

TRUST

Also by Iyanla Vanzant

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TRUST

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IYANLA Vanzant



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This book is dedicated to:

Every child whose inherent trusting nature has been knowingly or unknowingly violated by someone he/she loved and trusted

Every woman whose heart has been betrayed by people who simply didn't value the trust she placed in them

Every man whose confidence, self-worth, and agency has been diminished because of his race or stature, because society has deemed him to be untrustworthy

Every person who may believe that trust is something you give and receive because he/she does not understand it is a state of mind and being

To us all I say, *Lean not on your own understanding because we really do not know what anything is for.*

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TRUST OR CONSEQUENCES

TRUST TAKES YEARS TO BUILD,
SECONDS TO BREAK, AND
FOREVER TO REPAIR.

—Unknown

Wherever you are in this moment, stop, raise your hand, or nod if the following statement is or has been true for you: *“I have a difficult time trusting other people.”*

Most of us have entertained this thought or spoken these words with conviction at some point because we actually believe they are true. What I have discovered in my own life, as well as from years of working with other people, is that our issue is not really trusting other people, our core issue is trusting ourselves to get through the pain of the disappointment and betrayal we experience when people violate the trust we place in them.

Even when we have experienced such upsets time and time again, we cannot seem to figure out how to respond when someone we love and care about is inconsiderate to us, dishonest, or abandons us. And we long to know how to insulate ourselves from the possibility of being disrespected, rejected, or exploited by people we know or hardly know.

Trusting others is a difficult task and a powerful lesson we must all endure and move through, regardless of what happens. It

means that we place our confidence in someone to be honest, to keep his promise, to honor her word, and to treat us with decency and respect at all times, no matter what. The point we all seem to miss is that trusting other people means that we have a realistic understanding and perspective about people and that we must prepare ourselves for their failures. It means knowing that people are sometimes broken and complex; that they will lie when they are afraid and sacrifice our feelings to keep themselves safe and comfortable. Trusting others means recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting that we all have a history, and in some instances that history is filled with hurt, pain, and wounds that can and do impede our best intentions, resulting in dysfunctional behaviors that can have a devastating impact on those we know or love and care about most. In essence, trusting others means knowing that at all times, under all circumstances, in every situation, and with all people, we must be willing to trust, forgive, and start all over again.

HIDDEN TRUST ISSUES

Reading books on relationships or researching trust-related issues might lead you to conclude that women have a monopoly on being disappointed, betrayed, and violated. That would be a false conclusion. Men have just as many trust experiences and issues as women do. The difference is, they aren't always able to identify the problem as a trust issue, and they are far less willing to talk about their experiences. More often than not, when it comes to men, their objectionable behavior looks like rejection, abandonment, fear of commitment, jealousy, or control, when the truth is: *They are afraid to trust.*

Men are lied to and cheated on; men have their boundaries violated; men are taken advantage of; men are disappointed, let down, and abandoned. While the process of developing trust in oneself and others is the same for everyone, men may actually have a more difficult time rebuilding trust once it has been broken, because it's more difficult for them to admit they were duped in

the first place. It's also somewhat more challenging for men to forgive others, because they either don't see the need to or refuse to forgive themselves.

Kevin was a classic example of a man with serious trust issues who did not know it. He grew up under the iron fist of his very domineering mother, Anna. As a child, Kevin lost his voice, his ability to speak up for himself, and the capacity to express his personal needs, experiences, or desires. Anna had a bad habit of calling Kevin names and shutting him down whenever he tried to assert himself. Like a malevolent dictator, Anna decided what her son needed, wanted, and should be doing.

In an attempt to keep their sons in line, many mothers fail to recognize the distinction between discipline and emasculation. The situation is only exasperated when young boys do not see healthy adult interactions between men and women. This lack of healthy role models limits their ability to understand how men are supposed to be and behave with the opposite sex.

Kevin's mom was single, overbearing, angry, and verbally abusive. Anna had few good things to say about Kevin's father, who was rarely around and offered little instruction when he did see his son. As a teenager, Kevin learned some stuff about girls from the guys on the street, but at home he was mute and intimidated. By the time he graduated from high school, Kevin had only one clear vision for his future: get the hell away from his mother, as far and as fast as he could.

In college Kevin did not do well with the girls. They thought he was shy. The truth is, he was terrified of saying or doing the wrong thing. Watching his peers, he learned a few things about how to keep a woman in line, but he was not willing to pull the choke chain and risk the backlash of a woman's mouth or behavior. Then he met Vickie in English class, and they hit it off right away. Vickie was cute, sort of quiet, and very, very street smart.

Vickie would offer Kevin insights about how to be cool and how to modify his behavior without offending his sensibilities or his manhood. They had been cooing and courting for about three

months when Kevin discovered that Vickie was the most popular female pot dealer on campus. Kevin couldn't imagine what Vickie saw in him. Or why she wanted to hang with him when she could have any man on campus. *How lucky am I, he thought, to have such a beautiful and smart woman who wants me?*

Vickie taught Kevin a lot about how to be, what to do, how to do it, and how to keep his business under wraps. While she didn't yell or call him names, Vickie knew exactly how to get Kevin to do whatever she wanted him to do by suggesting it to him as if it were his idea in the first place. She let him in on her little secret because she needed and wanted male protection. She also needed some help with her growing business. The inseparable couple was well into their junior year when Vickie got busted for dealing pot on campus. Her way out was to point the finger at Kevin. After all, he had the stash in his dorm room, and he had most of the money in his pocket. When confronted by school officials, Kevin refused to say that he was a delivery boy for his girlfriend or that he held the stash because she had three roommates while he only had one.

Kevin was expelled from school, placed on probation, and abandoned by Vickie, who told the college officials that the only reason she was dealing was because Kevin had threatened her life. She also told them that she loved him but was afraid of him. Kevin's mother had a few choice names for her son, reminding him how stupid he had always been, which was why she refused to come to court and would not allow him to come back home. He ended up living with his aunt in the city and falling back on everything Vickie had taught him about wheeling and dealing in the streets.

Graduating from pot to harder substances, it took only two years before Kevin earned himself a three-year bid for street-corner peddling of his product. In jail, he learned a great deal more about whom to trust, when to trust, and what happened when you trusted the wrong people. In Kevin's mind, anyone who asked you for anything could not be trusted, and those who did not ask were probably just waiting for the opportunity to take something from you. He learned that staying to yourself and speaking only when

spoken to might make people think you were slow or crazy, but those were the behaviors that would keep you safe.

By the time Kevin was released from jail, his aunt had gotten married. Mr. Green was a quiet man, somewhat like Kevin, and he was very, very religious. He took a liking to Kevin, and on most evenings they had long and very interesting talks about life and women and God. Kevin had never experienced this kind of communication or relationship with anyone, let alone a man. He really liked Mr. Green, but he was also suspicious about what the man really wanted. He wondered what Mr. Green was up to by being so nice and accepting of who Kevin was and how he had lived.

Kevin's aunt, who was the total opposite of her sister, encouraged the relationship between her husband and her nephew. In fact, whenever Kevin would ask her something, she would respond, "I'm not sure. You should probably ask Mr. Green." In Kevin's mind, it felt like a setup, another form of rejection; he simply didn't understand why his aunt wouldn't tell him what to do and how to do it. He was confused and cautious about them both, just waiting for the axe to fall. He just wasn't sure who would be swinging the axe: Mr. Green or his aunt.

When you have lost your voice and don't know how to trust yourself, it's impossible to trust anyone else. When the people you love, care about, and trust violate you, distinguishing between loving care and a setup is difficult. Kevin had been taught that kindness was a weakness. He also believed that when you let people into your heart, they would hurt you sooner or later. These were the lessons he learned from his mother and Vickie. He had yet to master the lesson of knowing when to trust himself—or even that he *could* trust himself—or when it was safe to trust other people.

It had been almost a year since his release when Mr. Green told Kevin that a new condition for his staying in the home would be attending church. Wednesday night service was optional, but Sunday service was a requirement. *Okay! Here we go!* Kevin had known they were going to want something, and here it was! They

wanted him to be something he didn't know how to be and to do something he didn't know how to do.

If he refused, they would kick him out, but if he did what they wanted, he would probably mess it up. Kevin was between a rock and a hard place. He knew he should take a stand for himself, but he didn't know how. He was afraid to give in and afraid not to at the same time. Thanks to Mr. Green's advice, he had saved up a little money, so instead of asking questions, making a counteroffer, or simply honoring the request, Kevin packed his bags and left their home. He had been staying with a friend from work for a few weeks, looking for his own place, taking the bus to work, and minding his own business, when he got the call from his aunt: Mr. Green had had a stroke. They did not know if he would recover. Could he please come, because when Mr. Green opened his eyes, he had asked for Kevin.

When Kevin got to the hospital, there were about 25 people in the waiting room. He recognized some of the men and women from his few visits to church. His boss was there, and so were Mr. Green's grown children, two sons and two daughters from a previous marriage. The other people were from Mr. Green's job. His aunt gave him a big hug, as if everything between them was just fine; Mr. Green's children also hugged him. One of Mr. Green's sons introduced him to Mr. Green's co-worker as his brother.

Kevin was totally confused. What was up with these people? What did they want from him? Why were they being so nice? Why had they even called him? He just couldn't figure it out. He sat with them, listened to them, and stood with them when the doctor came out to give them the prognosis. Mr. Green was awake. He had no mobility on his right side, but he could speak. He wanted to see just the family. Kevin's aunt went in first. When she returned, the sons stood up to see their father, and they invited Kevin to go in with them. Reluctantly, Kevin obliged.

Mr. Green looked fine, except for all of the tubes and machines. He put his left hand out to reach for his sons, each of whom bent down to hug his father. Kevin could not remember having ever seen

one man hug another man in that way. He didn't know what to do, so he stood frozen by the door. When Mr. Green's eldest son invited Kevin over to "greet Dad," something hit him like a ton of bricks. *Acceptance*. Somehow in that moment he felt totally accepted and loved. It hit him first in his chest, then in his knees. After all he had done, everything he had said or not said, these people—including Mr. Green—were loving and accepting him just based on who he was. Kevin couldn't move. He felt as if he was about to faint. All eyes were on him. He tried to speak and could not. Mr. Green spoke for him. In a very soft voice, and with slightly slurred speech, Mr. Green said, "Trust me, son, all is forgiven." When he heard those words, Kevin fell to his knees and wept.

It is difficult for a broken heart to learn how to trust. It is particularly difficult when the heart that has been broken has never learned self-trust or the value of trusting others. When as children the adults we depend on for care and support unconsciously teach us that we cannot trust our own thoughts and feelings, we begin to rely on others to interpret what we feel and to tell us what to do. These are the seeds of co-dependence and people pleasing. When you have no voice and no independent thoughts, developing the depth of self-trust that is required to make independent and wise choices for yourself is almost impossible.

When as children we experience emotional alienation and/or abuse by domineering, intrusive, or emotionally unstable adults, learning to trust the goodness and kindness of others can be an insurmountable challenge. For many men, like Kevin, self-trust is undermined at a very young age by well-meaning, emotionally absent, or damaged parents who believe they are doing the best thing for the child. Then there are the many cases in which parents either don't know or don't care how their lack of child-rearing skills will impact the psyche of the young boys and adolescents in their midst. A boy who does not have a voice, or who has been taught that what he needs, feels, and thinks does not matter, becomes a man with serious trust issues.

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND AND AROUND . . .

Diane and Denise are identical twins. For most of their lives, they dressed alike and finished each other's sentences. Until well into their teen years, they did everything together. Then, a strange phenomenon entered their world—boys! When they entered high school, although each developed her own style of dressing, the boys couldn't seem to tell them apart.

The more difficult challenge was that Denise was never attracted to the boys who liked her. She was always drawn to the ones who fell for her sister, Diane. Although it caused some minor friction between them, Diane believed that Denise was being totally honest when she promised never to get out of line with a guy whom her sister was interested in. This pattern continued well into their young adult years, when the twins headed to two different colleges. They talked by telephone every day, sharing their most intimate secrets, particularly about the guys they were interested in. They were in their senior year when Diane announced she had found "the one," a medical student who simply made her toes curl. Denise could hardly wait to meet him when Diane said she was bringing him home for winter break.

Stephen, the doctor-to-be, was a cutie! He was pleasant, was well spoken, and had a great sense of humor; for the first three days, he really could not tell the twins apart. They kept reminding him that their hair was different, but when he impulsively grabbed Denise's hand under the table, she began to think he wasn't really trying to remember that they were different people.

On New Year's Eve, the twins thought it would be fun once again to dress alike. They each bought the same dress and shoes. Although Diane's hair had blond highlights and was slightly longer, they managed to achieve the same hairstyle. They knew their parents would be delighted, and it would be fun to tease and trick the rest of the family.

As the clock approached midnight, Diane was standing next to her beloved and Denise was standing behind him. When the clock

struck 12, he turned away from Diane and planted a sloppy wet kiss on Denise's lips. Pushing him away and screaming, Denise ran to her sister and began to apologize. Diane was stunned, as were her parents. Stephen made a very weak excuse that made absolutely no sense to anyone, but rather than challenge him, Diane just laughed it off. Denise, on the other hand, felt that her sister needed to pay closer attention to what was going on with her beau.

Fast forward! Diane and Mr. Doctor-to-Be had been married for four years and were expecting their first child when Denise traveled to spend a week with them. Five minutes into the visit, she knew that something was off, but her sister was being overtly cagey and kept mum. Her husband was doing his residency at a prestigious hospital and was therefore rarely home. Maybe that was it. Diane talked briefly about being lonely, and she said how glad she was that her mother had committed to coming for three weeks after the baby was born.

It was when Denise witnessed how her brother-in-law talked to her sister that she became intently concerned that something was really off in her twin sister's world. What she could not figure out was why her sister would not confide in her. Was it that she didn't trust her? Or was she just too embarrassed to tell the truth?

Diane went into labor three weeks early, on the day Denise was scheduled to leave. Their mother arrived later that day, and the baby came the next morning: a beautiful little girl. That evening, as Denise was leaving the hospital, euphoric over her sister's little angel, she was accosted by a young woman dressed in scrubs. The woman called Denise all manner of names and vowed that she would do everything in her power to "get her man back."

Denise tried to explain to the woman that she was making a mistake, but when her attacker mentioned her brother-in-law's name, Denise realized that she had stumbled into the truth she had been feeling all week long. The rest of the conversation took place in the parking lot, at the rear bumper of Denise's car. Beverly had been in and out of a relationship with Stephen since college. She had left him, gotten married, then divorced, but they had

rekindled their relationship the previous year when she finished nursing school and found herself working in the same hospital where he was a resident. No, they had not been having an affair. They had been involved in a long-term relationship. Stephen told Beverly that he was with Diane only because he and Beverly had broken up, and he promised that he would leave his wife. In fact, Stephen *had* briefly left Diane over a year before, but he had gone back home because he thought Beverly was mentally unstable. Beverly did not know that Diane was pregnant, which is why she had mistaken Denise for her sister.

We have a few things going on here: The first is that you can love and trust someone and still not share your deepest darkest secrets with her. You may love and trust your mother with your life and still not tell her that you have two lovers or that you smoke marijuana or that you stole change from her purse when you were ten years old.

As humans, we are often challenged with trusting someone and disappointing them. Everyone thrives on approval and acceptance. When we believe that something we have done or have been involved with would disappoint someone we love, chances are we will withhold the information. Does this mean we are untrustworthy? Or does it simply mean we are human? Does it mean we believe the person from whom we withhold the information cannot be trusted? Or does it mean we are attempting to control or maintain her opinion of us? These are some of the common pitfalls we face when it comes to trusting others. It is a choice we make in response to our needs in that moment.

Back to our story:

Stephen had demonstrated a propensity toward shady behavior with Denise early on. Diane was unaware of, or choosing to dismiss or deny, the early signs that she had fallen in love with Slim Shady. From his grabbing her hand under the table, to his New Year's Eve kiss, to that feeling she could not shake four years later, Denise had known that something was off with her brother-in-law, but she had

chosen not to say anything. Why? Because nothing is more difficult than to suspect or accuse someone of being untrustworthy when his surface behavior and communication contradicts what you know to be true within yourself.

We want to believe the best about people. We always want to give others the benefit of the doubt, and as human beings we are reluctant to move or speak without cold, hard evidence that substantiates what we're feeling. When the evidence is missing and those around us do not seem to support our suspicions, more often than not we will deny what we know in fear of being wrong. Why didn't Denise tell her sister that Stephen had grabbed her hand under the table? Does this omission mean that she is untrustworthy? Why didn't Diane tell her sister what she was feeling rather than waiting for Denise to spill the beans and confirm her suspicions?

How do you raise questions about someone's trustworthiness when everyone else seems to be blind to what you see? Are we willing to risk upsetting people or being wrong about our suspicions when it has an impact on our intimate relationships? In more instances than we care to admit, rather than run the risk of being wrong, we will remain deaf, mute, and blind, even when we have clear evidence that what we *think* is true is, in fact, true. In the end, when others discover that we knew or had reason to know the truth, they are disappointed that we did not tell them. In fact, they may feel that we betrayed their trust.

Denise explained to Beverly that Mr. Doctor-to-Be was and had been married for the past four years and, as far as she knew, had never discussed leaving her twin sister. She asked Beverly to back off because her sister had just had a baby, and she promised that she would deal with Mr. Doctor-to-Be herself.

She kept her word. That night Denise confronted Stephen about the young woman she had met and their conversation. She demanded to know his intentions with regard to both his wife and his lover. When Stephen tried to play it off as if Beverly were crazy, Denise reminded him of the New Year's Eve kiss and the other slips of integrity he had demonstrated to her.

Although Stephen eventually admitted his infidelity and promised to clean it up, Denise didn't believe a word of it. Stephen had already proven his ability to live a double life, and she did not trust that he would honor his word or her sister. *When people show you who they are, believe them the first time.*

Denise was torn about whether or not to tell Diane what she had discovered, but wondered whether telling her would be a violation of her sister's trust. They had always taken care of each other. They had always looked out for each other. How could she protect her sister from any future heartache? It just wasn't fair that she should be the one to break her sister's heart and shatter her dreams.

Diane was in her room resting with the baby when Denise asked her mother what she knew about what was going on between Diane and her husband. Mom knew everything except that the other woman was still in the picture. Mom knew that Diane and Stephen had separated briefly, but she thought it was because he was never home, and when he was, he treated Diane with utter disregard. Diane said he was mean and had, on several occasions, threatened her, but he had never made any physical moves. Mom had told Dad, and Dad had given him a good talking-to.

According to Mom, Stephen came home after a two-month absence, and Diane said things were much better now. Denise's first response was anger. To think that her sister didn't trust her with the truth just made her mad; then she was sad to know that her sister didn't trust her.

Why? What had she done that would make Diane think she couldn't tell her the truth? Why would her twin sister lie or hide the truth from her? It wasn't until her mom reminded her that perhaps Diane had felt the same way when Denise had waited until the last minute to tell Diane that she was going to a different college and later that she was not moving back home after college. Then her mom hit a really raw nerve when she asked if Denise had ever told Diane about the pregnancy she terminated the year before. Mom said it best: *"What you do and how you do it will come back to you, even when what you do is done to protect or help or spare someone else."*

Even when you have the best intentions, demonstrating that you do not trust someone with the truth, your feelings, or specific information will come back around, sooner or later.

TENDING THE GARDEN OF TRUST

Learning to trust someone is a process that grows over time. It requires that we really get to know people; that we remain open to moving through their mistakes and our own; that we allow people to grow, change, and heal in our presence while we grow, change, and heal in theirs. And when the evidence is clear that a certain person is simply not trustworthy, we must accept that, make a choice about the nature of our relationship with them, and move on.

Nothing impedes our ability to trust someone more deeply than not recognizing and accepting the truth that is revealed through their communications and behavior. Acting as if we don't know what we know about someone, or as if he did not say what we know he said, will only get us into deep trouble.

By spending time with someone, we gain knowledge and insight about their motivations, their character, their needs, and their fears that will support us in recognizing who they are and what motivates them. Noticing how they treat others and what they say about others provides insight and information that gives us silent clues as to how they may treat us. A prudent, wise, and self-aware person will catalog this information and avoid the trap of thinking: *They did that to everyone else, but they'll be different with me!*" They may be different. They may have grown and changed; however, you still need information as a yardstick to determine whether or not your assessment is true. Learning to trust someone means taking the time to observe who they are and being honest about what you discover.

Really learning how to trust others and how to forgive them when they fall short begins with taking a good, long, honest look at yourself. Ask yourself:

- Do you always keep your word?
- Do you always tell the truth about what you need and want?
- Are you always respectful of the feelings and needs of others?
- Have you always lived up to the trust and confidence others have placed in you?
- Most important, have you forgiven yourself for the instances when you have fallen short in your relationship with yourself and with others?

We are all human. We have all had days when we are less than our best selves. Acknowledging that and telling the truth about it is the key to learning to trust others. Giving ourselves the benefit of the doubt, understanding and acknowledging what motivates us and what throws us off track, and being real about what we have done that has hurt and disappointed others—whether we meant to do it or not—gives us a sense of compassion and awareness about the shortcomings of those around us. Raising ourselves above the human fray by believing that we are always right, have always been right, and have never done anything to hurt, harm, or disappoint anyone else can only lead to unrealistic expectations of others.

One important aspect of trusting others means knowing what you are capable of, remembering what you have done during your less-than-great moments, and being willing to recognize that the same is possible for every other human being. When you are serious about being able to trust others, you are willing to adjust your expectations. One way to think about this is the following: consider how many people have been or may be lying on the therapist's couch as a result of their relationship or interaction with you. No one is perfect! And by some miraculous means, we have all survived one another.