

Don't Tell Me What to Do

February 2025

A new day has begun in our country. The old order is passing. The individual is supreme. The community is secondary. The new guiding principle and ethic today warns us, "Be wary of believing what anyone tells you – it is most likely a lie." And the smart now say, "Don't tell me what to do." Quietly, we proudly think to ourselves, "I am not sure I need a boss or even a team with which to work; I think I am just fine on my own, thank you." But God has always warned us about the perils of excessive independence, distrust, and disobedience. They often become the ingredients and beginning of our downfall. They are the seeds which create a crisis of faith, nearly every time. We humans have been created to be in community, and community requires bonds of trust and humility, and our ultimate trust is in God. If we lose those underpinnings to our souls, we have lost everything. Proverbs 29:18 puts it this way, "When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful."

The best of human history is often attributable to leaders who exercised trust in our Lord. Could you imagine if Jesus had said to the Father, "I am fine now; I no longer need your guidance; I can make decisions on my own. I am kneeling here in the Garden of Gethsemane, and you want me to be crucified, but I have a better plan which involves a lot less suffering." If Jesus had followed those



temptations there would be no atonement for our sins, creating a dangerous dearth of grace in our world. Or, if Martin Luther had joined the armed rebellion against the ruling authorities of his day instead of holding fast to his faith alone, there would have been no start to the Reformation. Or, if Martin Luther King, Jr. had walked away from his peaceful, non-violent demonstrations in the streets of Memphis and joined a militant group at the time, his powerful, peacemaking mission from God would have been arrested.

Last month, I told you about one of my latest adventures in airports and airplanes. I didn't think it could get any worse than what I shared with you until I boarded another flight last week. The guy sitting next to me was wearing a pair of large, air-tight headphones, talking loudly and boldly to his friends on his phone. He was completely oblivious to his surroundings. He could have cared less that no one around him could enjoy their own peaceful or restful thoughts while he was blabbering away. We were all forced to listen to him debate with his buddies about the NFL playoff football game the previous day. His individual, highly enjoyable life was all that mattered to him. How anyone seated near him was doing that morning was irrelevant. But what he did during the landing of our flight was what really blew my mind. The flight attendant came by more than once and asked this fellow to stow away his laptop for the landing. He completely

ignored her and kept his laptop open on his tray, looking obsessively at his screen during the entire landing. The flight attendant had apparently assumed he had heard, understood, and obeyed her. But, no, he was gleefully lost in his own world and had apparently concluded that he didn't need to listen to anyone. His overall demeanor clearly communicated "Please don't tell me what to do." His internet discussion and pressing business matters on the ground were far more important to him than anything else.

I am fortunate to know friends who are very active in recovery programs for alcohol, drug or other addictions. Many of them have a beautiful and enviable relationship with our Lord, their chosen higher power. They trust and obey God with all their lives. To do otherwise will lead them eventually back to their destruction and near certain death. And they practice their recovery and depend on their success by respectfully and whole-heartedly serving each other and their larger community of friends. They would never think of saying to themselves, their higher power, or others, "Don't tell me what to do." Quite the opposite. They would say, please tell me what to do, whom should I trust, because if I am left to my own thoughts, I will make poor and harmful decisions every time.



One of my heroes in this recovery world is Dr. Emad Hamdy, founder of Freedom House in Egypt. His recovery program has blossomed from one facility 20 years ago to numerous recovery houses now throughout Egypt. His work is an outreach effort of Kasr El Dohara Presbyterian Church in Cairo, the largest Protestant, Arabic-speaking church in the Middle East. Many people do not know that many Egyptians and other Middle Eastern people are addicted to heroin and other hard drugs. Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol; therefore, sadly, many turn to drugs for unfortunate solace and worldly comforts. Many Christians in the Middle East also succumb to the power of drugs and alcohol in their lives. Dr. Emad's program has succeeded humbly in helping many of the participants to trust Jesus as their chosen higher power. Freedom House relies almost entirely on private donations, receiving very little government support. Please let me know if you are interested in becoming involved with this fantastic recovery program.

If distrust and disobedience become our new guiding lights for morality and life, our world is edging towards deeper trouble. In America, most people are still inclined to believe "In God we trust;" however, demonstration of that trust is clearly dimming. Trust and obedience are special

attributes of kind and successful leaders. Soldiers depend on trust and obedience for survival and success in war. Families and marriages survive when there is mutual submission, trust, and respect amongst its members. For many years, the best sports organizations enjoyed fantastic coaches and beautiful team cohesion; today, excessive individualism and gambling are threatening to destroy one of our most cherished pastimes.



One of my favorite passages in the Gospels is the recorded dialogue between Jesus and a Roman centurion. In this precious story, one of the centurion's treasured slaves and friend was sick and dying. The centurion sent messengers to Jesus asking if he would come and save his slave from certain death. Jesus decided to follow the messengers back to the centurion's house and learn more about the situation. When he entered the edge of that town, the centurion ran up and said to Jesus, "Lord, don't trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such honor. I am not even worthy of coming and meeting you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say, 'Do this,' they do it. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, 'I tell you I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel!' And when they returned to his house, they found the slave completely healed." (Luke 7:6b-10)

This is one of the few descriptions of Jesus being completely "amazed." He was blown away with the centurion's humility, obedience, and faith. In response, Jesus healed his slave, even though this story took place within a Roman and Gentile neighborhood. In other words, our magnificent triune God responds fully and quickly whenever trust, humility, and faith are at the center of our requests, needs, and longings, regardless of our backgrounds or social standings. If we are prideful, self-centered, excessively independent, and distrusting, Jesus weeps because he sadly cannot enter our hearts and homes to heal us under those unfortunate circumstances.

We all want and need trusted authorities in our lives. This is the way life is supposed to be. However, if you find yourself thinking or even saying, "Don't tell me what to do," you may want to examine where trust was injured or altered in your life. If you want to back up and reinsert trust into your life, I recommend beginning with trusting God again. It will completely change your life. If you trust him, trust of others will most likely flow from it. Next time around you might even notice that a flight attendant, friend, teacher, or coach is trying to help you, love you, and keep you from greater danger, not just telling you what to do.

Few words in our Bible better summarize a life of faith and trust than these: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." (Proverbs 3:5,6)