

INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth message in the series “No, that’s NOT in the Bible!” We’re examining ten popular statements people think are in the Bible, but they aren’t found in scripture. There are millions of Bibles in America, yet there is an alarming level of biblical ignorance. George Barna leads an organization that conducts research to determine the state of the American Church and culture. His surveys reveal some interesting beliefs:

65% believe the Bible “answers all or the most of the basic questions of life.” But 44% believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon teach the same truths. 60% of Americans can’t name half of the Ten Commandments; 63% can’t name the four gospels of the New Testament; 31% believe a good person can earn his/her way into heaven; 81% believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a direct quote from the Bible.

Bill O’Reilly hosts a popular show on Fox News Channel called “The No Spin Zone.” In January 2002, O’Reilly was interviewing the pastor of the 5th Street Presbyterian Church in New York City, which has an active ministry to help the homeless. O’Reilly told the pastor, “Jesus would have demanded that the homeless people shape themselves up or else, because, we all know the passage ‘The Lord helps those who help themselves.’” Oops. That statement revealed that Mr. O’Reilly is certainly no theologian.

“God helps those who help themselves” isn’t found in the scriptures. But it certainly sounds good doesn’t it? Let’s examine three aspects of this spurious Biblical misquote.

I. THE HALF-TRUTH: GOD WON’T HELP YOU IF YOU’RE LAZY!

Most of these Biblical misquotes contain a degree of truth. After all, a broken clock is right twice a day! There is a measure of truth in this saying, but not the *full* measure. Some suggest this saying was originated by Benjamin Franklin who published it in *Poor Richard’s Almanac* in 1735. But Ben only popularized it. Most likely it originated from an old Aesop fable that tells the following story: “A wagoneer was once driving a heavy load along a very muddy way. He came to a part of the road where the wheels sank half-way into the mire, and the more the horses pulled, the deeper sank the wheels. So the wagoneer threw down his whip, knelt down, and prayed to Hercules: “Oh, Hercules, help me in my hour of distress.” But Hercules appeared to him and said, “Man, don’t sprawl there. Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods help them that help themselves.”

“God helps those who help themselves” it is seldom spoken in kindness. Like Bill O’Reilly from Fox News, it’s usually spoken as a harsh statement challenging someone to get up from their pity party and get to work. This is a half-truth because the Bible *does* teach God won’t bless laziness. Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, “We gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy, they are busybodies (lazy-good-for-nothings). Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ, to settle down and earn the bread they eat.” Let’s imagine that you need a job to feed your family. You should get on your knees and ask God to give you a job, but then you shouldn’t get up and sit by the phone and just expect some employer to call you out of the blue and offer you a job. Don’t do

anything until you pray, but then get out and knock on doors and put in applications. That’s what Jesus meant when He told us to ask, seek, and knock. We’ve all met slackers who created the need for such a biblical misquote. Laziness is part of our sinful nature. Some people would love to just lay around and have God put food in their mouth and then massage their jaws to chew it, and tickle their throats so they’ll swallow it.

God blesses people who display energy and initiative. If you’ve ever watched ants work, you’ll agree they are busy little creatures. In the book of Proverbs, God uses the tiny ant as an example for us. We read in Proverbs 6:6-7, “You lazy fool, look at the ant. Let it teach you a thing or two. Nobody has to tell it what to do. All summer it stores up food. So how long are you going to laze around doing nothing? How long before you get out of bed?” (*The Message*)

A Children’s teacher was using this verse in Sunday School one day. She said, “Boys and girls, everyday the little ant gets up and goes to work. Everyday, the ant works hard. And in the end what happens to the ant?” Little Johnny raised his hand and said, “He gets stepped on!”

So, there is a measure of truth in this misquote—but it is only a half-truth and followers of Jesus should embrace only the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

II. THE LIE: SELF-HELP IS THE BEST HELP

This statement is a dangerous lie because it promotes the value of self-help. Some say the whole self-help movement began with the book “I’m okay, you’re okay” written by Dr. Thomas Harris in 1967. Today every secular bookstore has a large section devoted to “self-help” or “self-improvement” books. There you’ll find hundreds of titles of books devoted to helping you help yourself. I stopped by a secular bookstore this week and browsed the titles of books in the self-help section. You can find titles like: *Help Yourself*; *Think and Grow Rich*; *Create Your Own Destiny*; *I Believe in Me*; *10 Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*; and *Try Plato, Not Prozac*.

Americans are willing to spend millions of dollars to buy books they think will give them a secret way to help themselves out of their problems. The trouble with this approach is that it reinforces self-centeredness instead of seeking the One who truly has the power to help.

I came across a humorous list of suggested self-help book titles:

1. *Chickenless Soup for the Vegetarian Soul*
2. *7,000 Habits of Highly Compulsive People*
3. *The Joy of Sects: Choosing the Right Religious Cult*
4. *Stupidity for Dummies; I’m Okay; but You’re in Big Trouble*
5. *Men are from Mars; Women are from Hell*
6. *Teaching Yourself to Read*
7. *How to Lose Five Pounds in Six Years*
8. *How to Rip People off by Writing Self-help Books.*

Self-help books and seminars are designed to give people more self-assurance and self-confidence. While these are helpful traits to possess in business and sports, when it comes to your relationship with God, self-reliance leads to self-sufficiency and it can lead you away from seeking God. Notice two dangers of spiritual self-reliance:

1. Self reliance makes you arrogant

Professional heavyweight boxer Mohammed Ali never lacked self-confidence. He was known to look into the television camera and shout, “I am the greatest!” Before Ali was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease he boarded an airplane for a trip. When the flight attendant told him to buckle his seat belt, Ali said, “Superman don’t need no seat belt.” Without hesitation, the flight attendant replied, “Superman don’t need no airplane either, so buckle up!”

While most of us never displayed the kind of arrogance of Mohammed Ali, we all are born with a self-centered personality devoted to promote self and to protect self. We create our own little self-centered universe. You can see it today in cocky sports stars and celebrities, or you can see it in a three-year-old when you are trying to teach them to do something and they look at you and say, “I can do it myself!”

That’s human nature. We want to think we can do anything. When we’ve done something, we’re proud of self. When we accomplish something, we want to take all the credit. But the Bible says it is God who gives us the ability to accomplish anything. If you ask a successful person the key to his success he may answer that he worked harder and smarter than the others. The Bible says in Deuteronomy 8:17, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

If God had rearranged a few of your brain cells, you might not have the material possessions you think you earned. We need to be careful to give credit where credit is due. The Bible says “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5) Be on guard against the kind of self-assurance that produces arrogance.

2. Self-assurance makes you forget your dependence on God

If you believe “God helps those who help themselves,” then you probably have convinced yourself you can handle most situations on your own. That way you only have to bother God when you face the really tough situations. God isn’t looking for people who are self-reliant. He’s seeking people who understand what it means to deny self and to depend on Him for everything. In Jeremiah 17:5 we read, “This is what the Lord says, ‘Cursed is the strong one who depends on mere humans, Who thinks he can make it on muscle alone and sets God aside as dead weight.’”
(The Message)

Some people think they can trust their muscles, or their skill, or their intelligence, so they don’t really need God. There’s a great old hymn that says, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in his strength alone. The arm of flesh will fail you; You dare not trust your own.” (Words by George Duffield)

“God helps those who help themselves” is a lie that may lead someone to think maybe God needs *our* help instead of us needing His help! Let me introduce you to a woman in the Old Testament who apparently believed “God helps those who help themselves.” Her name was Sarai. Her husband’s name was Abram (later changed to Abraham). They were a childless couple, yet God had given Abraham a specific promise that he would have a son and one day his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Genesis 15:5) Abraham believed God and told his wife Sarah, so they started hoping and believing that they would have a child. They weren’t a young couple! Abraham was in his mid 80s and Sarai was in her mid 70s—not the age most couples are planning on a newborn! When she was unable to get pregnant, Sarai decided to take matters into her own hands. She decided God needed a little help. After all, God helps those who help themselves. So she came up with a scheme to produce a son. You can read about it in Genesis 16:1-2, “Now Sarah, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, ‘The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.’” You can almost see the wheels turning in Sarah’s mind as she reasoned, “God promised us a child—and it’s God’s fault that I’m barren, so I’ll help God out. I’ll just let my maid have a child and since Abram will be the father, then the promise will be fulfilled.”

I don’t know if you see it, but when I read this I can’t help but see a little humor in the situation. Here’s an old man whose wife comes to him with her young maid and says, “Abe, I want you to have sex with Hagar so she can have your child.” Abe says, “Yes, dear, if you insist.”

Hagar apparently didn’t have much of a choice in the matter and when she became pregnant by Abram she despised Sarah. The son born to Hagar was named Ishmael. Thirteen years later when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 she gave birth to a son. They named him Isaac which means “laughter” because Sarah had laughed when she heard the angels say that she would bear a child.

Ishmael became the father of all the Arab people. An angel told Hagar Ishmael would be a “wild donkey of man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.” (Genesis 16:12) The Arab Muslims trace their lineage back to Abraham through Ishmael. The Jews trace their lineage back to Abraham through Isaac. Much of the warfare and killing between the Jews and Arabs today can be traced back to a bad decision Sarah made almost four thousand years ago! If only Sarah would have waited on God and trusted His promise. Instead she believed God needed her help.

When we try to take things in our own hands and help God the result is usually painful. That’s the danger of self-assurance. Our plans become a substitute for God’s plan. When are we going to learn? God doesn’t need our help! God helps those who help themselves? Don’t believe it. It’s a lie, and here’s:

III. THE TRUTH: GOD HELPS THE HELPLESS!

Those who think they have enough power to help themselves will try—and they will not seek God’s help. But the Lord responds to those who cry out to him for help. Do you need God’s help today? Here’s two ways you can find help from God. God helps those who:

1. Admit they are powerless to help themselves

That’s not as easy as it sounds because we don’t want to admit we are weak. It’s especially hard for men to admit they need help. That’s why men are notorious for getting lost and then refusing to stop and ask someone for directions. Men don’t like to admit they need help.

In our culture we admire self-made men. We are a do-it-yourself society. But when it comes to salvation, you can’t do it yourself! You’ve got to admit you are a sinner and you need help.

In his book, *The Grace Awakening*, Dr. Charles Swindoll writes about this subject: “I consider the most dangerous heresy on earth the emphasis on what we do for God instead of what God does for us. Some are so convinced of the opposite, they would argue nose to nose. They are often the ones who claim that their favorite verse of Scripture is ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ The fact is, God helps the helpless, the undeserving, those who don’t measure up, those who fail to achieve His standard. Nevertheless, the heresy continues louder now than ever in history. Most people see themselves as ‘masters’ of their own fate, ‘captains’ of their own souls. And why not? It supports humanity’s all-time favorite subject: self.”

We must admit God is our only source of help and without it we are sunk! Compare the statement “God helps those who help themselves” to the words found in Psalm 94:17-19, “Unless the Lord had given me HELP, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your love, O Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.”

David said he was about to die and he was helpless to do anything about it. If God hadn’t helped him it would have been all over. That’s the same kind of attitude we must bring to God.

My favorite hymn in our hymnal is “Man of Sorrows, What a Name” written by Phillip Bliss. One reason I like it is because it tells the full story of the act of atonement, or forgiveness. The third verse speaks of how helpless we are without Jesus: “Guilty, vile, and helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full Atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, What a Savior!”

Are you willing to admit you are guilty, vile, and helpless? Only then will you find that God helps those who admit they are helpless.

2. Trust Him alone for help

God is not one of several sources of help for you. He is the *only* source of eternal help. David wrote in Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.” Most people think David was lifting up His eyes toward the hills and they reminded Him of God. But the Hebrew grammar makes it clear he was asking a question: “Does my help come from the hills? No, my help comes from God.” Whether David was camping out as a shepherd boy, or as a soldier, he knew that the hills were full of danger. Enemies, thieves and wild animals

came from the hills. The only reason he could go to sleep was because he knew God wasn’t sleeping—God was watching over him.

What is it in your life keeping you awake? What dangers are lurking up in the hills around you? Go ahead, trust Him. There’s no reason for you to stay up at night worrying about it. God never gets sleepy. He never snoozes. He is watching over you, so you don’t have to be afraid.

I heard about a Christian businessman who was leaving for a two-week business trip. He prayed with his wife before he left. “Lord, please protect Sharon and the kids while I’m gone.” After he finished his wife looked at him and said with a smile. “Thanks for the prayer, but who do you think protects us while you’re here?”

CONCLUSION

So, the next time you hear someone say, “God helps those who help themselves,” be sure to say, “Not so. In truth, God helps the helpless!”

The beginning of the 20th century was an interesting time for the world. Charles Darwin introduced the theory of evolution in 1859 with his book *The Origin of Species*. His theory was gaining popularity and many people believed social evolution existed too. There was a widespread belief that mankind was getting better and better and man’s collective evolution would result in utopia, or heaven on earth. It was a time of peace, progress, and endless promise.

With the Industrial Revolution in full swing, there seemed to be no limit to what technology could accomplish. The telephone, airplane, electric light, and the horseless carriage were all invented in the first few years of the 20th century. It was a heady time when man had a pompous confidence in himself and his technology. At the very pinnacle of this evolutionary climb was the construction of what was to be the greatest ship in history—the *Titanic*. It was the biggest, fastest, most luxurious ship ever built. It was a symbol of man’s technological evolution. When it was dedicated on May 31, 1911, one of the employees of the White Star Line was overheard to say, “Even God Himself could not sink this ship!”

On her maiden voyage, Captain E. J. Smith sped along at 22 knots, because he had no reason to fear such a petty thing as an iceberg; after all he was on an unsinkable ship. But as we all know, it wasn’t unsinkable at all. On the night of April 14, 1912, *Titanic* side-swiped an iceberg, tearing a 300-foot gash in her starboard hull. In an ironic twist of fate, the watertight compartments, which were designed to keep the ship afloat, actually caused it to sink. Because the six compartments at the bow were left open at the top, when the water filled them, the ship was pulled down at such an angle that seawater spilled over into the seventh compartment and then the eighth and so on.

The mind-boggling thing about the *Titanic* is that while the ship was designed to carry 3,000 passengers, there were only enough lifeboats for about 1,000 people. That’s the height of arrogance: lifeboats were superfluous on an unsinkable ship. Within two hours and forty minutes of striking the iceberg the unsinkable ship slipped below the surface and settled on the bottom of

the North Atlantic. 705 people survived in the lifeboats, and 1,528 people lost their lives because there was no lifeboat for them.

The iceberg wasn’t responsible for the death of all those people—human arrogance was. Our world is much like the *Titanic* on that moonless night—plunging full steam ahead with the music playing and the parties going strong, unaware or uncaring of the iceberg ahead. Sadly, the *Titanic* is the epitome of the self confident attitude that says, “I can do it all myself. Nothing can stop me. I don’t need God. He’s nothing but a lifeboat. Besides, I’m enjoying the glitter and glamour and music. Don’t bother me with iceberg reports, pastor!”

My friend, there is a lifeboat for you and His name is Jesus Christ. If you place your life in Him, He will carry you safely over the waters of eternal judgement. But in order to do that you must admit you are helpless—sunk without Him. And trust Him with all your heart. Remember, God helps those who admit they are *helpless*.

OUTLINE

I. THE HALF-TRUTH: GOD WON'T HELP YOU IF YOU'RE LAZY!

"We gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.' We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy, they are busybodies (lazy-good-for-nothings). Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ, to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 2 *Thessalonians* 3:10-12

II. THE LIE: SELF-HELP IS THE BEST HELP

Self reliance makes you:

1. Arrogant

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth."
Deuteronomy 8:17

2. Forget your dependence on God

This is what the Lord says, "Cursed is the strong one who depends on mere humans, who thinks he can make it on muscle alone and sets God aside as dead weight." *Jeremiah 17:5 The Message*

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"I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my HELP come from? My HELP comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." *Psalms 121:1-4*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes