

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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God's help for Christians today: Enduring in difficulties

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*. Over the last few weeks we have been considering "God's help for Christians today". Different speakers have looked at the following topics: "The greatness of our Saviour", "A High Priest in heaven", and "Sanctification is possible". This morning our subject is "Enduring in difficulties" which is the last talk in the series.

It is very important to remember that once you have truly repented from your sin, and you have put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, He does not leave you alone without any help in this difficult world. The Lord Jesus not only saves you from your sins and makes you fit for Heaven, but He also promises to keep you and walk with you daily on life's path. Hebrews 13:5 is confirmation of this fact, because the Lord your God said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" This verse is in reference to Deuteronomy 31:6 which says: "*Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*"

We must also be fully aware that even Christians have to endure difficult circumstances as we are not immune to the hardships of this life. But whatever situation we come across in our pathway through this world, we have the help of the God who made the universe - the God who made us and the God who loves and cares for us every moment of every day!

So how does God help us to endure in difficulties? How can He help us when He is in Heaven? Why do I have to suffer difficulties like this? All of these questions I am sure some of you have asked at one stage or another. The simple answer is in Hebrews 12:2 where we are told to "*look to Jesus.*" Let us read the verse together: "*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (Hebrews 12:2). The Lord when He was here on earth endured difficulties just like you and me. The Lord knows our pain, He feels it for us. In fact, the Lord had to endure difficulties that you and I will never have to endure when we consider His suffering and shame at the hands of the ones He created.

Difficulties we face in the pathway of life can come in various ways. We can have difficulties that we bring on ourselves because of our actions. We can have difficulties through no fault of our own. We could have difficulties because of what others do to us. In Hebrews 11 we read of many faithful men and women. Almost all of them had to endure difficulties in their lives. These experiences usually made their faith and trust stronger in God. Most of them learnt from the trials they went through, and with these experiences they were stronger when they came face to face with the next difficulty. It seems that God allows us to go through difficulties to strengthen our faith and trust in Him.

Have you ever been mountain climbing? Or should I say mountain walking? In Scotland we have a group of mountains over 3,000 feet high which are called the Munros. There are over 280 peaks and each one is a different mountain. Between 1856 and 1919 a man by the name of Sir Hugh Munro first listed these mountains. There are many people who are classed as "Munro baggers". You may be one? This term is used for anyone who is attempting over a period of time to climb all the Munros. In 1991, a group of us from our local church joined a sponsored event, "The great Scottish Climb", which was being held for cancer research. On that one particular day every Munro was climbed by someone. Since that day, usually twice a year some of the original party make our way North to have a day walking these wonderful mountains.

You may be wondering where I am going with this story about mountain climbing! I want to use mountain climbing as an illustration of the difficulties we endure on life's pathway. When considering this subject, there were so many things that we have to go through on a day's walking that hopefully it will help you to understand why and how we as Christians go through difficulties in life. So let's get our boots on and get ready for a day out in the Scottish hills!

Preparing for your day

Good preparation is the key to any climb. Weeks before, we get Sir Hugh Munro's book out and choose where we will go. Why do we get out Sir Hugh Munro's book? Because it was he who first walked and mapped out these mountains. He has been on the very mountain that we will be on. He has experienced the very paths that we will have to walk. He

knows where the best starting point is. He knows where there is danger. He knows the safe and easiest way to the mountain top. Is this not a wonderful illustration of the paths of life? We should turn to the Lord Jesus, the maker of Heaven and earth. He is the one who came into this world and became flesh and had a body like you and me. Jesus walked this earth feeling the same pain, disappointments and difficulties that you and I do. Jesus has walked this way before, so who better to turn to than Him? So in life we should turn to the Bible, God's word. The Bible prepares us for what we will face in life, in death and in the life to come. The Bible has all the answers.

The starting point

The starting point on a walk is so important, because if you start from the wrong place you can be lost for hours. We usually climb four or five Munros in a day so it's very important that we make a good start and don't lose any time. It's the same in life! The key to having a purposeful, meaningful, contented and happy life is found in the Lord Jesus. The best start in life is by accepting that you are a sinner and turning to God in repentance for your sins, and by putting your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. I am always very thankful for my Christian upbringing and for the day when I was about eight years old when I put my simple faith and trust in the Lord Jesus as my Saviour. This is the most important starting point for you and it's never too late to trust in the Lord Jesus! When you are saved, you are not only saved for Heaven and eternity but you are saved in this life. When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit enters into your heart. He helps you to stay on the paths of righteousness (see Psalm 23:3). The Holy Spirit keeps you from going the wrong way in life where you can be lost for years. The Holy Spirit continually acts as a conscience for you, keeping you away from the dangers of this world while pointing you to Christ.

Equipment for the walk

It is vital to have the right equipment so you are prepared for everything that you will face during the walk. If it's your first walk, you will need to ask for guidance from someone who has experience of walking. You need good boots to protect your feet and ankles as the terrain can change quite dramatically. The weather can change in minutes. Sometimes you can have had four seasons in one day, sun, rain, wind and snow. So you need to have warm layers of clothing, hats, gloves and a waterproof coat. As well as having Hugh Munro's guide book, we always take a map and a compass. Nowadays we also have satellite navigation. You must treat the mountains with respect. Sometimes when the cloud comes in, it is impossible to see a few steps in front of you, so you can't depend on just your eyesight. You also need to look after your body by taking the right food with you, food that gives you energy and keeps you going throughout the day. You also need to take water, plenty of water to keep you hydrated. If you are prepared with the right equipment, you are ready for whatever the elements throw at you. You should be able to keep safe and healthy. You should not get lost or hungry and you should stay reasonably warm and dry.

Equipment for the walk of life

Seek guidance from those Christians who have experienced life, from someone that's older whom you respect. Talk with them about how you should approach life. Listen to the problems they encountered and the lessons they learned. Always consult your Bible; your Bible is both a map and a compass. My thoughts turn to Ephesians 6:13-18 where you read about what you should wear daily as you try to fend off the wiles of the devil. *"Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."*

There is no point as a Christian going into a world that is full of sin and wrongdoing without wearing the right equipment! It is foolish to think we can survive without the equipment that God tells us to wear. As you read your Bible daily, you receive food for your souls, spiritual food, that sustains you, encourages you and comforts you. Water in the Bible mostly speaks of the Holy Spirit who keeps you on your way. The Bible gives us clear vision, clear instructions, instructions that never change from a God who never changes.

Friends to walk with you

In 2015, a few of us took on the three peaks challenge for charity. The challenge was to climb the highest mountain in Scotland, Ben Nevis; the highest mountain in England, Scafell Pike; and the highest mountain in Wales, Snowdon - all within 24 hours. The party consisted of fathers and sons, brothers, cousins, old friends and new friends. We all completed the challenge within the time but physically and mentally this was the hardest 24 hours of my life. We all started off up Ben Nevis with great enthusiasm and freshness. Then we rested our weary bodies in the minibus on the journey. We all struggled up and down Scafell Pike for various issues. But when we got to Snowdon, although we were tired, we knew it was the last mountain and then we had reached our goal. There is no way that I would have

completed this challenge without the help of my friends. We all walked together in groups talking and willing each other on. When we were travelling in the minibus between mountains we had a laugh together and shared our feelings and stories. Each one of us had the same goal, we were all striving for the same result.

Christians need good friends, faithful friends, friends they can trust. In the Bible, probably the best example of friendship is that between David and Jonathan. In 1 Samuel 18:1-4 and in 1 Samuel 20:14-17 we read of Jonathan's love for David. Jonathan's father, Saul, tried on numerous occasions to kill David. But Jonathan never went against his friend, even if he had to go against his father. Jonathan was a faithful friend to David.

Proverbs 18:24 says: *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* This is an interesting verse because you must be a true friend yourself if you expect others to be a true friend to you. Choosing friends is very important because of the influence they can have over you. But we are reminded in this verse of *"a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* This is of course referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. The words of the old hymn says,

*"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear,
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!"*

Joseph M Scriven (1819-1886)

So in times of trial and difficulty, turn to the Lord Jesus first, then you can seek help from faithful friends.

Walking the paths of life.

As you walk up the mountain, you usually follow paths where people have walked before. Sometimes these paths are very clear, other times the path merges with another so it is very easy to get confused and wander off the right path. The path is often steep, difficult, rocky and slippery under foot. As you grind your way up, you have feelings of tiredness, weariness, and weakness and often you feel like giving up. You need to have a healthy body, you need to be focused and you need to be determined. There are always things that discourage you along the way, things that you have no control over. The wind blows hard and the cloud and mist closes in on you. The rain or snow starts and you get cold and wet. Going upward is physically and mentally demanding. Trudging upwards with sore legs and a heart beating ten times faster than normal, I always find my head is constantly looking down at the path. On the other hand, when I reach the summit I relax and I lift up my head and look at the beauty that is all around me. And as you walk along the high ridges you feel much better, your body recovers and you are able to focus on the wonder of what the Lord has made.

As we journey through life, sometimes things come across our paths that we cannot control. Sometimes things like health issues, bereavement, financial problems, or family issues. There are times that you feel you just can't lift your head above the problems in your life, and a Christian is not immune to these things. But remember we have a friend in the Lord Jesus as we walk head down, feeling the pain and struggle of the path. Sometimes you lose your footing, you stumble you can't see a clear path before you. Let us read Psalm 121 for encouragement; *"I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence comes my help? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore"* (Psalm 121:1-8).

Cloud descending is probably the best example of the problem of seeing things clearly. One minute you can see nothing, I mean nothing! But within minutes the way can be perfectly clear before your eyes. When this happens in the mountains, it's amazing. It is even more so when we cast our burdens at the feet of the Lord Jesus; the clouds roll away and we can see clearly and we can lift your head and give God the glory, the honour and the praise.

Psalm 119:105 tells us that the Bible, God's word, will illuminate our path: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."* This verse really struck me as we walked at midnight along the shores of Loch Hourn, heading toward the Knoydart peninsula. We walked along a very rocky path at the side of the loch and we never needed to use our torches! The moon was so bright and clear that the path was illuminated. No artificial lighting was required. God had

provided ample light for our pathway. It was amazing! I will never forget it! Allow God to give light for and to direct your path.

Conclusion

One last illustration to encourage you in relation to the difficult path we tread now and the rest we will enjoy in Heaven one day. The A83 starts on the A82 at Tarbet, on the banks of Loch Lomond. Then it works its way to Arrochar at the head of Loch Long, before following the western shore to the mouth of Glen Croe at Ardgarten. From here the route becomes interesting as the long ascent of Glen Croe leads to the infamous "Rest and be Thankful", the highest point on the A83 and a stunning viewpoint in the midst of a wilderness. After walking the path of life, a Christian arrives safe in Heaven. Then we will be able to look back and see God's wonderful hand in our lives. Then we will have perfect rest and we will be thankful for everything that God allowed in our lives.

I hope you are not too tired after your walk in the Scottish mountains!

May God richly bless you. Amen.

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