

Trust Issues | A Fragile Currency

Aaron Brockett | Philemon 1:4-18

How about that bass? Anybody feeling that? I like it!

Good to see all of you today. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors, whether you're joining us from our North campus, Downtown, West, online, and those of you here at Northwest. Come on, everybody across all of our campuses put your hands together, make it a warm place. Good to see you. Happy to have you.

Last night we had our kickoff for our Student Ministry called Catalyst and we had 650 students all gathered together here and it was amazing. We had nearly 150 first-time students who came to join us and so I'm just so proud of our Student Ministry team and all of our volunteers to do what they do to just lead the next generation to Jesus. It was amazing.

If you are a student between the grades of 7 through 12 or if you have a 7th through 12th grader at home, we would love to see you at Catalyst. Catalyst meets every Sunday night beginning this evening. If you need more information about that, you can go to the website tpcc.org, get all the info that you need.

Well, today we're beginning this new series of messages that we are calling *Trust Issues*. Everybody say trust issues. Now a trust issue is anytime that you may have somebody close to you, could be a family member or friend, and they hurt you. They maybe say something that hurts your feelings. Maybe they abandon you in some way. Maybe they let you down. Maybe they mislead you. They told you one thing but then did another.

Maybe you had a friend, like I have, hypothetically speaking, who tells you that he's all in on CrossFit, who tells you that he'll be there and meet you in the gym and "we'll work out together" and "we'll achieve our goals together" and then very publicly tells a whole bunch of people he's just a dabbler, just dabbling in CrossFit. News to me. We must have very different definitions of dabble.

So what ends up happening is that you take this betrayal and you're just a little more cautious. You're just a little bit more guarded. You're a little bit more skeptical toward the intentions of others.

Now, here's where a trust issue becomes a real issue, when you project that hurt that you've experienced onto someone else who maybe doesn't even have anything to do with it. So you're sort of like, "Well, I know that we just recently met, but you kind of remind me of the person that hurt me. You sort of have the same mannerisms. You said that the way that that person

said that and that hurt me.” Or maybe it’s like, “You work in the same profession as that group of people that hurt me; therefore, I don’t know that I trust you.” That’s how a trust issue works.

Here’s the thing. None of us came into this world with trust issues. We developed them. See, babies don’t come into this world with trust issues. Babies come into this world just trusting. They’ve got all these strange adults picking them up, holding them. You could drop them. They don’t know.

When did you hear a little baby say, “Hey, hey, hey. Not so quick. I need to check the contents of that bottle before I consume so easily what you’re trying to give to me.”?

No baby has a trust issue, but we develop them over time, and what ends up happening is we have these interactions with others that end up letting us down and it teaches us that maybe we need to be a bit more guarded.

I can remember when I was in the fifth grade a really good friend of mine (his name was Jared) Jared was my good buddy. We would spend the night at each other’s houses. He was a great athlete. I thought he was one of my closest friends.

I remember coming in from recess one day. It was a hot day. We were all standing in line behind the water fountain, and Jared was talking to a couple other guys in front of me and he didn’t know that I was standing right behind him. Jared began to make fun of me. I remember he was making fun of the way I kicked the soccer ball.

I remember right then and there in that moment my trust just began to fracture and I remember thinking to myself, “If I can’t even trust my very best friend, then who can I trust?”

I remember when I was in the seventh grade, the prettiest girl in our neighborhood—her name was Jill Graybaugh and she was beautiful. I remember I was in the driveway shooting baskets one summer day and Jill and her friend Rachel came riding by on their bikes. Jill kept riding, but Rachel stopped. Rachel turned to me and she said, “Jill wanted me to tell you that she thinks you’re cute.”

I played it cool on the outside, but on the inside I was like doing backflips. I was like, “This is amazing!” I didn’t know what that meant, like are we boyfriend/girlfriend? Are we like exclusive now? Should I be shopping for rings? It’s like how does this whole thing work?

I was a pretty shy kid, and so for the next five days I would see Jill at the pool but I wouldn’t say anything to her, but I was just like, “Yeah, she’s my girlfriend. She thinks I’m cute.”

I remember about a week later my sister came into my room and she said, “Aaron, Jill wanted me to tell you... She wanted me to give you this message that...” in the dreaded words that every young man never wants to hear from the girl that he likes. Maybe some of you can finish the sentence with me. “Jill just likes you as a friend.” That’s the worst.

I remember thinking to myself, “Well, that hurt.” I sort of like opened up my heart to this other person. I have this crush and now she tells me that she’s actually taking it back and so I said, “Maybe I need to be a little bit more guarded with who I give my heart to.”

I wish that I could say that that’s been the extent of my trust issues, but that’s just the beginning.

Several years ago, there was a friendship that I had really invested a lot in. He was younger than me and so I believed in him, was trying to encourage him, cheer him on, gave him some opportunities. He was going through a difficult season of life and so I was trying to walk him through it, and he ended up like turning on me. He ended up like questioning my motives. He said I wasn’t doing enough for him and ended up just telling me to sort of get out of his life.

I remember thinking in that moment, “If that’s what it gets me for caring about a friend, then maybe I shouldn’t have too many.” Anybody ever been there?

Here’s the thing. I know that I can’t live my life that way, but it doesn’t mean the emotion of that wasn’t any less true. The thought still went through my mind.

Many years ago, here at the church, there was this family that we became friends with that attended the church. They became friends. We had dinner together. We had a lot in common. I thought to myself they’re some of our closer friends.

It ended up I didn’t see them at church for several weeks and wondered what was going on, just kind of followed up with them. “Hey,” you know. “How’s it going? Haven’t seen you lately.” It was just a little awkward.

Finally, they were just like, “Hey, we need to talk. We probably should tell you that we’re not at the church anymore.”

I was just like, “Oh, okay. Well, I’m sure there’s a reason for that. Can I help? We can still be friends, right?”

I remember it got even a little more awkward. He was like, “Well, you just need to know that the reason why we left is because we just don’t think you do enough for us and we don’t really connect that much with your teaching anymore. We don’t really understand the direction of the church and so we’ve just found this other church that fits us better. No offense.”

Oh, none taken.

I remember thinking to myself, “If that’s what it means to actually open up the door and to let people in the church kind of into our lives and if they’re going to do that, then maybe I shouldn’t let too many people in.”

See, that's how leaders isolate. That's how people find themselves all alone. Now I know I can't live my life that way, but it doesn't mean the emotions of it are any less true.

I'm just wondering across all of our campuses if there is anybody—you have your own experiences where somebody that you thought you could trust broke your trust and so you thought to yourself, "If I can't trust them, then who can I trust?" So when our trust has been broken multiple times over and over again, we can find ourselves in this very lonely position where we have trouble trusting anyone. Therefore, we want to isolate from everyone.

In fact, it's getting so bad that many experts around the world are just tracking a general downward trend in trust according to one website *ourworldindata.com*. It says that in the United States back in 1976, 44 percent of our population said that people could be trusted, but in 2016, that percentage had dropped to just 32 percent.

According to Pew Research Center, they asked this question of people. They said, "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or you just can't be too careful in dealing with people today?" and 40 percent of Baby Boomers said that most people can be trusted, but only 19 percent of Millennials said that they agree that most people can be trusted.

In an online survey of 70,000 adults conducted by MSNBC, 28 percent of men and 18 percent of women claimed to have cheated on their spouse. And those are just the people who are willing to admit it, so that tells me that the percentages are actually probably a whole lot higher.

For the sake of this series, we can think about it this way: *If the currency of our economy, at least in the Western World, is the **dollar**, then the currency of our relationships is **trust**.*

Trust has to be earned. Trust doesn't necessarily come really quickly. In fact, if somebody says to you, "Hey, just trust me," that's probably a pretty good indication that you shouldn't.

Trust takes a little bit of time to build up. Trust is kind of like a sand castle. You ever built a sand castle on a beach? It takes a lot of time to do it, but then it can be wiped out with one single wave.

The same is true in our relationships. It takes days and weeks and months and maybe even years to build up trust in a person, but all it takes is just one moment, one conversation, one action, one indiscretion and it can be wiped out. The currency in our relationships is really, really fragile.

And I would say that most of us listening to this across all of our campuses would probably say of ourselves that we're a trustworthy person.

If I were to say to you, "I'd say I'm a trustworthy person, or at least I try to be a trustworthy person," and yet at the same time, if you were to say, "Well, Aaron, have you ever broken

anybody's trust?" I'd have to say yes. Whether it was intentional or unintentional, I've still done it.

*See, that's the dilemma that we find ourselves in. We've all had our trust broken by people whom we love and care for **and** we have all broken the trust of others who love and care for us.*

In fact, the Bible says it this way in Jeremiah 17:9. It says, "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"

This is saying to us right here that you can't even trust yourself. You can't even trust your own heart, let alone the hearts and the intentions of other people, and so where does this leave us?

Does this mean that we should just blindly put our trust in everyone and then just be hurt all the time? Does this mean that we should isolate ourselves and trust no one? Where do we go from here? That's really the issue that's in front of us.

The Bible talks a whole lot about trust, but never does the Bible say you should put your trust in another human being. It does talk about the object of our trust.

Today we just want to talk about this fragile currency of trust. Next week we're going to talk about trust issues with people. The week after that, we're going to talk about trust issues with organized religion. That should be a fun one. Mark that on your calendar. You don't want to miss it. And then we'll actually wrap this series up by talking about the trust issues that we have with God himself.

I want to turn your attention to a book in the New Testament. If you have a Bible or a Bible app, it's a book that doesn't get a whole lot of exposure or play. It's the book of Philemon.

Philemon is actually only one chapter long. There are only three books in the Bible that are one chapter long. Philemon is one of them. It's 25 verses to be exact.

This is an interesting letter, and that's what it is. In fact, if you're new to Bible study, much of the New Testament is letters and they're letters written mostly from a guy named Paul to individuals or to churches that are gathered in cities in the first century, and these are called epistles.

This is a letter as well, but most of the time when Paul would write a letter, it was because he was trying to provide some instruction on theology or maybe he was addressing an issue within the church that needed to be confronted. But in this particular letter, this is unique in the sense that this almost could pass as a text message. It's brief enough for that and it's personal enough for that.

Paul is almost, it's like he's calling in a favor to somebody whom he's known for awhile. Now, Paul writes this text message, so to speak, from a Roman prison cell to a man by the name of

Philemon who is now living in Colossae, but Paul met this guy years ago in Rome, and Philemon had become a Christian under Paul's ministry.

So Paul writes to him and let's look at the first few verses of this chapter, verses 4 through 7. Paul says to him, "I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity..." He's not talking about financial generosity here; he's talking about relational generosity. "...that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people."

So here's what Paul is doing. He's saying: Listen, I'm acknowledging the kind of person you are. I'm acknowledging the kind of heart that you have. I'm acknowledging the fact that you've actually lived your life very openly toward other people.

Now he's getting ready to address the issue, and in order for us to understand the issue that he's addressing, we need to know a little bit of background. And Paul is not endorsing this, but he is acknowledging it, that Philemon in his past had had a slave named Onesimus.

Now slavery is shameful, especially in our shameful history with it. Slavery during the Roman Empire in the first century, while we can't endorse it, it was different than what we oftentimes associate with slavery today. In fact, it was much closer to legitimate employment.

There were slaves who, during the end of their time, they would oftentimes say, "I want to stay here and I want to continue to work," and they would take this little wooden post and they would pierce it through their ear and they would be known as their bond slave. They would say, "I want to stay with you." While we don't endorse it, there were some differences.

But Philemon had had this slave named Onesimus, and there's something that happened between the two of them. We don't fully know what. It appears as if Onesimus had maybe stolen from Philemon. He had run away. He had maybe betrayed his trust in some way. My guess is maybe Philemon had done something to, I don't know, maybe even deserve it.

So Paul's going to address that because here's the thing. Onesimus meets Paul in Rome and Paul leads Onesimus to Jesus and now he's getting ready to send him back to Colossae. So he writes Philemon and he encourages him to rebuild some trust. Listen to what he writes.

He says, "That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do." I love that. I love Paul. He's such a type A. "But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.

“I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. Onesimus hasn’t been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

“I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. But I didn’t want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced.

“It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while...” He’s talking about the rift in their relationship. “...so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.”

So Paul is addressing several different things in this correspondence, but one of the primary things that he’s doing is he’s saying: Listen, the two of you are followers of Jesus now. That should actually change a whole lot about the way that you interact with each other.

And Paul is vouching for Onesimus. If maybe you’ve ever written a recommendation letter for somebody, you’ve ever placed your reputation on the line for someone else, Paul is doing this and a whole lot more. He’s saying: Listen, I know that there’s been some kind of a break in the trust in your relationship in your past. Now I’m urging you both to do what you can to rebuild some trust that’s been lost in your relationship and, as a result, in your life.

The question that I have as I read these brief 25 verses is simply this. Why was this such a big deal to Paul? Paul’s in a Roman prison cell. He’s got problems of his own. Paul, why are you kind of sticking your nose in what appears to be somebody else’s business? Paul, why are you asking this favor of Philemon? What’s the big deal with this, Paul?

And here’s the other thing. Why in the world is this a book in the New Testament? I don’t know that any of you have ever... I’ve never done like an in-depth Bible study on Philemon. I’ve never sat down with a group, “Hey, guys. What do you want to study?” “Philemon would be great!”

There’s no rich theological truth in this book. The name of Jesus is mentioned a few times, but God’s never mentioned. It’s like, “Paul, why is this such a big deal to you?” and I think that the reason why it was such a big deal to Paul is because what happened in their relationship specifically was going to continue to happen in our relationships generally, even today.

Chances are in your life you have a relationship, or if we’re more honest, multiple relationships in which the trust has been broken. And Paul, I think the reason why he is writing this is because he wants Philemon and Onesimus to keep trust alive. He knew that their personal trust issues would eventually have very public ramifications. They always do.

So Paul is not saying to Philemon that he just needs to get over it. He's not saying that it's not that big of a deal. In fact, he even says: Hey, I recognize that Onesimus may have done you wrong and you probably did him wrong, but I want you to know that if he's done anything wrong, if he owes you anything, charge it to me, which is interesting because Paul's in prison. He didn't have any money. What he's saying is: Hey, let me loan you the trust that maybe you need so that you can begin to trust again.

See, it is impossible for us to talk about our own trust issues without talking about this little term right here: relational debt. We all have it.

I want you to think about your own relationships, your own friendships. Think about your marriage right now if you're married. If you're not married, think about maybe your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your roommate, your close friends, your coworkers, your boss.

How do you assess how that relationship is going? Like in your own mind you probably have just like, I don't know, maybe like a bank or a savings account you kind of have a relational account. It's sort of like, "Okay, well I know that this friendship is going pretty well because he complimented me the last time that we were together." Or maybe "We had lunch, and he really listened to me and he was attuned to what was going on in my life." Or "He's spent quality time with me."

Or maybe it's vice versa. Maybe I haven't heard from him for awhile or I sent him a text message and he didn't respond or he was actually really weird around me last time. He said something that kind of hit me wrong and so the relationship goes down. We all do this.

So if you have somebody with whom you share something confidential and he takes that information and shares it with others, then that's a relational withdrawal. It's a big one. If you have a boss who is consistently taking advantage of you who never says thank you, there's a relational withdrawal. It's a big one. If you have a spouse who's cheated on you, again it's a big one.

What ends up happening in our relationships, if there are no deposits that are made to trust, and then we foreclose on the relationship, eventually. We come to this place and we say, "Well, you know what? It's just too much. There've just been too many withdrawals. I just can't handle this anymore."

The object of our trust was this other person and it really shouldn't have been. It should've been redirected to someone or something else bigger than that other person. In fact, if we were to go on in Jeremiah 17, God even says it to us this way in verse 5.

It says, "This is what the Lord says: 'Cursed are those who put their **trust** in...'" In what? Say it out loud with me, all of our campuses. "...**mere humans**," that's all we are. Not just a human, we're mere humans.

Turn to your neighbor and say, "You're just a mere human." Do it now. Now turn to your second choice for a neighbor and say, "You're a mere human too. And so am I."

We're all just mere humans, and God is saying: Hey, don't put your trust in mere humans "who rely on human strength and turn their hearts..." which we've already said our hearts can't be trusted "...away from the Lord. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no **hope** for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land."

Aren't you glad you came to church today? So uplifting. Put that verse on your coffee mug.

What he's talking about here is relational debt, and he's saying: Listen, we are imperfect, flawed, broken, messed-up people. Even if we don't want it to happen, it's going to happen.

There have been times when I've hurt my friend, and I didn't mean to but I did. There have been times when I hurt my wife, and I didn't mean to but I did. There have been times when I've hurt my kids, and I didn't mean to but I did. Why? Because my heart's fallen and flawed and broken.

In this passage that God just said it's true, and we know it deep down. So when there've been enough withdrawals that have happened in the relationship and we get to this place and we're like, "I'm tired of being taken advantage of," we write these people off and out of our lives, and maybe we have every reason to.

We have this term that we oftentimes use for people in which we have foreclosed on the relationship. We call them exes.

So, "I have this ex-wife or I have this ex-husband or I have this ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend. I have this ex-roommate, and I don't really have much of a relationship with them anymore or it's fundamentally changed and there's really no hope that I have for even having a relationship with them in the future."

I guess maybe we could live our lives that way, but are we at anymore peace? Do we have anymore joy?

See, here's the thing. This book of Philemon comes along and Paul urges Philemon to trust again. Now he never says put your trust in Onesimus; he says trust again.

So maybe I could say to somebody here today, "Hey, you may not be able to put your trust in your ex-wife again, but please trust again." "You may not be able to put your trust in that friend who took what you confidentially shared with them and they shared it with others, but please trust again."

Here's what Paul is saying. He's saying: Please at least be open to trust again.

This is somewhat nuanced and it's tricky and I want you to hear me clearly. I'm not saying that you need to actually let that other person back into your life. I'm not saying that there shouldn't be some boundaries that are established. I'm not saying that you should allow them access to your heart anymore. In fact, maybe you really shouldn't, especially if there are some cases of abuse involved. I'm just simply saying please don't let go of trust because someone broke yours. Does that make sense?

So because somebody broke my trust, well I'm just not a very trusting person anymore, and Paul puts his foot in the door and says: Hey, don't go there. Please keep the door open on trust. It's not trust that's the problem; it's the object of your trust. The object of your trust is what broke your trust.

So the opposite of being a trusting person is to be a suspicious person. It's to allow bitterness in and unresolved anger, and that just sucks the joy right out of your life. See, here's why. When you and I let go of trust, then we lose hope. And when you lose hope, then you become this thing called a cynic.

Know any? You just can't win with a cynic. Cynics will take anything that you say and spin it. Cynics will take anything that you say and reject it, and it really has nothing to do with you. It has everything to do with maybe broken trust or a broken heart from their past. And there's a cynic who sort of lives in all of us, and the cynic is born out of broken trust.

Quite a few years ago now, when my oldest kids were three and five—they are 14 and almost 16 now, so this was about a decade ago—we were driving cross-country and they'd been in the car for hours, so we stopped in western Kansas to get something to eat.

So we eat at this IHOP, and our kids are like just bouncing off the walls, man. They're so stir crazy, and they're being loud. They're in the booth and they're bothering the people around us, and so Lindsay and I, we recognize this and so we start shushing them as only a good parent can do. We're like, "Shush! Shush! Quiet!" It was like, "We don't want to bother the people sitting around us."

We must've, I don't know, maybe been a little bit too directive with them because there was a man who was bussing the table right across from us. He was, I'm assuming, maybe in his mid-60s or so.

And I'll never forget. He turned around. He was missing his two front teeth (that has nothing to do with the illustration; it's just what I remember from him. No judgment; just that's what it was) he didn't even look at me and Lindsay, totally ignored the two of us, and he leaned across the table and looked right at our 5-year-old and our 3-year-old, and he said this to them.

He goes, "Hey, tell your mom and dad it's okay. You can make as much noise as you want. We're not in church." And then—I kid you not. I couldn't even make this up—he goes, "And I don't see a preacher around here anywhere, do you?"

My kids were so confused. They're like looking at me. I'm like, "Shhhh."

Now, I don't mean to presume on his past. I don't know what that guy went through. Something tells me he'd been hurt in his past, or at least had been misled in some way. Maybe he'd had a bad church experience somewhere along the line. Something tells me maybe a pastor had shushed him and he didn't appreciate it.

See, the alternative to trusting and hoping is that you isolate yourself and you become a cynic. And it's so easy in this world in which we live today because every time you turn around, there's some sort of institution, some sort of structure, some sort of leader, some sort of politician who's violating trust once again. You almost just come to expect it. If you're not careful, then you digress into cynicism, and cynicism doesn't help anybody, including you.

See, cynics prejudge people. "I've never met you before, but just by the way you look I'm just assuming that you're going to think this or act this way." Cynics put people into categories. Cynics come to conclusions way too quickly. You can't teach a cynic anything; they already know it all. Cynics say things like this. "Well, I know how this plays out." Cynics keep their hearts locked down.

Here's what cynics do. I've already alluded to it just a few moments ago. Cynics project past hurts and betrayals on future opportunities and relationships. "We've never met, but it doesn't really matter. I've already prejudged you, and so because of the hurt of my past, I've locked my heart down and I've already kind of projected onto you the hurts from my past."

Several years ago... I remember the first time we ever did a spontaneous baptism here at the church. We do them all the time now, but about eight or nine years ago was the first time we'd ever done one, and so we didn't know how it was going to go.

So I got up here and I preached the message and tried to lay out what the gospel message is and what it isn't, what baptism is, and tried to anticipate people's objections and reasons why they maybe wouldn't get baptized, and just gave people an invitation to do it. We saw like 275 people get baptized that day, just in one morning. It was amazing.

The following week, I got an email from a lady who said, "It was my first time to visit the church and I just wanted you to know that I don't trust you and that made me super nervous," and she went on to explain how she came from and grew up in a church that was very legalistic around the issue of baptism. They taught something called water regeneration, which is basically that what saves you is going under water and that's where the emphasis is placed, and she said, "It made me super nervous to see you urging people to be baptized right then and there and I just don't know what your motives are."

See, what she's doing—it's understandable—she's taking a past hurt and she's projecting it upon me, whom she did not know. And I've done the same thing with others.

I was talking to somebody out in the lobby years ago when I was starting a sermon series just on the vision of our church, that this is where we feel God's leading us. This individual walked up to me afterward and his body language was so rigid and so cold. He was just like, "I don't understand where we're going with this series and I'm not quite sure about what you're going to say here because, see, in my last church, the preacher did something very similar to this. We came to find out all he really wanted was our money."

You come to see that a past hurt gets projected upon future relationships, and it just locks everything down.

So I shared with you some of the ways that I've been hurt in the past, and I tell you being a pastor, especially of a church this large, (which I never dreamed that I would ever be in a position like this) it's a very weird feeling to know that there are a whole lot more people who know me that I don't know.

There are times when people walk up to me out in public and either they don't think very highly of me or they think way too highly of me. It's a very weird experience. I just see myself as Aaron. Just an ordinary guy, got a lot of imperfections and flaws and stuff that I'm working through. Just ask my wife. She has a list of all of them. She can hand them to you. I'm totally kidding. She's very, very gracious.

But I'm just an ordinary guy. There are moments when I get confused at times as to why somebody treats me the way that they do or maybe why they want to be my friend. And I'm always, in the back of my mind, going, "Now why do you want to be my friend? Why do you want to get close to me?" because I've got trust issues. I've been hurt.

I realize that leaders get themselves in trouble when they take that hurt and they isolate themselves and they say, "You know what? I'm just going to come out here on stage and I'll do my thing and then I'll go back to my office and hide and I'm not going to have any close relationships because I don't want you to hurt me." That'll get me in trouble faster than anything.

See, the way in which I can keep a soft heart and the way in which I can push cynicism out of my life is through vulnerability. And vulnerability is exactly that. It means you can hurt me if you want to. It means I've had to... I want you to know this, that, as your pastor—I don't have everybody speak into my life, that would be insane, but I do have people who speak into my life.

Here's what I've had to. I've had to get some people around me and I've had to say, "Hey, listen. I trust you. You could still hurt me, but I'm going to actually share with you some information about me that if you wanted to you could use this against me." So figuratively speaking, I've handed them the gun and I've handed them the bullets. That's what vulnerability is.

Here's the thing. How else are you going to live?

So you say, "Well, I don't know about that because that person could hurt me." Yeah, he might. In fact, he likely will. But the alternative to that is that you isolate. You can't even trust your own heart.

So God says to us: Please don't shut the door on trust. Please keep it open. Please be a trusting person because the alternative to that is that you'll just isolate and you'll get hardened and you'll grow as a cynic.

I think it's important for you to hear this, that if you are a cynic, if there's a cynic who lives in you, it does not mean that you're a bad person; it means that you're a hurt person. It means your trust has been violated.

My friend Carey Nieuwhof says it this way. He says, "Cynicism begins not because you don't care, but because you do."

You did care. You do care. And then somebody you cared about, they spit on your care and then they threw it on the ground, they stomped on it, and you said, "Well, if that's what it's going to get me, then no thanks." So you go through a painful breakup and you lock down your heart.

You have a controlling boss and so you leave that job and you take that baggage and you project it onto your new boss.

You have a bad church experience, then you go to another church and you say, "I'm not going to get involved at all," or you walk away from church altogether.

You've been taken advantage of. You say, "I'll never be vulnerable ever again."

Listen. That is exactly where the enemy wants you. That's exactly what he wants you to think. That's exactly what he wants you to feel. That's exactly what he wants you to say.

In those moments, you've got to fight to keep a soft heart. You've got to fight to trust again, fight to keep trust alive in your life, and you've got to stay vulnerable.

Here's the antidote. It's trust. Here's the reason why. Trust leads to hope, and hope is the antidote to cynicism.

Don't let go of hope.

So you say, "Well, these people have hurt me." I get that. So how do we position ourselves? Well, Jeremiah 17, this passage that's been laced through the message, let's come back to it.

God says to us, “But blessed are those who **trust** in the Lord and have made the Lord their **hope** and **confidence**.”

I know for some of you that’s not enough. Some of you would say, “Well I’ve got trust issues with the Lord.” Hang around. We’ll get there.

But he says put your trust and your hope and your confidence in me, the one who is trustworthy. Here’s what’ll happen. If you do that, you “are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach **deep** into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought.” That’s relational debt. That’s what he’s talking about. “Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.” Even through the hurt.

So the antidote to this isn’t to pull back and to say, “I’m not going to trust anybody ever again.” He says no the solution to this is to plant your roots deep, stay connected to the Lord to develop deep roots that can withstand the intentional or even the unintentional hurts that are caused by other people.

Could I say it this way? To become unoffendable. And when I say that, I’m not talking about being emotionally detached; I’m talking about being emotionally connected to the right source.

In other words, you say, “You know what? I’m going to plug myself into these relationships and I know full well that these people could hurt me, but you know what? Even if they do, that’s actually not where my source of identity is connected to. My source of identity is connected to someone greater than that.”

Can I just say this to somebody maybe visiting for the first time or you’ve been away from church a long time or you’ve never been here? You’re trying to figure out exactly what a Christian is? That’s all a Christian is.

A Christian is just a regular, broken, flawed person with trust issues who chooses to put his trust in someone who can be trusted and says, “You know what? I’m going to plant my roots deep. I’m not going to try to avoid the storm; I’m going to actually try to stay connected to the only source of strength that can sustain me through it.”

So that’s the invitation today. And maybe you’re not fully convinced and that’s okay. I would just simply ask you just to walk with us through this series and see what God might do in and through your life.

Really, here’s all I want you to do with the message today. I know you’re chewing on it. I know this is kind of a heavy subject. It hits close to home with all of us. Here’s the first place to begin: For you just to heal. Because I know that a number of you right now are going through it, maybe right now in the middle of it. Maybe you’ve been through something in your past that you’re not fully over and you’re like, “Man, this hits really a little too close to home, Aaron.”

The only thing I'm asking you to do today is just be. I'm not asking you to get over it. I'm not asking you to walk out of here and say, "Well, everything's okay. Everything's great." It's not great. I'm just asking you to just be real, be authentic. Don't be bitter. Don't stuff it. Don't fake it, but don't be angry. Just say, "God, I just need healing. I need to be healed because I don't want to be a cynical, skeptical, bitter person, but I also don't want to be a naïve, blind, foolish person either."

And God says, "Welcome home and stay connected to me."

Would you be willing just to keep the door open on trust? That's all I'm asking.

Father, we come to you right now, and I just pray that your Spirit would fall freshly upon the room that each and every individual sitting in, regardless of what campus they're at; that you would meet us right where we are, right in the seat that we are sitting in; and that you would speak a word that we desperately need to hear.

God, I pray that you would speak to that man whose wife just told him she's leaving. I pray that you would speak to that woman who just found out that her husband's been unfaithful. I pray that you would speak to that orphan who wonders if they have a home. I pray that you would speak to that employee who's just been fired unfairly.

I pray that you would speak to that friend who feels alone and that you would let them know that there is a God who can be trusted. And I pray that the only thing that they would feel any need to do right now is just to sit there and be and to experience the healing that only you can provide.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.