relationship with God: “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?” (v. 9)

As one Christian writer has said, the question of where we place our trust is a matter of life and death. Jeremiah says, "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. This is the blessed person of the first Psalm - the person whose food is the Word of GOD, whose confidence is in the Lord alone - the perfect example of which is our Lord Himself. How little do we, who know Him as our Saviour, practically follow Him in this! When all goes well it is easy to deceive ourselves and think that we are trusting in the Lord, when in reality we are resting on an arm of flesh. The time of trial proves where our confidence really is. "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small." (Proverbs 24:10)

The prophet Jeremiah points to God as the source of blessings. We are told that the blessed life is found in the person who trusts in the LORD, whose hope and confidence are in Him. Therefore, strictly speaking, ‘blessing’ is a Christian word for it is the outcome of a deep personal relationship with a personal God. The coming of Jesus changed the definition of blessings and pointed to true blessings. While God may graciously bless with wealth and health, the New Testament almost never mentions material abundance as blessings in themselves. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20-23) it is the poor, the down-trodden, and the persecuted who are blessed!

But the greatest description of blessings that God desires for us above all, is in Christ. We read that in the great letter of Paul in Ephesians 1 which spells out the extraordinary blessings that every believer possesses in Christ: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the*

*world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us.”*

Jesus is our ultimate blessing. Jesus is also the key to the fulfilment of every blessing promised by God. We find complete satisfaction and eternal security in Him, and therefore are able to rejoice in every situation. This is the blessedness that beats all other blessings.

In the most straightforward sense, this snippet from Jeremiah 17 is all about trust. Bad Trust. Good Trust. What is it that you look for protection and provision in your life? What do you rely for wisdom and guidance? How do you seek joy? Where do you find your strengths? Where do you turn when troubles arise in your life? Do you turn to God? Or, do you turn to some mere thing? (Note also Gospel regarding Jesus meeting us in the ‘low places’).

It happens all the time. People are disappointed by the behaviour they witness in God's Church, and so they leave. They may go to another congregation or another denomination, or they may leave the Christian Church entirely. Sadly, in many of these cases, their trust which had been invested in people may lead them to wander from the Gospel of Christ. How could anyone not trust in the LORD when He has done so much? Indeed, He has done everything, and more. From beginning to end, He is the Author and Perfecter of your faith. When you were yet enemies of God, He sent His Son in human flesh to redeem you. He alone lived and suffered and died and rose. The only help He had from human flesh was the sins that all humankind laid upon His shoulders. But He alone strived and laboured for your salvation. He atoned for your guilt and satisfied the wrath of God.

In the New Testament, we hear the language of flourishing with the enhanced vocabulary of the covenant of grace through Jesus Christ. Again, the images are often botanical: vine & branches, the good tree that bears good fruit, the seed sown in good soil. Jesus said that the disciple who abides in him will bear much fruit, to the glory of the Father. “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

Later in Jeremiah 17 we read (Jer.17:13-14: *“O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water. Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise.”*

There is only one way to quench our deepest thirst, and that is through the water fountain that is the Lord. There is only one source of healing, only one source of rescue, only one sources of strength: and that is God Himself. So if we turn away from Him, if we praise and depend on anything else, we will lose everything we think we are gaining, and thus will be put to shame. But if we instead come to Him for healing – if we cry out to Him for salvation, looking only to His offer of Christ for our confidence and joy – then we shall be truly healed. Then we shall be truly saved. Then we shall fulfill His great purposes for us, His people.

*O Lord, Maker of heaven and earth, You have also made us and know everything about our sometimes fragmented lives. You know us top to bottom, inside and out. May we trust You completely to guide us through our upside-down world. Amen.*