

BEYOND TODAY

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Antidote to discouragement

God's Word is more than a comfort in times of distress – it is an inspiration and a promise.

We can become discouraged for any number of reasons – job loss, ill health, the state of this world. Such a mindset can effectively paralyse us and make us a candidate to be picked off by a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). The antidote to feeling demoralised or in despair is to focus on the solution. If we focus on the difficulty we might become even more discouraged.

A solid promise

Jesus promised those His Father had called to Him, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

As an encouragement, He told His disciples “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (Matthew 10:29). He added: “Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (verse 31).

On another occasion, Christ mentioned another costing for sparrows: “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).

We should never forget that the God who created the heavens, who inhabits eternity and calls the stars by name (Psalm 147:4) is also aware of what happens to each of His common, garden variety sparrows.

That being the case, our Heavenly Father is not so busy that He can’t attend to our individual needs, be they fears, trials, sickness or weakness.

Focus on the problem solver

Since God knows about a sparrow’s fate, how much more does He know and care about those He is working with in this age? The antidote to discouragement is to focus on the problem solver. As serious as our predicament



Adult Eurasian tree sparrow feeding a juvenile.

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may be, we should be encouraged knowing our Lord is with us. We are not alone. He can deal with any of the dilemmas we have right now but, if that is not His will, He has eternity in mind, and we need to remember to look beyond today.

God cares for us and has a path and purpose for us.

The apostle Peter advised: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Isaiah 41:10 elaborates on this: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

The Amplified Version of the Bible summarises this verse quite succinctly: "Fear not [there is nothing to fear], for I am with you; do not look around you in terror and be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen and harden you to difficulties, yes, I will help you; yes, I will hold you up and retain you with My [victorious] right

hand of rightness and justice."

God is the problem solver. He is with us, He will help us, He gives us strength. The Almighty is infinitely more powerful than our problems. He commands a universe, but He still knows about every sparrow.

Throughout life, there may be times when we feel dejected. Always remember, however, that God watches over us through it all. If we focus on the problem, we will become discouraged. Conversely, if we focus on the problem solver, we will be greatly encouraged. Therefore, remember the sparrows.

Jason Godfrey

Tool kit for spiritual survival

Christ's followers always have help available.

God gives us specific guidance on how to counter-act the devil and his influence. His Word instructs us: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). This promise is clearly directed toward those willing to "submit to God" and is immediately followed with the instruction, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (verse 8).

How, then, do we draw near to God? His instruction continues, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you doubleminded." We must actively seek to eliminate Satan's way of thinking and behaving from our lives.

Satan is so clever and powerful that no human being can successfully resist his influence without divine help. Having repented of our sins, been baptised and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we need to submit to God from the heart, take His word seriously and obey His directives and commands.

For our protection God recommends His armour, as outlined in Ephesians 6:10-20.

Belt of truth: Satan is known as the Great Deceiver. He is a master liar, so we need to be trained in knowing the truth. God's Word helps defend against Satan's lies (John 17:17).

Breastplate of righteousness: This protects our hearts. Righteousness is the state of being "right with God" through obedience – and by His forgiveness of our sins. God's commandments define righteousness (Psalm

119:172), which is striving to keep sin out of our hearts.

Shoes of the Gospel of peace: All warriors need to be prepared to run or move forward in battle when called upon to do so. They never know when the battle will hit. We need to have shoes of the Gospel of peace so we can keep moving towards the Kingdom of God, practise godly ways and be ready to discuss our faith with others.

Shield of faith: Sometimes we sin because Satan finds a weakness in our armour, and he aims well. The shield of faith covers those weaknesses when we don't have the knowledge or strength to face a situation. We can cry out to God in faith, trusting Him to always be faithful to us.

Helmet of salvation: Salvation means deliverance. This helmet helps us avoid thinking ungodly thoughts by replacing them with the way Jesus Christ thinks (2 Corinthians 10:5). This allows us to focus on God's goodness to deliver us into His Kingdom (Psalm 107).

Sword of the Spirit (Word of God): This weapon – the Bible – guides us into a godly way of living. It helps us to be proactive in fighting Satan by cutting straight to the core of a matter and uncovering the truth (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

We should put all these items of armour on every day, which will transform us into a "good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

To study further please see our Family Study Guide at www.ucg.org/learn/family-study-guides/armor-god-overview.

Godly worship – a way of life

A relationship with our Heavenly Father goes to the core of what it is to be human, made in the image of God.

As a small boy I enjoyed the many occasions when I was taken by bus, often in the rain, to visit grandparents amongst rows of small, terraced houses near Salford docks. We approached their house from the back alley which we boys used to run along to create a distinctive echoing sound. I never really knew exactly where we were on these visits, but I remember that the adults seemed to know the area and described it by the names of church buildings which stood on many street corners.

In Scripture the “Church” is the group of people who make up the congregation, not the building itself. Churches or places of worship exist because those who claim to be people of faith want to come together for a public confession of their faith. Traditional church services include praise and thanks to God in the form of hymns and prayers, and teaching through Bible readings and sermons that expound the scriptures. Support for all these aspects of worship can be found in the scriptures and for most that seems to satisfy their needs. Others may remember to thank God before meals and to pray or study the scriptures at other times.

However, is that all that is required of those who claim to follow the God of the Holy Bible?

Worship builds a relationship with God

The Bible asserts that people were specifically created by God in His image (Genesis 1:26) to have a relationship with the God who had designed, fashioned and made them. This relationship is based on what is termed “worship.” In speaking the words of the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5, God states the first of those commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” To “have God” is to worship the true God and Him alone.

Centuries later the apostle Paul, writing to Church members in Rome, comments about people in general: “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23). Paul is observing that, instead

of worshipping God the Creator, people have taken to venerating aspects of the creation.

The need for a relationship with God is often diverted into the worship of idols in any of their numerous forms. Idolatry can also include esteeming ephemeral items such as wealth, fame, power, prestige or even one’s own

God wants us to build a deep relationship with Him.

intellect. The apostle John, writing in the final book of the Bible, records a vision of a future time when an angel will take the gospel to everyone living on earth, calling on them to fear God, give Him glory and worship Him as Creator – the inference being that people living at that time will not be doing any of those things (Revelation 14:6-7).

How to become a living sacrifice

Worship should reflect God’s instructions as revealed in the pages of the Bible, not what people try to dictate. Often, the two could not be more different. God wants us to build a deep relationship with Him, to walk humbly with Him and to display more of His character. When a lawyer tested Jesus about the most important commandment He responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Jesus did not say to love God occasionally, when we remember or when we need help. “All our heart, soul and mind” means exactly that.

Jesus also said we should be seeking the perfection of God in our lives, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The apostle Paul referred to this as presenting ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). He continued with the instruction, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (verse 2).

Both Christ’s teachings and Paul’s writings reveal many

aspects of becoming a living sacrifice. Perhaps the best summaries are found in Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” and in 2 Corinthians 10:5, where we are told to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” If we seek to have the mind of Christ in us through God’s Spirit, with God’s help we can worship Him in all aspects of our lives.

When venerating God, whether in our public, private, or personal worship, we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact

that all we do should bring honour to the awesome Sovereign of the universe.

To learn more of the God who created mankind, to have a relationship with Him – to worship Him – please request or download free copies of our booklets *Who is God?* and *Why Were You Born?* Both address the question of the ages – the purpose for the existence of the human family.

David Fenney

Why the command to forgive others?

Forgiveness does not come easily for most of us.

Forgiveness is at the core of Christian faith, belief and action. It’s only by God’s grace that we can be saved (Ephesians 2:5, 8), and His grace is the foundation of His forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 1:7). That forgiveness was made possible by God’s love and the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17). We must never take that lightly. We must do everything that’s necessary to receive God’s initial forgiveness of all our past sins. And then for the rest of our lives, we must daily ask God for His forgiveness for any further sins we commit (1 John 1:9).

When hurt by others, our natural instinct is to recoil in self-protection, retaliation and revenge. We don’t naturally overflow with mercy, grace and forgiveness when we

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12).

are wronged. It can also be hard to admit wrong and seek forgiveness when we are at fault.

There is a difference between God’s forgiveness and our forgiveness of others. When God forgives us, He completely blots out the sin and removes the guilt (Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 103:1-12). Only God can forgive sins in that way (Mark 2:5-11). When we forgive someone for hurting us, we are deciding to cancel his or her indebtedness to us personally and to not harbour any resentment or grudge. We human beings are not able to quickly forget how someone has hurt us, but we can treat the person as if we’ve forgotten the hurt.

This does not require us to remain in a situation where we could be seriously hurt again. Good sense should lead us to remove ourselves from a dangerous or seriously abusive state.

A difficult instruction

The command to forgive is difficult because often we don’t want to. We want to strike back, we want justice, we want the other person to know the pain he or she has inflicted on us. If we forgive someone, aren’t we just letting someone get away with a wrong? If we simply forgive, won’t we just be allowing people to take advantage of us?

This is a natural, human response to hurt but Christ further illustrates this teaching for us in what is commonly known as the Lord’s prayer: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). He then explains: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (verses 14-15).

Sin is represented as piled up debts (compare Luke 11:4). We cannot expect God to forgive our debts, the penalty we owe for sin, if we are not also forgiving others. This is emphasised throughout the New Testament. Remember also, that Christ is the ultimate judge and all sinners will be required to repent or face the prospect of eternal death.

Begin the road to lasting, meaningful forgiveness right now – forgiving others and seeking and receiving forgiveness, especially from God. To study this important subject further, please request or download our study aid *Forgiveness Is Possible*.

Counting the cost of discipleship

To pay the penalty of our sins cost Jesus His life. Entering the Kingdom of God requires that we devote ourselves to a lifetime of commitment. Obedience to God's way will be costly.

God the Father is like the athletic coach who sees in a youngster the potential to become an Olympic champion. Even though we are governed by human nature when God calls us, He invites us to become disciples because He can see our potential, and He knows we can attain the goal of entering into His Kingdom, assuming we do our part. He wants disciples who make a total commitment to Him and Jesus Christ and will stay the course.

The apostle John records Christ's words: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). God will not call us unless He knows we are capable of reaching the Kingdom.

Counting the cost

Much more is required than just saying, "Yes, I accept you, God and Jesus Christ. I believe in you, now let me get into the Kingdom." That belief must be demonstrated by obedience. This does not earn us salvation, but to continue to live in sin would reveal a heart and mind unsuited to eternity with God.

Jesus tells us: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Hate is a very poor translation here. The word implies that when we become followers of Jesus Christ, He must be our top priority. Nothing else – not mother, father, wife, son, daughter, career, houses or investments – is to be in that number one slot.

In Exodus 20:5 the second of the Ten Commandments describes God as being jealous, not wanting us to be worshipping any other gods or idols. He needs to be number one in our lives and He will not tolerate being displaced by anything. Anything we put ahead of Him is an idol, no matter what it is.

Our Saviour continued: "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it – lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has

cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27-30, 33).

Verse 33 again shows that to be a disciple of Jesus Christ we need to put Him as number one, surrender to Him and trust Him unconditionally. He wants total commitment and no turning back.

Spiritual requirements

As Christ's "household" (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19), our period of judgment is now, during our lifetime. The apostle Peter wrote: "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Those called and responsive now are destined for the first or better resurrection. From the time they accept that calling they are being judged or assessed to see whether they are worthy of entry into the Kingdom of God (Luke 21:36).

Those who are raised to physical life during the

"If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

second resurrection, also called the White Throne Judgment, will be taught God's way of life at that time and will be judged according to the choices they make then (Revelation 20:11-12)

Jesus revealed what we need to do. The apostle John records His words: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Matthew documented another occasion: "Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to Him, 'Which ones?' Jesus said, 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matthew 19:16-19).

Eternal life is a gift from God. However, there are certain strings attached. We are obliged to do our part, not to earn salvation but to fulfil the prerequisites of the gift. This thought continues in verse 29: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother

or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life."

Whilst many choose to believe that the law was nailed to the cross when Christ was crucified, multiple Bible verses state the contrary. Around A.D. 90, about 60 years after Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the apostle John wrote the following: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Matthew recorded Christ's words thus: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of God, but He who does the *will* of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practise lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Many Christians will think that they have lived good lives and deserve to be in God's Kingdom. However, Christ will inform them that they have been practising lawlessness. They believed they had a relationship with Jesus, but He will say that the reverse is actually true.

The Parable of the Sower

Christ often told the multitudes parables to illustrate spiritual ideas. One parable involved a farmer spreading seed that falls into four different types of ground. These are symbolic of different types of responses when people hear the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The parable is found in Matthew chapter 13. "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them." This occurred before the seed had a chance to germinate and take root (verses 3-4).

Later Jesus explained to His disciples: "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside." These people hear the message but it has no significant impact on them (verses 18-19).

The parable continues: "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away" (verses 5-6).

This seed germinated. However, there was insufficient soil for roots to fully develop so the seedlings withered in the sun. Verses 20-21 explain: "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in

himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."

Of the third type of ground, Christ said: "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them" (verse 7). These plants were not strong enough to resist being choked out by the weeds.

Christ explained: "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful." This seed represents people who were aligned with God's way of life then gave it up for the world (verse 22).

Finally, "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Seed that fell on this fourth type of soil produced lasting fruit (verses 8, 23). These received the word, repented and



A bumper crop of ripe barley

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did good works, the latter determining the degree of the reward that Christ will give them in the Kingdom.

God will not call us unless He knows we can succeed. However, it is still our choice. As we count the cost of total commitment to God's way of life, choosing to put our relationship with God above all else, are we going to say, "Yes, I'll do it"? Or will we assess the work required and turn away?

Once we have repented of our sins, and counted the cost, we can be baptised to demonstrate our commitment to living Christ's way continually. We then need to ensure we are not like the seeds that became choked by the weeds, allowing the cares of this world to divert us away from God's Kingdom. We are to set our eyes on the prize and run the race, without looking back, being confident that He who has begun a good work in us will complete it until the day of Christ's return (Philippians 1:6).

Wayne Topping



Q Is money really the root of all evil? 1 Timothy 6:10 seems to indicate that it is.

FAQ

A Money of itself is neutral and can be used for good or for bad. The Bible is replete with stories of people whom God blessed with riches. The first time the Bible mentions a very wealthy person, it speaks of a righteous man, Abraham, who “was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold” (Genesis 13:2). It is not a sin to have money – in fact, it is important that we have enough to leave as an inheritance and to give to the poor. Learning how to handle our wealth is the key.

1 Timothy 6:10 actually states: “For *the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

People who believe in the Bible hold widely divergent views about what it says about money. Some view money as indeed the root of all evil and believe that poverty brings one closer to God. Others accept a health-and-wealth gospel, believing Christians are almost automatically destined to become financially successful if not fabulously wealthy.

Sometimes the wealthy despise the poor, and sometimes the poor despise the rich. Jesus did not hold such biases. He ate with tax collectors and those looked down upon as sinners, was called their friend and ministered to the poor (Matthew 9:10; Matthew 11:5, Matthew 11:19).

Yet He showed no partiality and could also be found with the rich (Matthew 27:57; Luke 19:1-10). A wealthy man so admired Jesus that he buried Him in his unused family tomb (Matthew 27:57-60). Jesus Christ died for all of humanity, regardless of social or financial standing.

God is not opposed to riches. In fact, He is the originator of financial blessings (1 Samuel 2:7; Proverbs 10:22)

and reminds us that personal diligence can also lead to wealth (Proverbs 10:4). Indeed, we should consider that having sufficient money puts us in a better position to help others in need. It becomes easy, however, as a person accumulates worldly goods, to look to wealth – rather than God – as a source of protection and stability (Proverbs 18:11).

Jesus explained this to a young man who wanted eternal life. The riches of the man were not intrinsically wrong, but his misplaced priorities – his improper attachment to material wealth – were. Christ perceived that he was more interested in his money than God. Indeed, the young man was despondent over Christ’s advice to give away his belongings “and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:17-22).

Jesus challenged the young man’s commitment to the commandments by testing Him on the very first one, which forbids having any gods before the true God. Clearly, the young man prioritised his wealth above God.

This passage does not imply that the rest of us must give away everything we have – unless, that is, we too have a particular problem with placing a higher priority on our possessions than on God. It is important for us to submit to Him wholeheartedly.

Keeping priorities straight can be quite a challenge for people who have been blessed with material goods. We must remember Christ’s instruction regarding our priorities: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:20-21).

The Scriptures show that money is neutral. Our attitude towards it, however, is important. Money tests our allegiance; it makes apparent whether we are committed to God or to our possessions. At its best, money is a tool we can use for important and beneficial purposes, including honouring God and helping those in need.

Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible say about meditation?

Biblical meditation involves deeply considering applications of God’s laws (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 119:27, 48, 78, 97, 99), His Majesty and power (Psalm 77:12; 143:5; 145:5) and His characteristics (Psalm 63:6; 119:148; Malachi 3:16).

We should also consider virtuous aspects of life: Philippians 4:8.



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Thank you very much for your most informative magazine. I always look forward to reading it. I have enclosed a donation towards your costs and look forward to receiving it in the future.

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Thanks for your *Beyond Today* magazine. With suffering depression, those [articles] have helped me so much. Please renew my free subscription.

Reader in Basingstoke

Thank you so much for all the magazines and booklets you have sent me over the many years I have been with you. I am now 95 and have learned so much. I am truly grateful.

I pray God will protect you all to carry on your good works.

Reader in St Leonards-on-Sea

Thank you for the latest copy of *Beyond Today*. I pray for God's Kingdom to come and remove all that is wrong in the world today. Please also send me the study guide *Why Were You Born?*

Reader in Ossett

Thank you very much for my subscription to *Beyond Today*. Please send me [your booklet] *The US and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.

Reader in Liverpool

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Reader in Torpoint

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Jesus Christ instructed His disciples that as they had freely received they were to freely give (Matthew

10:8), so we supply our literature free of charge, making Christ's message available to all. Our gratitude goes to those who assist financially in this aspect of the Church's work.

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