

## Introduction

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In this short book there are forty reflections about trust. They are offered not as definitive statements but rather as brief ideas to spark further thinking. It may be helpful to allow time to consider each one, thinking about where you agree or disagree, and what you may wish to do with what you have read.

The central theme is that whenever we talk about trusting someone there is an inevitable, often unspoken, second half of the sentence: there is something specific that we are trusting this person *to do*.

This is true of all our relationships and the same question arises for those interested in Christian faith. Christians talk rather a lot about trusting in Jesus, but what does that mean? What do they trust Jesus *to do*?

Some of the reflections are based around two characters, Alex and Thomas. Thomas seems to be particularly interested in issues around trust; as the book continues his identity becomes a little clearer.

If any small phrase catches your attention and is helpful to you in your understanding of trust, given and received, then the author will be grateful indeed. He has much to learn in this area himself, hence the need to write the book.

## Reflection 1

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### *A restless beginning to a walk*

*There are times when I long  
For a world refreshed  
With hope restored, renewed  
Where truth and trust grow strong  
Once more  
And fear is lost in love*

I pushed the paper across the desk with resignation and frustration. It had not been a good morning. And now this poem was not working either. What was I trying to say? Was it a plaintive cry or a call to arms? I looked out of the window and saw the hill that I had seen so often but had never visited. It seemed a good day for a walk.

At the top of the hill there was a grassy glade. I sat with my back against a tree and looked around. A group was gathering and they seemed to be preparing for some sort of campaign. Some were smiling and some were grim-faced. Bags were being fastened and hitched on to shoulders, boot laces were being tied tighter. It was a warm and fresh morning.

I heard snatches of conversations and caught the exchanges, spoken and unspoken. It seemed that the next stage of the campaign was a walk down the hill and through the woods. It was uncertain terrain. There would no doubt be need for company, conversation and assistance. Something caught my eye and I looked up in time to see a bird flying across the glade.

“What are you thinking?” A young man had walked across and was standing next to me.

I am not one of those who can slip easily into relaxed conversations with strangers but I did not feel as guarded as I would usually be. Perhaps this was an unusual place. I wondered why I had not visited it before, even though its outline had always seemed familiar. I found myself replying:

“I am wondering what it means to prepare for a journey alongside companions such as these. I am wondering how they know they can trust each other.”

“This is a question that is good to ask,” my new companion replied. “My name is Thomas. Would you like to know more?”

His directness and assurance were disconcerting, and so, if I’m honest, was the topic. Trust has been both a comforting and a disturbing word for me. I could think of friendships that have been full of trust but, equally vividly, there was that time when someone I had trusted badly let me down. And

there were the times when I had damaged friends' trust in me. I have let more people down than I care to remember.

Perhaps I was thinking about all this because trust was more on my mind than I realised. That in itself felt rather unsettling. Or perhaps it was the hill. And so I simply nodded. Thomas sat down on the grass and continued:

“Do you see how this large group is divided into much smaller groups, preparing to walk down the hill? In these smaller groups the key theme, as you have guessed, is the kind of trust that exists between the members. The three questions they are asking about each other are these:

- \* Can I trust them to care for me?
- \* Can I trust them to be able to help me, to make a difference?
- \* Can I trust them to trust me in turn?”

“You seem very sure about all this,” I said, aware of how defensive I was now sounding. “I think I need you to explain a little more about those three questions.”

“I would be pleased to do so,” said Thomas. “May I ask your name?”

“Alex.” I replied.

## Reflection 2

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### *Trusting someone who cares*

“Alex, look at that group getting ready over there,” said Thomas. “Look at the way they glance or smile at each other. They like being together. There is genuine affection. If you are in that group, you know that you are cared for.

“It is not selfish to want to be cared for and to be valued, it is a healthy recognition that we need external affirmation to help us flourish. It makes sense to want to trust someone who is on our side and who has our best interests at heart.

“This does not mean we want to be favoured. It would be too narrow to trust someone who is never willing to affirm others whilst apparently always keen to affirm us. We know that our well-being is tied up with that of the group. It is not enough for you to be the only one to play your clarinet well, you want the whole orchestra to sound good. For the orchestra to succeed each person needs to receive the right support and guidance so each can play their part as best they can. Deep down we understand that if our trusted

friend is truly on our side then sometimes they may need to speak difficult truths so we can play better, we trust them to care enough to do that.

“Trusting someone who truly cares includes knowing that the person is willing to listen to our whole situation. If not, there may arise conversations like these: ‘I wanted her to chat with me about my career prospects, but she never even asked what stage my children were at in school, and whether they could move easily’. ‘He listens so he can say he listens, but he is not really interested in what he hears.’ ‘He does not care that I play hockey. He once learnt to trampoline and that’s all he wants to talk about. In fact, I rather think he would prefer it if I stopped playing hockey altogether.’ ‘She pretends she is listening to me but all the time her eyes are darting around, seeing if there is someone more interesting in the room.’ ‘He kept asking me lots of questions, but somehow it seemed to be more for his interest than for my benefit.’ We want to be able to trust someone who cares for us as we are, and will listen to our story as it is.”

Sitting on the grass in the morning sun I remembered and honoured those whom I could trust to care for me, those who had truly listened to as much as I was willing to share. And then I considered those whom I thought had cared, but

who later I had painfully realised were following their own agenda. As if reading my thoughts, Thomas continued:

“People’s motives are always going to be slightly mixed. But you would be surprised at how many continue wanting to trust people who do not really care for them at all.”

I nodded at that. I wondered how he knew I played the clarinet. And that my experiences of trying to be part of an orchestra were, to say the least, somewhat mixed.