

“God Helps Those Who Can’t Help Themselves”

1. GOD SAVES US IN SPITE OF OUR WEAKNESS
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1. In the 2006 film, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Will Smith portrays the life of a man named Christopher Gardner. Gardner is a self-made millionaire, and the founder and CEO of Gardner Rich & Co., a stock brokerage firm in Chicago.

2. Gardner’s story made for a good movie because it is the classic rags-to-riches - pull your self up by your boot straps - tale of personal triumph.

3. Gardner grew up in a welfare family, without a positive male role model, and spent time in and out of foster care.

4. As he got older, he developed a hunger for success, and a desire to rise above his upbringing. While trying to work his way into the finance business, Gardner and his young son were even homeless for a period of time.

5. Eventually Gardner was able to overcome all his obstacles, and build his own investment firm. He credits much of his success to his mother, Bettye Jean.

6. She instilled him a deep sense of self-reliance. Gardner recalls her telling him, “You can only depend on yourself. The cavalry ain’t coming.”ⁱ

7. No doubt, there are some people who would listen to a story like Christopher Gardner’s, and think to themselves, “That reminds me of what the Bible says. ‘God helps those who help themselves.’”

8. The reality is that *nowhere* does the Bible say that God will help those who help themselves. In fact, the Bible teaches a very opposite principle.

9. The Scriptures teach that God helps those who *can’t* help themselves. Romans 5:6 says, “*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*”

10. The salvation that God offers men through Jesus Christ is not something He does for them because of something they have done for themselves.

11. No, God does not save us because of us. He saves us in spite of us. Paul reminds us of this in the passage before us in Romans 5.

12. In these verses, Paul has in view God's love for man as it is displayed in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. He reminds us that the work of salvation is not something that is motivated by anything in us.

13. When we could not help ourselves, God loved us, and provided what we needed in spite of our helpless, hopeless condition.

14. Look at these verses with me, and consider the salvation that God provides in spite of the fact that we cannot help ourselves. Notice first of all that:

I. GOD SAVES US IN SPITE OF OUR WEAKNESS

1. In verse 6, Paul says that Christ died for us, "*...when we were yet without strength...*" Take note of that phrase "without strength".

2. It is translated from a word that is used some 25 times in the New Testament. It describes both a physical and a spiritual condition.

3. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to use this word in order to convey the weak and helpless state we were in when the Lord Jesus laid down His life on our behalf.

4. Consider a couple of things about our weak condition. First of all, Paul is describing here:

A. The infirmity of our sin

1. Verse 6 describes us prior to salvation as being "without strength". The word translated "without strength" is the same one used on a number of occasions to describe someone who is sick.

2. For instance, in Acts 5:15, it says that they, "*...brought forth the sick into the streets...*" in hopes that Peter might pass by them and heal them.

3. The word for "sick" in Acts 5:15 is the same one we find translated "without strength" in Romans 5:6.

4. There is a reminder here that all those born into Adam's race carry in them the disease of Adam's sin. All of us are born with the infirmity of sin.

5. In this same chapter, in verse 12, Paul says, "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*"

6. Though you may have looked like a healthy baby at your birth, what the doctors did not know was that your parents had passed on to you a terminal disease – the disease of sin.

7. There is no therapy or treatment that we can administer to ourselves to cure us of this disease. The medicine of morality will not help us. The remedy of religion proves useless.

8. Apart from God's intervention, we will surely die in our sins. That is the point of verse 6. When we were terminally ill with the infirmity of our sin, Christ came and gave up His health to give us hope.

9. While we were weak with the sickness of sin, He came to heal us. Consider something else about our weakness. Paul points us not only to the infirmity of our sin, but also to:

B. The impossibility of our situation

1. Look again at that phrase in verse 6, "without strength". It is not only used to describe someone who is sick, but it also used to describe a state of inability or powerlessness.

2. Again, we find it used in the book of Acts. In Acts 4:9, Peter uses the same word when he refers to a man that had been healed as "the impotent man".

3. We are told in Acts 3:2, that this man was, "*lame from his mother's womb,*" and had to be carried wherever he went.

4. The idea is that he did not have the strength in his legs to move himself. He was "without strength" apart from the help of someone else.

5. This is the picture Paul paints of our weakened condition in Romans 5:6. We could not get up out of our sin and go to God. We were impotent; powerless to change our condition.

6. Some dear soul stands up and testifies in church, and says, "I remember when I came to Christ..." I know what they mean, but they are wrong. They did not come to Christ. They *could not* come to Christ. He came to them!

7. The songwriter's theology is correct:

When I could not come to where He was, He came to me!

8. Jesus did not love you and save you because you were healthy and strong, and looked like a good prospect for His kingdom.
9. No, quite the contrary. You were stuck on the sick bed, paralyzed by sin, and He came and saved you in spite of your weakness.
10. As this text reminds us that God helps those who can't themselves, we see here not only that *God saves us in spite of our weakness*, but notice also secondly that:

II. GOD SAVES US IN SPITE OF OUR WICKEDNESS

1. Look with me at what else we find in verse 6. Paul says, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*"
2. According to this verse, when Jesus came to save us, we were not only "without strength", but we were also "ungodly".
3. Though you may live for, and love the Lord Jesus now, that has not always been your condition. In fact, when Jesus came to save you, there wasn't anything godly about you at all. You were *ungodly*.
4. Spurgeon says of this verse, "I am not going to tell you that Christ died for saints. He died for sinners, not for the godly, but for the ungodly..."ⁱⁱ
5. Think with me about our ungodly condition prior to our salvation. The idea here is that Jesus came to save us:

A. Before we ever worshipped Him

1. Again, in verse 6, Paul says that "in due time", or at the appointed time, "*...Christ died for the ungodly.*" Mark that word "ungodly".
2. It is translated from a word that simply means "without worship". It describes someone who has no fear or reverence for God.
3. There is a sense in which those for whom Christ died were agnostics and atheists at the time He came to die for them.
4. Oh, you may have been in church. You may have listened to the sermons, and sang along with the songs, but you didn't worship Christ before He saved you.
5. In fact, while you were still in unbelief, all your religious efforts and exercises did nothing but mock the Lord Jesus and His death. You were ungodly.

6. Bill Maher is the host of a talk show on *HBO*, and is an open opponent of religion, which he made very clear in his 2008 film, *Religulous*. Maher considers religion and faith to be a neurological disorder.

7. Bill Maher is a pretty good example of what this word “ungodly” means in verse 6. However, before you snarl your lip at the likes of Bill Maher, you need to understand that you too were ungodly before Christ saved you.

8. Away with this notion that after you sang the third stanza of “Pass me not, oh gentle Savior”, Jesus heard your singing and decided to save you.

9. No. You had never worshipped Him, or given Him any glory whatsoever before He came and offered Himself up on your behalf.

10. As we think about our wickedness prior to salvation, we are reminded not only that Jesus came to save us before we ever worshipped him, but also, Jesus came to save us:

B. Before we ever wanted Him

1. This word “ungodly”, that we find in verse 6, is also found in II Peter 2:5. There, Peter says that God, “...spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the **ungodly**.”

2. The same term applied to us in Romans 5:6 is also used to describe the people outside the ark when God judged the earth with a flood.

3. In Genesis 6:5, we read regarding those people: “*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”

4. There are some who have the idea that lost people are out there looking for God. They really want Him; they just haven’t found Him yet.

5. That sounds like a quaint notion, but it simply isn’t biblical. Men don’t naturally want God. We are naturally inclined to run *from* God, not to Him.

6. In John 3:19, Jesus said, “*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*”

7. One of the most powerful and penetrating sermons I have ever heard is a message entitled “Ten Shekels and a Shirt”, by a preacher and missionary named Paris Reidhead.

8. In that message Reidhead says:

"If you'll ask me why I went to Africa, I'll tell you I went primarily to improve on the justice of God. I didn't think it was right for anybody to go to Hell without a chance to be saved. So I went to give poor sinners a chance to go to heaven."

He goes on and says, "And when I went to Africa, I discovered that they weren't poor, ignorant, little heathen running around in the woods looking for someone to tell them how to go to heaven...they were monsters of iniquity! They were living in utter and total defiance of far more knowledge of God than I ever dreamed they had!"ⁱⁱⁱ

9. When Jesus Christ came and gave His life up for us, we were not waiting and watching for Him, wanting to know how to have a relationship with God. No, we were wicked!

10. Nevertheless, in spite our inability to help ourselves, and in spite of inclination toward evil, God still sent His Son to redeem us to Himself.

11. There is a third truth we find in this passage that points us to the fact that God helps those who can't help themselves.

12. We see here not only that *God saves us in spite of our weakness, and in spite of our wickedness*, but notice also further that:

III. GOD SAVES US IN SPITE OF OUR WORTHINESS

1. In an age where so much emphasis is placed upon self-esteem, and the idea that we should all love ourselves, this text goes completely against "conventional wisdom".

2. In fact, that is usually the way it is with the Word of God. A.W. Tozer said, "There is plenty of good news in the Bible, but there is never any flattery or back scratching, and what God has spoken is never complimentary to men."^{iv}

3. In Romans 5:7-8, the Apostle Paul communicates that we were not in any way worthy of sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. He did not die for us because we deserved it,

4. Think about this idea of our worthiness, or lack thereof. This text reminds us of:

A. How unusual the reason for Christ's death

1. In verse 7, the Apostle Paul sets up an illustration to help us understand just how amazing the atoning death of Jesus really is.

2. Look at this verse. He says, *"For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."*
3. Essentially, what Paul says is that there are rare occasions when someone will sacrifice themselves for the sake of another.
4. When this happens, it is for the sake of a "righteous man", or a "good man." In other words, the person who dies does so behalf of someone they deem worthy of such a sacrifice.
5. Imagine a soldier falling on a grenade to save his comrades whom he loves and who also love him. Imagine a loyal servant, pushing himself between his master and a would-be assassin.
6. There are rare occasions of great personal sacrifice among men, but in each one, the one being saved is deemed by the savior to be worthy of that sacrifice.
7. There is a scene in the 1998 film, *Saving Private Ryan*, when a couple of the soldiers are discussing the unique mission they have been given of finding and protecting the last of the Ryan brothers.
8. In the scene, Captain Miller says, "He better be worth it. He better go home and cure a disease, or invent a longer-lasting light bulb." That is how men view the rare sacrifice for the sake of another. They had better be worth it.
9. With that in mind, notice in Romans 5, how verse 8 begins. Paul says, *"But God..."* In other words, God operates differently than men do. Men sacrifice for worthy men, but the death of Jesus is very different. Its reasoning is unusual.
11. Why is it unusual? Well, notice with me not only how unusual the reason for Christ's death, but consider also:

B. How unworthy the recipients of Christ's death

1. Look now at that wonderful 8th verse. Paul says, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*
2. A few men will die for a worthy man. But God demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus to die for us, even while we were sinners.
3. The idea of the word "sinners" in verse 8 is that of missing the mark. It is falling short of what is required.

4. In other words, we were not worthy. We had not earned such love and sacrifice as God demonstrated when Jesus bled and died on the tree.
5. Imagine if you will, a man kidnaps and murders your only child. He is arrested and convicted, and you are ask to be present at his sentencing.
6. The judge reads through the charges against your child's murderer, recounting the horrible and ghastly things he had done.
7. When the moment comes for the judge to punish your child's murderer, and hand down a death-sentence, suddenly you jump up and says, "Wait! I will die in his place! I will take his sentence and his death!"
8. It sounds ridiculous. It sounds insane. You would say that kind of behavior is inexplicable, and I would have to agree.
9. It is no less inexplicable than what happened at Calvary some 2,000 years ago. All of us though yet unborn, were present there in the form of our sins laid upon the Lord Jesus.
10. He was God's innocent Son, and we were, in so many ways, responsible for his death, and yet His death was on our behalf.
11. We were as unworthy of the Father's love as the murderer of our child would be of ours. Yet, He demonstrated His love for us, "*...in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"

As Wesley put it:

*And can it be that I should gain,
An entrance in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused Him pain,
For me who Him to death pursued?*

*Amazing love! How can it be?
That Thou my God should die for me!*

1. If it were true that God helps those who help themselves, then we are all in real trouble.
2. Apart from God's grace, we can no more help ourselves than a terminally ill patient can cure their own body, or a paralyzed man can run in a marathon.

3. We can't help ourselves when it comes to eternal and spiritual things. We are weak, wicked, and certainly not worthy.
4. But that is why we call grace amazing. What God has done for us in Christ is nothing short of amazing.
5. Lest we begin to think that somehow we earned or merited God's love, we need to be reminded that God did not save us because of anything in us, or anything we had done for ourselves.
6. An old, French saint lay dying, and called for her child to come to her bed-side. In a weak voice she said, "I have loved you because of what you are; my heavenly Father, to whom I go, has loved me 'malgre moi'."
7. The translation is this: "My heavenly Father, to whom I go, has loved me despite myself."
8. May we never wander far from the truth of the cross, and remember, that on that cross, God helped those who can not help themselves.

ⁱ [Chris Gardner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Gardner), *wikipedia* article, accessed 7/8/10, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Gardner

ⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, 1184 – The Sad Plight And Sure Relief, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, (WORDsearch ebooks)

ⁱⁱⁱ Reidhead, Paris, "Ten Shekels and a Shirt", transcript of tape, *prophecyandtruth.com*, accessed 7/9/10, <http://www.prophecyandtruth.com/tenshekelsandashirt.pdf>

^{iv} Tozer, A.W., Renewed Day by Day, (WORDsearch ebook, 2007)