

In 1994 I went to Spokane as a youth pastor—good size group, but they were very disconnected  
It became clear that we needed to learn to work together  
I arranged for a challenge course  
    Early on they were blindfolded and had to be led by someone else  
    Shortly after beginning—the leader stopped the group because we were unsafe  
    We didn't trust that the person leading knew where they were going  
    Essential to community is trust—we had to build trust  
Throughout the day, the exercises increasingly demanded that we trust each other  
    While we struggled, we learned that we could trust each other

In general, we struggle because we don't trust  
    Before entering a new group or community, we want to know if it is safe and trustworthy  
    We steel ourselves against not being trusted

It's no wonder that we struggle with trust  
    Trust was broken in the Garden of Eden  
    A place of beauty and bounty was given to them to enjoy  
    God said not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—Genesis 2:17  
    By eating the fruit from that tree, they broke trust with God  
    As a result, they were sent from the garden and a flaming sword placed at the entrance  
Ever since, humanity has struggled with trust

But rather than re-building trust, we yearn for safety and guarantees  
    We expect the world to provide it for us  
    Laws are written, we demand it from our communities and churches  
    It is as if we truly believe, we are capable of creating a safe world

Can you trust me? I want to say yes—I am trustworthy  
    But truth is, that I cannot guarantee that I will never say or do anything that hurts another  
    Life happens and things are hurled our way

Upset that life doesn't work as we expect, we turn our frustration and blame God  
    For allowing it in the first place or not stopping it

Twice this summer I've watched the movie, *"The Shack"*  
    A man's daughter is abducted from their campsite, leaving him anguished, depressed, angry at God  
    In a personification of his spiritual journey, he meets God, Jesus, and the Spirit in a shack  
    They walk with him through the hard places in his life, bringing healing and restoration of hope  
    It is a powerful visualization of his encounter with tragedy and learning to see beyond it  
    He discovers places where his thinking was stuck and misdirected  
    He learns to trust the goodness of God and to see how much God loves him  
    I encourage you to watch it—first for the story—then again for the God truths in the story

The truth is that bad stuff does happen in life  
    God doesn't cause it or give it to us and God doesn't think we need it to learn some lesson  
    We live in a broken world and bad stuff happens  
    The miracle is that God can transform and bring healing, creating good out of the ashes  
    With God, we can face the pain head on and find way forward—find hope again

Truth is that we cannot create a good and safe world by external forces  
But we aren't helpless victims, stuck with the pain and brokenness

Way forward is to learn to trust God—that God loves us deeply and knows our struggles  
That God will walk with us and never leave us, even in our darkest hour  
That nothing I do can or will drive God away  
That God will somehow use the difficulty to create good and new life in us

But it isn't that learning to trust means all will be clear and good—that we will know ahead of time it's ok  
Our trust doesn't bring final clarity to life or make everything easy  
In fact, like Jesus in his darkest hour on the cross, we learn to say,  
"Into your hands I commit my spirit" Luke 23:46

Part of our problem is that we have replaced trust with belief and ultimately our doctrinal truths  
The church has too long emphasized belief in God—but belief is of little use to us in dark times  
We can't think our way out of the pain and confusion—no wonder we get stuck  
Even when Scripture tells us to have faith—it gets lost in something that isn't intimate  
Faith—is it faith as in our beliefs or community of faith / Or is it something else?  
The Message often translates "faith" as "trust"—seeing that as more accessible to us  
While faith can mean trust—we often hear it as something I'm to believe in  
What we need is the "withness" of God—one who walks with us and grieves with us  
Leaning into that "withness" and trusting that God won't leave allows for a new movement  
We move into conversation with God—asking questions, waiting for knowings  
We learn that there is mystery and places my thinking has created false pathways  
We learn to trust the journey and the winding way it unfolds within my spirit  
We learn that even in the hard times, God is trustworthy and will see me through

As we learn to trust God again, we can re-enter the place of intimacy with God  
Humanity can again enter into the Garden of Eden—walking daily with God  
We can go back past the flaming sword set at the entrance to the garden  
George Fox expresses this in his Journal...

*"Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocence, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell... But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall." (Pg. 27)*