

Bent Out Of Shape



JAMES TRAVIS

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INTRODUCTION

When people come to the Bible looking for encouragement, hope, comfort, or reassurance they are sure to find it. However, it's so important that we find it in the right places and that we find it properly.

I think we've all done this: seen a passage or a few words in our English Bibles and thought 'Yes, *that's exactly what I need!*'. The problem is that sometimes we've missed the context: the paragraph, the chapter, the book, the section of the Bible, perhaps even the Covenant that the book falls under. Someone once explained to me that when we do this, we aren't believing what the Bible teaches, but playing make believe. None of us want that, right?

—

'*Bent Out Of Shape*' is a collection of nineteen short devotionals about great Bible verses that are often misused or misunderstood. Read one a day and take great encouragement, hope, comfort, and reassurance from what they *really* mean!

A FUTURE FILLED WITH HOPE

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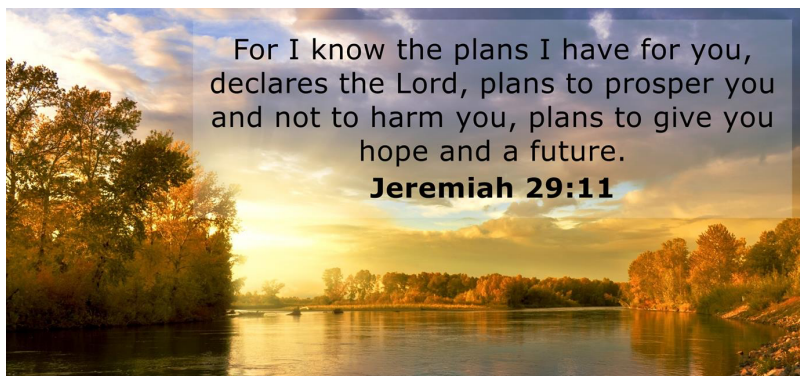


JEREMIAH 29.11

"For I know what I have planned for you," says the LORD. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope."

(Jeremiah 29.11)

How often do we see this verse attached to a beautiful vista on some kind of social media? Something like this, perhaps:



Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with reading passages in the Old Testament and seeing the principle that is in play and applying it to your own life...but that is not often what happens, is it? In fact, more than saying '*there is nothing wrong with...*', I'd actually say that it is a *great* thing to do: when reading the Old Testament, when reading of those living under the Old Covenant, see what is happening, see what principles are in play, see how God is moving among them and with them and for them, then think how that looks in your life now. Don't, however, pull a sentence out of a paragraph, out of a chapter, out of a book, out of a wider part of the Bible, and assume you can copy-paste the English words into your own life. Context is so important.

Let's think about **Jeremiah 29.11** for a moment:

"For I know what I have planned for you," says the LORD. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.'

First, it begins with the word **for**, which is a bit of a giveaway. **For** is a marker that shows relationships between sentences ¹. Straight away then, we know that **v.11** is connected to **v.10**.

What does **v.10** say?

“For the LORD says, ‘Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland.’”

Ok, so **when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over...I will fulfill my gracious promise to you...restore you to your homeland**. That’s not us, is it?

But wait, **v.10** also began with **for**, so what does the preceding passage say? From **v.4** of **Jeremiah 29**, we see the Lord giving a message **to all those sent into exile to Babylon from Jerusalem** about how they should live whilst there (**vv.4-7**). Not us, is it? Then, in **vv.8-10**, we see a countering of false teaching that was spreading in the community: ‘Don’t worry...we won’t be there long...we’ll be heading home before you know it...’. Jeremiah says no, **only when the seventy...(v.10)**.

So, **Jeremiah 29.11** is a wonderful verse filled with hope for those who were heading into Babylonian exile. It tells them that the Lord has not forgotten about them and will not forget about them. It tells them that this uncomfortable and reconciliatory season they were about to enter was not going to last forever. The Lord, through

¹ - KM Hebrew

Jeremiah, goes on to say that when the people call out to Him, they will find Him (**vv.12-13**) and that, ultimately, He will reverse their **plight** and will take them back to their homeland soon enough (**v.14**).

*

So, **Jeremiah 29.11...**

It's not for you when you have a bad start to the day.

It's not for you when you're feeling a little fuzzy about what to do next week, or month, or year.

It's not a universal promise that good things are just around the corner.

It is, however, a wonderful example of the faithfulness of God. Despite people having turned away from Him in heart and mind (**Jeremiah 25.8-14**) He still had plans for them, still loved them, still wanted what was best for them. That, then, is what should come to mind when we read

"For I know what I have planned for you," says the LORD. "I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope."

WHERE TWO OR THREE...

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MATTHEW 18.20

Have you ever been in church, perhaps at a time of prayer, and someone has said ‘Lord, we know you are here with us now because, as your Word says, **Where two or three are gathered, there I am with them...**’?

Similar to yesterday with **Jeremiah 29.11**, the principle in play is a great one, but misusing and confusing the particular Scripture is a problem. **Matthew 18.20** says this:

"For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them."

As with yesterday's verse **Matthew 18.20** begins with **for...**which we now know is a giveaway. Lets look at the passage:

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault when the two of you are alone. If he listens to you, you have regained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others with you, so that at the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector."

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven. Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them."

(Matthew 18.15-20)

This passage, then, is actually about church discipline. It's about what to do when a fellow believer sins against you (**v.15**). It's about taking others with you to make the case, seeking church-wide support (**vv.16-17**). It's about the role the church plays on earth now in the bodily absence of the Lord Jesus (**v.18**). It's about the truth that the church is His representative to a fallen and broken world and that we ought to be interacting with people as He would (**vv.19-20**). It's

not about inviting an Omnipresent God into your specific location (**Acts 7.48, cf. Psalm 139.7**). He is, of course, already with you.

Really then, when **Matthew 18.20** is misused and confused it's usually people *trying* to invoke Scripture to show that God is with them. Ironically, the truths of **Matthew 18.20**, when unpacked, actually do show this, but just not in the way that quoting it in isolation claims.

Matthew 18.20 is a wonderful truth about the role that the church has in the world today. Yes, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus is with us, but that is true whether there are two, three, or a thousand believers present. Even if you are alone, the Lord is with you, you don't need a couple of other people to enter into God's presence. Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave have permanently opened the presence of God to you through Him (**John 14.6, Hebrews 4**).

CAUGHT UP

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1 THESSALONIANS 4.17

If you do any kind of formal and academic Christian study, you are going to engage with the topic of *eschatology*, the study of the end times, or last things. There are going to be arguments about the millennial reign of Chris (**Revelation 20**), about the stages of bodily

resurrection for all who have lived on earth (**John 5.25-29**), and about something called *the rapture*. Much debate stems from this verse, wielded like Excalibur by those who hold to a *pre-tribulational rapture position*:

"Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord".

(1 Thessalonians 4.17)

I had always been told and taught this position: Jesus returns and kind of hovers in the air, then zaps up believers to Him (**suddenly caught up**) and then we all head off to heaven to watch as the world destroys itself. Then, when things look like they couldn't get any worse, we all come back with the Lord and He puts all the wrongs right. Sounds pretty neat, right?

The problem is, that's not what Paul said here. Paul says that when Jesus returns, believers who have died are raised (**1 Thessalonians 4.16**), then, **we who are alive**...Here is where we depart from tradition and the bending of Scripture and stay tight to the text.

Paul's language, his choice of words, tells us a lot here. He says that we meet Jesus like a returning general, a returning King. This is how Romans, this is how the Thessalonians, this is how the people of the day, would describe the arrival of the Emperor to their city.

Paul *doesn't write* that we meet Jesus in the air and disappear with Him, it's more of a meet and greet. Jesus returns, personally and bodily from heaven. If **1 Thessalonians 4.17** is bent out of shape to

try and give believers comfort and encouragement, need we look further than this: Jesus returns, personally and bodily from heaven.

Paul here borrows images and uses language—from *OT and the culture and politics of the day* —to enhance his encouragement and the understanding of his readers. He is writing in a way he *knows* they will understand!

Paul gets a bit political here, and he chooses and uses very clever imagery given the culture to which he was writing. Thessalonica was under Roman rule, so the the language of an emperor visiting would have been instantly understood. We read

*“...to **meet** the Lord in the air.”*

Now, in our English Bibles there’s nothing special about that is there?

*“...to **meet** the Lord in the air.”*

But, to the Thessalonians, this word, **meet** (ἀπάντησις) used in this way meant something very specific!

When the emperor visited a colony or province, when the ruler visited a place under his rule, the citizens of the country would go to **meet** him at some distance from the city. It would be disrespectful for the Emperor or ruler to arrive at the gates of the city unescorted, as though nobody could be bothered to go and meet and greet him properly. When the people under his rule met him, they wouldn’t then stay out in the open country, or go back to where the Emperor

had come from, they would escort him royally into the city itself where he would take up rule.

When Paul writes of “**meeting**’ the Lord in the air”, the point is precisely not—as tradition might teach—that raised and alive believers would then stay up in the air somewhere, maybe return to heaven for a little while...The point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, raised and alive believers will escort him royally into his Kingdom, on earth as in heaven...

Think about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the donkey - as rulers who came in peace did - on what we now call Palm Sunday: people led Jesus into town, didn't they? They were singing **Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord**...they didn't meet and greet the Lord and say “*Great, now let's turn around and come back to where you've come from, Lord...let's go away together for a while...*”

Paul writes that believers are

“...to **meet** the Lord in the air.”

and this should make us think the same. **1 Thessalonians 4.17** is a hugely encouraging verse, but not in the way often taught.

The reality to which it refers is this:

Jesus will return personally, those who died as believers will be raised, and the living Christians on earth when He does will be **caught up**, quickly, suddenly transformed, and will suddenly be **together with [the resurrected believers]** in the clouds to **meet**, greet, **the Lord in the air**, and escort Him to His kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Take encouragement from that today!

CAST ALL YOUR CARES

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1 PETER 5.7

If you've ever asked a fellow believer for advice or for counsel, the chances are they will have either quoted **1 Peter 5.7** to you verbatim or perhaps paraphrased the principle. Either way, it's a commonly thrown-at-people verse:

“...cast all your cares on him because he cares for you”.

It can sometimes feel like a magic, catch-all verse when someone is struggling with something or working through something, can't it?

Them: *'I'm having a tough time at work at the moment'*

You: *'Cast all your cares on Him...'*

Them: *'My kids are in a really challenging phase of behaviour right now'*

You: *'Cast all your cares on Him...'*

Them: *'We don't know whether to stay here for another year, move back home, or look for work elsewhere'*

You: *'Cast all your cares on Him...'*

Sometimes quoting **1 Peter 5.7** can almost be like saying *well, I've got no discernible opinion or advice to give, so, just give it to God*. Is that what Peter intended? Let's see...

1 Peter 5 begins with instructions on how elders in the church ought to be looking after people (**vv.1-4**, especially **v.3**). As we move into **vv.5-7** Peter then says, essentially, *'As they are looking after you, let them do so, and all of you are take a humble attitude towards one another, because God opposes the proud. If you do this, God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourself under his mighty hand*

by casting all your cares on Him, because, you know, He cares about you’.

So as elders are to look after people with a humble attitude, people are to allow themselves to be looked after with a humble attitude, which is all very pleasing to God because He opposes the proud (**Proverbs 3.34**). Peter then says that we humble ourselves *by* casting all of our cares on Him. No need for sackcloth or ashes, simply humble yourself by coming to God with your cares. As we are humble before others, we humble ourselves before God by casting our cares on Him. Roger M. Raymer writes this:

“Knowing God’s attitude should cause Christians not only to be subject to others but also to subject themselves deliberately to God’s sovereign rule. The command humble yourselves (ταπεινώθητε) could be translated “allow yourselves to be humbled.”²

Again with bending Scripture out of shape, we’re not far off with the casual use of **1 Peter 5.7**, are we?

‘Bro, just cast all your cares on Him because you know, like, God cares for you’.

That is *kind of* what Peter is saying, but he introduces it with examples from church life then says *look, and as you’re doing that with one another, do so with God too.*

We have the profound privilege of being able to approach God boldly and confidently in prayer because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross (**Matthew 27.51, Hebrews 4.14-16**). Because He died, rose, and in doing so restored those who put their faith in Him to right relationship with God, we are able to humble ourselves, we are able to cast our cares on Him, and we are able to know that He cares (**John 3.16**).

So, rather than simply throwing **1 Peter 5.7** at people when they need advice or counsel, let's use the bigger picture it teaches to encourage people, to build people up, and to show them that we have a loving and caring God who wants to help them.

**HEAL THE SICK, RAISE THE DEAD, CLEANSE
LEPERS, CAST OUT DEMONS...**

*Bent Out
Of Shape*



MATTHEW 10.8

I once had someone throw this verse at me with the accusation that I wasn't doing enough, not fulfilling the office of pastor properly,

because *‘there is so much more that you need to be doing, things like **Matthew 10.8**...’*. Here is what the part he threw at me says:

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons...”

I wasn’t pastoring properly because I had never healed anyone, resuscitated or resurrected anyone, cleansed anyone of disease or forgiven sins, and had not battled with and cast out demons. This came as quite a shock to me, mainly because I never considered myself to be part of **these twelve** that Jesus addresses in **Matthew 10.5**. I also quite like going on **[roads] that lead to Gentile regions (v.5)**. Actually, I’m from a Gentile region, live in a Gentile region, and where I serve now minister exclusively to Gentiles. But, *‘you’re not doing anything from Matthew 10.8, you need to be doing more...’* said my accuser.

Matthew 10.8 is not the remit of your pastor, not the charge for you as a Christian, or even the collective call for your church family. **Matthew 9.35** begins a section wherein Jesus displays His power, notes that He is going to need co-labourers in His task (**9.38**), gives authority and ability to His twelve disciples (**10.1**), then sends them out to proclaim and reinforce and spread His message of salvation (**10.5-42**). **Matthew 10.8** is not the remit of your pastor, not the charge for you as a Christian, and is not the the collective call for your church family.

It does, however, show us how Jesus sought to establish and expand His teaching and message initially during His earthly

ministry. Twelve hands and feet are better than one, and the Lord's willingness to entrust His life-saving and life-changing message of salvation to others should stir us to want to be involved now.

There is still a place for pastors, believers, and churches to take the good news message of Jesus to others. No, we're not all called to **heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons**, but we are all called to tell - through words and actions - others about Jesus.

I AM ABLE TO DO ALL THINGS

*Bent Out
Of Shape*



PHILIPPIANS 4.13

Philippians 4.13 is such a good verse. I think that's why it's a real frustration when people rip it out of context and stick it next to - literally - anything they need to do:

Running a marathon? **I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.**

Trying to get a new job? **I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me**

Trying not to lose your mind with your unruly kids? **I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me.**

Is this really what Paul had in mind when he penned the passage we now refer to as **Philippians 4**? Let's see...

Having spoken about things that are good for the mind (**vv.8-9**), Paul then speaks first of something that is good for the soul - giving:

*"I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me.
(Now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything.)"*
(Philippians 4.10)

He writes that he was pleased, that he had **great joy in the Lord** that the Philippians had **again expressed [their] concern for [him]**, and how pleased he was that they had opportunity to show this concern through giving and support.

But, he writes, he is not rejoicing because he had a great need, no, because Paul knew and had learned how to be content in any and all circumstances (**v.11**).

He had learned, through experience, how to be content in **times of need and times of abundance**, whether he was **satisfied or hungry**, and whether he had **plenty or** nothing. He writes that the secret to this is the fact that he can **do all things through the one who strengthens me (v.13)**.

Sadly for some, this is *not* a triumphant declaration that being a believer means that you can do anything and everything you so choose, as your favourite Christian sports star misusing this verse might have you believe. It's actually about Paul's ability to be content in all circumstances; being rich, being poor, having enough, not having enough, being celebrated, or being stoned. **All these things** he can do through the power of Jesus who strengthens him.³

Have you found this strength? Have you found and learned the truth in the statement of **Philippians 4.13** that no matter what is going on around you, with you, or for you, you can **do all things through the one who strengthens you?**

So often misused and abused, this is actually a wonderful verse. It's a crowning statement at the end of a paragraph fraught with the difficulties that we will all face in life.

There are two things, then, that we can take from this today; first, it is good to give (**v.10, 14**), and second, no matter what we are going through, there is already willing and waiting the strength for you to be content in that (**vv.12-13**).

³ - *Philippians: Day by Day*

BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

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GENESIS 9.1

This is another of those verses that in context, is great. Out of context, it can really do some damage to people. For a start, people often throw just a piece of **Genesis 9.1** or **Genesis 9.7** around. Usually, it's this bit:

“Be fruitful and multiply...”

Ok, great. I am going to be fruitful in the eyes of God and multiply and have a family. I am going to procreate, reproduce, and bring forth new life. If only it were that simple.

There are not many situations that I encounter as a pastor that are more heartbreaking than that of a newlywed couple, as in-love as they possibly can be, who have a strong desire to **be fruitful and multiply**, but who cannot. There are vast and varied reasons why some people cannot have children, and they are all heartbreaking. Does that mean then that they are not **[being] fruitful** because they cannot **multiply**? What about those that God has called to a life of singleness and dedication to Him? Are they not fruitful?

To avoid hurting people with the words of Scripture we need to read it carefully first. **Genesis 9.1** actually says this:

“Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...”

Look at the first part again:

*“Then God blessed **Noah and his sons** and **said to them...**”*

God is talking to **Noah and his sons** here. This isn't a catch-all kind of verse like **John 3.16** wherein we see that God loves the entire cosmos and everything and everyone in it. **Genesis 9.1** is written to four guys: Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (**Genesis 7.13**). The

command to **be fruitful and multiply** isn't the Scriptural command of every believer ever, and throwing this verse around as if it is will surely do more harm than good.

I recently spoke at a wedding where another minister said this in his blessing about being fruitful and multiplying. It was a tactful, thoughtful, and caring addition:

*"Bestow on them, if it is your will,
the heritage and gift of children
and the grace to bring them up
to know you, to love you and to serve you."* ⁴

The commands of **Genesis 9.1 and 7** were specific to a place and time. The principle behind them, however, is still very much true: God has plans for the future of His creation. We are to steward the resources that He has given us well in the here and now (**be fruitful**) and we are also to actively work towards the future with an expectant hope that there will in fact be a tomorrow (**and multiply**).

The faithfulness of God is encapsulated in this wonderful verse, and it gives us strength for today and a bright hope for tomorrow.

GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS!

⁴ - Church of England, Weddings

TURNING TABLES

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JOHN 2.15

Maybe you've heard someone use this verse in defence of their behaviour when it's less-than-excellent. You know, something like this: 'well, *Jesus flipped tables in **John 2.15***, so if He can express

anger like that, (what I did) is no problem really...'. Is that what that verse teaches us? Let's see...

"He found in the temple courts those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at tables. So he made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple courts, with the sheep and the oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold the doves he said, "Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will devour me."
(John 2.14-17)

Many Jews were in Jerusalem for Passover (**Exodus 12.14-20, Deuteronomy 16.1-8**) to remember and celebrate God's grace in delivering them from bondage in Egypt ⁵. On arrival, Jesus finds many people **selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at tables**. What was most likely started out of consideration for the incoming pilgrims had developed and descended into a commercial operation where profit was more important than people. Jesus saw what had happened to His **Father's house** and was overcome with righteous indignation and moral outrage. This manifested itself in His **[overturning] their tables** and **[driving] them all out of the temple**.

Does this justify our own emotional outburst of poor behaviour?

⁵ - BKC

Are we free to flip tables at, and drive people out of, any establishment we choose?

If we read carefully, we see that this was the manifestation of the **zeal** Jesus felt for His Father's house, a **zeal** that was predicted many years before in **Psalm 69**:

*His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will devour me."*

N.T. Wright shares some brilliant insight into **zeal** in his book 'Paul: A Biography' ⁶. As simply as possible, this is the passion, energy, dedication, and the associated behaviour for God and His will, His Word, and His ways.

Seeing profiteering in the temple courts stirred Jesus to act.
Seeing dedicated pilgrims being extorted stirred Jesus to act.
Seeing the Father's house turned into a market stirred Jesus to act.

Does **John 2.15** excuse our poor, petulant, or or permissive behaviour? No, it doesn't. **John 2.15** shows us that, in the Lord Jesus, we serve someone who was willing to do anything and everything in His power for the will of the Father to be done (**Matthew 26.24, Luke 22.42, for example**). Without His great **zeal** for the house and for the will of God, you and I would still be estranged from our heavenly

⁶ - Paul

Father. In His ultimate act of **zeal**, Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world and laid down His life as an atoning sacrifice (**1 John 2.2b, John 19.30**).

Does **John 2.15** excuse our poor behaviour? No, but it does show us the lengths Jesus was willing to go to for the will of the Father to be done.

SUCH A TIME AS THIS

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ESTHER 4.14

Have you ever been just the right person in just the right place at just the right time? Your Christian brothers and sisters are all *'woah, you're just like Esther, in this place at this time for just this reason, this*

is so **Esther 4.14!**. Is it? Is **Esther 4.14** about our providentially being in the right place at the right time? Let's look at **Esther 4** and see...

Coming off the back of learning that his people are to be systematically killed (**3.13**), Mordecai responds somewhat understandably and seeks out help. Perhaps he feels responsible(**3.5-6**), perhaps he knows this cannot be changed (**1.9**), perhaps he is just overcome with sadness, but he makes enough of a scene to attract the attention of Esther (**v.4**).

Mordecai wants Esther to boldly approach the King to stop this coming atrocity (**v.8**). Esther is in a difficult situation wherein she wants to help, but circumstances seem to be very much against her (**v.11**).

After laying some harsh truth on Esther (**v.13**), Mordecai then says,

"It may very well be that you have achieved royal status for such a time as this!"
(Esther 4.14b)

She's the right person in the right place at the right time! Surely, that's what this is all about then: using that providence for good and using your influence for other people?

Could it be that Esther was put in this role for this very moment, to be the representative for her people against a seemingly undefeatable enemy?

Esther gathers collective support (**v.16**), and commits boldly to being the representative that God's people need (**v.16b**).

Is **Esther 4** teaching you and me that sometimes we will find ourselves as the right person in the right place at the right time and when we do, it's time to act? I'm not sure it is.

Reading this chapter, we cannot escape the foreshadowing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus. One from humble beginnings just as Esther was, called to take on the task of snatching God's people from impending death through a situation that looks like it will claim the life of the redeemer.

It would be easy to read this chapter and think of ourselves as Esther; **you** are here, **you** need to be bold, **you** need to save some people...the problem with that is that it leaves Jesus out of the story completely, the One whom all the Scriptures point to (**John 5.39-40**).

He defeated a seemingly undefeatable situation.

He entered into the battle even though it seemed like it would claim His life.

He saved God's people.

He saved you from impending death.

Friends, you don't need to be Esther in this story because you are the redeemed, you are the saved, you are the people snatched from death to life through the person and work of Jesus.

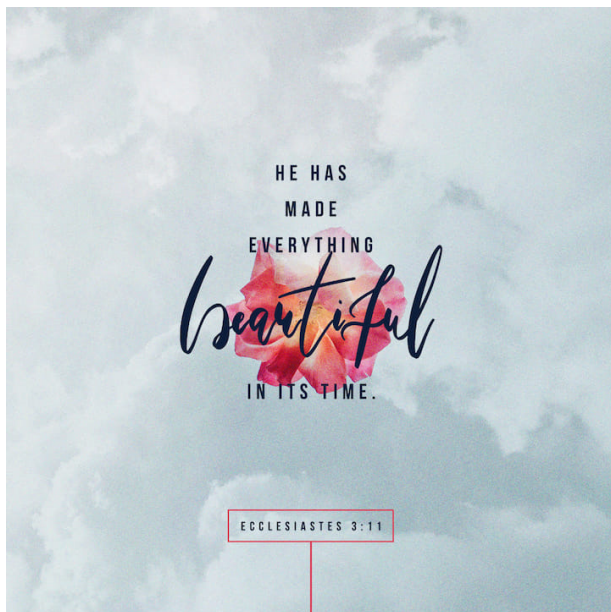
Bent Out Of Shape



ECCLESIASTES 3.11

Today is another example of a verse that is no stranger to social media. Again, I'm not *against* people sharing Scripture online (far from it) but we really have to know that we're getting it right before we offer it out to others. You wouldn't knowingly bake a cake with the

wrong ingredients and serve it to a friend, would you? **Ecclesiastes 3.11** is just like that:



Maybe your Bible says something like the picture: God has made everything beautiful in its time. Sounds nice, doesn't it? You know, whatever you are working through at the moment, don't worry if it's difficult, because God has made everything beautiful in its time. Is that what the main voice we hear in **Ecclesiastes** is teaching us? Let's see...

In **vv.1-8** of **chapter three** the teacher shares a poem of extreme opposites designed to show that everything we encounter in our human lives, both good and bad, comes in its own time and season. He is teaching that we don't control these seasons, and that God is the initiator and author of these seasons. He then says this:

*“God has made everything fit beautifully in its appropriate time,
but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart
so that people cannot discover what God has ordained,
from the beginning to the end of their lives.”*
(Ecclesiastes 3.11)

If we think about the popular, often flower-enhanced version of this verse, that God has made everything beautiful in its time, this doesn't fit with the '**everything**s' of **vv.1-8** that includes war, hate, death, killing, weeping, and mourning. Are those things ever truly beautiful?

What the teacher is teaching here is that we cannot control our lives as much as we may like to, but what we can control is our attitude (**vv.12-15**).

We can choose to enjoy what is in front of us now, today, rather than looking ahead to coming times and seasons.

We can choose to love and cherish those the Lord puts in our path whilst they are in our path.

We can choose to honour God above all else in our lives in the midst of changing times and seasons.

We can choose to take a positive and Jesus-focused attitude into the day and all that it may bring.

We can choose to work wholeheartedly at everything we are doing today, as if working for the Lord Himself.

We cannot choose the times and seasons we are in and about to move into, but we can choose our attitude whilst we're in them.

STRIPES

Bent Out Of Shape



ISAIAH 53.5

Isaiah 53.5 is another great verse that is so often misunderstood. When this happens, the power of the Word is just not there and we end up playing make-believe with what we *think* it says, not what it *actually* says.

Isaiah 53.5 is often used when someone is ill, injured, or infirm. Sometimes, in a well meaning way, it's attached to a charity that supports those who are seriously ill. Maybe you've seen it looking like this:



Is that what Isaiah was saying, that if we have physical injuries, illnesses, or infirmities that the death of Jesus guarantees their healing? Let's see...

*"He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds,
crushed because of our sins;
he endured punishment that made us well;
because of his wounds we have been healed".
(Isaiah 53.5)*

So, because of **our rebellious deeds** and our **sins**, the Servant of **Isaiah 52.13** will be **wounded** and **crushed**. He will **[endure]** **punishment** and **wounds** that will **[make] us well** and heal us.

The word we read here as **well**:

*"...he endured punishment that made us **well**;"*

could just as accurately have been translated as peace (שלום - *shalom*).

Jesus, the Servant of **Isaiah 52.13**, was physically wounded, tortured, and killed so that we can experience peace with God. John A. Martin writes that

"Ironically His wounds, inflicted by the soldiers' scourging and which were followed by His death, are the means of healing believers' spiritual wounds in salvation." ⁷

Jesus' death on the cross doesn't guarantee us physical healing from everything from aches and pains to cancer. If that were the case, would any believer have ever died in pain? Would our loved ones suffer physical discomfort, ever? Would we fall and break bones, dislocate joints, or ever need a doctor?

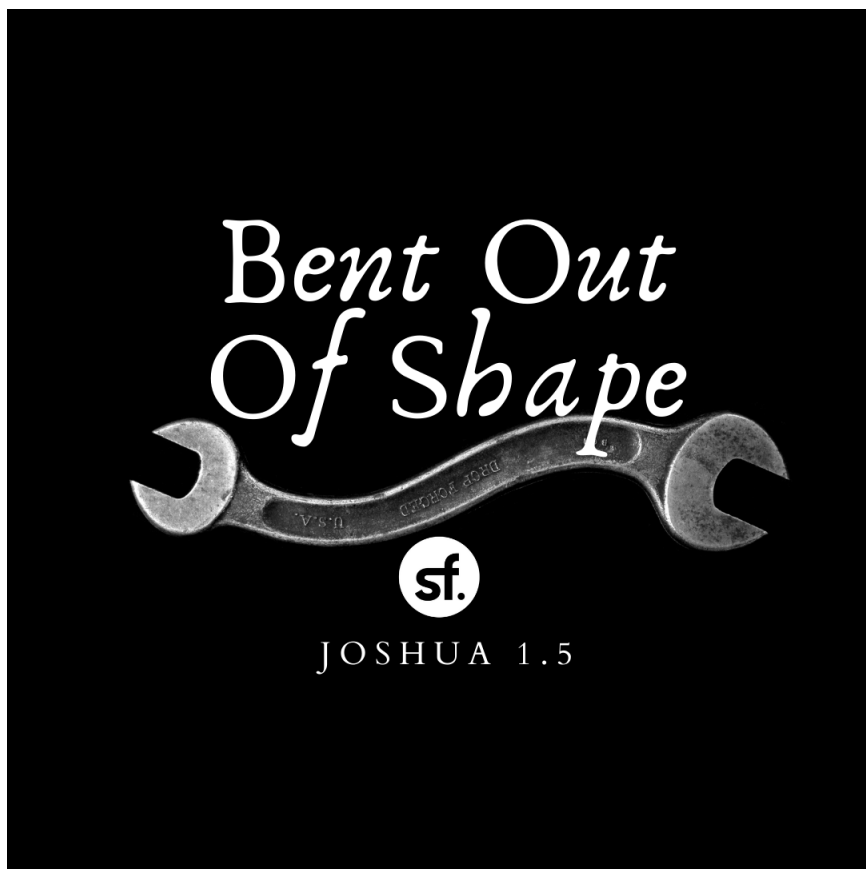
The healing that the cross of Christ brings to you is a spiritual healing. It is the restoration of right relationship between God and man. The only reason God chooses to not hold you accountable for the consequences of your sin is because **He was wounded... crushed...He endured punishment...of his wounds...**

Isaiah 53.5 is a wonderful, amazing, grace-filled verse. It doesn't mean that all your physical ailments will be healed this side of eternity, and we really shouldn't be telling people that it does. The

⁷ - BKC

better part, the more amazing part, is that because of the suffering servant we see on the cross, there is opportunity for you to be healed of the consequences of your sin and there is opportunity to be forgiven, accepted, and for you to experience a love and belonging like never before.

AS I WAS WITH MOSES...



There are a couple of phrases that are often pulled out of **Joshua 1** to claim some kind of special anointing or protection. **Joshua 1.5** in particular seems to be a favourite for this:

*"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.
I will not abandon you or leave you alone."*

Donald K.Campbell wrote about this and said that as Joshua was about to take on a tremendous task he needed some fresh encouragement ⁸. So far, so good, that could apply to us, right? You're facing a new challenge, you're facing a seemingly immovable obstacle and you need fresh encouragement. Is that all that is going on? What about the '**As I was with Moses...**' bit?

Joshua was the guy to take over leadership of the nation of God's people from Moses (**Deuteronomy 34.9-12**). Joshua was the guy Moses had prayed over and set apart as the leader at God's instruction (**Numbers 27.18-21**). In short, Joshua was now the guy.

So, the '**As I was with Moses...**' bit clearly shows us that **Joshua 1.5** was written to a specific person in a specific place at a specific time, and its not you. However, the '**I will not abandon you or leave you alone**' bit is far more applicable to you and me, isn't it?

Scripture is peppered with verses saying, essentially, the same thing: God keep His promises to His people and is faithful to them (**1 Chronicles 28.20, 1 Kings 8.57, Deuteronomy 3.41, 31.6, 8, Hebrews 13.5-6, Matthew 28.20, Psalm 94.14**).

This verse spoken to Joshua by the Lord was just that: spoken to Joshua. The principle in play, however, is very much for you and for me: God will never abandon or leave alone those who love Him (**John 10.27-28**).

⁸ - BKC

Today then, focus on the *end* of **Joshua 1.5** and know that this can be as applicable to you as it was to Joshua!

TONGUES OF FIRE

Bent Out Of Shape



ACTS 2.4

Some may point to **Acts 2.4** as a prooftext for believers being given the miraculous ability to speak in tongues, maybe a prooftext to see how spiritual you are. Honestly, I think many misunderstand what ‘tongues’ actually are.

*"Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language."
(Acts 2.1-6)*

Verse 4 says that the believers present were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Other Bibles will translate **v.4** as the believers speaking in "other tongues". The word we read as **languages** (γλῶσσαι) can be read as 'tongue' literally and physically, but can also describe speech and language. Context dictates that the first time we see this word in the passage,

*"...**tongues** (γλῶσσαι) spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them."*

we picture some tongue-shaped manifestation of the Spirit.

'Languages like fire' doesn't make much sense there, does it?

Then, the second time we see this word used, context dictates we think of speech and language:

*"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other **languages** (γλῶσσαι) as the Spirit enabled them".*

What is the point here, then? The point is *not* that believers are filled with the Spirit and given the ability to babble incoherently, as you may have seen before. Notice with me **v.6** of the passage:

*“When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them **speaking in his own language.**”*

These miraculous abilities to speak in others languages weren’t for the benefit of those who received the gift, they were for the benefit of others (**Acts 2.9-11**).

Acts 2.4 isn’t a proof-text to see if we are super-spiritual because we speak in tongues. It is, however, a great verse because it shows us that the miraculous gifts of God are given to us for the benefit of others, to allow them to hear of His wondrous works (**Acts 2.11**), and to experience His great love for them (**1 Corinthians 13-14.1-25**).

GREATER DEEDS

Bent Out Of Shape



JOHN 14.12

In **John 14.12** Jesus tells His closest followers that they will impact the world in a spectacular way. The statement comes off the back of an interaction wherein Jesus said He was going away (**John 13.33**), that the disciples were to love one another (**v.34**), that Peter was

going to deny Him (**vv.36-38**), that Jesus Himself was the path the disciples needed to follow (**John 14.1-6**), and that by now they ought to have realised that He was the manifestation of God the Father walking on earth (**vv.8-11**, cf. **Hebrews 1.3a**). To calm their restless spirits even more, Jesus then says this:

"I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."
(**John 14.12-14**)

The disciples wouldn't do more spectacular and amazing miracles than the Lord, but they did manage to reach a tremendous amount more people with the Good News (**Acts 2.41**, for example). Jesus came to seek and save the lost, didn't He? He said as much in **Mark 1.38**, **Luke 5.31-32**, **Mark 10.45**, and **Luke 19.10**. Reaching others with the Good News is the **greater deed** of **John 14.12**, not turning water into wine or opening the eyes of the blind.

What do we do with this then? Well, rather than constantly trying to find and do and see the spectacular and supernatural, let us focus on those the Lord has put in our paths today. Rather than try to manufacture a miracle, let us pursue the people in our lives with the Good News. Because, really, what could possibly be a **greater deed** than sharing the life-changing, life-saving, and life-giving news of Jesus with someone?

ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

Bent Out Of Shape



1 PETER 5.7

1 Peter 2.9 is another great verse. Perhaps you've heard it used to try and back up some views on local church leadership (I know I have). Is that what Peter was talking about?

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

Being bent out of shape here is the phrase “...**you are...a royal priesthood...**”. Does this mean that all believers now are to have the role of a priest? Does this mean that all believers now need to fulfill the role of priests and pastors (**Ephesians 4.10-13**)? I don’t think it does.

1 Peter 2.9 begins with the word **but**, doesn’t it, so we know he is drawing a contrast. Peter is saying that believers now, both his original readers and you and I, are called to live a life that is different to those who **do not believe (v.7)**. **But you**, he says, do believe and therefore you have some roles and responsibilities to fulfill.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

You are chosen by God to have access to Him by faith in Jesus (**Hebrews 10**).

You are chosen by God to live a holy, separate from the world, kind of life (**1 Peter 1.16**).

You are chosen by God to bear His name (**1 Peter 4.16b**).

Why are you chosen to do all of this?

“...so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

You are chosen by God to have the access of a priest, the roles and responsibilities of a believer so that you can **proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light**. All that God has chosen you to do is for His glory, His name's sake, and to fulfill His good and perfect will.

Yes, we're called to be a royal priesthood, but you can put down the sacrificial shears and simply focus on living a life that proclaims His virtues!

IT WILL BE YOURS

Bent Out Of Shape



MARK 11.24

In **Mark 11.20-25** Jesus is following up on something that happened back in **vv.12-14**. A fig tree that bore no fruit was found to be withered and the disciples were shocked (**v.21**). Jesus then

explains and says, simply, that everything is possible for one who truly believes and lacks doubt (**vv.23-23**). He then says this:

“For this reason I tell you, whatever you pray and ask for, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”
(**v.24**)

So is this a name-and-claim, have-all-you-want kind of verse? Perhaps it is when detached from context. That's not how we read the Bible though, is it?

The kind of faith Jesus is talking about in **vv.22-23** is an unwavering trust in God that includes His goodness and His provision.

The kind of faith Jesus is talking about in **vv.22-23** already knows that prayer and petitions must fall in line with God's revealed will to us (**Mark 14.36, Matthew 6.9-10**, for example).

The kind of faith Jesus is talking about already knows that God exists for His own glory, not yours, and will pray accordingly ⁹.

What do we do with **Mark 11.24** then? It's a great promise that when we have the kind of unbending trust in God's goodness and provision that Jesus is talking about here, then we do know that whatever we pray for will be ours. If we're praying for new opportunities, help, healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, or more faith, then we know that a good, loving, Sovereign God who works all things together for His glory and our good will move in such as way as to prove His Word true (**Romans 8.26-30**).

⁹ - *Pray BIG Prayers*

Today then, pray as if you know that God will answer!

SUBMIT

Bent Out Of Shape



EPHESIANS 5.22

In ***Ephesians 5*** Paul has been setting before the church some principles of Christian living. Now, in **5.22**, we see a statement that is often bent out of shape:

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,”

Straight away, we see this verse ends with a comma, so it cannot stand by itself. What does Paul go on to say?

*“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church (he himself being the savior of the body). But as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, so that he may present the church to himself as glorious—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one has ever hated his own body, but he feeds it and takes care of it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of his body. **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.** This mystery is great—but I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.”*
(Ephesians 5.22-33)

Instead of a statement that can be used to buttress and back-up an un-Christlike marriage structure where a husband rules and reigns in his very own house-sized kingdom, here in **Ephesians 5** Paul is applying the principles of Christian living to particular situations. In marriage, he says, there ought to be such a high level of mutual love and respect (**vv.22-23, 25**) that a beautiful circle of selfless love emerges. Wives are to acknowledge the truth that the marriage relationship is an earthly example of a heavenly reality (**v.32**) and therefore **submit to [their] husbands**, and at the same time the husband is to **love [their] wives just as Christ loved the church**.

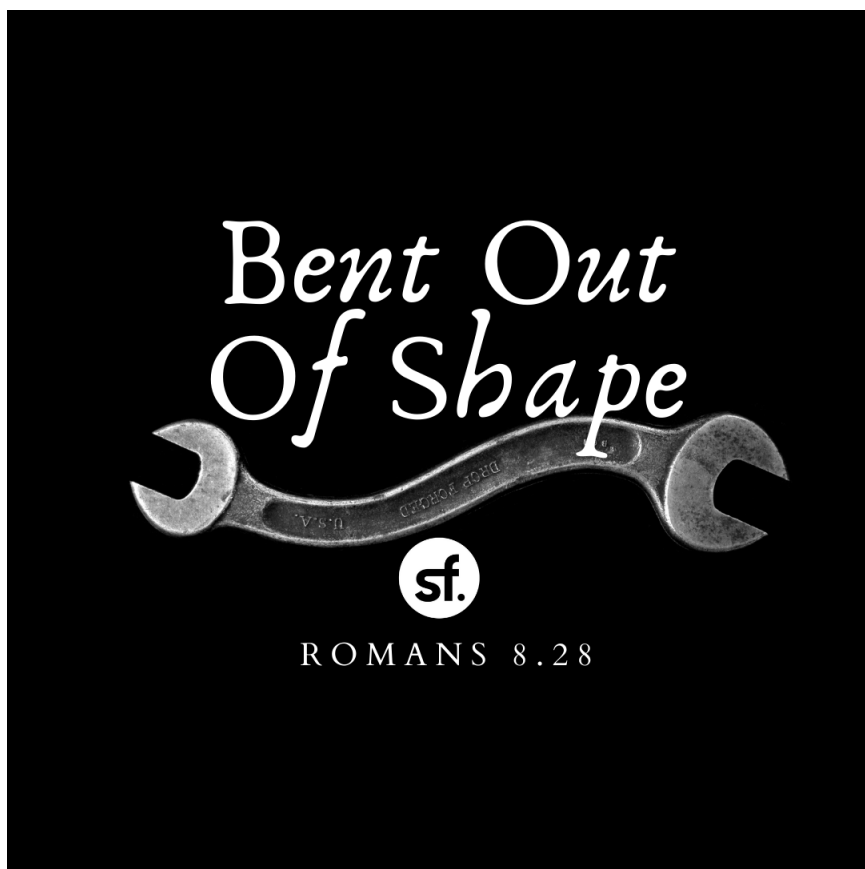
Both parties are to practice selfless submission. Both parties come together in a power union, not a power struggle. There is mutual love and mutual respect in the Christian marriage (**v.33**) that ultimately points towards the spiritual truth of **Christ and the church**.

We see Jesus in almost every verse in this passage, don't we:

*"Wives, submit to your husbands **as to the Lord**, because the husband is the head of the wife as also **Christ is the head of the church (he himself being the savior of the body)**. But as **the church submits to Christ**, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives **just as Christ loved the church** and **gave himself for her** to sanctify her by cleansing her with the washing of the water by the word, so that **he may present the church to himself as glorious**—not having a stain or wrinkle, or any such blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one has ever hated his own body, but he feeds it and takes care of it, just as **Christ also does the church**, because we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This mystery is great—but **I am actually speaking with reference to Christ and the church**. Nevertheless, each one of you must also love his own wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*
(**Ephesians 5.22-33**, emphasis added)

This passage in **Ephesians 5** is really about what Jesus did for you and how it works itself out in particular situations, here specifically marriage. The bigger picture here is that we are called to submit to Him as our head, and we already know that He loves us, don't we? We know that He couldn't have proved His love for us in any greater or more spectacular way. When we know we are loved like this, we have no problem submitting to the leading of that person. Paul is saying, simply, as in the church, so in the home.

ALL THINGS



Romans 8.28 is often used on social media in posts like this:

It looks nice, sounds nice, and gives us a warm fuzzy feeling, right? God is working out everything, so everything is gonna be

alright. When this verse is misunderstood we can be left feeling that we will have a hassle-free life, a trouble-free life, and a pain-free life. Sadly, this is never promised to us when we put faith in Jesus.

But, what is promised is that even though we will endure **present sufferings (Romans 8.18)**, each and every experience in our lives, both good and bad, is working together to form the whole.

Our experiences and challenges together with our sufferings and our losses are never isolated from each other. God has Sovereignly ordained everything to work together for our ultimate good.



"...we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose, because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified."
(Romans 8.28-30)

Life is hard, there is no doubt about that. We will experience pain, we will experience loss, and we will experience suffering. But, at the core, we can rejoice even though that may feel so unnatural. We can

do this because, ultimately, God is over all, God is directing our steps, and although we may not be able to see it, feel it, or experience it this side of heaven, He is working **all things work together for good for those who love God.**

Romans 8.28 doesn't guarantee you a a hassle-free life, a trouble-free life, and a pain-free life. It does, however, show us that God is leading us in a good life, a life that Jesus lived, died, and rose to secure (**vv.29-30**).

Bent Out Of Shape



JONAH

Quite often we see the story of Jonah used to illustrate the truth that we ought to listen to God and obey what He says. If you get it wrong the first time, you'd better get it right the next time, kind of thing...The conclusion isn't wrong: we ought to listen to God, and we

ought to obey what He says (**Deuteronomy 6.4, Ecclesiastes 5.1**).

However, using the story of Jonah might not be the best way to make this point. Maybe you've seen this before:

The LORD's message came to Jonah a second time, "Go immediately to Nineveh, that large city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah went immediately to Nineveh, in keeping with the LORD's message.
(Jonah 3.1-3a)

The explanation usually goes something like 'See, God spoke, and Jonah went...'.

So is the main message of Jonah a moral lesson for you and me about obedience and being faithful to God's call? Well, that is in there for sure, but is it the primary message?

Contrary to what many preachers and interpreters say, that is not the primary point of Jonah. The primary point of Jonah is not about how Jonah should have obeyed, it's about how God continued his redemptive plan *despite* Jonah's disobedience.¹⁰

**THINK ABOUT THIS -
GOD'S PLAN WAS ONE MAN.**

God's plan for Nineveh was one man, Jonah,
and that was sufficient.

God's plan for mankind was one man, Jesus,
and that was sufficient.

David Guzik wrote this:

*"Jonah gave his life to appease the wrath of God coming upon others.
But...death did not hold him - three days and nights later he was free
of imprisonment, he was alive and free." ¹¹*

Think: read that again and swap Jonah for Jesus:

*"**Jesus** gave his life to appease the wrath of God coming upon
others.
But...death did not hold him - three days and nights later **Jesus** was
free of imprisonment, he was alive and free."
(emphasis added)*

What is the story of Jonah really about then?

It's about the truth that Jesus is the better Jonah.

It's about how the Ninevites needed Jonah to preach a message
of repentance and forgiveness, and we needed Jesus to do the
same.

It's about how through one man God worked the salvation of an
entire nation.

It's about how God's plan was one man.

NEVER READ A BIBLE VERSE

Gregory Koukl's short work titled 'Never Read a Bible Verse: The Most Important Thing I Could Ever Teach You' (n.d.) is a direct, straightforward and clear piece on the benefits of reading the Bible in its proper context, the benefits of reading the Bible with the true meaning of the passage in mind, and the benefits of reading more than single isolated Bible verses.

Koukl begins with the titular exhortation to never read a Bible verse in isolation if we want to understand the true meaning of a passage of Scripture (n.d., p. 1). He then goes on to set out clear and concise methods and ways of reading the Bible. For example, '...read the paragraph, not just the verse...Begin with the broad context of the book...stand back from the verse and look for breaks in the text that identify major units of thought.' (Ibid., p. 2). From the depth of thought and clarity of writing, it is clear to see that this is a principle in which Koukl genuinely believes as opposed to something he feels will sell copies of his work. Throughout the work, nothing but the Word of God is glorified, and one never has the feeling that Koukl is furthering his own authorial career.

Other pithy statements are sprinkled throughout this short but powerful work, such as 'Context is king.' (n.d., p. 7), 'Inaccurate quoting...leads to inaccurate interpretations.' (Ibid., p. 7-8), 'Simply

“claiming” a verse doesn't make it our own’ (Ibid., p. 15), and ‘Simply put, a text cannot mean what it never meant.’ (Ibid., p. 18).

There are clear examples given of reading verses in context, or out of context as the case may be, and then Koukl moves on to the role of the Holy Spirit in discerning the meaning of the Word of God, and finally summarises with a reiteration of the benefits of reading the Bible in context, by larger units of thought, and with the general flow of the text in mind at all times.

It is clear from reading Koukl’s work that his major premise is this; if we want God’s Word to truly transform us, and not simply be another piece of literature we read and take a variety of things from, then we simply must read it in context and look at the bigger picture of the passages of text, not singular Bible verses (n.d., p. 19).

Koukl cites the wider world of general communication as a reinforcing agent. He states, ‘Meaning always flows from the top down, from the larger units to the smaller units, not the other way around. The key to the meaning of any verse comes from the paragraph, not just from the individual words.’ (n.d., p. 1).

It is evident that Koukl believes that the general Bible-reading populous miss the proper meaning and interpretation of the Word of God. Firstly, and perhaps most logically, he would not have taken the time to commit his advice and exhortations to paper if he did not feel so. One does not seek to address a problem that does not exist, in the very least, in one’s own perception. Our perception is our reality, and therefore, we can infer that Koukl sees a problem that he feels needs to be addressed.

Koukl's solution to his perceived problem is relatively simple; never take one singular Bible verse and treat it as a stand-alone unit of Scripture, God's Holy Word. Rather, we should look to the meaning-carrying paragraph as a minimum. He writes, '...never read a Bible verse. Instead, always read a paragraph (at least) if you want to unlock the meaning of a passage.' (n.d., p. 1). To reiterate and consolidate, to solve the problem of poor Bible-reading and comprehension skills, Koukl recommends reading paragraphs over verses.

Koukl must also feel that the true sense of many Bible passages are being missed, or misinterpreted. Statements such as 'As Christians our commitment should be to the truth of the passage, not to the feeling a certain reading of that passage gives us' (n.d., p. 16).

To combat this problem, Koukl returns to his now well-used maxim, 'Never read a Bible verse. Instead, read a paragraph, at least. Always check the context. Observe the flow of thought. Then focus on the verse itself.' (n.d., p.16).

I believe, to the best of my ability, that I have understood the main premise of Koukl and the reasoning behind his premise. It is important to initially put aside any feelings or bias or pre-reading agreement or disagreement, and first read impartially the material set before you.

That being said, I believe I have set out clearly Koukl's position and his solutions and am now in a position to be in full agreement with his main premise; proper understanding of God's Word to us

comes from a contextual reading of more than singular Bible verses or even phrases within verses.

I would agree with Koukl that in modern times, people are busy and have packed schedules, and therefore often seek to squeeze as much value from limited resources as possible. This is not inherently a bad thing. Our case in point is time spent reading the Bible. I am not sure whether this argument of 'Biblical Fast Food' (n.d., p. 15) would have been as appropriate in generations gone by, however, in modern times the idea that there are '...legitimate questions concerning the daily devotionals that are so popular...' is a very real one. Koukl goes on to say '...[they are] built around single verses, sometimes only a phrase...They're inspirational and short, able to be wedged into the busiest schedule.' (Ibid.)

To call for a proper, in-context reading of the Bible in response to the aforementioned problem is very logical and sensible. One verse does not give context, and therefore we see a clear corollary between the problem stated and Koukl's exhortation to read a paragraph (as a minimum) in order to gain a deeper and fuller understanding of the main idea.

Rather than disagree or even suspend or withhold judgement whilst initially reading this text I found myself agreeing with Koukl at every turn. His solid premise is simple, succinct and turned into easily-actionable steps.

My personal agreeance may be rooted in the fact that I too see the aforementioned starting point for this paper as a problem; the fact that many modern Christians seem to base their worldview on a smattering of single verses and their personally-formed meanings.

This meant that I approached the paper almost fully bent on agreeing, but, Koukl writes well, gives solid examples and focuses on one main point rather than painting with as broad a brush as possible. Koukl's main resource seems to be the Bible itself, fulfilling his own premise that much can be gained and understood from the context of a passage.

Koukl's short but effective work is something that I hope to integrate into my teaching ministry, the principles herein, rather. I would proffer that more effective results would be seen should the principles be drip fed and modeled to people over an extended period of time rather than distributing multiple copies of the actual work. As discussed above, people are busy and most, sadly, would not take the time to read the twenty pages here. His key idea, and his often-used maxim of 'Never read a Bible verse' is controversial enough at initial hearing to generate discussion, and it is this, along with his other short and pithy statements, that I hope to share frequently with people publically, but the deeper approach of reading paragraphs and the surrounding context that I feel will bring benefits on a wider scale and in the longer-term.

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NOTES

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