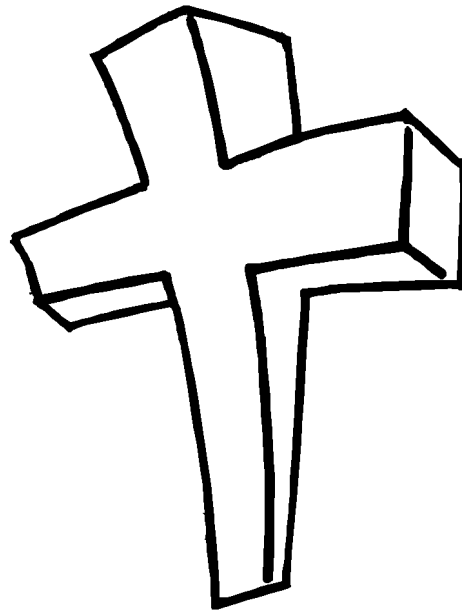




“... we triumph even in our troubles, knowing that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope—a hope which never disappoints us, since God’s love floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Romans 5:3, 5)

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14)

As a schoolmaster in Zimbabwe, October is a challenging month. Well, maybe not so much for the teachers, though you might be surprised at the pressure many feel, but mostly for the pupils at the top end of the school who are sitting public exams.

Throughout life we face challenges. For those of us who are older, we may wonder why school exams seemed such an obstacle at the time as we are confronted with financial demands, trials within our families, bereavement, illness or whatever. Each trial seems the worst we have encountered at the time. To others they may appear insignificant but to us, they loom up in an insurmountable way. That is life.

As a Christian we are not spared from such troubles but we can have confidence, firstly, that God understands what we are going through, and secondly that he is right there with us as we do confront the apparently impossible.

Paul's assurance of hope and triumph to the Romans is really a very encouraging verse to hold on to even if we seem to be travelling through the valley of the shadow of death. Even where our challenge is moral or spiritual, we are confident that God will not allow us to be tempted more than we can cope with.

As God asked Abraham, obviously rhetorically, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" What greater assurance can we carry around with us? If life weighs heavily on you for any reason at all, cast your burdens onto Jesus for he really does care for you and is more than capable of taking that load.

Reach the heights

I once climbed the Ruwenzori Mountains in the Congo. Each day the view got better until, from Hut III, at 4300 metres, I looked down – yes down – on a rainbow! I could see the tropical Semliki valley, more than 3000 metres below. Next day, I went up even higher. I was walking on a glacier, at below-zero temperatures – on the equator! I wondered at the beauty and extremes of God's creation spread before me.

I didn't get there without effort and without help. Days of climbing. A guide that led me, who became my friend and helped carry my pack over the tough bits. Six porters.

Just like the gospel journey. The view from the top is our knowledge of God. Our guide is Jesus: he shows the way; he becomes our friend; and he shares our load. The Christian community, like the porters, help us on the way. We have to work at the gospel journey, stage by stage; as we conquer, our view of God's creation and mercy gets better and better.

Jesus encourages a broad view of his creation, ministry and salvation. First, he gives an overview, and tells us what to look for. Then, he tells us to follow him and not his messengers (the guide, not the porters). Like a mountain guide, Jesus reprimands those who don't follow him he thanks God for making us learn, not by wisdom, but with unquestioning faith. He offers to share our burden, just as my guide shouldered my pack. He invites us to join the team: the guide, the porters and the climber.

Derek Hurlin
Closer to God, Scripture Union

What's your worldview?

“There is a way that seems right to a person, but eventually it ends in death.” Proverbs 14:12 (GW)

There are countless worldviews—beliefs you build your life on. Those beliefs come at you from books, media, classrooms, the people around you, music, advertising, and more. Most of the time, we don't even think about our worldview. But you need to—because your worldview influences how you see yourself and other people, how you make decisions, and just about every other aspect of how you live.

Here are some worldviews that are popular in today's culture. See which ones you recognize in the people around you, and maybe even in yourself.

Materialism. This worldview can be summarized with the word *more*—more, more, more. Materialism says that the only thing that really matters in life is the acquisition of things. Materialists confuse values with valuables. They think, “If I have more, I'm worth more.”

Jesus loved to challenge conventional wisdom, including the idea of materialism. He once said, “*One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15 ESV). In other words, you can't judge your life

by how much you've got because the greatest things in life aren't actually things.

Individualism. We live in a serve-yourself world that says, "It's all about you!" Advertising tells us things like, "Live your truth," "Be your own hero," and "You deserve it." It's a self-centered, individualistic, "me first" way of living.

But Jesus taught, *"If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it"* (Matthew 16:25 NLT). Jesus says you only begin living your life when you start giving it away. Significance in life doesn't come from individual status, salary, or success; it comes from serving God and serving others.

Hedonism. Hedonism urges, "Do whatever feels good!" Hedonism is simply the desire that says, "The most important thing in life is how I feel. If I feel good, then it's good; if I feel bad, then it's bad." The hedonist lives for comfort, pleasure, fun, and good feelings.

"What's wrong with pleasure?" you might ask. After all, God is the one who created pleasure. But pleasure wasn't made to be your ultimate goal. Instead, pleasure is a result of living the kind of life God wants you to live. The Message paraphrase says it like this: *"You're addicted to thrills? What an empty life! The pursuit of pleasure is never satisfied"* (Proverbs 21:17).

Pragmatism. "Whatever works for you"—that's the theme of the pragmatist. Pragmatism says it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong; it doesn't matter if it hurts someone; if it works for you, it's fine.

But the Bible offers a different perspective: *"There is a way that seems right to a person, but eventually it ends in death"* (Proverbs 14:12 GW). Just because something seems to be working now doesn't mean it's right. Cheating on a spouse, stealing from your business, or relying on alcohol may all seem to work for you in the short-term, but eventually they'll bring you down.

Think about your own life. Are you caught up in some of these popular worldviews? Or are you choosing to follow the different path that Jesus offers?

Rick Warren www.purposedriven.com

Unpraised

Verse of the day

All these things my hand has made, so all these things are mine, says the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit who trembles at my word.

- Isaiah 66:2

Voice of the day

Yet the deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised.

- Aragorn from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* (1955)

Prayer of the day

God who sees what often goes unseen, remind us that there is always worth in what we do, and help us proclaim not our own glories, but those of others and of yourself.

www.sojo.net

Sinning by not praying

Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.
1 Samuel 12:23

The context is that Israel has turned away from God and sinned. The people then ask the prophet, Samuel to pray for them. The verse above is his response.

We all know that we ought to pray but the idea that not praying is a sin may shock us. Jesus told His disciples to pray and not give up (Luke 18:1-8). Paul commanded us to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Peter wrote that we are to be self-controlled so that we can pray (1 Peter 4:7). James commanded us to pray for each other (James 5:16). If failing to do something we are commanded to do is sin, then prayerlessness is surely a major sin for believers.

Samuel had such a love, commitment and faithfulness to the people of God. A different translation says: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, but I will teach you the good and the right way". Samuel modelled God's grace by continuing to love and teach people "the good and the right way" regardless of their behaviour and rebellion. We must also be committed to continuously taking people before the Lord in prayer.

Praying for someone who has wronged you, a workmate, a family member, a neighbour, can be a challenge but can also be an important step on the road to a better relationship with them.

Do you throw up an occasional prayer as things arise, or do you have a time set apart daily for spending quality time with the Lord in prayer?

Stuart Weir www.veritesport.org

How to keep calm during life's storms

1. Pause and pray: before reacting, talk to God, "Lord, you are in control; I place this situation in your hands." (Psalm 46:10)
2. Shift your focus: from the problem, to God's promises. What you focus on will shape your peace. (Colossians 3:2)
3. Breathe in his peace: slow your thoughts and invite the Holy Spirit to calm your heart. (Philippians 4:7)

4. Trust the process: storms don't mean God has left you. Sometimes storms are where he grows you. (Isaiah 43:2)
5. Walk by faith, not fear: choose faith, even when you don't understand. (2 Corinthians 5:7)
6. Remain thankful: gratitude keeps your heart anchored in hope. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Knee Polishing

Pray along with what we have read in the articles

Sunday: pray for peace in your life, whatever storms may be raging
Monday: pray for peace in the world, whatever storms may be raging there
Tuesday: pray that we may not cease praying
Wednesday: pray that we may praise the unpraised
Thursday: pray that we may always give the ultimate praise to the Lord
Friday: pray that our worldview may be Biblical, founded on the rock of Christ
Saturday: pray that we may reach the heights and stick with God's team

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the Ark?"

"No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms."

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