

Dumb Things: God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

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- [0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 12th. My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the lead pastor here. I will continue to not take it personally that everyone sits at the back.
- I was in university. I sat at the back. I feel your pain. So if you're here with me in person this morning, that means you remembered. As Len said, you remembered Daylight Savings begins today, or more accurately, it began at 2 a.m. this morning.
- I set our clocks ahead in our house by an hour at about 7 last night because I said, got to get in the mode, got to get in the mode, especially for the pastor.
- Can't be an hour late. So maybe after the service, we can all gather around the entrances and pretend we're about to start just in case anyone shows up who forgot.
- I like doing that. It's fun. But seriously, though, you've heard me say this before. As a former AMA spokesperson, be kind to yourself this week because you may not feel it today, but this hour of lost sleep can hit you.
- [1 : 1 3] It will hit you. I can almost guarantee it later in the week. So be careful on the roads, especially in the mornings this week as people adjust.
- But that extra hour of daylight that we get, hopefully, will help ease your pain a little bit. This morning, we're continuing in our sermon series called Dumb Things Smart Christians Believe.
- And through this series, we'll continue to look at just a few of the dumb things, the incomplete or mistaken concepts that some Christians have come to believe over time.
- Often with the best of intentions, we learn these things, right? We believe them. And we probably have no reason to doubt what we've heard or been told by others over time.
- And that's the common theme we're exploring in this series. And in our introduction to that concept of belief, we've recognized, I'm going to start not saying this and see if everybody remembers, there's two important factors to belief.
- [2 : 1 5] And one is, yeah, faith is good. The first one is trust. So we need to trust in the source of the information in question.
- Trust in whom we have been given the information by. And then faith, as someone said. That any part of what we can't completely see, can't completely understand, can still be trusted.
- So we've also considered some of the things that we may have believed to be true. And then we've remembered each time so far that it's the Bible that is our ultimate source to confirm what parts of what we have come to believe are actually true.
- So as we begin this morning, I'm going to say something. And I don't want you to think about it too long. I just want you to answer. But before you put your hand up or keep it down, depending on what your choice is, I want you to determine whether what I'm about to say is in the Bible or not.

No overthinking. Ready? God helps those who help themselves. In the Bible or not? No hands up. All right. Sermon over. Very interesting, right?

[3 : 28] Not one person. I thought to myself, that's okay if somebody thinks. Now Paul cheated a little for everyone and said definitely not. There's a pastor saying definitely not. But I want to take, so right now I want to take a moment to introduce you to something that has changed my life.

And while you may be expecting me to say, Jesus, that's definitely true. I would introduce you to him quite happily. And he has changed my life. This is something a little different.

And I'm surprised that my observant, generally observant wife and son did not ask me what this was. And that's good. So this is something a little different.

That's a butcher knife. Look familiar, perhaps, to anyone? Everyone's saying don't touch it. So this butcher knife, everyone's gasping as I hold it, managed to quite effectively ruin our plans one evening last June.

This is the actual, this is the weapon that's been entered into evidence. And in some ways, it has changed my life. There's no question. It's certainly something I will never forget.

[4 : 37] Everyone's gasping as I wield it wildly around. Because an accident with this knife caused a fairly catastrophic injury, is the reality.

Certainly a traumatic one. And there it is. I'll just put it there. So it's certainly become something that I'll never forget. Because this injury, I won't go into all the details here this morning.

I thought of maybe putting up a picture or two and blurring them a little, but nah. I don't want to scar anyone in church. But really, this incident that happened in my life has caused me to forever rethink the idea of the phrase, I'll give you a hand.

It's become a long road of rehabilitation and therapy. And it is not even remotely over yet.

And I also recognize that I couldn't have done it without God, without Michelle, without Connor and Emily, and the many prayers that have been lifted up by people on my behalf, in our church, in my family, in our friends.

[5 : 44] And my physiotherapist, who I just saw again on Friday morning, has been with me on nearly every step of this journey, almost from day one. And she hit me with a ton, not literally, hit me with a ton of bricks out of the blue last week at our session.

She said that given the severity of my injury, given the surgery and intensive rehab required, no one gets a result like this ever.

Ever. So I immediately gushed about the skill of my surgeon, chief of plastics at the University of Alberta Hospital, gushed about my therapist, Michelle Ann, who's awesome.

And I've also told her that prayer has been a significant part of my recovery. And she kind of laughs a little bit. But she gets it.

So she reflected to me two weeks ago that she knows full well that I have worked my butt off and been diligent. My brother-in-law last summer sat at the dining room table at Michelle's mom's house as I sat with stitched fingers doing exercises, wrapping and unwrapping my fingers every hour.

[7 : 03] Some of you know that part of the journey. And he said, whatever result you get, no one can question that you didn't work hard. And I suppose that's a fair perspective, right?

My therapist was very quick to attribute my miraculous results, there's no question, primarily to my hard work. And I recognized that I wanted to share this story in this series and particularly today.

because we're considering dumb things smart Christians believe, right? The perspective of my healing and recovery being solely attributed to my hard work and diligence tends to perfectly reflect this idea that God helps those who help themselves.

Sure, there's no question, I've been fiercely diligent in doing my exercises, working on my therapy, doing all the things that I'm told to do and trying my best not to do any of the things I'm told not to do.

And so, even when changes or healing or improvements went unnoticed, the road ahead seemed dark and overwhelming and it has many times, I've continued to try to do my best.

[8 : 20] So, you can almost come to believe in some way that God showed up. God acted in my healing. God supported and encouraged me along the way so far as some kind of response to my initiative, a reward for my hard work or my efforts.

And so, there's that idea that God helps those who help themselves. And those words are likely familiar. I said them and nobody said, huh?

Those words are probably familiar to you and they're often defined and generally understood to be a proverb. Right? A common saying that serves as a language tool.

It's used to give advice or share a universal truth or impart some sort of wisdom. That's what proverbs do. And often a proverb can become so familiar that the speaker can simply quote part of it and then rely on the fact that it's familiar to the listeners and they can complete the statement or the quote on their own.

And we can recognize these types of English expressions. They can pose real challenges, I'm sure Luan would agree, for someone who's learning English, that got your attention, learning English as a new language.

[9 : 45] Right? I had a Korean friend who I was helping with English several years ago and he found these kinds of expressions, often called, they're called idiomatic expressions usually, to be extremely frustrating.

Right? Luan, is that fair that they're frustrating? If you stop and think about it as native English speakers, these kinds of phrases are usually communicated to us from a very young age.

Their meanings don't usually often fit what the expression says, and yet we learn them at the same time. So those words fit that meaning whether it makes sense or not.

So sometimes I tease Michelle because she'll cross-pollinate two idiomatic expressions. So she'll say, I can't even think of an example, I should have written some down, but she will say an idiomatic expression that starts as one and finishes as a different one.

And I say, do you mean this or this? And she says, yeah, there it is. So, but if you stop and think about it, we know them, right? And as I said, they may not make sense, the words and what we understand it to mean.

[10 : 56] Better late than never. Huh? Early to bed, early to rise makes a man, thank you, the early bird or catches the worm, an apple a day, who eats 365 apples a year?

Not me. That is a high-fiber diet, very high-fiber. Maybe it works, I don't know. I've never tried it, I don't plan to start now. So the Bible features, you probably expected I would go here, an entire book of these kinds of sayings.

Sayings and advice, and this book is literally called Proverbs, right? That's where we get this name from. And some of them tend to be quoted in the English language all the time.

And again, not surprisingly, people will quote it and not recognize that it's from Scripture. And they are wise sayings. And I want to dig into the book of Proverbs at some point, maybe next year.

So they're wise sayings. And we've already considered in this series so far that famous quotes from the Bible and other sources have really worked their way into our language, worked their way into our common expressions.

[12 : 13] God helps those who help themselves. We know those words. And in around 428 BCE, if you're more contemporary in your understanding of history and time, or BC if you prefer, some people use that as well, the Greek playwright Euripides wrote this line.

Now, obviously, he would have written it in Greek, not English. Try first thyself and after call on God. For to the worker, God himself lends aid.

Do you see that? That suggests kind of a different perspective than the one that we're exploring today. That one, God helps those who help themselves, was actually written by an English politician named Algernon Sidney in the 1600s.

So the intended meaning there seems to have changed over time. Do you see that? That God will step in, but you're also expected to work as well, which is more correct.

But then, now we've morphed it to the point where God will show up, but you've got to do all the work first, which doesn't really jive. So they're certainly wise-sounding words, but is there truth in this expression?

[13 : 34] Is that perspective actually reflected in the Bible or what we know of God's character? Well, you know, as I've thought more about this idea, I've also been reminded clearly of something I experienced in elementary school, and maybe some of you can relate to this.

Do you remember times when a teacher would give you and your classmates either a worksheet or write a problem on the board, and then that would happen sometimes, and the teacher would then leave the room.

The teacher would leave the room with the expectation that we would continue to work on it while they were away. We were essentially left to our own devices to try and figure it out on our own before we had the opportunity to ask for help.

So for me, that's the idea of trying to help ourselves first. That's what that leaves me with. A sense of being left alone to figure it out.

Often with no idea where to begin, without any of the tools or all the tools or resources that we need to solve the problem. That's the kind of feeling that leaves me with.

[14 : 43] This idea that God helps those who help themselves. Because if you take it at face value, certainly the expression has some valid biblical truth there.

There's a bit of that there. And I think we can agree that it's important for us to take responsibility for our actions. If you watched the Oilers game last night, I think Ryan McLeod is taking responsibility for an unfortunate turn of events or a turnover of events, actually.

But I think the reality is also that God doesn't just puppet us through every step and motion in our lives. There isn't a complete sense of passivity to our lives.

He gives us opportunities and prompts us towards action. But it really is left to us in many ways to decide whether we respond to God's prompting and leading or not.

We are expected to work. We are expected to use the gifts and skills and resources that God has given us and put them into action in our lives.

[15 : 57] We don't generally sit around praying for a job, right? We don't generally say, Lord, I'm just going to sit here and hope my phone rings.

Without building a resume, without applying for job openings, without positioning ourselves to be the successful candidate. Food doesn't miraculously appear on your plate at dinner.

If it does, can I come over? But it doesn't appear on our plates, right? Without us buying the groceries and preparing the meal. That's the reality.

But we need to remember and recognize that God is still the ultimate source of provision. still the ultimate source of blessing in our lives, even though we may have a role in assembling the pieces.

And we also recognize that God doesn't just make things happen for us without the expectation that we engage and do our part as well. I also believe there's an aspect to this message here that is not, here we go, Paul, not consistent with the message of Scripture.

[17 : 10] It's actually counter to the message of the gospel, completely counter to it, particularly as it relates to God's grace, and especially towards each of us as individuals.

God isn't sitting back with his arms folded, waiting to see what we do first. He doesn't sit back and wait to decide what he will do on our behalf on his own.

God's God's character. That's not consistent with how we understand God to be revealed to us in Scripture. If we live with that perspective, that, oh boy, I gotta get going, I gotta get doing this, we may wind up just running around in a panic, essentially trying to guess what God wants, good luck, what God expects us to do.

That's not what we're supposed to be doing. If you're seeking to somehow please or even worse, appease God, hoping that at some point you'll just somehow trigger his action on your behalf, his acceptance and his love for you, that's not consistent with Scripture at all.

Doesn't that sound exhausting and extremely stressful? But some Christians tend to live their lives that way. Perhaps out of a sense of needing to measure up, a sense of needing to earn or somehow deserve God's grace, God's love, or in some way to pay for something that has actually been freely given to you.

[18 : 52] My friends, God does not weigh his love or grace to us or his action on our behalf solely based on us trying to help ourselves first.

first. That's not how it works. In Matthew 6 verse 33, you can turn there or I can read it off the screen too. Let's read it together.

Jesus reminds us, but seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. We're not meant to worry about seeking to please God or even ultimately provide for our own needs.

when we make God our priority, which is what we read here, when we turn to him first for help and insight, when we seek to make his desires our desires as well, then he promises he will take care of the rest.

He will show up. Do you remember what we've considered about God's grace together in the past? grace. As I've said to you before, we can sum up God's grace as his favor and kindness towards us.

[20 : 06] That's what God's grace means. We can't ever earn it. We certainly do not deserve it, but it reveals so much about God's character and his attitude towards us.

As author Philip Yancey puts it this way, you can read it on the screen, grace means there's nothing we can do to make God love us more. And grace means there's nothing we can do to make God love us less.

Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love. Isn't that cool? Isn't that comforting?

God already loves you as much as an infinite God can possibly love. So wait, this gift of grace that means that we can be restored into an unconditional loving relationship with the God who created all things is free?

Yes, this gift is free to us. It is ours to receive. Remember, we've talked about you need to receive a gift and accept it.

[21 : 21] We must choose to do that, but we must never forget that it came at a cost. We think about this at this time of year.

A terrible cost that was the only way through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Ephesians 2 verse 9 gives us an important perspective on this gift of grace.

Let's read it together. For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

When someone gives you a gift, is your response usually, oh, thanks, that's so thoughtful, how much do I owe you? Does that sound like gift giving or gift receiving?

Probably not. And yet as Christians, I believe we can tend to develop this unhealthy perspective. That even after we've been given the gift of salvation, given the gift of salvation, we need to somehow work to earn it.

[22 : 34] Recognizing that God's grace and our salvation are freely given, we, you, can be free to live in gratitude, in praise, in joy, seeking God's direction and the ways that you can serve him and serve others.

I just want to go back to the story of my rehab and recovery for a minute. Friends, the reality of that journey is that I could not have done it on my own, not a chance.

I couldn't have mustered the drive to start the uphill climb of my rehabilitation on my own. God is helping me through this because I couldn't help myself.

And he keeps showing up every day. My friends, our God is good. Our God's grace and love towards us, towards you, knows no limits.

And he will always meet us, always meet you, where you are and in the moment of your greatest need. Reach out to God because he is always there for you.

[23 : 54] And God will always help you, often in the most unexpected ways. And at times when you can't even begin to imagine how to help yourself.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.