

When you want to mend broken relationships:

Restoring Trust

By Dave Batty

“I didn’t realize how valuable trust was until I lost it,” commented Frank. “Because of 15 years of drug addiction I lost my family. My wife divorced me and remarried, taking with her our two children.”

Frank’s addiction finally brought him to a place of desperation and he came to Teen Challenge—experienced God’s forgiveness and healing in his life. He’s now employed, a responsible adult.

“But my 17 year old son is angry at me for never being there. More than anything,” says Frank, “I want to see my relationship with my son restored.”

Can trust be restored? Frank’s son looks back at a lifetime of broken trust.

For others the wounds go even deeper. Many of the women coming to Teen Challenge were abused by a member of their own family.

Traci was sexually abused by her step father for 8 years. When her father was arrested and on trial, Traci’s mom was in the court room every day—but not with Traci. Instead she was there to support her husband—the abuser of Traci.

Can trust be restored in relationships so broken—where the wounds are so deep?

Those coming to Teen Challenge see God do a marvelous work of healing and transformation in their lives. He puts hope where only despair existed. He puts love where selfishness ruled. He puts honesty where deceit, denial, and dishonesty had been.

With God’s forgiveness they discover a whole new life. But family members often remain skeptical. Is “religion” just one more game like the past 10 years?

Can trust be restored where the family history is filled with so

much pain and brokenness? The family looks at this person much like it says in Psalm 5:9 “Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.” (NIV)

Restoring trust is a two way street – both the family who saw

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trust destroyed and the one who destroyed that trust by his or her actions.

I had a boss who told every new employee, “I will trust you until you prove you can’t be trusted.” That’s the positive way to start a relationship.

But many of us can point to a family member and say, “We are way past that point. You have 5 – 10 – 15 years of history proving that I can’t trust you. You’ve lied to me,

- ❖ **What does it take to restore your relationship of trust that has been destroyed?**
- ❖ **How do you know when it is the right time to restore a broken relationship?**
- ❖ **How easy is it for you to trust God? How is trusting God different from trusting another person?**

stolen from me, abused me—and now you want me to trust you again?”

Start with trusting God

Restoring trust is like a two-sided coin. On one hand we need to learn how to trust others. On the other hand we must learn how to become a person worthy of being trusted.

Restoring trust starts with trusting God. If you want to learn how to trust people – start by learning how to trust God.

Isaiah 26:3-4 says, “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.” (NIV)

The Bible is full of verses challenging us to place our trust in God. Proverbs 29:25 states, “Whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.” (NIV) If we trust God, our problems will not instantly disappear. But when we go through problems and trials – we have the promise that God will be with us. Jesus told us at the end of His life – “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

If you are the person who has destroyed trust by your past actions, the place to start is not with the people you hurt – the place to start is by learning to trust God.

“Trusting God is really hard for me,” stated one new Christian.

“How can you trust someone you can’t see?” Her prayers and study of the Bible helped her to grow in trusting God.

God is faithful – He is worthy of trust more than any person you know. The more we learn how to trust God, the better we can be at learning how to trust others.

One of the big issues we will

Forgiveness and restoring trust

You’ve heard it said, “God has forgiven them, why can’t you?”

First, we need to remember that forgiving someone is a separate issue from trusting someone. To forgive means that you no longer hold anger or bitterness against that person. Forgiveness means you release that person to God, saying, “God, you deal with that person’s sin against me. I will not take revenge against that person.”

You can be at peace in your heart, knowing that God has seen the sin committed against you by this person. But forgiveness does not automatically mean you have to trust that person.

face over and over is deciding – should I trust this person? What about that person? Not everyone is deserving of our trust. How do you decide whom to trust?

One new Christian met a handsome young man and within a week she was convinced that he was the man with whom she wanted to spend the rest of her life. Close friends warned her to go slow – or stay away from him. However, in a few short weeks he was back on drugs and alcohol. She had moved in with him, compromised her walk with God, and found herself trapped

with a controlling, violent man.

Clearly her way of determining whom to trust was flawed. If you are to avoid more tragedies in your future, you must put God in the driver’s seat and let Him guide you in these decisions.

Becoming worthy of trust

The second issue related to restoring trust focuses on your own personal character growth. If you want others to trust you, first ask yourself – “Am I a trustworthy person?”

What makes one a trustworthy person? You may want to make a list of those you have met who are trustworthy. What characteristics describe these persons?

Your obedience to God will make you more trustworthy. Jesus said if you love me – obey me. If you want to convince others you are worthy of trust let them see you walking in obedience to God.

One young man graduated from Teen Challenge and came home. As soon as he stepped inside the house his mother said three words – “Get a job!” and then walked out of the room. Harsh words from a mother – you say. She had no interest in his wonderful testimony – she wanted to see action.

Greg got a job – and stayed at that job. In the weeks that followed this mother became more receptive

to her son.

“Words are not mere words, you know. If they’re not backed up by a godly life, they accumulate as poison in the soul.” 2 Timothy 2:16 (The Message)

If you truly want to restore trust – show by your actions you have changed.

Another dimension of becoming a trustworthy person is,

If you truly want to restore trust—show by your actions that you have changed.

“Can I trust myself?” You see yourself on the inside – do you have the personal character that deserves trust? How are you handling temptation to sin or compromise? How good are you at hiding the “real you” from others?

Jesus spoke about becoming trustworthy. “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. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?” (Luke 16:10-12 NIV)

Two other issues are vital if we wish to see trust restored – Time and Truth.

Time

Restoring trust takes time. Some who are seeking to restore trust have a background of drug or alcohol addiction. Instant pleasure from getting high was their master. The euphoria of the moment became their focus. The faster the rush, the greater the high, the more powerful the addiction.

Restoring trust is much the opposite. It doesn’t happen instantly. Trust may have been destroyed by 5 – 10 – 15 years of broken promises, stealing, abuse, and more. The hurt and damage run deep.

No matter how convinced you are that God has genuinely changed you – your loved ones may be slow to move down this path of restoring trust.

One mom told me, “Every time I went into a drug treatment program, I told my children, ‘When I come out I’ll be different.’ But every time I would go back to drugs. Now that I’m in Teen Challenge I tell my son, ‘I’m really different this time.’ He’s not impressed – He’s heard me say this before.”

Another man graduated from Teen Challenge and tried to restore his relationship with his wife. She was unwilling. His friends told him to divorce her and move on with his life. He refused. It was 8 years before she was willing to restore their marriage. He was willing to invest 8 years proving that he could now be trusted.

Truth and Trust

Restoring trust must be built on the foundation of truth. Trust was

destroyed in part by dishonesty and deception. God speaks to this in Jeremiah 7:8, “But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.” (NIV)

The one who has destroyed trust must be open and honest – especially with the one where trust was broken in the past. It’s not enough to say, “Others trust me – why don’t you?”

We must see restoring trust as a unique challenge with each person. You may restore your relationship with one person by sitting down face to face over coffee and sharing what God has done to change your life.

With another person you may have to take a much different path to see the relationship restored. You may need to ask, “What do I need to do to help you see I have changed?”

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Your willingness to be truthful, to be open, to be accountable may help pave the road to restoration.

Ultimately it’s important to see that restoring trust is a two person issue – you must want to restore trust – the other person must feel the same way. You can’t force someone to trust you.

The path of restoring trust also means we must face other problems. Secrets of past sins are not always known by those closest to us. To

say “I stole from you,” is one thing. To say, “I slept with your husband,” is quite a different complication.

One new Christian woman had been involved in an immoral relationship with her uncle before coming to Christ. Some advised this lady to tell her aunt the whole truth. Others advised her to keep it a secret. So what should she do?

Proverbs provides powerful advice. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV) Total trust in God is the best path. God, I will do what you want me to do.

Restoring trust is risky

Trust makes us vulnerable to the other person. For you to restore trust when you have been hurt so many times before may be very hard. And there are no guarantees of the future. You may get hurt again.

That’s why it’s so vital to make

When is it right to trust again?

For the one who has been deeply wounded by the betrayal of a loved one—perhaps even a family member—how do you know when it is appropriate to restore that relationship?

The pain is still real when you remember the deep hurt you experienced when they violated your trust. Perhaps your loved one is saying, “I’ve changed—trust me!” Should you? Or are you just setting yourself up for more pain?

Many who have a history of abusing others are also very tender, kind persons. They may bring special gifts and promise, “I’ll never do that again.”

You need to evaluate more than their words. The person who violated your trust may be great at apologizing. Charm may be one of his or her greater assets. Neither of these should be given much weight in deciding to trust again.

So how do you determine if this person has really changed? Here are a few issues to consider.

1. Look for consistency in change. Good behavior for one day is not reason to trust again. Consistency in words should not be your focus—look for consistency in actions. Can you and others around you clearly see changed behavior that indicates this person is truly changing?
2. Is this person accountable to you or someone else? The deeper the violation of trust, the greater is the need for accountability for that person. If you have a tendency to be too soft-hearted (gullible), then someone else should be the person of accountability.
3. What areas is this person choosing to submit to accountability? Just one small

area, or all areas of his or her life?

4. Does this person still live with secrets? Does she/he bristle when you ask questions about his/her personal life?
5. What makes this person trustworthy? Is she/he giving without expecting in return? Do you and others see the character of Christ in this person?
6. Does this person take responsibility for his/her actions? Or are they quick to blame others for their problems?
7. Does this person fulfill their commitments even at their own loss?
8. Is this person facing his/her problems God’s way? Or are they trying to do this in their own strength? Are they clearly seeking scriptures that they can use to resolve their problems?
9. Do others living close to this person today trust this person? Do they demonstrate Godly character in their lives? Can you trust their advice, or are they naïve and gullible?

trusting others wholly dependent on trusting God. If others do let you down in the future, God will remain faithful. Your security must be in Jesus – not people.

God has created us with a desire and a need to be in relationship with others. We need trusting relationships to experience life to the full. The rich benefits of trusting relationships cannot be duplicated simply by loving myself.

As Jesus sought to restore his relationship with Peter, he asked him, “Do you love me?” When Peter said yes, Jesus responded, “Feed my sheep.” Jesus called on Peter to prove that he was trustworthy—not simply in promises of words, but in consistent, unselfish actions.

Jesus was saying, “Peter, I’m giving you an opportunity to prove that you have changed. You can show me that you are trustworthy by helping other people.”

What is Jesus saying to you today? Do you need to focus on being a more trustworthy person? What actions is He asking you to take that will demonstrate you can be trusted? What about your relationships with others?

Is God asking you to open your heart and forgive the one who has betrayed you? Or are you the one that blindly opens your heart to someone who should not be trusted? Do you set yourself up for unnecessary pain by failing to listen to God when He says—stay away from that person. Not everyone should be trusted. How you make those decisions should be based on what God is saying to you, not what your emotions say.

Restoring trust may take you down some painful paths, but if you are tightly holding on to Jesus as you go down those paths, you can have the peace in your heart that you are on the best path for today.

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Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to trust other people? Explain what makes it easy or hard to trust others.
2. What have others done to rebuild trust in their relationship with you?
3. What have you done to rebuild a relationship of trust broken by your past behavior?
4. Read Proverbs 3:5-6. How easy is it for you to trust God?
5. How is trusting God different from trusting another person?
6. Do you have the problem of too quickly trusting a person? Respond to how you can use the suggestions listed in the boxed article on page 4, “*When is it right to trust again?*”



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