

A scenic view of a coastline. In the foreground, a steep, grassy cliffside descends towards the sea. The cliff face is light-colored and shows some erosion. The sea is a deep blue-green color. In the middle ground, a small, cylindrical lighthouse with red and white horizontal stripes stands on a rocky outcrop in the water. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall mood is serene and coastal.

**Make helping others  
A priority**

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## Table of Contents

Forward		3
Chapter 1	To help others, we must get involved	4
Chapter 2	God's help often comes gradually	10
Chapter 3	Jesus can help when no one else can	16
Chapter 4	Helping is a good way to demonstrate love	20

## Forward

All of us understand God's physical laws of nature. For example, jumping off a tall building means death because of the law of gravity.

But some don't understand how God's spiritual laws work. God forbids us to do certain things because he wants to keep us from self-destruction.

God gave many rules to his people—but not without reason. He did not withhold good from them; he only prohibited those acts that would bring them to ruin.

God has help where we least expect it. He provides for us in ways that go beyond our narrow definitions or expectations.

No matter how bitter our trials or how seemingly hopeless our situation, we should look for God's caring touch. We may find his providence in some strange places!

Next time you are drawn to a forbidden physical or emotional pleasure, remind yourself that its consequences might be suffering and separation from the God who is trying to help you.

## Chapter 1



**To help others, you must get involved.**

Genesis 14:14-16

When Abram learned that Lot had been captured, he called together the men born into his household, 318 of them in all. He chased after Kedorlaomer's army until he caught up with them in Dan.

There he divided his men and attacked during the night from several directions. Kedorlaomer's army fled, but Abram chased them to Hobah, north of Damascus.

Abram and his allies recovered everything—the goods that had been taken, Abram's nephew Lot with his possessions, and all the women and other captives.

These incidents portray two of Abram's characteristics:

- (1) He had courage that came from God. Facing a powerful foe, he attacked.
  
- 2) He was prepared. He had taken time to train his men for a potential conflict.

We never know when we will be called upon to complete difficult tasks. Like Abram, we should prepare for those times and take courage from God when they come.

When Abram learned that Lot was a prisoner, he immediately tried to rescue his nephew.

It is easier and safer not to become involved. But with Lot in serious trouble, Abram acted at once.

Sometimes we must get involved in a messy or painful situation in order to help others. We should be willing to act immediately when others need our help.

### **Nothing is too hard for God's help.**

Genesis 18:14

Is anything too hard for the Lord? About a year from now, just as I told you, I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" The obvious answer is, "Of course not!" This question reveals much about God. Make it a habit to insert your specific needs into the question.

"Is this day in my life too hard for the Lord?" "Is this habit I'm trying to break too hard for him?" "Is the communication problem I'm having too hard for him?" Asking the question this way reminds you that God is personally involved in your life and nudges you to ask for his power to help you.

## **Are you willing to let God help you?**

Exodus 4:14

Then the Lord became angry with Moses. "All right," he said. "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? He is a good speaker. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. And when he sees you, he will be very glad.

God finally agreed to let Aaron speak for Moses. Moses' feelings of inadequacy were so strong that he could not trust even God's ability to help him.

Moses had to deal with his deep sense of inadequacy many times. When we face difficult or frightening situations, we must be willing to let God help us.

## **God's laws designed to help, not restrain us.**

Leviticus 20:22-23

"You must carefully obey all my laws and regulations; otherwise the land to which I am bringing you will vomit you out.

Do not live by the customs of the people whom I will expel before you. It is because they do these terrible things that I detest them so much.

God gave many rules to his people—but not without reason. He did not withhold good from them; he only prohibited those acts that would bring them to ruin.

All of us understand God's physical laws of nature. For example, jumping off a ten-story building means death because of the law of gravity.

But some of us don't understand how God's spiritual laws work. God forbids us to do certain things because he wants to keep us from self-destruction.

Next time you are drawn to a forbidden physical or emotional pleasure, remind yourself that its consequences might be suffering and separation from the God who is trying to help you.

**Not all who offer spiritual help are sincere.**

Numbers 25:1-3

While the Israelites were camped at Acacia, some of the men defiled themselves by sleeping with the local Moabite women.

These women invited them to attend sacrifices to their gods, and soon the Israelites were feasting with them and worshiping the gods of Moab.

Before long Israel was joining in the worship of Baal of Peor, causing the Lord's anger to blaze against his people.

This combination of sexual sin and idolatry, it turns out, was Balaam's idea (see Numbers 31:16; Rev. 2:14), the same Balaam who had just blessed Israel and who appeared to be on their side.

It is easy to see how the Israelites were misled, for Balaam seemed to say and do all the right things—at least for a while (Numbers 22-24).

Not until Balaam had inflicted great damage on them did the Israelites realize that he was greedy, used sorcery, and was deeply involved in pagan religious practices.

We must be careful to weigh both the words and the deeds of those who claim to offer spiritual help.

Baal was the most popular god in Canaan, the land Israel was about to enter. Represented by a bull, symbol of strength and fertility, he was the god of the rains and harvest.

The Israelites were continually attracted to Baal worship, in which prostitution played a large part, throughout their years in Canaan.

Because Baal was so popular, his name was often used as a generic title for all the local gods.

### **Help those who help you.**

Numbers 32:16-19

But they responded to Moses, "We simply want to build sheepfolds for our flocks and fortified cities for our wives and children.

Then we will arm ourselves and lead our fellow Israelites into battle until we have brought them safely to their inheritance. Meanwhile, our families will stay in the fortified cities we build here, so they will be safe from any attacks by the local people.

We will not return to our homes until all the people of Israel have received their inheritance of land. But we do not want any of the land on the other side of the Jordan. We would rather live here on the east side where we have received our inheritance."



A simple pen for livestock had four roughly built stonewalls, high enough to keep wild animals out. Sometimes the top of the wall was lined with thorns to further discourage predators and thieves.

The pen's single entrance made it easier for a shepherd to guard his flock. Often several shepherds used a single pen and took turns guarding the entrance.

Mingling the animals was no problem since each flock responded readily to its own shepherd's voice. The three tribes who chose to remain east of the Jordan River wanted to build pens to protect their flocks and cities to protect their families before the men crossed the river to help the rest of the tribes conquer the Promised Land.

The land on the east side of the Jordan had been conquered. The hard work was done by all of the tribes together. But the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh did not stop after their land was cleared.

They promised to keep working with the others until everyone's land was conquered. After others have helped you, do you make excuses to escape helping them? Finish the whole job, even those parts that may not benefit you directly.

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## Chapter 2



**God's help often comes gradually.**

Deut. 7:21-24

As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and was defeating them, until the Ancient One came and judged in favor of the holy people of the Most High. Then the time arrived for the holy people to take over the kingdom.

Then he said to me, "This fourth beast is the fourth world power that will rule the earth. It will be different from all the others. It will devour the whole world, trampling everything in its path.

Its ten horns are ten kings that will rule that empire. Then another king will arise, different from the other ten, who will subdue three of them.

Moses told the Israelites that God would destroy Israel's enemies, but not all at once.

God had the power to destroy those nations instantly, but he chose to do it in stages.

In the same way and with the same power, God could miraculously and instantaneously change your life. Usually, however, he chooses to help you gradually, teaching you one lesson at a time.

Rather than expecting instant spiritual maturity and solutions to all your problems, slow down and work one step at a time, trusting God to make up the difference between where you should be and where you are now.

You'll soon look back and see that a miraculous transformation has occurred.

### **God helps us when we least expect it.**

1 Kings 17:10

So he went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the gates of the village, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he asked her, "Would you please bring me a cup of water?"

In a nation that was required by law to care for its prophets, it is ironic that God turned to ravens (unclean birds) and a widow (a foreigner from Jezebel's home territory) to care for Elijah.

God has help where we least expect it. He provides for us in ways that go beyond our narrow definitions or expectations.

No matter how bitter our trials or how seemingly hopeless our situation, we should look for God's caring touch. We may find his providence in some strange places!

## **Don't be afraid to ask others for.**

Neh. 2:7-8

I also said to the king, "If it please Your Majesty, give me letters to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, instructing them to let me travel safely through their territories on my way to Judah.

And please send a letter to Asaph, the manager of the king's forest, instructing him to give me timber.

I will need it to make beams for the gates of the Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for a house for myself." And the king granted these requests, because the gracious hand of God was on me.

After his prayer, Nehemiah asked the king for permission to go to Judah.

As soon as he got a positive answer, he began asking for additional help.

Sometimes when we have needs, we hesitate to ask the right people for help because we are afraid to approach them. Not Nehemiah! He went directly to the person who could help him the most. Don't be reluctant to ask those who are most able to help. They may be more interested and approachable than you think. God's answers to prayer may come as a result of our asking others.

He acknowledged that God's gracious hand was upon him. He knew that without God's strength, his efforts would be in vain.

Do you acknowledge God as your power source and the giver of your gifts?

## **Why do you want God's help?**

Psalm 9:13-14

Lord, have mercy on me. See how I suffer at the hands of those who hate me. Snatch me back from the jaws of death.

Save me, so I can praise you publicly at Jerusalem's gates, so I can rejoice that you have rescued me.

All of us want God to help us when we are in trouble, but often for different reasons. Some want God's help so that they will be successful and other people will like them.

Others want God's help so that they will be comfortable and feel good about themselves.

David, however, wanted help from God so that justice would be restored to Israel and so that he could show others God's power.

When you call to God for help, consider your motive. Is it to save yourself pain and embarrassment or to bring God glory and honor?

**Don't cry for God's help without being willing to repent.**

Jeremiah 14:1

This message came to Jeremiah from the Lord, explaining why he was holding back the rain:

Drought was a judgment with devastating consequences. As usual, when their backs were to the wall, the people cried out to God.

But God rejected their plea because they did not repent; they merely wanted his rescue. Not even Jeremiah's prayers would help. Their only hope was to turn to God.

### **Why Jesus is qualified to help us.**

Matthew 1:18

Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

There were three steps in a Jewish marriage. First, the two families agreed to the union. Second, a public announcement was made. At this point, the couple was "pledged."

This was similar to engagement today except that their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce (even though sexual relations were not yet permitted).

Third, the couple was married and began living together. Because Mary and Joseph were engaged, Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma.

According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce her, and the Jewish authorities could have had her stoned to death (Deut. 22:23-24).

Why is the virgin birth important to the Christian faith?

Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam.

Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine.

Because Jesus lived as a man, we know that he fully understands our experiences and struggles (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver us from sin (Col. 2:13-15).

We can tell Jesus all our thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where we are now, and he has the ability to help.

## Chapter 3



**Jesus can help when no one else can.**

Matthew 9:23-24

When Jesus arrived at the official's home, he noticed the noisy crowds and heard the funeral music. He said, "Go away, for the girl isn't dead; she's only asleep." But the crowd laughed at him.

The synagogue ruler didn't come to Jesus until his daughter was dead—it was too late for anyone else to help. But Jesus simply went to the girl and raised her!

In our lives, Christ can make a difference when it seems too late for anyone else to help.

He can bring healing to broken relationships, release from addicting habits, and forgiveness and healing to emotional scars.

If your situation looks hopeless, remember that Christ can do the impossible.



## **Helping others is a priority.**

Luke 13:15-16

But the Lord replied, "You hypocrite! You work on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from their stalls on the Sabbath and lead them out for water?"

Wasn't it necessary for me, even on the Sabbath day, to free this dear woman from the bondage in which Satan has held her for eighteen years?"

The Pharisees hid behind their own set of laws to avoid love's obligations.

We too can use the letter of the law to rationalize away our obligation to care for others (for example, by tithing regularly and then refusing to help a needy neighbor).

But people's needs are more important than rules and regulations. Take time to help others, even if doing so might compromise your public image.

In our fallen world, disease and disability are common. Their causes are many and often multiple—inadequate nutrition, contact with a source of infection, lowered defenses, and even direct attack by Satan.

Whatever the immediate cause of our illness, we can trace its original source to Satan, the author of all the evil in our world.

The good news is that Jesus is more powerful than any devil or any disease. He often brings physical healing in this life; and when he returns, he will put an end to all disease and disability.

## **Help always comes to those with faith.**

Luke 18:35

As they approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road.

Beggars often waited along the roads near cities, because that was where they were able to contact the most people.

Usually disabled in some way, beggars were unable to earn a living. Medical help was not available for their problems, and people tended to ignore their obligation to care for the needy (Leviticus 25:35-38).

Thus beggars had little hope of escaping their degrading way of life. But this blind beggar took hope in the Messiah.

He shamelessly cried out for Jesus' attention, and Jesus said that his faith allowed him to see. No matter how desperate your situation may seem, if you call out to Jesus in faith, he will help you.

## **Helping contrasted with hurting others.**

John 8:9

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman.

When Jesus said that only someone who had not sinned should throw the first stone, the leaders slipped quietly away, from oldest to youngest. Evidently the older men were more aware of their sins than the younger. Age and experience often temper youthful self-righteousness.

But whatever your age, take an honest look at your life. Recognize your sinful nature, and look for ways to help others rather than hurt them.

### **From Jesus' extraordinary resources**

John 11:3

So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, the one you love is very sick."

As their brother grew very sick, Mary and Martha turned to Jesus for help. They believed in his ability to help because they had seen his miracles.

We too know of Jesus' miracles, both from Scripture and through changed lives we have seen. When we need extraordinary help, Jesus offers extraordinary resources. We should not hesitate to ask him for assistance.

## Chapter 4



**Helping is a good way to demonstrate love.**

John 13:35

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Jesus says that our Christ like love will show we are his disciples. Do people see petty bickering, jealousy, and division in your church? Or do they know you are Jesus' followers by your love for one another?

Love is more than simply warm feelings; it is an attitude that reveals itself in action. How can we love others as Jesus loves us? By helping when it's not convenient, by giving when it hurts, by devoting energy to others' welfare rather than our own, by absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back.

This kind of loving is hard to do. That is why people notice when you do it and know you are empowered by a supernatural source. The Bible has another beautiful description of love in 1 Cor. 13.

## **Sharing is a form of helping others.**

Acts 2:44

And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had.

Recognizing the other believers as brothers and sisters in the family of God, the Christians in Jerusalem shared all they had so that all could benefit from God's gifts. It is tempting—especially if we have material wealth—to cut ourselves off from one another, each taking care of his or her own interests, each providing for and enjoying his or her own little piece of the world.

But as part of God's spiritual family, it is our responsibility to help one another in every way possible. God's family works best when its members work together.

## **Giving help to new believers**

Acts 14:21-22

After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, where they strengthened the believers.

They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that they must enter into the Kingdom of God through many tribulations.

Paul and Barnabas returned to visit the believers in all the cities where they had recently been threatened and physically attacked.

These men knew the dangers they faced, yet they believed that they had a responsibility to encourage the new believers.

No matter how inconvenient or uncomfortable the task may seem, we must always support new believers who need our help and encouragement.

It was not convenient or comfortable for Jesus to go to the cross for us!

### **Helping others versus judging them.**

1 Cor. 4:5

So be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether or not someone is faithful. When the Lord comes, he will bring our deepest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. And then God will give to everyone whatever praise is due.

It is tempting to judge fellow Christians, evaluating whether or not they are good followers of Christ. But only God knows a person's heart, and he is the only one with the right to judge. Paul's warning to the Corinthians should also warn us.

We are to confront those who are sinning (see 1 Cor. 5:12-13), but we must not judge who is a better servant for Christ. When you judge someone, you invariably consider yourself better—and that is arrogant.

## **We should help others.**

Galatians 6:1-3

Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody.

No Christian should ever think that he or she is totally independent and doesn't need help from others, and no one should feel excused from the task of helping others.

The body of Christ—the church—functions only when the members work together for the common good. Do you know someone who needs help? Is there a Christian brother or sister who needs correction or encouragement? Humbly and gently reach out to that person (John 13:34-35).

**To receive Jesus as your savior, please pray this Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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