



Does trusting God remove anxiety?

by [Phil](#)

Over the years of doing therapy with Christians I have noticed how many feel guilty for their anxieties. "If only I could trust God more...I say I believe he is good but clearly I don't trust him because I can't stop being anxious." Still others express distress that their faith in God does not change their feelings of hurt over past relational wounds and fears it will never get better.

It seems we believe this maxim: If I really trust in God, I will be at peace. I will not struggle with the brokenness around me or with the unknown future.

Is this true? Is it possible to trust God fully and experience chronic negative emotion?

Let me suggest a better maxim and then illustrate it with a couple of Psalms.

Because I trust God completely, I bring him my angst again and again.

At the recent #CCEF16 conference on emotions, David Powlison referred to Psalm 62:8a, *Trust in him at all times, O people*; He noted that this assertion is strong. But what does it look like in action? David pointed us to the next line (8b) *Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge*. Trusting God looks a lot like venting, crying out in our confusion, sharing our fears and despairs.

Take a closer look at this Psalm. The writer is under assault by others. He likens himself to being a tottering fence, something easily knocked over. He is asking his enemies, "how long are you going to harm me?" He knows their intent. But their evil is the worst sort, one that pretends to be good but is really evil. *They take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse*. It is likely the psalmist could say, "with friends like this, who needs enemies?"

So, how does he talk to himself? Look at the cyclical pattern: reminder-pain-reminder-warning-reminder

1. He starts with some truth. My only rest (or silence/peace) is in you God. You alone are my fortress. I will never [ultimately] be shaken.
2. He laments. But you enemies are trying your best to destroy me, a weak, tottering fence.
3. He reminds himself. Remember, look for rest and peace in God alone, it is only there you can find it, even when the ground is shaking
4. He warns self and others. Don't trust in your position, don't trust in ill-gotten gain. And if God blesses you, don't trust in the blessing
5. He cycles back to truth. Remember this one thing: God you are strong AND loving. You will remain righteous in your dealings with us.

While the Psalm ends, I suspect the writer could easily have kept the pattern going, as in starting again with the first verse or adding more to the pattern.

This pattern of truth, honest admission of pain, reminder of truth is a far better picture of the reality of life hidden in Christ than the false stoic (or Zen) image of being unperturbed by the chaos in and around us. God does not remove us from the storm. Instead, we express our trust (as much to remind ourselves as in bold assertion), we lament, we groan, we pour out our troubles and we circle back to the one truth we can hang our hope on.

You can see this pattern also in Psalm 42 and 43 with slight variations: Remember when I used to be out in front leading the worship but now my tears are my only food. Why am I like this? I hope in God. But I am downcast. Day and night God is loving...but it seems you have forgotten me in my oppression? Vindicate me. You are my stronghold so why is this not getting better? Free me so I can worship you...yet I am still in despair even as I hope in you.

If you feel guilty much of the time when thinking about your level of trusting God, consider this alternative narrative: it is the greatest act of trust to keep bringing God your troubles, even when things or your response to them do not get easier.

So, does trust in God remove our anxieties? Not as much as we might think. But, if you could no longer feel guilty about your angst, might you in fact feel more peace as you trust God through the storm?