

### “Spiritual Trust Fall”

*“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:11-12).*

Are you familiar with the trust fall exercise? You know that act of falling backwards into another’s arms. It was an activity that often got used for community building. You might have been part of a group, team, camp, organization, etc. that encouraged this exercise. And a primary goal of this activity was to build a sense of trust that was supposed to carry over into daily life. However, I’m not sure how effective it always was.

From my experiences of going through this activity, I remember that it revealed our struggle to trust more than it built trust. For example, many times, the individuals doing the falling would put their leg back to try and catch themselves just before the spotter would. Other times, those falling would try and look over their shoulder to see what was coming. It seemed like even though they knew someone was there, they weren’t convinced that the spotter had what it took to catch them. And certainly, if the person falling had a choice the distance picked was the shortest possible to shrink the amount of trust needed in the exercise. To me, that trust fall exercise is a clear reminder of something we all know well, trust is a hard thing to build.

The fact of the matter is that our trust issues that this simple exercise reveals is only the surface of the much deeper trust issues we have. I don’t think it’s a stretch to see that trust exercise as an illustration for the Christian life. The journey of faith for the believer is in a sense a spiritual trust fall. And it’s not just those major crisis moments either where this is true. Certainly, we can recognize the struggle to trust when intense suffering and encounters with death come, but this struggle is also true in the daily grind of life when things seem less overwhelming and more in our control.

So, honestly, every day could be thought of as a spiritual trust fall. We’re either falling into the arms of Jesus or trying to prop ourselves up with our own means. Just like what we observe in that physical trust fall, we see in ourselves with this spiritual trust fall. We try to break our fall with idols – pride, money and possessions, position and influence, sexual pleasure outside of God’s design, etc. – that give us the sense of a safety net that really covers up the pit into which we’re falling.

And when it’s not idols that we turn to in our fall, we’re looking backwards because we’re not convinced that our Lord has what it takes to catch us. Whatever struggle that we’re enduring makes God feel so small and so far away, that there’s no way He can do what He promises. God must listen to our plan and design for how to catch us, otherwise were convinced He’ll drop us. And this belief that we can help God do His job covers up the faithfulness of our God who can do far more than we ask.

We have trust issues, especially with God. And this weekend’s second reading from 1 Timothy chapter six provides helpful insight into our spiritual trust fall and our trust issues. As many of you know, Paul wrote this letter to a young pastor, named Timothy, to encourage and guide him in his service. However, Paul’s words to Timothy in our passage this weekend also apply to every Christian.

Verses eleven and twelve of this reading especially deliver some powerful guidance for the Christian life and its daily, spiritual trust fall. **“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses”** (1 Timothy 6:11-12). Three action words stand out in these verses, pursue, fight and take hold which direct our lives and their journey of faith.

Paul’s encouragement to pursue comes in light of fleeing things that are harmful to the believer’s trust being built in the Lord. Paul recognizes a dangerous craving in this life that flows from the desire to

become rich and the love of money. The attitude that trusts in riches and wealth above everything else is detrimental to faith. Riches and wealth aren't the problem but when we prioritize them above all, this shoves God out of His rightful place in our hearts and lives. Our hope is placed on the uncertainty of riches instead of on the certainty of God.

For this reason, Paul urges a pursuit of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness and gentleness. And our pursuit begins and ends with Jesus who lived this out perfectly in our place clinging to the Word of God over and against the tempting treasures of this world. Jesus' perfect life pursuing these very things and His perfect death pay for our failures to live this way and create in us new hearts that the Holy Spirit guides to seek these fruits of faith. Jesus won for us forgiveness, mercy and grace so that our lives might be shaped by His Word pursuing the trust building qualities Paul mentions in our text. In terms of our spiritual trust fall, our pursuit is by Jesus' forgiveness falling away from our sinful cravings and into His satisfying Word.

The next action Paul encourages is to fight. In our day and age, we often look at fighting as putting up our "dukes" and going on the offensive. Yet, the good fight of faith isn't Biblically depicted as going out to gain more territory or position by force, but rather enduring in faith where God has put us. The fight isn't something that really needs to be sought out, the devil consistently brings it to those who cling to Christ. The good fight of faith is a daily battle with sin and Satan as they constantly seek to lead us away from Jesus.

Once again, our fight begins and ends with Jesus. He's involved us in His fight as He died to forgive us praying on the cross for sinners in that moment and for us too, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Through His victorious resurrection we stand forgiven and fight to stay there based on Jesus' merits alone and nothing else. We fight to remain under the protection of our baptismal identity in the Triune God – a gift that Jesus died and rose for all to have – and not behind our sin-riddled familial, vocational, sexual, political or even denominational identities. In terms of our spiritual trust fall, our fight is by Jesus' mercy falling away from sin's darkness and into His marvelous light.

The last action Paul encourages is to take hold. And Paul has something very specific in his mind for the believer to take hold of, eternal life. You see, eternal life is much more concrete than we often think. It's not just a destination after this life is over. It's not merely a location somewhere up in sky where we imagine heaven to be. It's a present gift of a relationship with Jesus who has defeated death and is the source of life eternal.

So, like our pursuit and our fight, our taking hold of eternal life begins and ends with Jesus. He graciously puts Himself into our lives even into our hands and mouths as we take and eat and drink of His body and blood regularly. By word, wafer and wine, Jesus delivers to us forgiveness, life and salvation. He has promised to be with us which He fulfills right now through Word and Sacrament and which He will fulfill when our last hour comes as He leads us, like Lazarus in our Gospel reading, to fall into the arms of His angels to carry us to our eternal home with Him. Until He returns or calls us home, our spiritual trust fall by Jesus' grace is falling away from our grasp on temporal things and into His grasp with eternal things.

Dear friends in Christ, while our trust issues aren't going to go away overnight, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ isn't going anywhere either. He is here for you, today, tomorrow and always. He is here to strengthen and enable you to pursue, fight for and take hold of Him, to forgive you when you mess it up and to finish the good work He has begun in you. He's got you! By His forgiveness, mercy and grace, day after day you'll be falling into Jesus' capable, safe and secure arms. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan