

TRUST ME

LEARNING TO TRUST THAT GOD IS GOOD AND
IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN LIFE IS DIFFICULT

Verna Birkey

Adapted by Claire McCarey and Heather Craig

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR *TRUST ME*

Claire and Heather have done us all a great service by updating Ver-
na Birkey's book! Western Christians, steeped in a self-focused and
self-entitled culture, desperately need a more robust theology of suf-
fering. And the heart of a robust theology of suffering is the biblical
teaching about God's goodness and sovereignty. Birkey's teaching on
this truth is biblical, practical, and compassionate. May it receive a
wide reading!

—Gary DeLashmutt

Co-Founder of Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio

Author of

*Loving God's Way: A Fresh Look at the One Another Passages and
Colossians: Christ over All; Christ in You*

Trust Me took biblical truth I have known in bits and pieces from
over fifty years of faith and put them all together in one place. In
reading it, I was reminded again not just why I can trust Jesus in
times of hardship and struggle, but who it is I am trusting and what
trusting Him looks like. The updates bring timeless truth into a cur-
rent context, which made what I already know new again. It is also
a book filled with empathy, which is rare. The stories represent dif-
ferent types of difficulties, with no weight or scale assigned to any.
I consider it a resource for the Christian life that I will go back to
again and again. I would feel comfortable sharing this with a new

mom worn out from lack of sleep and a friend in despair over a tragic loss—it would be powerful and appropriate for both.

—Elizabeth Murphy, Speaker and Author

Far more important to Him than giving us an easy life is the development of our character and our growth in grace. Every person and event that enters our lives moves toward that one all-consuming passion of His heart, that we be like His Son. This declaration from the book conveys, for me, the essence of its message. With appropriate Scriptures, relevant stories, and simple but insightful questions, the reader is encouraged along the path of beneficial self-reflection to hopefully see the eternal purposes of God within the often confusing and painful experiences of life. This book may well function at its best when used as part of a structured group activity.

—Ian Stewart

Team Leader, Christian Guidelines Counseling Agency, Northern Ireland

“Trust Me” is not so much a command as an invitation to find our identity and rest in the One who is completely trustworthy. I envision people gathered around a living room to consider together what Claire and Heather have presented as a case for living under the banner of the One who is good and who is in control, and determining together that He is indeed at work in all the craziness of this life in a broken world. What hope we have as we lean into Him! The thoughtful questions provided allow for consideration of God’s character and nature individually as well as corporately and compel us to respond to His goodness.

At a critical juncture in my life while facing the despairing loss of an infant son, God offered me hope with these words: “Now is the time

to reconcile how you feel with what you know to be true.” In a real way, that is the message of *Trust Me*. It is true that He is good and is in control, and that is our source of hope.

—Donna Crum
Speaker and Leadership Team Member of Park Community Church,
Chicago, Illinois

Where is God in this? How can God let this happen? How can God have control over this situation and still be good? These questions, and many versions of them, rumble beneath the surface in our sufferings and can erupt in anxiety, distress, despair, hopelessness, and guilt. In short, accessible chapters, this book seeks to address such questions biblically. There is no dodging of hard issues, and with the help of personal stories, we are repeatedly brought back to the best and most basic of responses: Trust Me. This book will help us personally and will also be useful in one-to-one discipling and small-group study. May the Lord use it widely to help us grow . . . in trusting Him.

—Dr. Andrew Collins
Consultant Psychiatrist and Executive Committee Member,
Biblical Counseling, UK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Verna Birkey, author of the original version of this book, *If God Is in Control, Why Is My World Falling Apart?*, is a woman before her time. For over thirty years she ministered worldwide to thousands of women through the Enriched Living Workshops, and she had a wonderful gift of applying truth to family life and everyday issues. She taught practical, biblical, timely messages spoken with authority and clarity and given by God.

Verna is a graduate of Goshen College, Indiana, and Columbia International University Graduate School, South Carolina, and is the author of thirteen books. Today she is a youthful ninety-year-old with an infectious and vibrant energy. Still driving, she continues to serve God and others as she visits residents in local care homes, bringing them the comfort and presence of God.

This book, now updated for a wider audience, seems even more relevant than when it was first written in 1990. It is filled with timeless truths and a strong message of hope and confidence in our uncertain world. Although theologically honest, her writing touches the heart.

Verna Birkey's name will stand alongside men and women of great faith. Her legacy to the body of Christ is immeasurable.

FOREWORD

A few years ago we were looking for some material on anxiety to use in our women's Bible study groups. Claire's mum pulled this old green book with curled-down corners from her bookshelves and suggested we try it. And so we read *If God Is in Control, Why Is My World Falling Apart?* for the first time, and we knew that our groups needed the contents of this book.

We ordered copies (secondhand, because the book was out of print) for the women in our groups. We met together in our small groups, poring over verses we had read—often for the first time—and were overwhelmed with truths God used to speak directly into all our circumstances. As He enlarged our understanding of His love for us, and as He strengthened our faith with an even bigger view of who He is, we knew that more people needed to have access to this book. And not just women! We knew the men in our church also needed to learn these truths.

Through the very humble and gracious Pam Johnston, we contacted Verna and, with great brazenness, asked if we could produce a new version of her book. The goal was to make this book available to anyone, whether they were new in their faith or had been walking with God for many years.

To our delight, Verna said yes! Thus began a five-year process of squeezing in time on the book between being mums and wives and workers and church leaders.

But now we are done, with a great deal of help and support from many people, including our Belfast Collective family, our husbands, Pam Johnston, and, of course, Verna.

We have two quick pieces of advice (there's that brazenness again!).

First, we encourage people to do this material in small groups rather than on their own. Working out how to understand and apply God's truth is a more challenging, enriching, and fulfilling experience when you get to participate with other people who want this too.

Second, there are questions at the end of each chapter to help with personal reflection and facilitate group discussion, but we would also recommend taking the time to work through the "Going Deeper" questions at the back of the book. One of the things we loved about this book was the time spent in different parts of God's Word, so we encourage you to take the time to do that. It will be worth it!

One final word. This book is not meant to be an exhaustive study of suffering or God's sovereignty. The goal of this book is that anyone reading might see more clearly how the Bible reveals to us a God who loves us, a God who is good, and a God who is in control. This is our prayer for you as you read it.

Claire and Heather

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INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this book, perhaps you have questions about God.

Maybe you are experiencing painful circumstances that threaten to shake your faith and cause you to doubt God's love. Perhaps you have a family member with cancer, or someone in your family has lost their job. Maybe you are experiencing a marriage breakdown or you have bills that can't be paid.

If you are reading this book, perhaps you just don't understand why people can believe in God when the world is so messed up.

The Bible gives us two significant, sustaining, and comforting truths for all the circumstances we face: God is good, and God is in control.

But when flights are delayed, when the baby won't sleep, when our plans fall through, when illness strikes, or when jobs are insecure, we feel as if everything is out of control . . .

Then the questions come flooding in. Why is this happening? What will the outcome be? What should I do now? How can I cope? These questions are normal, but underlying all the questions, we can have a deep-seated assurance that God is in control. Our lives, with their inconveniences and difficulties, have not taken Him by surprise.

In this time of staggering changes in our world, it is good to affirm that our loving Lord reigns over all the earth. It is even more comfort-

ing to know and believe that God rules in the daily circumstances of my personal life. Nothing in this world is out of His control. Life is different when I affirm that God is ruling in my current situation.

In all of this, what can bring us to a place of trust during large or small crises, when we feel our world is falling apart?

That is what this book is all about.

CHAPTER 1

God Knows Best

Rightly understood and accepted with the heart, the truth of God's loving control, coupled with a deep assurance that He actually cares for me, is one of the most peace-producing concepts in all of Scripture. But what can bring us to that place of trust?

THE CIRCLE OF GOD'S WILL



The above circle represents the sphere of God's will: God's way for us, His plan for our lives. And we will also include in this what He allows to happen to us in life—His permissive will. The *X* inside the circle represents the person whose basic life direction is to go God's way. He or she is committed to Jesus Christ as Savior, knows Him as Lord and Master, and wants to follow in His way.¹

If our desire is to follow the way of God, to live in agreement with Him and have His will fulfilled in us, then that *X* represents you and me. We have responded to God's call to us through Paul when he said:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom. 12:1–2 NIV).

At the end of Paul's life, he was able to say, "As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and I have remained faithful" (2 Tim. 4:6–7). Paul had lived his life with a single-minded purpose, with a solid commitment to walk in the ways of God and in the plans God had for him, and Paul's decision is one that every follower of Christ must make every single day, in every circumstance of life.

The desire to walk in God's way is the same attitude Jesus had and expressed in so many ways in the book of John: "For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will" (John 6:38), and "I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

Jesus single-mindedly walked in God's ways as God revealed them step by step. The supreme expression of this commitment came during those closing days of His life and the trying hours in the garden of Gethsemane as He poured out His heart to the Father to "take this cup of suffering away from me." But when the cup remained, His sincere and unqualified prayer continued to be "I want your will to be done, not mine" (Luke 22:42).

COMMITTED TO GOD'S WILL

For us, the first mile of the journey toward peace is this same commitment to the will of God that Jesus had, and like Jesus, we must be committed to choosing God's will above our own will, above our own preferences, and above our own desires.

God's ultimate and general will for all of His children is that we become more and more Christlike, that we increasingly become "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29 NIV). In addition, He promises to lead each of us in the way we should go. As we trust in His will, we can be sure He will direct us on our specific path. He directs us in many ways. For example, He directs us through the Bible, through the voice of circumstances, or through the advice of a trusted, godly friend. He may use other means, but one thing is sure: God never guides us into sin, nor does He ever expect us to do anything contrary to His Word.

GOD'S GOOD, PLEASING, AND PERFECT WILL

It is reassuring and encouraging to know that what God wills for us is what's best for us. His will is "good, pleasing, and perfect." However, many of God's children tend to have a wrong view of His will. Perhaps they think it is difficult, harsh, or against their best interests. Some may think God is out to make their lives miserable and take away all those things, people, or even ministries in which they find joy. But our loving heavenly Father is not like that. John 10:10 NIV says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." As He promises us in this verse, He is interested in our personal welfare and our best interests. The love God has for us is wrapped up in His goodness, and His posture toward us is always one of love and doing what is best for us. Numerous times in Deuteronomy the promise comes "that it may

be well with you.” This was God’s heart for His people then and is still true for us today.

Jess’s Story: *I became a Christian at a young age, and growing up, I increasingly wanted to live for God. Somewhere along the way, however, my thinking got a bit confused. I began to see God’s will as a tightrope and almost impossible to discern. I believed that God would always ask me to give up what I wanted for something less desirable. His will for me would always be more painful or more difficult. By giving up what I wanted and accepting a harder path, I could prove my love to Him and learn the most about service and devotion. This belief came from right intentions, but it led to months and months of worry and confusion. Was I studying the right subjects? Was I in the right relationship? This led to a long period where I couldn’t even pray. I couldn’t come before God until I was sure I was in His will.*

GOD DOES KNOW BEST

Many of us can identify with these sentiments. In fact, it is true that we scarcely think that God, our Father, is equal to us in tenderness, love, and thoughtful care. Often in our secret thoughts, we charge Him with neglect and indifference. However, the truth is that His care is infinitely superior to any possibilities of human care, and He, who counts the very hairs on our heads and will not let one sparrow fall to the ground without His awareness, takes note of the minutest matters that can affect the lives of His children and regulates them all according to His own perfect will.

God is our Father and He loves us, and He knows just what is best for us. Therefore, His will is the most perfect thing for us under any circumstance. This can, of course, be difficult to understand. It really would seem as if God’s own children were more afraid of His will than of anything else in life, yet His good, pleasing, and perfect will brings

only lovingkindness, tender mercy, deep joy, and peace. These are all things God has promised in His Word. When I agree that the will of God for me is good—this can be a difficult thing to do—and when I know He has my best interests in view, I can say, “Yes, Lord, Your will be done.”

We are constantly praying one of two things (sometimes in words, sometimes in thoughts, but always in actions): *Lord, help me do what pleases You*, or *Lord, let me do what pleases me*. If we are honest with God, He will show us which of these two prayers we often use. Some of us use the first prayer in the morning and the second prayer throughout the day. The second is inevitably our true desire. Some people vary between the two, which leads to up-and-down lives. Some prayers grow more and more into the first as an all-day prayer, and our lives grow stronger and steadier, more dependable, and much more peaceful.

AM I LIVING WITHIN THE CIRCLE?

We need to ask ourselves, am I living within the circle of God’s will for me? Here we are referring to a deeper relationship than merely claiming Christ as Savior and going our own way. Rather, am I committed to going His way, to walking in obedience to His will—not wanting to go counter to His will but to cooperate with Him? Have I made that basic life choice to seek His will and way above my own?

It’s important to remember that yielding to God’s will does not assure us an easy life or that we will get all we think we should have, but in the face of a heartache, yielding is the first step to peace. We must ask if our will is aligned with God’s will. Sometimes we may experience a stubborn, inward resistance and a clinging to our own way that we may not want to recognize, but according to Jeremiah 17:9, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked.” It is good to ask the Holy Spirit for His gentle work of instruction and

illumination. Jeremiah 17:10 further explains that the Lord searches “all hearts and examine[s] secret motives.”

If we are to believe that God does know what is best for us and if we are going to be able to follow His will, we need to have a growing understanding and trust of His promises to us.

What, then, are God’s promises?

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What negative ideas have you or some of your friends had about the will of God?
2. Write out the promise of Jeremiah 29:11, personalizing it for yourself (e.g., changing “you” to “me”). If this verse is true, how might it apply to your current circumstances?
3. Each morning this week, ask God to help you check out which prayer you are consciously or unconsciously praying during the day:

Let me do what pleases me, or Help me do what pleases you.

At the end of the day, think through your attitudes and actions, and pray for God to reveal your habit of life in this respect.