

Welcome to the 3rd of a 4-part series on family dynamics called “The Family Circus” which was also the name of what might be the world’s worst comic strip.

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visual of Family Circus comic strip

<http://bleedingedgemachine.logspot.com/2012/12/gradient-descent.html>

And right now all the kids in the audience are like “What’s a comic strip?” and we’re all like “Well, come sit on grandpa’s knee and I’ll tell you about a time

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Montage of newspapers

where we used to learn what was happening in the world by reading some giant papers that were made out of trees that were delivered to our doorstep every morning before dawn and were filled with all the things that were happening in the world... yesterday.

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Montage of Sunday cartoons

“And those everyday tree papers had funny hand-drawn pictures in them that made us all smile and forget the fact that the internet hadn’t been invented yet.”

So, again, welcome to the Family Circus series.

The first week in our series, Dustyn Vanzant talked about all the ways family members seek to escape being present and in real relationship with each other and ways we can take that on.

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heritagecc.com / heritage app

Last week, Robin Vanzant on the topic of anxiety, and its increasing hold on our family members and if you missed either of those talks, you can catch up with your family at heritagecc.org or on the heritage app.

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Trust

And now, (tonight), as a husband of 23 years and a father of three girls ages 17, 14 and 11, I get to come before you as a humble man to talk about... Trust.

Our time here isn’t going to be so much about establishing the trustworthy nature of God (hopefully we can all at least casually agree on that one), nor a theological deep dive into some Old Testament minor prophet who trusted Yahweh through a prolonged and agonizing experience only to emerge from all that with a word on trust that rings out over the millennia.

Nope. This is the Family Circus! We're getting real about what it is like, out there in the wild, for families trying to follow Jesus and raise kids who follow Jesus. So to give you a peek into what the level of trust is like in our house a lot of days, and to set the tone for our time today, I came across this instructional video:

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y4vbS6c4p4>

Our time together today is going to be less about teaching or instruction and instead is instead just going to be a giant therapy session for me.

So, let's start with this question: What *is* Trust, really?

We all, from our first days, intrinsically grasp the *implications* of Trust.

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Newborn baby

The human newborn is unique among all other mammals in that for the first 1000 hours of life outside the womb, we are utterly and completely helpless, relying on our parents for <literally> everything.

Relying on our parents for everything.

Sidenote, some of you might be thinking, eh, the teenager in my basement kind of still matches that description. Another topic for another day.

But if you watch those adorable animal videos on YouTube, from the cute little lamb to the gangly giraffe baby

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A48romCt8Jg>

to a little puppy dog, for as vulnerable as those babies are, they're still capable of doing a lot more than a human newborn.

As a child, we find that we *have* to trust our parents with literally all of our emotional and physical needs, from trusting that food will show up when we are hungry to trusting that we'll be kept safe and free from harm.

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Start with the word "Trust" then bring in the circle/slash

Right away, right from the beginning, from our earliest understanding of trust, you can see how the stage is being set, and see the potential for Trust to be violated and in doing so influence one's worldview if you grew up in a place where you went hungry, or home wasn't a place where you were safe and free from harm.

Trust is precious. Because trust is fragile. It is delicate. It can be grievously hurt. And what took a lifetime to build can be undone in a moment.

Fundamentally, we understand the implications of trust, and even as children, if we couldn't define what trust was, we knew what it felt like.

Here's something interesting to think about: how is *trusting* someone different than *depending* on them or simply *relying* on them?

Because it is different. But HOW, exactly?

As it turns out, volumes have been written on the nuances and implications of trust. To this day, philosophers continue to debate what trust is and how it works.

I came across this definition of trust from Sanford Goldberg, a philosophy professor from Northwestern University

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<https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/trust-project/videos/goldberg-ep-1.aspx>

who said that trust is different from dependence or reliance, because there is more than just a feeling of disappointment when your trust is violated:

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Trust gives rise to a sense of betrayal when it is violated.

Trust gives rise to a sense of *betrayal* when it is violated. And betrayal is a really heavy, heavy word.

It turns out, as a species, we don't like being betrayed very much. In fact, we hate it. It is pretty much the worst thing.

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Build visuals for the institutions that follow

We hate it so much we created things like **governments, and laws, and rules, and armies, and police, and money, and grades** all to fundamentally solve for the lack of trust.

You see, because if we could fully and completely trust each other, we wouldn't need any of those institutions.

I remember as a kid, standing in line at the grocery store with my mom, ogling the candy that is somehow always perfectly positioned at kid height and thinking "Here's a theory: What if I could just *take* the candy? Why do we need money to get things we need? We need these groceries. And I *need* this candy bar. What if we could all just take the things we need, as we need them?"

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Grocery store candy aisle

I took this concept pretty far in my young mind. Food, clothes, stuff like toys, possessions... if I have some and you need some, or you have some and I need some, why do we need money to get in the way of this transaction?

After all, in my family, I didn't use money to buy a meal at dinnertime. I didn't have to pony up to rent my room every night, or pay my mom to pick me up from wrestling practice.

Although I didn't realize it at the time that I was pushing deep into areas of economic theory, anthropology, behavioral science, psychology, faith and who knows what else.

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A Zagnut bar

All of that, disguised as a Zagnut bar in the grocery store checkout lane.

Without knowing it, the central idea that I was kicking around in my 8-year old brain was this issue of Trust.

Trust is one of the Big Words. Like Love. Faith. Hope. Belief.

The Big Words all live in the same neighborhood, and when they get together sometimes it is hard to tell who is who. Like, from a distance, Faith looks a lot like Hope. Belief looks a lot like Faith. Trust looks a lot like Love.

If you know me, at all, you know that Love is the only reason I'm still in the Christ Following Game. I find the politics and power dynamics of western Christianity honestly pretty repellent.

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Luke 10:27

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your strength and with all of your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And if you know me, you know that while I can conceptually align with loving the lord my God with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my strength, and all my mind, I am tortured with the mandate to love my neighbor as myself.

Because under my own power, I am not a huge fan of people. Y'all are messy. Inconsistent. Irrational. Prone to betrayal.

So, what's the difference between loving someone... and trusting someone?

How are they the same... and how are they different?

In society, Trust is a trending right now. Like, in the Big Words neighborhood, Trust is throwing the best parties. Everyone wants to be friends with Trust.

How do I know? Brene Brown told me. Right now, all the men are looking at me like “Brene who?” and all the women are like, “Oh Brene Brown. Is there anything she can’t do?”

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<https://brenebrown.com/videos/anatomy-trust-video/>

Brené Brown is a research professor who has done Ted talks, written books, and spoken at length on issues of trust, vulnerability, authenticity and shame, and did a great video called “The anatomy of trust” that is well worth watching.

One of the things she says that I love and will come back to is this:

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Trust is built in very small moments.

“Trust is built in very small moments.”

In so many areas of our lives, the topic of Trust keeps coming up.

Corporations want to be friends with Trust because it makes it easier to do business when you trust the other party and when the other party trusts you. Not trusting is inefficient, and expensive.

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Data breach visual

And there, trust is under attack, eroded thru data breaches, and password hacks, and corporate scandals, and corruption.

Governments want to be friends with Trust because it is easier to govern people when those people trust you.

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Political riot/protest visual

And there too, trust is under attack, eroded through toxic tribalism, and fake news, and real news, and human rights violations, and moral failings of people we have venerated to maintain the public trust.

In your home right now, you might not realize it, but Trust is the most important currency you have as a family.

Why is that?

Because in our families, our job as parents is to prepare our kids to one day be adults, and live their own lives, and to equip them in their faith to be able to handle the hard business of going out and being Jesus in the world to other people.

And that requires young people to grow and stretch and try... and sometimes fail.

And that vulnerable space requires parents and children to Trust each other.

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Mylin Family Trust Video

These days we have together as parents and children, all under one roof, are precious and they are numbered.

And as we fly through these days, as I fly through these days, often at breakneck speed, it's easy to prioritize the outcome over the journey. The accomplishment over the attempt.

The summer before I went college, my parents and I attended an orientation weekend at the school I was going to be going to. They gathered all of us into the gym, and the Dean of Students addressed families about how to make the transition into college life easier.

She said two things I remember to this day:

- 1) A surprisingly large number of students arrive at college every year with their umbilical cord in hand, looking for a place to plug it in, and
- 2) Any time we do something for our kids that they can do for themselves we rob them of their ability to be a person.

So, when it comes to trust as the currency for families, when it comes to parents trusting kids and kids trusting parents, and all of us trusting God to help us figure out the path, I am here to say that while Trust and Love are two sides of the same coin, as hard as Love is, Trust can be even harder.

Why is that?

In the 1 Cor 13 definition of Love, Love famously keeps no record of wrongs.

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1 Corinthians 13: 4-6 (NIV)

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

But Trust does.

There is a reason we sing a song called Reckless Love, and don't sing a song called Reckless Trust.

And that reason might be because we do not like to be betrayed.

Nor do we like to feel like we are betraying God by not doing we implied we would do.

Giving trust away recklessly is an invitation for hurt.

In the Brene Brown video on trust, she references an author named Charles Feltmen who wrote the Thin Book of Trust, and who defines trust as *choosing to make something that is valuable to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else*.

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Trust is choosing to make something that is valuable to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else.

Make that which is valuable, vulnerable.

Guarding your valuables with vulnerability.

It makes no sense. Yet it works. Which is a pretty good indication that the idea of trust came from God, who in addition to being the King of Kings is also the King of Paradoxes.

And so, with all that as a backdrop, I want to use a single Bible verse as the source code for an entire theory about building and rebuilding trust in our families.

Another sidebar: Do you know how ridiculous it is to use one verse of the Bible, with no historical or revelatory context as a basis to prove or disprove *anything*? Do you know how dangerous that is?

I'll tell you: It's bananas. It is lunacy. It is not a good idea. So why am I doing it?

So they never ask me to do this again.

This verse is Luke 16:10, and is part of one of the oddest parables in the Bible, a story about a manager who has not doing a good job of looking after the resources of his master and is about to get canned, so he makes the problem apparently worse by telling all the people who owe his master to basically cook the books so they now would owe his master less than it appears... and the master ends up commending the manager for, I don't know, reasons.

The point here is that after Jesus lays out this story about resource management, he says:

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Luke 16:10 (NIV)

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.”

These days we hear about Big things, like Big Data and Big Pharma and Big Oil.

I want to talk about Little Trust.

Little Trust is the smallest possible increment of Trust you can imagine. It is the honoring of the tiniest obligation. The keeping of a minor confidence. The showing up for someone, or putting their need in a slightly vulnerable moment above your own.

Imagine that every time you did the thing you implied you were going to do for someone, that person put a gold coin in a jar that was directly attached to your heart.

It’s a weird visual, just go with me here.

Every time you decided not to do what you implied you would do, a gold coin was taken out of that jar.

And in both cases, there was no discussion. It was just the action itself. No promotional “Hey, look what I did!” or explanations of “Well, you see, here’s what happened.” In the words of the immortal prophet:

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5SNAIuOj6U>

Do, or do not. There is no try.

That storing up of trust coins is the currency of family, of friendship, of intimacy on every level.

Trust inherently involves risk. That’s what the stakes are.

If you trust, you risk being betrayed.

And if you are trusted, you risk being a betrayer.

That's why it matters. That's why it is so important to do Little Trust well.

And the best place to learn to do that is in the home life we are tending to every day. A home where we celebrate Love and actively build Trust.

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***Actively* build trust**

Did you catch that? *Actively* build trust. Intentionally, consistently, we view our encounters with these people we love through the lens not of accomplishing tasks or crossing-off to-do lists but of building trust.

This is Little Trust. That we would begin our encounters with "I am trusting you to..."

We recognize it Trust. We celebrate when trust has been built and engage when it has been broken.

Remember how I said today was really just a therapy session for me?

I need to do a better job of recognizing Little Trust moments. I need to acknowledge and celebrate when trust has been built. I need to engage and process with my wife and daughters when trust has been broken.

And that I need to move past the transactional nature of getting through my day that is filled with appointments and activities and obligations and would pay attention to the Little Trust opportunities that are happening all over the place in my family.

If I could provide any advice, it would be this: Take the same approach and appetite to building trust as you do to building wealth: pour your efforts into it, do it all the time, don't check your balance very often, and check in with your trusted advisor to provide some counsel.

Sorry, not "trusted" advisor. Your Trust Advisor. The Holy Spirit, who does a fantastic job in my life of showing me the honest spaces where I have been wrong or blown it or violated a trust.

And sometimes, the Holy Spirit looks a lot like another person. Maybe someone who has been "there and done that" with raising kids and can provide a perspective or a word of wisdom, guidance or encouragement that you need to hear.

In your family, trust will be broken. In giving people the space to fail, guess what: they sometimes fail.

And after trust has been destroyed, after those jars have been emptied, after our trust equity has been squandered, the only thing to do is to start again with a Giant Love that keeps no record of wrongs and dust each other off and meet each other again in our Little Trust spaces.

My hope today is not to bum everybody out with emphasizing how hard trust is, or how much it hurts to be betrayed. You're all like "Yeah, pretty much knew all that before I came here today."

My hope is that this time together can just be an excuse to give ourselves permission to walk out of those doors and into honest conversations with the people we love about the state of trust in our families.

That we would forgive each other, hug each other, and if we need to, agree to hit the reset button, to wipe the slate as clean as we can, and restart the process of actively building trust—again—with each other.

(prayer)

Move into a time of communion. If you didn't pick up a the pre-packaged communion elements on your weigh in, just raise your hand and our ushers will bring one to you.

Take and eat.
Take and drink.
God is good.

Communion