

# Learning to Trust God

OR

## *How My Father Taught Me to Swim*

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*Remember that I have commanded you to be determined and confident. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9*

*And I will be with you always, to the end of the age. Matt. 28:20*

“I know the Bible says God is always with me,” a friend declared recently, “but sometimes when I need Him most, I don’t feel Him near me at all!”

“I hear you, brother...,” I said hesitantly, my voice trailing off into memories of similar times in my own life. Unsure how to respond further, I suggested we pray and ask Jesus how He’s praying about this (Romans 8:34).

Before long, a boyhood memory came to mind of myself about five or six years old, in the Navy base swimming pool where my father, a career Navy officer, was stationed. I didn’t know how to swim then, but he said he’d take me that day and teach me.

As he stepped into the water and picked me off the poolside, a trace of fear swept over me, and I clung to his neck a little more tightly than our living room welcome-home-from-work hug at home.

At six-foot-two, Dad stood waist-deep in the “shallow” end of the pool. I discovered the hard way, however, that it was far above my waist. At one point, he shifted me around in front of him and I dropped out of our slippery-wet hug and went down.

I expected to touch bottom and push back up.

Not.

Immediately, I felt Dad’s strong arms reach down under my armpits, drawing me up out of the depths and holding me tightly to his chest.

Amid my sputtering, I faced the truth: No way was I going to be able to stand up by myself when I needed a breath. *Everything—even my life itself—depended on my father’s holding me up.*

My heartbeat shifted into high gear.

Matter-of-factly, Dad put his hand firmly under my stomach and told me to let go of his neck and lie down flat on the water as he held me up atop his palm.

Tentatively, I let go and lay on his hand, grasping his forearm.

“That’s good,” he said. “Now kick your feet up and down.”

I kicked my best and held on as he drew me ahead.

“That’s the idea,” he encouraged. “Now cup your hands, and reach out and paddle. Don’t worry—I’ve got you.”

Determined to follow directions, I let go of Dad's arm and, gingerly, began paddling.

"OK," he said; "now keep paddling your hands and start kicking your feet at the same time."

I took a deep breath, and put the kicking and paddling together as Dad kept drawing me ahead.

### **IT'S TIME**

Eventually, he decided it was time.

"Now, I'm going to hold your hands and step in front of you," he said. "I want you to keep kicking your feet, OK?"

"O...K," I replied, not sure where this was going.

After a minute or two, he proclaimed, "Now you've got it! I'm going to step back just a bit and let go of your hands. I'll be right here, but want you to see what it's like to be kicking and paddling by yourself."

Clearly, there was no way out of this. Though I'd never done it before, I had a good enough imagination to think about postponing the lesson.

But then suddenly, my hands were alone. Dad was standing right in front of me, able to grab me if necessary, but looking at me and calling out, "Come to me! I'm right here—kick your feet! Paddle your hands!"

Needing no further motivation, I kicked and paddled desperately with all my might until... Yes! Dad had my hands in his hands and was drawing me to himself.

"You're getting it," he said as again I wrapped my arms around his neck.

Buoyed by my father's confidence, I managed a smile.

"That's good," he said. "Now let's try it again."

This time, to my surprise, he stepped back two paces.

"Come to me!" Dad called out again.

Gamely, I began thrashing the water until once again I reached his mighty hands and outstretched arms.

### **I CAN DO IT!**

Soon, he stepped back three paces, then four and more. I still had some fear, but the evidence was clearly shifting in my favor. In fact, I might really be able to do this!

As indeed, before long I could swim—all by myself, in fact, as my father called me to come to him.

Meanwhile, back at the prayer time, I told my friend this memory.

With a thin smile, he nodded. "That's really helpful."

It's natural to feel uneasy and scared when you can't feel Father God close to you. Sometimes, you wonder if you've slipped out of His grasp and are going down. But that doesn't mean He's abandoned you and is far away.

It could be that He's teaching you as His son or daughter to trust Him in His joint venture of life, that is, by teaching you to do all you can by yourself and trusting Him for the rest.

It's called growing up, into sonship/daughtership (see Rom. 8:14-16).

Sure, it's always a little scary as you do—because our human nature just isn't capable of perfect trust. That's why Jesus came.

“If you want to learn trust in God,” as the saying goes, “do something you can’t do.”

### **STORM IN THE NIGHT**

One night, the disciples went sailing on Lake Galilee while Jesus stayed ashore (Matt. 14:22-32). Heavy storm winds started blowing, and Jesus walked out across the waves in the dark to where Peter and the others clung fearfully to their rocking, windswept boat.

Standing on the water just ahead of them, Jesus called to Peter, “Come to me!”

The Navy base swimming pool had no storm waves—but the same fear stirred in me.

As insightful author Don Basham casts the scene<sup>i</sup>, a miracle often has two parts: ours and God’s. Jesus doesn’t ask us to do anything supernatural. Peter had healthy legs and could walk. That’s all He asked Peter to do: climb out of the boat and walk.

When Peter did his natural part and put one foot in front of the other, Jesus did His super-natural part and held him up.

“The miracle,” Basham concludes, “**was not that Peter walked on water, but that he didn’t sink.**”

God is not co-dependent. Next time you feel the Father is far away from you and you’re waiting for Him to come closer to you, maybe He’s right there in front of you, waiting for you to do what you can do naturally to draw closer to Him.

That’s often fearful, simply because trusting God supernaturally is not possible for our limited, natural human instincts. In fact, it requires greater power than your own strength can muster (Rom. 7:14-8:1).

Trusting God, in fact, is not an achievement.

It’s a miracle.

### **FALLEN WORLD**

Sure, we thank God for human intelligence, from medical healing to rational construction. Nevertheless, we live in a fallen world of brokenness that requires more than our human abilities in order to overcome.

The best of doctors know this.

“If you come to me with a broken arm,” as I once heard a surgeon declare, “neither I nor any other human being can heal you. All I can do is put the pieces of bone back in their intended place and help them stay there with a cast.

“But I can’t make the bone cells knit back together. Only a power greater than me can do that for you.”

So here’s a suggestion:

When you feel distant from Father God, step out of the boat and trust that He’s with you in your “dark storm.” Confess you don’t have what it takes to meet your need, but declare that He does. Fix your heart on Jesus and press ahead with what you can do:

Read the Bible for reminders of your Father’s persevering love in Jesus and His power today in Holy Spirit. Spend time talking with Him and give Him time to speak to you. Seek wisdom and encouragement from prayer partners, talk to doctors, meet with a Christian counselor, read a book on healing. Take care of your body; eat healthy, exercise, and rest when you need to. Sing praise songs. Use your prayer language. Get prayer for healing and deliverance.

Keep paddling and kicking.

When you feel broken apart and disconnected, cry out to Jesus and let the Great Physician put your “pieces” back in order. Trust Him to hold you together—like a bone cast—and make you whole again in His timing.

Believe me, as I’ve struggle lately with a number of health issues, I know: it can be awfully hard. But my experience suggests that *you don’t learn authentic trust until you need it*. In fact, surgeons say that a healed bone is stronger precisely where it was broken.

### **HELP MY UNBELIEF!**

When I face my lack of trust in God, I remember that marvelous brother in the Bible who cried out to Jesus in behalf of his spiritually oppressed son, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

With that prayer, I step out of my boat.

And do my best to keep walking:

“Father, I trust that you’re at work in my brokenness and the circumstances before me. Show me how I can cooperate with your healing purposes.”

I confess that, at times, even after such praying, I still feel distant from God and scared. When that happens, I surrender—not to the circumstance, but to my Father:

“Father, please, have mercy on me!” I cry out. “I’m doing everything I can think of. If there’s more I can do, please show me.

“Otherwise, I’m counting on you to do what I can’t.”

It’s easy to believe that if I could just muster more trust, God would be obliged to come closer and answer my prayer. From that viewpoint, I’m still in control and the outcome depends on me.

### **RELATIONSHIP, NOT FORMULA**

The older I get, however, the more **trusting God is not about a formula that depends on my ability, but rather, a relationship that depends on His ability**. That is, what blesses the Father more than my fearful attempts to gain greater trust is my utter humility in confessing that I need Him to do what I can’t (Rom. 7:18-8:1).

Of course, you don’t know where that natural limit is until you try your best and fail. But don’t worry—you’ll find it sooner or later in this fallen world!

When that happens, allow God’s limitless supernatural reach in Jesus to find you.

Keep kicking and paddling toward your Father, doing what you can and crying out to Him for what you can’t.

For me, this process is where new trust in Him is most often born.

Our Father God has given us free will. When we do our best and it’s not “working,” we imagine two choices. Grit your teeth and try harder to trust God, or distrust Him, give up to the circumstance, and quit paddling.

Amid the storm, however, another choice beckons from Jesus: “Come to me!”

The bad news is, there’s nowhere else to go.

And the good news, of course, is there’s nowhere else to go.

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<sup>i</sup> Don Basham, *Ministering the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*. Whitaker books, 1971.