

“Trust in the Lord and Do Good”

A sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr.
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***Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of
your heart. (Psalm 37:3-4)***

Simplicity. “Trust in the Lord and do good.” Who among us doesn’t resonate with the simplicity of that statement? It’s not hard to understand. It could easily be a mantra for life, and as a window into a whole code of conduct that we aspire to. “Trust in the Lord and do good.” Simple, straightforward, and powerful.

But does trust in the Lord always feel simple? We know from experience that it does not. What about when we’re in the throes of temptation and are feeling forlorn—by guilt and a sense of our own failings? What about when life feels completely overwhelming, or we’re experiencing something that just feels unfair? The Psalmist puts words to how we sometimes feel: “O Lord, how long...? I am weary with my groaning...I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief” (Psalm 6:4,6). Sometimes it’s hard to simply “trust in the Lord.”

What about “doing good”? How many of us have struggled with the most helpful course of action in the complexities of life? Do we step in or stand back? Is this a time to stand firm on principle with the likelihood of distancing ourselves from people we love, or is this a time to listen more intently to where they are coming from and be patient? Should I go to my superiors with this issue or try to handle it myself? Will this money actually help, or will it deepen a kind of dependency? Sometimes we are like Solomon when he said, “I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in” (1 Kings 3:7). Making good decisions, even when intending to do so, is not always easy.

Despite all that, there is a formula here that is indeed simple and is incredibly powerful. There is great wisdom in trusting in the Lord—in turning to Him in all things of life; believing that He can enlighten us; in deeply perceiving that He is the only One who can get us through all that life throws our way. And there is blessedness in consistently striving to do what is good. Even asking ourselves that question: What is the right thing to do in this situation? What will help? So often that leads to actions the Lord can bless. At the end of the day, the Lord is always the answer, and from Him we will be led to do what is good.

So let’s spend some time with this Psalm in which we receive this message. As we may expect, the verses that follow lay out a pathway for us of how to increase our trust in the Lord and come to a better understanding of the good things that He calls us to do.

Try it and you’ll see. The very next phrase provides us with one of those keys. “Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness” (Psalm 37:3). In this our minds can be drawn to the Children of Israel in the Land of Canaan. This is a Psalm of David, during a time in Israel’s history where they had largely conquered the land, but still had the pivotal challenge of obeying their part of the covenant in it.

What I hear in the phrase, “Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness,” is the message: try it and you’ll see. Land means heaven in the Word (see *Arcana Coelestia* 9305, 2658:7, *Apocalypse Explained* 304:77). Dwelling in the land means to live a good life (*Apocalypse Revealed* 883). For the Israelites there was a specific message to obey the covenant in the land that the Lord had provided. The covenant, as any student of the Old Testament knows, is the determinant of the experience of the Israelites in the land. If they obeyed, good things happened. If they disobeyed, bad things happened.

The message, then, for us is to feed on His faithfulness, is to obey the covenant. Be faithful to the covenant. Obey the Lord’s commandments. Live according to the principles given to us in the Word.

The command to “dwell in the land” is “try it and you will see” part of it. It’s not obedience for the sake of it. Rather there is an invitation to see that goodness results. For the Israelites, they saw viscerally—their crops grew, they had safety from their enemies, they had healthy and growing families. If they obeyed. When they did “feed on His faithfulness,” life worked. And if they disobeyed, it didn’t—again in palpable ways.

What we come to realize is the same thing is true for us—even though it’s not always so obvious. We’re invited to project a bit into the life of heaven—to try it out and see that a heavenly way of acting is pleasant, joyful, and safe. When we obey the Lord’s teachings our relationships work, we experience less guilt, our business dealings prosper, and we feel the inherent satisfaction of being useful. But every time we disobey, an opposite trend happens. Maybe not always, or right away, but if we’re paying attention, anxiety increases, we’re shorter on patience and more self-centered. As a result, things don’t go well between us and others.

There’s a principle given to us in the Heavenly Doctrines that applies. We read, “Action comes first, then the desire for it in the person’s will follows” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4353:3). In that passage, the specific reference is to the two great commandments: to love the Lord and to serve the neighbor. But the point is underscored that these two are really a summary of all the truths of the Word—all the many teachings which explain and give breadth to what it means to serve the Lord and the neighbor.

So we’re invited to pick one and try it. We start by compelling ourselves to do the truth, whether or not we love it or buy into it. The Psalm provides us with an example. “Cease from anger and forsake wrath” (Psalm 37: 8). Well that’s a hard one for many of us. Obedience might very well need to be the initial motivator. The Lord says it, so I will do it. I’m going to dwell in the land—to project myself into a place where my anger is under control. I won’t say the grumpy thing. I won’t criticize or rebuke. I won’t let em have it when they don’t do exactly what I wanted. I won’t hold grudges. I won’t be passive aggressive.

As we make such efforts, it’s not hard to imagine some positive feedback. If loved ones see that we’re trying, they’ll appreciate it. Even one effort to bite our tongue makes a difference. And so it goes if we persistently strive to make this change in our lives. As the passage we read said, it gets easier. We remember more often. So much so that eventually it becomes “habitual.” But even more importantly we’re living a new reality. We’re dwelling in the land of no anger. We’re feeding on His faithfulness and coming to see that He’s right. Cease

from anger and forsake wrath—it only causes harm. Yeah, that’s true. This way is so much better. And we come to love this new way of interacting.

The same is true of kindnesses. There’s a passage that says that everyone in heaven loves and serves others in the first place, rather than pushing pervasively for their own needs (*Arcana Caelestia* 549). This too is something we can try out. We can project into a heavenly way of living by consciously seeking to make the day of the ones we love better. It may feel clumsy and forced at first, but we’re almost certain to receive positive feedback from our efforts. And as we persist, we come to realize that heaven on earth is indeed created by everyone paying attention to the needs of others with an effort to meet them.

The same is true with admitting our wrongs. Could we see ourselves committing to that? “Yes I am guilty of that.” “Yes that’s what I was thinking.” “You caught me.” Instead of “I would never...” “Come on, me? No way.” As we try it, we begin to see that it actually works. The person to whom we are admitting doesn’t think less of us but more. We begin to see the seedlings of greater trust. We experience the positive feedback of a willingness to change our patterns, the gratitude of investing in our relationship in a new way. “Action comes first, then the desire for it in the person’s will follows.” This is “dwelling in the land and feeding on His faithfulness.” This is experiencing a slice of heaven on earth, because we are willing to trust in the Lord’s plan—because we are willing to conform our actions to what He says. We feed on His faithfulness and find it to be delightful.

Delight in the Lord. It should be no surprise, then, to discover that the very next word in the Psalm is “delight.” “Delight yourself also in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). Now I love “...the desires of the heart part” but at this point I want to focus on the part about the Lord.

Delight yourself also *in the Lord*. The Psalm actually has several callings to us relating to the Lord. We’ve already talked about “Trust *in the Lord* and do good.” But then there’s “Commit your way *to the Lord*” (vs. 5). “Rest *in the Lord*.” “Wait patiently *for Him*” (vs. 7).

In general we’re talking about the Source. Yes there are the principles of truth that we are to live by—and to see that they work. But how fundamental and powerful it is to recognize that it is the Lord who is asking. It is Him who is offering heaven. It is Him who is showing us the way and coaching us consistently to walk in it.

There is a powerful teaching along these lines in the Heavenly Doctrines:

Acknowledging one's God is the starting point of religion, and among Christians acknowledging the Lord is the starting point of the Church; for without acknowledgement of Him there can be no transmission of anything from Him, nor consequently any faith, nor thus any love. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10,112)

Similarly we read in the Psalms, “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10).

So we are called to “Delight [ourselves] in the Lord.” Not only is there an invitation to find true delight in the Lord’s path, but to discover the contentedness from knowing deeply in our spirits that He is the source of all our true happiness. We can capture this when we develop

a habit of thanking the Lord for all that's good in our lives. For when we notice our blessings, and attribute them to Him, we come to understand that He is indeed a God of love.

Commit your way to the Lord. So too with committing. We have been talking about it—committing to the Lord's pathways, or His teachings. But the focus can also be on committing *to the Lord*. Is there not a leap of faith involved at least on some level? We have to say at some point, "Okay, Lord, I'm in." "I'm going with Your plan." "I dedicate my life to You." Isn't it amazing, and sad, how many people can't seem to get there?

Rest in the Lord. So next comes the invitation to "*rest in the Lord*". There appears to be an invitation to live with the reality that He is always with us—to try to live with that awareness. The most famous of the Psalms says, "The Lord is my Shepherd." And then backs that up with a powerful list of acknowledgments: "He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness. [He is with me, even in] the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:2-4). As we reflect on all that we go through, can we acknowledge these things about Him? When we can capture that sense, our souls can be at rest, knowing and believing in a deep way that we are never alone.

Wait patiently. And if we get to phases of life where we *do* feel alone, or in one of those valleys of the shadow of death where we can't easily experience the Lord's presence, can we wait patiently for Him to lead us to a better state? Isn't it true that when we reflect back, He has led us through. He has provided comfort. He has brought us to brighter days when happiness returned—when the trauma is over, when the overwhelming feeling has past, when the problem is either resolved or in the process of being resolved.

Conclusion. We live in a world where a vast number of people, some very well known to us, have a growing hesitancy to place their faith in the Word, or to believe in the Lord. In our skeptical world where people can't seem to commit or don't have that simple faith, the Lord places this simple formula before them: "Trust in the Lord and do good."

I'm well aware that I'm preaching to the choir for the most part. I can easily imagine that you've seen the Lord's principles at work in your life—you've dwelt in the land and know the experience of heaven that can come. You're also likely to resonate with the sense of the Lord's presence—to nod your head with your own version of the ways in which the Lord has carried you through.

So today maybe there's an extended invitation to share this simple formula with someone who might need it—with someone who is skeptical; with someone who hasn't yet found it in themselves to commit. Can you share with them that it's all about trusting in the Lord and doing good? It's all about trying it and seeing that it works. It's all about placing your delights and true happiness—the desires of your heart—on the things the Lord wants to give you anyway.

At the end of the day, we are all on a journey to the land flowing with milk and honey. We all need to hear the Lord say to us, "In My father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you" (John, 14:2). We know that a full and rich experience of heaven awaits us to the extent that we persevere in our part of the covenant.

Today we have been reminded that we do not actually need to wait. It's not all a future promise. It can be ours right now in powerful and real ways, if we will only "dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness." If we can "commit our ways to the Lord;" if are willing to "rest in Him" and "wait patiently for Him." If we "trust in the Lord and do good." Amen.

Readings from the Lord's Word: Psalm 37:3-9, Matthew 6:25-33, *Arcana Caelestia* 4353:3.

Psalm 37

- ³ Trust in the LORD, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
- ⁴ Delight yourself also in the LORD,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
- ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.
- ⁶ He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.
- ⁷ Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
- ⁸ Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm.
- ⁹ For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the LORD,
They shall inherit the earth.

Matthew 6

²⁵ "...Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

²⁸ "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

***Arcana Caelestia* 4353:3**

Every Divine truth is related to the following two commandments: Love God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself. These two commandments are the base from which truths

are derived, the reason why truths exist, and the end to which truths lead – immediately or remotely. Therefore when truths are translated into action they are introduced step by step into their beginning and into their end, that is to say, into charity towards the neighbor and love to the Lord, and as a consequence truth becomes the good which is called the good of truth. Once truth becomes such it is able to be joined to the internal person, a conjunction which becomes step by step more interior as truths that are more interior are implanted within that good. Action comes first, then the desire for it in the person's will follows. For when people are led by their understanding to carry out any action, they are at length led by their will to do it, till at last they have taken it on as an action performed habitually. When this point is reached it is introduced into the rational or internal person; and once it has been introduced, truth is no longer that which motivates that person when he does a good action but good. For now he begins to feel within it something of what is blessed and so to speak of heaven. This remains with him after death, and by means of it the Lord raises him up to heaven.