

“It is hard not to be moved by Timothy Nagy’s passion for his topic and his own trust in God’s desire for our sanctification, helpfully defined as the process in which we become more like Jesus Christ. Mr. Nagy’s brief but deep dive into biblical theology will reward those who are new to the faith as well as the more seasoned disciple in need of spiritual refreshment from a young and welcome voice.”

The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld  
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of  
New Hampshire

“Timothy Nagy provokes spiritual introspection to galvanize our trust in the character of God. His book delivers an honest, straightforward approach for all Believers who seek fulfillment in their spiritual journey.”

Archbishop Timothy Paul, S.T.D.  
International Communion Of  
The Holy Christian Orthodox Church

“*Trust: A Perspective on God’s Will* provides a roadmap to the frequently-asked and intensely-felt question, ‘What is God’s will?’ Drawing from a wide range of voices in the Christian tradition and ever dependent on Scripture, Nagy does not suggest a short jaunt to an easy answer, but a lifelong journey to the right answer: God’s will is to trust unto holiness. I will be glad to put this into the hands of my students and parishioners who are in the midst of asking this question.”

Amy Peeler  
Associate Professor of New Testament,  
Wheaton College and  
Associate Rector, St. Mark’s Episcopal Church,  
Geneva, IL

“Through scripture, metaphors and the Christian giants of history, Nagy shows us in *Trust: A Perspective on God’s Will* that discerning God’s will for our lives is more than knowing what’s around the corner. God’s will is for us to trust him through the thick and thin, the good and the bad, but particularly the trials of life. This is what leads to holiness. We are to be patient and know God is working in our lives for His good and our good. My favorite phrases to hold onto as I learn to trust God with my life are: “an experienced gardener will never damage a fruit tree by pruning it,” and “the goldsmith has to place the gold in the hottest part of the fire.”

Rachel Britton  
Speaker, Author and Blogger



# TRUST

A Perspective  
on God's Will

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## PREFACE

I have sat down to write a preface for this book a few times now, and I have found it challenging to convey what I want without being too polarizing. I also want to carefully set a tone that is conversational, easygoing, and ecumenical. So to you, my reader, before you dive into this book, I hope that you will consider the following train of thought.

Belief and trust are key differentiating factors in Christianity. Belief is judging something to be factual. Believing the gospel of Jesus Christ is the first critical step in Christian life. However, just as James writes that faith without works is dead, I would say that belief without trust is dead. Belief indicates that one is convinced of God's existence, but what's next? What can one do with such an amazing reality? You guessed it—one can trust. Trust is a means for activating belief. Trust is putting faith into action. Trust is the difference between knowing

Jesus is there and following him. Furthermore, trust is not an aloof and dogmatic theological concept tucked away somewhere in the church archives. Rather, trust is accessible to all and is essential to everyday Christian life.

Trusting God, though essential, is difficult—sometimes extremely difficult. The shadow of death, the rapids of divorce, the dagger of heartache, the chasm of addiction, the stupor of confusion, the precipice of disability, the darkness of depression, the deluge of anxiety, the torrent of disease—life is marked by suffering. As the disciples said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22, NIV). But how can one get through these storms? Once again, you guessed it—one can trust. And trusting is not only for enduring trials. One can trust God at all times (see, e.g., Ps 62:8). In fact, as the title indicates, I am going to try to convince you that trusting in God is God’s will.

I will leave you with one more thought before you move on. Much of what I am



getting at with this book is a perspective, or an attitude perhaps, for approaching life. For a Christian, going along with the crowd will never cut it. Other philosophies will not work. Following Jesus is still radical, still difficult, yet still life-giving and the most practical decision one can make. Søren Kierkegaard, the great nineteenth-century Danish philosopher, puts the matter this way: “‘For,’ says common sense, ‘a fanatic is a fanatic. Bad enough. But seriously to...become his disciple is the greatest possible madness. There is only one possible way of being madder than a madman: it is the higher madness of attaching oneself in all seriousness to a madman, regarding him as a wise man.’”<sup>1</sup> I have been engaging with this higher madness for some time now, and it has caused a paradigm shift in my very being. The mind is where that shift starts, and I do not think it ever ends. Therefore, let us search this great madness and see if we might find some wisdom after all.

Timothy Nagy, Riverdale, NY  
December 1, 2017

## INTRODUCTION

This little book is a product of my attempt to discern God's will. During my discernment I have experienced everything from deep confusion to freeing contentment. The pages that follow are not a direct reflection on these experiences—I plan to present those in another volume. Instead, I have compiled the most essential Bible passages, prayers, and writings that have helped me gain a new understanding. These words have gradually shifted my understanding of God's will for his people, have sustained me throughout times of despair, and have put me on the narrow path going ahead (see Matt 7:13). They have taught me the importance of discipline, obedience, and patience. They have shown me a new approach toward suffering, the power of prayer, and the expectation of tension. These words have

convinced me to be excited for the future as I look forward to God's promises.

By chance the extra-biblical material I have included is of a confidently ecumenical flavor. Anglican, Baptist, Calvinist, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, and Reformed thought are all incorporated. Each has helped me to grapple with different topics and to approach them biblically. I believe Christianity goes far beyond any and all earthly polity and side with this thought from Gordon Smith: "Evangelicals are increasingly insistent that conversion is not ultimately to the church but to Christ and his kingdom, and that therefore the kingdom and not the church is the focus of mission. The church is only a means to the end."<sup>2</sup> Being a member of a strong community of faith is essential to living an authentic Christian life. God calls us to be one unified body, and that is reflected in each church, each community of believers striving together to keep in step with the Spirit. Church leaders are appointed to shepherd God's flock. These leaders are

constantly engaging in the gospel-centric mission of creating, building, and strengthening trust in God through Jesus Christ. Given this dynamic, Smith's note that the "church is only a means to the end" is of great value. In other words, the practices and understandings may vary amongst the denominations, but the goal is the same: hallowed be thy name.

My thinking on the topic of trust began when I realized I have free will—when I truly comprehended the vast amount of choices I can make. This idea challenged me, and I desperately wanted to make the correct and optimal choice in every situation. All I wanted was for God to replace my will with his will. That desire has not changed, but my understanding of how that might happen has. This little book presents my perspective, based on biblical and theological reflection, on God's will and his gift to us that allows us to pursue it—namely, trust.

The Greek word for faith, trust, and reliability is Πίστις or *pistis*. Many translate *pistis* as "faith," but I offer that translating *pistis* as

“trust” allows for a much better understanding because it conveys relationship with God. Faith has gradually come to mean belief that God exists. This is a product of the popularization and acceptance of atheism, the increasingly interfaith landscape, and the promotion of a clash between science and religion. Belief is an absolutely paramount aspect of Christian life since belief initiates one’s relationship with God. However, a relationship with God must surpass belief. Faith is a noun. One can *have* faith, but one cannot *faith* God. Trust is a verb; it makes faith an action. One can trust God. Therefore, trust gives us a better framework for thinking about *pistis* because it conveys action and relationship. To trust is to act upon that original belief in God, establishing a link that can either grow stronger or fade away over time. A great way of thinking about this link is to consider the metaphor Jesus presents in John 15:1–8 of the vine and the branches. This metaphor holds trust at the pinnacle of Christian life as trust enables one to do God’s

will—that is what I aim to show throughout this book.

I recommend keeping a Bible close by as you read. The endnotes at the end of the book include additional verses on the topic at hand that you may want to investigate. For longer passages I have included a snippet of the text, but it will be most helpful to read the entire passage from your Bible.