

52 Thoughts



Preface

On the famous long-running radio show *Desert Island Discs* guests are asked to select eight music recordings to take with them to a desert island on which they are to be stranded alone. The conversation around the music allows for an often illuminating insight into the guest celebrity's life.

Since the 1950s the choice of a favourite book has been part of those insights. Early on it was decided that castaways would automatically be given the Bible and the complete works of Shakespeare; presumably to ensure variety as too many were likely to choose one of those books. More than sixty years later, show guests continue to be offered those books, more out of tradition than necessity I suspect. It seems most unlikely that the Bible would now be chosen as frequently as the producer thought probable sixty or so years ago.

The Bible can no longer be assumed to be part of our common cultural baggage, at least in the way it was in



earlier generations. There is lots of evidence that it is no longer part of our society's received common wisdom. It is no longer used by individuals in the way it used to be, nor do its stories figure in many people's imaginations as they once did. These changes are even apparent within the Christian faith community, albeit to a lesser degree than in wider society.

As the researcher Dr Clive Field observes 'Christianity is becoming de-coupled in everyday life from the holy book on which it is founded.' YBible aims to address the issue directly; what can we do to encourage one another in our engagement with the Bible? The intention is that YBible should prompt us to try new things as well as reinvigorating things we're already committed to. The key is sharing with one another what we're doing so that ideas and enthusiasms spread. This book offers 52 personal accounts of engagement with a verse of scripture. Warm thanks are offered to all who have shared their thoughts. We hope that sharing will be an encouragement and a renewed affirmation of Bible vitality.

Christopher Burkett
Editor

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Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' (NRSV)

Genesis 28.16

On the run, in the dark, alone, asleep, Jacob comes to a stunning realisation: 'the Lord is in this place.'

This has been my favourite verse for twenty years or more, because it succinctly summarises everything I am able to believe, even in the darkest of times. When I might want to question who 'the Lord' is, and how in this moment he might be 'Lord,' I can at least grasp this much: 'the Lord (whatever that might mean) is in this place.'

Sometimes 'this place' has seemed a place where I could not cope with life's challenges; sometimes it has felt as though I made a wrong choice; sometimes I have wanted to look to the next thing but not been sure what it might be. Wherever 'this place' has been, realizing that 'the Lord' is in it has adjusted my perspective.

Jacob is overwhelmed by the presence of God: 'how awesome is this place.' He does not immediately turn to God in repentance or bring requests in prayer – although there was much he might have asked for – he acknowledges the presence of the Lord, and waits till morning.

I love the fact that Jacob recognizes the presence of God, and stays where he is. He may have had no choice, although it would have been usual in those days to sleep by a fire, both for warmth and protection from wild animals.

In dark times, when I have been unable to pray, acknowledging the presence of the Lord, and waiting till morning has been enough.

Liz Shercliff

The Lord will fight for you; you only need to be still. (NIV)

Exodus 14.14



Life at times throws the curved ball, storms blow in and storms blow out, and all that we once deemed stable and secure can become fragile and jagged. Suddenly we can find ourselves clinging to fragments of hope drowning in a mist of shattered dreams and broken lives. We can have tried our best, done all we

can to stand, and those around have no more answers; peace eluding the dead-ends and disappointment.

However we have a God who is faithful, who has promised never to leave us or forsake us. He alone will guide us to the safe harbour and a place of grace. By day He will lead, and by night He will watch over those who shelter in His care: His tender mercies never ceasing, appearing new every morning.

Just like Moses said to the Israelites camped by the sea, who were terrified and afraid, not knowing which way to turn, 'The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.' Whatever your trial, whatever your storm, whatever the high mountain challenging your faith is; the Lord will fight for you; you only need to be still. Dwell in His presence, prayerful and faithful and see the deliverance of the Lord in your circumstances and life, just as I have done when a heartrending storm blew into my own life.

Christine Turner

But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.' (NIV)

Ruth 1.16

My emotions are heightened by this verse; two grieving and empty people about to go their separate ways, and then this wonderful declaration of faith from Ruth. A declaration of understanding and commitment to something that Ruth has seen at work in the lives of the family she has entered. She sees, she knows, she understands that God's love encompasses each and every person, including herself, a Gentile from a different ethnic group. She feels included, so much so that she can declare, 'Your God will be my God.'



She not only accepts God's love but reflects it in her commitment to Naomi. Two women, so empty, experience fullness and wholeness through their love of God. Vulnerable herself, she offers selfless, generous and loving care to Naomi so that both can start a new journey leading to abundant lives.

We need each other in this world. God connects us all in unity and diversity.

Janice Mason

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. (ESV)

1 Samuel 3.1

It so often seems that in our age the word of the Lord is rare, there is no frequent vision. On those occasions when we feel sorry for ourselves and think we are tending stony ground it is worth being reminded that we are not the first and we won't be the last. It is no good devising great schemes which will massage the numbers, God will do what God will do when the time is right.

What God needs is people to keep the faith through the hard times. It is in the midst of such times that God acts in the unexpected. In the account of Samuel it is a child who is ministering to the Lord, in whom hope is established. The experts, the movers and shakers, the ones who think they're in charge, are irrelevant. God acts through a child.

I love this verse because it takes me back to the first stirring of my own sense of vocation. On those days when I am too busy and too caught up with bureaucracy and busyness and self-importance, the boy Samuel reminds me what God is really about: keeping the flame alive in the midst of the darkness. Listening in the silence; when the word of the Lord seems rare, that's just when God speaks.

Paul Dawson

Ezra had committed himself to study and obey the Law of the Lord. He also wanted to teach the Lord's rules and laws in Israel. (NIRV)

Ezra 7.10

Moses had his burning bush. I had a rolled-up newspaper. Odd? Let me explain. I bet that God spoke to Moses many times before it escalated to the bush. I bet there was a gently smouldering tussock too, but Moses didn't catch the quieter hints. He only listened when God really shouted.

It was the same with me. God probably spoke many times before that momentous morning when he thwacked me round the head with a rolled-up newspaper, but I'm not always good at listening. Strangely, it was not my chosen verse that struck me like a cartoon piano, it was Luke 9.59 – the man responding to Jesus' call with

'First let me go and...'

I realised I had been doing that: 'First let me raise my babies;' 'First let me get them into nursery;' 'First let me have them all in school, I'll have time to serve you then.' But being a working single mum, such spare time never materialised. So I made some.

I am pretty certain that the reason God thwacked me round the head that day was to be a writer and preacher. That's where Ezra 7.10 comes in. Study and teach. Yep, that's me!

So now I am studying theology and loving every (stolen) minute. There is always time for important stuff, even if I don't have time for newspapers.

Fay Rowland

Who knows? Maybe you were made queen for just such a time as this. (The Message)

Esther 4.14



Speech day was underway and I was gearing myself up to give the annual Headmaster's Report, when I was grabbed by some words used by one of the governors in the prayers that traditionally opened the ceremony. '...for we did not choose the age in which we were born.' Over the weeks, months and years since then I have often mused on that phrase and its resonance with the challenge given to Queen Esther. She was in a position to do something most important and significant. She was in the right place at the right time.

So we too are in a particular place at a particular time and therefore in a unique position to express our discipleship within our own set of opportunities and challenges. As we move from one chapter of our autobiography into another, then we have to think afresh what it is God is calling us to do in the particular place and at the particular time in which we now find ourselves. Speculate as much as we like – we are here and we are now. God has placed us here and now. For each one of us, this is our special time and place. So when we think of how we should be serving God – it will be within that God-given framework.

John Knowles

They sat with (Job) on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great. (NRSV)

Job 2.13

I arrived on the ward in the morning and by the end of my first ever shift, he had died. I can still remember his name over three decades later. Since then I have had the privilege of sitting with many dying people, sitting with their families, sitting as priest, bearer of hope, healing and good news, in the midst of sadness, pain and fear.

I have known the temptation to hide behind the Bible, to justify the ways of God, to offer texts as a way of shutting down further conversation. Faith is such a fragile gift so often expressed in overly confident tones in the midst of turmoil. I love that, in the Bible, I find the book of Job subtly sharing wisdom with me, of when to speak with conviction and urgency and when to stay silent and let God be God.

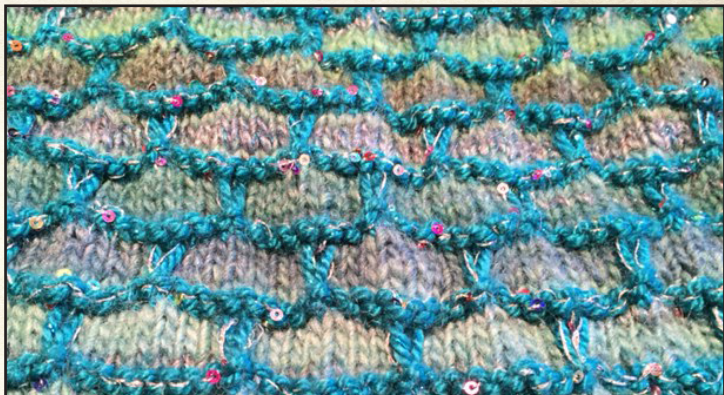
The honesty of the Bible that allows silence in the face of pain, and ecstatic praise in the presence of God, that shows glimpses of heaven and the reality of hell on earth, means for me that I can read it with all my heart and intellect.

And I love it that the Bible does offer me words when my own faith stutters, offers the words of fellow pilgrims further down the Way.

Julian Heaton

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth,
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God. (NRSV)*

Job 19.25-26



I once told a colleague how wonderful God's blessings had been for me. Soon afterwards the pattern of my life changed dramatically. Grief and illness undermined that sense of optimism. I learned for myself that saying, 'I know how you feel' was almost never helpful. These verses from the book of Job really depend on reading the whole book: a catalogue of grief and tragedy heightened by the unhelpful advice of pious people who say they 'know how you feel.' It's as if it's the climax of a symphony: the moment the listener has been waiting for. In the end everything is stripped away from this man, even his skin: exposed and vulnerable, extraordinarily he knows that God will vindicate him. In his raw flesh he will come face to face with God. I hear in these words faith as trust in God. Such faith can only be expressed in terms of knowing. Carl Jung's words echo here, 'I don't need to believe. I know.'

Clair Jaquiss

*You, Lord, are all I have,
and you give me all I need;
my future is in your hands. (GNT)*

Psalm 16.5

The outstanding simplicity of the Good News translation was breathtaking. In just three phrases of six words each my life was expressed.

The first six are so direct, so intensely relational. They stop me in my tracks. There is nowhere to rush off to. There are only six words in the world. Here, now, you and I.

The second six are unexpectedly affirming. They tell me that I am being given all I need. All that I need but much of which I have not wanted. All the grit and the rough stuff. You give me all I need. I have begun to see it. I have begun to want it. I weigh again those first six words.

The third six are where I go from here. I can do no other. You have told me true. You formed me in my mother's womb and you form me still. In my brokenness, you affirm all that I am.
You are my God. I am yours.

Rob Croft



Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (NIV)

Psalm 51.12

These words are like the intense sustenance of a protein ball amidst the arduous hike of life. They are one of my favourite verses, as, like all scripture, they have the power to change my drifting and forgetful heart and return to what matters.

In a brief moment, the source of strength is revealed – asking The Lord to provide, to ‘restore.’ And His ultimate provision is the renewed glimpse and delight in His goodness, as He makes us right with Him through Christ Jesus. Having this perspective keeps me on track, as no matter what life has in store I know that I have the only thing that one, really matters, and two, is unshakeable, and will last.

The second part of this verse is also essential, as I need to ask Him for a ‘willing’ spirit – obedient, co-operative, and eager. It reminds me I can’t achieve this in my own strength but need to ask Him to grant me this. It also reminds me that without a ‘willing spirit’, my life can take a rapid downward spiral as I no longer have the protection and strength to sustain me.

There are many verses I could have chosen, but I selected this one as it’s currently in my car. Just a small, folded piece of paper of the ‘verse of the week’ from the church notices. Tucked in one of those seemingly random storage holes, just in front of the gear stick, I see it as I begin and end my working day.

Emily Allen

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (NRSV)

Psalm 119.105

We all have times when we yearn to hear God speak clearly into our lives. In recent years the process of discerning God's will for my future ministry in the church was certainly a time of listening, a time when I found Scripture often had the loudest voice. This verse in particular reassured me that God's word will bring the light of revelation and understanding and illumine the darkness that at times masked the way ahead (2 Samuel 22.29; John 8.12). I realised the lamp of which the Psalmist speaks would have been a small oil lamp with trimmed wick, providing a pool of orange light, enough to light the feet and just the next step of the journey. At the time it was reassuring that God's word was not like a powerful torch illuminating the final destination, else I might well have been scared off and like Jonah changed direction; or tried to map the path ahead in my own way, under my strength; rather than relying on God's guidance and provision for each step of the journey.



When we are engaged with walking faithfully and enjoying the process, as a wise friend once advised me 'the head doesn't always know where the feet are leading the heart'. As God's word lights the way ahead, I take steps of faith, knowing God has my future in his hands (Jeremiah 29.11), even if I have only partial foresight at any moment in time.

Andrew Knight

He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. (RSV)

Ecclesiastes 3.11

When I look into the night sky, I see stars that do not exist. Their light has taken so long to travel here, they have already died. It is only the light that continues through the almost infinite distances of space. How can I begin to comprehend such vastness?

The Hebrew of this verse from Ecclesiastes is hard to translate as an examination of different Bible versions indicates, but it is a verse that I underlined in the Bible that I had as a teenager and it is one I have often thought about since.

I find life fascinating: the discoveries of science, the joys of art and literature, the intricacies of language. Human beings are capable of so much and we live in a world that can be so beautiful, including those stars at night. My mind has a sense of eternity. Yet, I am limited. My life is short. I become preoccupied with trivial daily concerns. I know there is much that I can never know. Sometimes this leads to a sense of frustration and despair, but it also turns me again to the God of eternity and makes me humble enough to accept my limitations and grateful for what is beautiful in our world.

David Lamb

*Fear not, for I am with you,
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (RSV)*

Isaiah 41.10

Isaiah 41:10-13 was given to me (in the Revised Standard Version) on my baptism, aged fifteen, thirty-eight years ago. I was a new Christian, new to the church, and the minister did not know me well, so the verses he chose came as a surprise to me; they were very different from my friend's, who was baptised alongside me. God knew what He was doing, of course: I have been plagued by anxiety my whole life, and I often turn to this Scripture for comfort.

Verse 10, in particular, is God's promise to me that He is always with me no matter what I'm going through. Whenever I am fearful, God tells me not to be. I like it that the words are not, Do not be afraid, which I hear softly spoken; but, fear not: an order! God is in charge, so why do I worry?

I feel dismay repeatedly, especially when faced with difficult situations. The instruction, be not dismayed is gentle, warm; especially followed by the assertion, I am your God. It's like a heavenly arm around my shoulders.

I will is then repeated three times in quick succession: three is a holy number and that gives added weight to God's declaration that I am never alone because He strengthens me; He helps me; He upholds me.

I read this Scripture often; I share it with others, especially those going through a worrying time. Sometimes I feel strengthened; sometimes I feel held up; always, I am comforted.

Linda Cosgriff

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you."* (NRSV)

Isaiah 43.2



This is one of my favourite Bible verses because it speaks so powerfully of the loving relationship between God and his people Israel, and for all of us adopted into His family through Jesus.

This verse doesn't promise an easy life; there isn't a guarantee that God will organise life so that hard times never befall us. However, in the inevitable storms and trials of life we can be confident that God will be with us. It's a verse that comforted me as a homesick student and one that I continue to turn to in times of change and upheaval.

Throughout the Bible, individuals and groups are regularly instructed not to be afraid. Fear undermines our confidence and hampers our ability to respond to God. I know from personal experience that anxiety can be a crippling emotion. But, the good news is that we don't have to overcome our fears alone. God, who knows us by name, stands with us even when life seems overwhelming. This is a verse to hold on to in the darkest moments!

Ruth Mock

*The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up. (NRSV)*

Isaiah 50.7-9

Although perhaps not my very favourite Bible passage, this is the passage which, quite simply, changed my life and the one I return to time and time again.

I feel it speaks directly to me. When I heard it read in church some years ago now, I found myself really listening. How often do we do that, really listen?

At the time I was being bullied at work. Life was tough and I thought that by going in and not dealing with it assertively, and 'turning the other cheek,' I was weak. I felt alone and like a failure.

On listening to the words, I realised that I was not alone. God was helping me; that I had nothing to be ashamed of. I was doing the right thing. Who at the end of the day were my adversaries? They were no threat to me because standing together with God, well, I felt invincible! By standing up to the bully, they crumbled and faded away, just like a moth-eaten garment.

Ailsa Whorton

*Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
the one who dies at a hundred
will be thought a mere child;
the one who fails to reach a hundred
will be considered accursed. (NIV)*

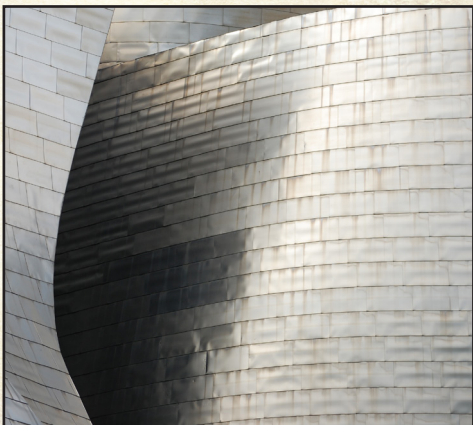
Isaiah 65.20

This verse, which is echoed in the Book of Revelation, speaks of a promise to us, a promise that reaches to us from the past and stretches out before us into a future hope of that new heaven and new earth, the Kingdom of God already within our grasp but also out of reach.

It was a verse which I turned to many times during my work as a Midwife and Neonatal Nurse as I cared for 'infants, who lived but a few days', and for their grieving families. It drew me closer to the heart of God as I walked through the darkest valley of cancer with my father who died in his late 50s, an 'old man who did not live out his years.'

And it comes to me daily as I pray for God's Kingdom to come, for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, as I watch the news and read the papers and sometimes come to the brink of despair for our world. This is not how it should be, this not how it will be.

Jo Parker



They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. (NRSV)

Jeremiah 17.8

I was devastated when I was advised to suspend my ordination training. I had just been diagnosed with breast cancer and was facing chemotherapy. Three months before I had taken early retirement and was excited about the new future God had for me but now it was likely to be put on hold for a year.

I didn't expect to find comfort in my daily readings from Jeremiah! But this verse jumped out from the page. Fruitful in the year of drought! Was it possible? I hoped and prayed it would be.

In the next few months my roots went deeper. Scriptures and Christian songs came to mean much to me and I held on to God's faithfulness and presence.

Then came some crazy ideas: organise a carol service linked with Breast Cancer Care on the theme of Christmas Hope! Create a calendar based around the verses and songs that had strengthened me! Could I do these? Was this what it meant to be fruitful in the year of drought? Amazingly God blessed these activities in ways beyond my expectations and many were encouraged through them.

Take heart – God doesn't waste an experience! Even in the desert he produces fruit.

Eunice Blackmore

Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear; He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. (NIV)

Hosea 6:3



This verse especially spoke to me at a dry time with my walk with the Lord and was a great encouragement to me to press on deeper into Him. Hosea was a prophet circa 750 BC and was speaking to a people whose love for the Lord had withered away in the light of material prosperity and judgment was proclaimed. But the Lord through Hosea expresses his deep longing for His people to return to Him and seek Him again.

Deep at the heart of this book and this verse is a deep longing for the Lord to be a part of His people's lives, to love them and for them to find afresh and experience His love. 'Press on' invokes a response from us to play our part in making deeper inroads into the Lord and our understanding of Him and His claim on our lives. The illustration of the refreshing rains gives us a picture of all that the Lord offers us.

Judgment is always there but the Lord desires mercy, love and new life for us. The longing of the Lord is always to woo us into a deeper relationship with Him. When we seek Him with all our hearts He will come like rain to a parched land. The Lord says, press on to know me more and the rewards will be out of this world!

Trevor Green

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. (NRSV)

Hosea 11.8-9

I keep coming back to these verses. The previous chapter is Old Testament frightening stuff and in verse 7 of this chapter 'My people are bent on turning away from me, so they are appointed to the yoke, and none shall remove it.' Imagine if the book had ended there! Praise God it doesn't! It is what they (and I) deserve but God's love comes shining through to change everything in the above verses. These verses help me to appreciate the Grace of God and his abundant Love for me.

Another favourite (Romans 8.38) makes it absolutely clear 'For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

'Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.' I hope and pray that can be my response.

George Colville

Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (NRSV)

Matthew 5.3

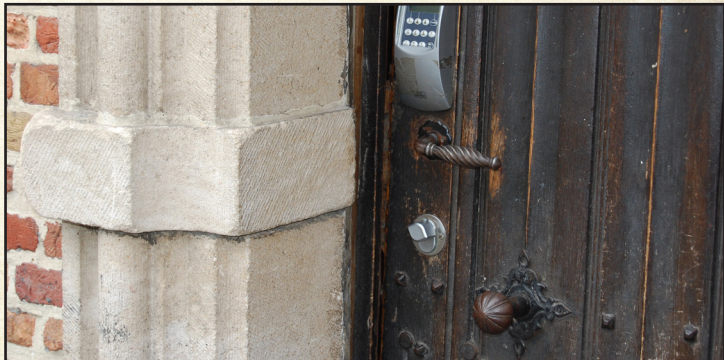
Some years ago a new lady started to come to church, Flo who was 84 years old. 'Would you like to be confirmed?' I asked.

'Me', she said, 'get confirmed?' 'I'm 84, it's a bit late for me, your havin' a laugh', she said. 'It's never too late,' I said, 'have a think about it.'

So one night she was in bed thinking about it and it came into her mind, 'When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him' (Matthew 5.1). So she hauled herself out of bed opened her old Bible and read, that Jesus seeing the crowds called them together and began to teach them.

Well, she thought, maybe I should go to the classes, and struggled back into bed. Then as she was lying there, Flo thought, but I'm not really worth bothering about. She hauled herself out of bed again and read on: Jesus said 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matthew 5.3). Amazed, Flo went to the classes, was confirmed and was at worship every Sunday.

Graham Green



Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (NKJV)

Matthew 11.28



When I was a young teenager I used to accompany my parents before breakfast to 8.00 morning 1662 Book of Common Prayer Service said Holy Communion in St Mary the Virgin Church in Oxford. Phrases such as, 'oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world' and 'did institute' meant very little to me and much of the service, I am sure, flowed over me. When we came to the words after the confession and absolution from Matthew 11.28, however, I always knew that God was close. All I needed to do was approach Jesus and a place of rest would be given to me.

These words meant I could be physically exhausted from playing games at school, I could have had enough of revising for exams, or I could simply need to feel loved and I would find God's loving arms waiting for me. Jesus' words gave hope that no matter what I needed there would always be a place of rest with God.

I have the privilege now of saying these words in the Book of Common Prayer service at 8.00am in Chester Cathedral. Many years on, I still find comfort and hope that however weary I am, God will give me that rest; and I am assured that when my body is weary of this world loving arms will be waiting to give me eternal sleep.

Jane Brooke

Jesus also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.' (NRSV)

Mark 4.26-39

I had been a Christian for only a few years when my local vicar sent me on a trip to Taizé. I spent nearly three weeks living in this amazing community and my prayers were dominated by these few verses from Mark. It was a life transforming time. I think the phrase 'he does not know how' spoke most powerfully to me. Up to that point I had tried hard to be a Christian, working to ensure my life was in tune with the will of God. This verse itself worked like yeast in my mind, transforming my thoughts. I realised that my life had changed considerably but not in any way I had intended. God had done his work secretly and powerfully but in the most surprising ways.

The seed had certainly sprouted and grown but not in a way I had intended. Something had happened but how? This was a challenge to me to rest, to surrender, to give my life in a more profound way to God. I gave up getting up quite so early to pray, I became a more relaxed person, hopefully more accepting of others and myself.

There was a real sense with these verses that:

'I heard a voice I had not known:

"I relieved your shoulder of the burden;
your hands were freed from the basket.'"

Psalm 81.7

Richard Burton

'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him. The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.' (NIV)

Mark 10.51

When I was ten my ophthalmic consultant took my hand and said: 'Diane, what do you want me to do for you?' I said to him: 'I would like to be able to see,' (I had been born blind). Eight months later my greatest desire came true, and I could see, albeit with only one eye. Many years later I heard those words during my confirmation class and realised that sight is an amazing gift, never to be taken for granted. I will never forget the day I saw my mum's face after years of only touching it.

Over the years I have come to understand that it isn't only physical sight that matters but 'seeing' the Gospel in all its beauty, truth and compassion. Jesus walks with me through darkness and light.

If, in the future, I was to lose the sight that I have, I will be for ever grateful that I was able to see what I have seen all these years, but more importantly that I have had the opportunity to read the Bible with my eyes, and, where possible, have tried to live the gospel of love, care and compassion.

Diane Cookson



No-one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. (NRSV)

Luke 9. 62

Awoken suddenly, whilst at Fairacres Convent in Oxford, by the high-pitched sound of nuns chanting their early morning office from the confines of the nearby chapel, I opened the window of my guest room and leant out. Bright and clear in the sky overhead was the Plough, and this verse unusually leaped into my consciousness, despite rarely before being able to bring Bible texts readily to mind.

As a Marine Cargo Insurance Broker at Lloyd's of London, I'd come away for the weekend to discern whether I might be put forward to another Bishops' Selection Conference, to be considered for training as a Deaconess, the only licensed ministry then available to women. Two years previously I had been through a similar discernment process, but it was said that, although pastorally I would be brilliant, I needed to develop greater self-confidence.

Determined to see if my call was authentic, I met with a therapist, who helped me begin to unravel the protective cocoon I had woven at the age of eight following the sudden death of my father. Then that night in June 1986 I looked up and knew God was indeed calling me to go on. I stepped into the bright field that beckoned me and followed the plough, overturning the dark earth along that stony furrow, eight years later becoming one of the first women ordained as priests.

Veronica Hydon

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (NIV)

Luke 15.20

Extravagant, unrestrained, lavish and copious — here is love without limit, forgiveness without boundary, and joy without restraint. A father runs to greet his child despite the shame of his leaving. Determined and unhesitating, his expansive love and compassion is deeper and higher than all the son's imaginings.

For so many years I thought God's love for me was about following rules, about how nice or good I was. I knew about God's love but in a detached manner. Then, following a time when everything was called into question, my faith seemingly unfit for circumstance, I read this parable. God felt light years away yet the Father ran to meet me.

Here was a love which bubbled out, overflowing. A new understanding that I was not kept at arms-length until I measured up. Here was a spacious and broad place to live, a sense of being cherished in a long loving look that cut through my chains and offered liberty. Ultimately, there was the laughter of knowing I was accepted and loved just as I was, still growing and changing, yet of infinite worth. It made a difference.

I wonder, have we fallen into the embrace of the Father? Are we prepared to extend his limitless love to others? Can we offer anything less?

Heather Carty

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. (NIV)

John 13.3

I am embarrassed to admit that I realised in my 30s that my older sister and I were still competing for our mother's attention whenever we and our children visited our parents at the same time. We were regressing to childhood behaviour of 'who was the favourite?' We both knew we were loved by our parents – so why did we do it? I stopped competing and the tension in the house reduced.



John 13.3 sets the scene for Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Jesus didn't need to prove who he was, or how important he was. Confident in God's love, and God's love for these people he could take on the job of the servant and invited them to do the same, secure in his friendship and love.

So who am I? I am a child of God, loved and forgiven; safe in that love. Do I need to impress anyone else if God loves me? Do I need to prove my importance – to myself or anyone else? I am invited to love as I have been loved, to serve as I have been served. And what anyone else thinks? Well, in comparison to that – it doesn't matter!

Helen Chantry

There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. (NASB)

John 13.23

This verse is from Saint John's Gospel, from the Last Supper. It is one that has captured my imagination in recent years. It doesn't take many words to conjure up the intimacy of the relationship between the beloved disciple and Jesus. We tend to sit down to our meals, but Jesus' custom would have been to recline, with his left elbow as a prop. Against him lies the 'beloved disciple.' The wonder of this passage escaped me while I wondered who the 'beloved disciple' was. Then I realised that it was possible to read the verse as if this wasn't somebody in particular, but any disciple: you and me, disciples loved by Jesus.

The intimacy is captured by a word which is often lost in our translations. It's an important word that gives the place for the disciple to be. It is the word kolpos, meaning 'bosom.' This is where beloved disciples are – at the bosom of Jesus, at his heart, so close to him that we are privileged to hear his whisper, catch his breath and listen to the secrets of his heart.

Jesus made that place available to the disciple that he loved then and the disciples he loves now. Is John, in his telling of this story, inviting us into this allegorical place of intimacy with God? I trust so.

David Herbert

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' (NRSV)

John 14.5

Having been a Reader for many years there have often been questions which I felt that I have not been able to answer adequately. At the time of writing this I am approaching ordination, after which there will, no doubt, be an even greater expectation from some people that I will be able to answer any question put to me. I know that there will still be many times where the only true answer I will have will be, 'I don't know.' This comment from Thomas reassures me



that even he, and probably the other disciples too, who had been with Jesus for three years by the time this was raised, still had things that they did not know or understand. Thomas had the integrity and the courage to admit when he did not know something, and the humility to ask, that is why I believe he is such a good example to try to follow.

John Stopford

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark ... (NRSV)
John 20.1a

We all know what happens next. Mary Magdalene comes into view, creeping through the darkness, without hope, to anoint Jesus' body with spices.

The words which I've chosen lead us into the wonder and exuberant joy of the whole resurrection story. The stone is rolled back, the body gone. Jesus Christ has risen! The militant atheist Richard Dawkins said in one of his books that religious people have a medieval view of the universe that is 'puny, pathetic and measly.' It seems to me that we exist in a universe which is a place of wonder and magnificence and beauty, and that we worship an amazing God who constantly confounds our expectations, causing extraordinary things to happen, even miracles, and the greatest of them is the resurrection. I don't myself see a universe which contains the resurrection as being puny, pathetic and measly! Rather it speaks to me of the mystery of our faith.

Surely a world which contains the wonder of angels appearing to mere mortals, and a world where the dead rise, is a world of wonders indeed. I'd been watching the son of a good friend of mine die slowly over more or less the period of my curacy. He was younger than me and he died. This story gives me hope in the face of the everyday tragedies of this life.

It also speaks to me, more specifically, of Mary's indomitable courage in the face of despair. Her leader and friend is dead, but she sets out in the lonely stillness before dawn to do the one last thing she can do for him. Like Mary we can find ourselves stumbling along through the darkness of life's problems without seeing the way ahead or the solutions we need. Yet the resurrection shows us darkness giving way to light; a light which bursts out of even the blackest times to bring new life, transformation and hope.

Vivien Gisby

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord;’ and she told them that he had said these things to her.
(NRSV)

John 20.18

In the previous verse Mary Magdalene has direct experience of the risen Christ. She remains the person – a woman – who has first-hand experience of this as well as a direct command to go and tell others about it. For me this has always been biblical evidence that God affirms and advocates the calling of all women to preach the gospel and have a strong voice and leadership role in the church.

But the calling goes beyond this in that Mary, in this moment is upset, un-composed and vulnerable. But to Jesus this matters not – God can spread the incredible message of a resurrected God and a gospel of hope through a fragile humanity. The verse also tells us that we can begin to have a ministry as soon as we experience Jesus.

Magdalen Smith



When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. (NRSV)

John 21.9; 12-13.

When life's hectic, when there's too much to do, when it's hard to find a quiet moment to pray, this story of Jesus making breakfast on the beach reminds me that, in his coming to live alongside us, Jesus shows me the blessedness of the everyday.

This story is very like that earlier one in which Jesus fed a hungry crowd with bread and fish. But, whereas in that story the emphasis is on the miraculous, here the focus is on the charcoal fire, the cooking, the calling out that it's ready, the serving out of the food. The focus is on the mundane, the things I do myself and have done almost every day for the whole of my adult life. Things I've not always done with a good grace, especially after a hard day at work.

I treasure this story because it stops me in my tracks. I picture him working alongside me, his hands testing the bread, turning the fish. And I begin to glimpse how the everyday has an importance, a sacredness beyond anything that I can grasp.

Josette Tuplin

Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord. (NRSV)

John 21.12

The Church's later celebrations of Holy Communion are in direct continuity with the meals which the risen Christ shared with his disciples – and, of course, with the pre-crucifixion Last Supper.

The events surrounding the Cross and Resurrection were terrifying for the first Christian disciples. The earthquake which caused the stone to roll away from the tomb was paralleled by the spiritual earthquake in their own understanding both of God and themselves.



But amid the wonder and terror there's also a calm sense of normality too. In the midst of a fallen and sinful world the pure presence of the Kingdom of God, in the risen Jesus Christ, reveals God's ultimate purposes for us and our world, the world's true and intended normality.

One of our modern eucharistic prayers includes the sentence, which we all say together: 'You embraced us as your children and welcomed us to sit and eat with you.' That, for me, expresses the heart of the Christian Gospel: 'Come and have breakfast.'

Bishop Peter

In him we live and move and have our being. (NRSV)

Acts 17.28

I love the fluidity and depth of this verse which is woven into my own faith journey. There is no alpha and omega here, no beginning or end. It is constant and feels nourishing and sustaining giving me a safe womb-like security and promises that, one day, I will be birthed into His Kingdom.

But this verse, set in the context of God's nature and relationship with us, also challenges me. I live, I move, I have my being in God. How much of God do I absorb? Is it possible to stay within a bubble and not be part of this osmosis of living, of moving and being with Him? How much am I abandoning myself to his love and trust and belief in me? That our mighty, creator God allows us to be such an intimate part of Him is so very humbling!

But these words also call me to move with God; to extend my tent pegs and enlarge my place of habitation with Him.

But most of all, this verse excites me. Physically I live, emotionally I move and spiritually I have my being in God. It brings so much new potential and possibilities to my faith. In him I touch both my Creator and the power and beauty of creation. In Him I touch both my Saviour and my Healer. And in Him, I find and know, that I am loved.

Beth Glover

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose. (NRSV)

Romans 8.28

Life has a habit of throwing all kinds of things at us. Storms will come – whether we are a Christian or not – and we may face trials not of our own making or find our plans and hopes are shattered. But I find enduring hope in this verse of Scripture and it helps me to see the bigger picture. God can use all that happens to me – yes, everything – to further His purposes.



While on retreat once, I experienced this Scripture in the image of a piece of weaving. The threads of our life are made of many colours – bright hues of joy and happiness interspersed with dark threads symbolic of times of adversity. There may be occasions when the threads of our life feel frayed, or even completely broken. But God uses all these threads – the dark ones and the broken ones too – and He brings them all together. And if we let Him, from them He creates a work of grace – a work made up of many shades; a work fit for His purpose.

Helen McFall

Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other people's wrongdoing, but delights in the truth.

1 Corinthians 13.5

Love keeps no score of wrongs? Yeah ... as if! I was hurt, I was betrayed, I was deceived and I was lied to and I was keeping the score – and boy, was it tallying up! ‘Revenge is mine, says the Lord,’ maybe, but it would be so good to be there when it happened ... but it didn’t. The person who committed these vile offences against me just carried on with their life ignorant of my pain and vengeful heart. I knew I was screwing myself up, harming my soul and being negligent to my spiritual wellbeing by this stance, but I couldn’t help it.

Then ... then I read 1 Corinthians 13 at a funeral service and this particular verse stood out stark and challenging. I wanted to be love, I wanted to be the love of Christ in the world and I wasn’t doing a good job at this time. So I pasted this verse onto to my mugs cupboard where I would see it regularly. I prayed and thought, and prayed and considered and prayed – then it happened Yes, I could love the world; yes, I could love this person again despite the offence and the hurt. I was filled with what I can only describe as a ‘warm glow’ and I knew I was healing. The verse is staying on my cupboard just to remind me.

Jane Parry

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NRSV)

2 Corinthians 5.21

The only way to make a dirty thing clean is to make a clean thing dirty. Think about it. My son cleans the food off his dirty face onto his clean sleeve. His face is now clean and his sleeve is dirty! We make dirty clothes clean by making clean water dirty. We put chemicals in the water which cling to the dirt and draw it out. Then we throw the water away. It has been polluted.

For our sins to be taken away we needed someone perfectly sinless – the Son of God in flesh – to bear them away. Our faith in Christ makes us one with Christ, so our sins cling to him. On the cross he bore his Father's judgment on our sins as if they were his.

It isn't just one way, however. It is not just that our sins go on Christ. It is a double exchange. Christ's righteousness comes on us: the righteousness of God. When we sit in a hot bubbly bath, the soap doesn't just bear the dirt away; it leaves its fragrance on us. It leaves us smelling sweet!

It is a much deeper process in Christ. We are united with him by faith, and his death paid the price for sin, so sin was done away with. His resurrection proves this. Now we are united with him in his righteousness, reconciled to the Father and assured of our own resurrection.

George Crowder

Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life. (The Message)

Galatians 6.5

I love the way this is translated in *The Message*: so much more helpful than the more traditional translation 'to bear your own burden'. Somehow something that could sound distinctly onerous is much more positively described. Who doesn't want to do the creative best they can with their own life? A 'burden' that may have seemed difficult and unpleasant is depicted entirely differently: step up and make the most of your life; make an effort and be imaginative in how you live it; find ways to be the best Christian you can be for God. Life in Christ is not a burden, it's a great gift!

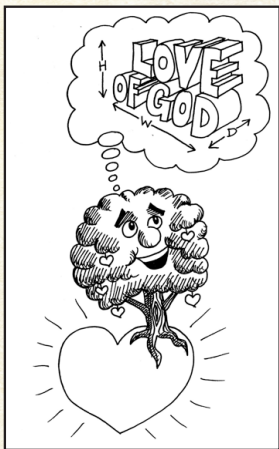
Joanne Ridley



And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (NIV)

Ephesians 3:17b-19

I often draw my responses to God's Word and this is one of my favourites out of all my cartoons: the picture of us, as Christians, being a happy, mature tree, deeply rooted and established in God's boundless love, looking up and reflecting upon God's amazing love for us. A tree is a great symbol of our life of faith, with the hidden roots being even more important than the visible branches. In my drawing, the tree is sprouting fruit, and the fruit is love! What we feed on is important and, if we draw upon God's limitless resources of love, we will, inevitably, grow fruit that reflects this.



My tree is trying to get its head around the dimensions of God's love. I have always liked the fact that, in this verse, God's love is four-dimensional! For us mere humans, the height of our understanding and experience is in three-dimensions but God's love fills our understanding to overflowing and then goes beyond, into realms we can only dream of!

Chris Gilbert

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. (NRSV)

Philippians 3.10



My reason for this verse is that it was given to me at my baptism on 7th December 1969, when I was 17 years of age, in Carshalton Beeches Baptist Free Church. I had come to faith as a teenager, I knew nothing really about church, and this was the nearest lively church with a youth fellowship and after a couple of years attending I decided – having not been baptised as a child – that that would be the time for my profession of faith.

This verse has always been close to my heart, both as a Christian in the early days and especially during the years of full-time ordained ministry. The personal knowing of Christ and the combining both of the experience of joy and suffering linked to the Lord's resurrection and death is the way my Christian journey has gone, and I go back to this verse time and time again. It is my prayer and my experience of God answering prayer, in knowing a share in his sufferings and the power of his resurrection.

Bishop Keith

I can do all things in him who strengthens me. (RSV)

Philippians 4.13

Before I found my way into the Church of England as a student, I was brought up in an independent church where my father was an elder. He baptized me, by full immersion, when I was sixteen. As each candidate came up out of the water, they were given a Bible verse, and this was mine. I still have the small piece of card in my father's handwriting, which I treasure, almost ten years on since he died.

This is a famous verse which is often misunderstood. It does not mean that we are superheroes. Rather, Paul is talking about being able to cope in all circumstances – in wealth or poverty, having plenty to eat or going hungry – simply because he is dependent on the loving grace of Jesus Christ. Earlier in the chapter he has encouraged the Philippians to rejoice always, and to bring all their needs to God in prayer. And, says Paul, 'the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'



So this short verse is a reminder to me that Jesus is with me in his love and power each day, in whatever circumstances I find myself. More than that, this is true for anyone who trusts in Christ, and I want others to be able to experience it for themselves. So this verse is also a great incentive to share my faith with others.

Mike Gilbertson

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
(NRSV)

Colossians 3.3

When I was a scruffy student in the late nineties I fell ill with appendicitis. Students aren't well known for their cleanly kitchens, and are well known for having one drink too many. So between suspicions about what I had been eating and what I had been drinking a visiting nurse decided that I would soon pull through.

My mum and dad were not convinced. After finally getting me on the one phone in my lodgings (this was before mobiles – imagine), they decided to come and get me. Dad shuffled me into the car and drove me several hours home. I remember groaning in pain all the way. Later that day, I found myself in hospital having my appendix out: it was about to burst.

Sitting at home recovering, I realised that I'd had a bit of close shave. As I thought back through the experience, and how confusing it had all been, there was one clear thing that stood out. This was the sense of Jesus' close presence to me, a calm and loving attention which offered a promise to stick with me whatever happened.

This particular verse crystallised in my head at about that time. It made me think of my baptism and how my life has been swapped for Jesus' life. Jesus took my fragile life and gave me his death-defeating life in return. It reminded me that, through life and through death, Jesus is always there with me.

Alison Fulford

Pray without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (NRSV)

1 Thessalonians 5.17

My favourite verse – that is a tall order! Different verses take that spot at different times, but one which I come back to time and time again is 1 Thessalonians 5.17. It does what I need the Bible to do – it encourages me, and it challenges me. And all in 2 words! ‘Pray continually.’

It encourages me because if I am to pray continually, that must mean that God is listening continually. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to our Father in heaven, and I can't think of another verse which says as clearly as this one that our Father in heaven is always listening for me to speak to him. And because my days are made up of so many different activities, this verse encourages me to speak to God about everything I am doing – he is not only interested in some ‘spiritual’ part of my life, but in all of it. In fact, if I can't pray about something, it means I probably shouldn't be doing it!

But alongside the encouragement comes challenge, because I know that I am a long way short of doing what this says. There are many things I do without involving God in them, in fact at times I hardly give him a thought. At those times, this verse reminds me that I've a long way to go in my discipleship. It is not an impossible ideal, but a goal well worth aiming for.

Graham Cousins

The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 5.24

When I discovered, as an 11 year old, that the God who made heaven and earth gave everything for me in Jesus, I could do no other than give myself in loving response. I thought I might be a dancer, then, I thought I might be a civil engineer, but God had other plans. I feel extraordinarily blessed that God has chosen to use my love of Him through a call to ordination. Through the people and processes of the Church of England God led me to a ministry I love. It is a gift and a privilege.



Especially now, people sometimes speak of my achievement – but that is not my story. My story is that the One who calls is faithful, and my life and ministry is not about my work for God, but about God's work in me. I have learnt to be at peace with whatever that brings.

As the Methodist Covenant Prayer puts it:

I am no longer my own but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will

Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you

Let me have all things, let me have nothing

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.

You are mine and I am yours.

So be it.

Bishop Libby

Fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when I laid my hands upon you. For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and self-discipline. So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. (NLT)

2 Timothy 1:6-8

I don't normally pin up verses from the Bible around the house but this one I have. As an ordained minister it's all too easy to lose sight of the fact that God chose me and equipped me for the task. The church acknowledged that in my ordination service when bishops and clergy gathered around and laid hands on me, many years ago though that may be!

When life and ministry are difficult I can forget the gift that God gave me through his Spirit dwelling in me. I need this reminder from scripture to daily remember that I do not minister in my own strength but through God's strength. He gives me the power, love and self-discipline I need to live the life I am called to.

When I doubt myself and my ministry I return to Paul's letters to Timothy. Here I read words of encouragement to a timid but gifted young man. Trust in the Gospel, live by the Spirit and never be ashamed to tell other about Jesus.

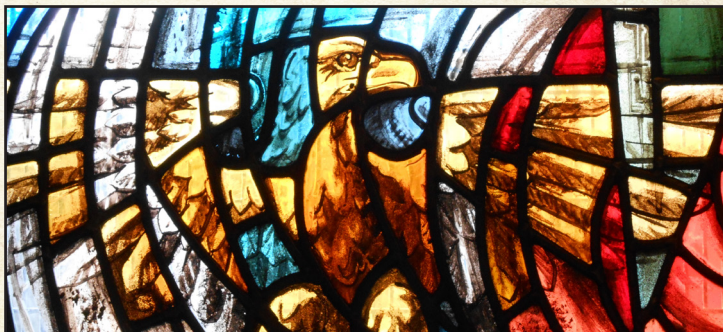
Simon Drew

For God has not given us a spirit of fear (timidity, cowardice), but of power (inherent strength, ability) and of love (affection, good-will) and of a sound mind (self-control, moderation). (NKJV)

2 Timothy 1.7

This verse was written in the front cover of my office diary when I worked in the City of London some years ago. If I had an important meeting or a difficult interview I would take time to read these words and draw strength from them. I knew that if I showed any form of fear in the face of competitors or even colleagues, then I would not be able to give clear presentations or develop the work that I had been given to do. I needed to draw on the inner strength that I knew God had given me in such situations and not allow timidity to hinder my performance. It was important to remain strong in the face of arguments and controversy to make sure that good-will and sound judgement ensued. Later, I found the process of 'Love, Power and Justice' put forward by Paul Tillich (1954) an important guide in decision making. Tillich suggests that in our relationship with God, love is leading, in our personal relationships, justice is leading and in our social relationships, power is leading. This is not a simple solution, but it may cause us to reflect on the above verse and our primary relationship with God, as the source of power, love and a sound mind in everyday life.

Gwen Knight



But godliness with contentment is great gain. (NIV)

1 Timothy 6.6



My favourite verse is 1 Timothy 6.6, 'But godliness with contentment is great gain.' It was a verse given to me by a friend at a time when I was considering ordination. I was anxious about giving up a well-paid job and going back to college for three years, anxious about the future, anxious about how we would cope. My friend got me to think about what makes me content. It didn't take long to realise that I am most content when I know I am living simply, focused on Christ and not striving after things that really shouldn't matter. I'm sure St Paul was trying to get the young Timothy to think the same way.

I then discovered *The Message* translation of the verse which helpfully expresses it this way, 'A devout life does bring wealth, but it's the rich simplicity of being yourself before God.' Over the years I have discovered the riches of God most profoundly when I am simply being myself with him. And whenever stress and anxiety or ambition becomes unhealthy, I get taken back to that same verse again and again. Contentment is a precious gift worth more than any worldly wealth.

Ian Bishop

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith ... that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (NIV)

Hebrews 12.1-3

It is so difficult to choose one favourite verse of the Bible. I love the accounts of characters such as Hannah, Ruth and Esther. However, if pushed to choose just one favourite, it would have to be Hebrews 12.1-3.

I am encouraged and amazed to know that God has set out before me my unique race – not the same as the race He has set out for others, but my own, personal race that He has chosen for me. I don't need to look with longing at the race that my fellow Christians might be running, but am satisfied and content with the race that God has chosen for me.

There are times when my race feels as though it is a marathon of hurdles, but experience and faith have taught me that when I have Jesus as my focus and running companion, and equipped by the Holy Spirit, I can jump even the greatest of hurdles. How encouraging that I have a great cloud of witnesses cheering my every step!

Who needs a gold medal? The prize for running my race will be eternity with Him.

Liz Geddes

Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. (ESV)

Hebrews 12.2

As a somewhat reluctant twelve year old I was invited along to a Christian youth group known as Crusaders (aka Urban Saints). I thought, 'At least it was better than going to Sunday School!' What surprised me was that both teenagers and the leaders took the Bible seriously. Many even read it daily. How strange was that? Despite this oddness I couldn't help but be attracted by the group's approach to life. I couldn't find the words to describe it then, but there was a love and a joy that I didn't have and I wanted it. After a while the penny dropped and I made the connection between the Bible reading and the lifestyle. Not a 'what' but a 'who' – Jesus. The rest, as they say, is history.



The verse from Hebrews was the group's motto and the verse has stuck with me ever since. Not that it's just history. These words continue to remind me, particularly when I think I can do things in my own strength, or I'm feeling down, that at the heart of the Christian faith is a relationship with Jesus. I need to keep my eyes of faith firmly on him and not be distracted by traditions, human arguments or personal pride.

Malcolm Winton

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house. (NRSV)

1 Peter 2.4-5a

I was brought up in the area known as the Cotswolds. Here the fields have often been given their shape and size by walls made from the local Cotswold sandstone. Many of these walls are hundreds of years old. As a youngster I was deeply impressed by the work of the dry-stone wallers creating such mortar-less walls. With only the simplest of tools — a chipping hammer, a string line, and perhaps a shovel — the waller builds a strong boundary of elegance and durability that will serve its purpose for many generations. It's as if each unique stone somehow has a living space all of its own.

On completion, no debris or chippings remain because the waller will have incorporated them all into the centre of the wall. There is simply no mess and nothing 'left-over.' For me that has always been a powerful metaphor of the life of faith. With God nothing in life is wasted.

The strength, resilience and serviceability of the wall are achieved by the artful skill of the waller using what is to hand. This is a skill learnt over time and with much practice; its application produces something of beauty that will remain long after the individual who created it. This is a first order craft that turns simple stones into purposeful artefacts.

How much more can the eternal skill of a gracious God achieve? God is the master waller who turns our inauspicious rockiness into something steadfast and beautiful if we allow ourselves to be built by him.

Christopher Burkett

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have. (NIV)

1 Peter 3.15

From the very beginnings of the Church, Christians have been exhorted to share their faith with others.

As the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, it often encountered hostility or incomprehension. It had to explain itself amidst a



plethora of alternative cultural and religious viewpoints. Christians were viewed as suspect because they refused to participate in the public veneration of the Emperor – for which they were accused of being atheists! Sometimes they were even tried in a court of law, accused of sedition against the authorities.

In response, the writer of the first letter of Peter advises the community not to be afraid or defensive. They should see such questioning as an opportunity to bear witness to Christ crucified and risen, and to remember that every Christian was a living sign of the Gospel.

Like those early Christians, we live in a culture today of competing world-views, in which Christianity is no longer the dominant faith. I think we have a lot to learn from this commission, to ‘give a reason’, or justification, for our faith when challenged.

Yet our surest testimony may not be what we say, but how we live and behave. The early Quaker George Fox advised his followers to ‘Let your lives speak’. If we were put on trial for being Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

Elaine Graham

For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day
(AV)

2 Timothy 1.12

This was the verse the Vicar wrote in my Greek New Testament when I was confirmed (I was studying Greek at school) – and it's been a special verse for me ever since. The AV brings out the richness and rhythm of the Greek – and it was set to music in 1883. Not great music, but compellingly memorable (check it out on YouTube!).

- I know whom I have believed: faith isn't about WHAT you know but WHO you know – faith rests on a Person, not a set of propositions.
- and am persuaded that He is able: my confidence rests not on my own ability but on God's: not 'I can' but 'He can' (check out Jude 24; 1 Thess 5.23-24).
- to keep that which I've committed: in Greek, 'my paratheke': something held on trust, something on safe-deposit. But is it what I have entrusted to Him – or what He has entrusted to me? Both, is the answer – my ministry, my relationships, my life, my soul.
- unto Him against that day. A hope and a promise: we are 'kept by the power of God.'

I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
What weary ways or golden days
Before his face I see:
But I know whom I have believed ...

Loveday Alexander

Acknowledgements:

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- AV Authorized Version. Cambridge University Press (Rights vested in the Crown). 1995.
- ESV The English Standard Version Bible. Crossway Bibles, a ministry of the Good News Publishers, Wheaton, USA. 2001.
- GNT Good News Bible (Anglicized Version). Bible Society. 1994.
- NASB New American Standard Bible. The Lockman Foundation. 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995.
- NIV New International Version. Biblica and Hodder and Stoughton. 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011.
- NIRV New International Readers Version. International Bible Society. 1992.
- NKJV New King James Version. HarperCollins. 1982.
- NLT New Living Translation. Tyndale House. 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013.
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version. The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. 1989.
- RSV Revised Standard Version. The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. 1952.
- The Message by Eugene H Peterson. Navpress. 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002.

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