

5 Verses You Thought Were in the Bible... but Aren't

Even though Western culture gets slapped with the “Post-Christian” label, that doesn’t mean references to biblical ideas have been scrubbed away. In fact, nods to [Scripture](#) show up quite often in pop culture—from movies to rockstars.

But as often as not, these attempts at grabbing onto what the Bible actually says can miss. By a lot. You see, we’ve got some “everybody knows” notions about God’s Word that borrow much more from Western ethos than they do from the Wisdom literature. You could say they’re something like the “old wives’ tales” that popular imagination has attributed to the Good Book.

That doesn’t mean these “phantom [verses](#)” are okay, though. In fact, they actually go against what Scripture teaches. Sometimes in damaging ways.

So, what verses do people think are in the Bible but really aren’t? Here are 5 to get us started.

1. "God helps those who help themselves." 1 Americanians 17:76

The so-called American Dream means that almost anyone can be born into or come to the country with nothing, work hard, gather a loan payment or three, and die with enough to leave to children. And this “verse” (which may [go back all the way to Aesop](#) of fable fame) fits nicely with that American ethic.

But it’s definitely not biblical.

In the Bible, the help always comes from one place, which the Psalmist lays out succinctly in [Psalm 121:2](#), "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." When the Israelites stared down the crashing waves of the Red Sea and the crushing horses of Pharaoh’s army, God didn’t have the people build boats. He did the helping:

"The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still." ([Exodus 14:14](#))

When desperate people came begging Jesus for help, He never had them prove their mettle. After all, He knows the sinfulness in us. Instead, He helped them because of His own compassion.

Does that mean we can just float through our Christian walk? Not at all. In fact, it’s because of our salvation through Christ that God has provided everything we need to “abound in every good work” ([2 Cor. 9:8](#)). We’re saved to do good because God provides the tools and power to get it done.

2. "This, too, shall pass." Wisdominius 4:11

Whenever something bad happens, this “verse” pops up. It certainly sounds biblical, and some have even quoted it on TV as being from God’s Word. But it’s not, and it’s not even necessarily true.

Sure, we’ll usually move beyond the debilitating pain of loss or find another job or heal from an accident. But not every pain will pass away while we’re here on earth and in this body.

In fact, some pains don’t pass because God has a bigger purpose for them. When Paul struggled with a thorn in his flesh, he begged Jesus to remove it. You’d think that Paul, who saw many miracles as he preached the gospel, would see this pain “pass.” But he didn’t:

"But [Jesus] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." ([2 Cor. 12:9](#))

We can be sure that God provides comfort, but that doesn’t mean He will necessarily take away the source of the pain.

3. "Yea, verily, God wants you to be happy." Oprah 1:1

This popular verse floats to the top every so often and gets thrown around on talk shows and magazines. We like to think that our happiness is God’s highest goal because that fits our consumer-focused, instant-access, you-deserve-it

world. It's a verse that allows people to skirt other biblical mandates because, as is often claimed, happiness trumps everything else.

But none of these false verses does more damage than this one. So, let's just be blunt here: your happiness is not God's intent nor your reason for existing. We are here to praise God—not to accumulate wealth, be comfortable, have a great relationship, feel satisfied, or reach our personal goals.

Here's how Paul puts it:

"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."
([Ephesians 2:6-7](#))

Why are we saved? So that God can forever point to us as evidence of His love and His glory. That in itself is enough to make us happy and to give us joy. But happiness is not the goal.

In fact, if we put our happiness ahead of everything else, we're completely disobeying what Jesus said are the most important commands: Love God; love people ([Luke 10:27](#)). Elevating our own happiness as the ultimate goal gets in the way of both of those. We love God by obeying Him. We love our neighbor by serving.

4. "If you work hard enough, you'll be successful." 2 Jobs 4:04

Is hard work good? Yes. In fact, we're told over and over in Proverbs that we're supposed to work hard ([12:11](#), [13:4](#), [14:23](#), etc.). Jesus kept a tireless pace during His life on earth, and you'll never hear Paul condemn someone who works hard (in fact, he condemns those who don't in [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)).

But the popular idea that hard work necessarily equals abundant earthly blessings has no basis in Scripture. In fact, for all His hard work, Jesus sometimes had nowhere to even sleep at night ([Luke 9:58](#)). Paul, the tireless tentmaker, spent much of his time running from mobs, swimming from shipwrecks, and singing in jail.

As a Christian, we are supposed to work at everything as if we were doing it for Jesus. But our reward is in knowing we did our best for Him, not in seeing our bank accounts bloom. While we may receive tangible blessings for our hard work, the bigger blessing is knowing that our Father who sees everything is pleased ([Matthew 6:4](#)). That's a huge reward in itself.

5. "Just follow your heart and believe, and you can do anything." Song of Disney 20:15

Sometimes, Disney movies seem to invade Scripture. Perhaps because we humans love Cinderella stories (unjust rags to magical riches), the notion of us being "anything we want to be if we just believe" has become weaved into the fabric of how we view the Bible. David the shepherd boy became a king, right?

But we aren't meant to do just anything. We're meant to fulfill the purpose God has for our lives. For example, David was created to be king. Long before he was born, in fact, Jacob/Israel had prophesied that a ruler would spring from the line of Judah ([Genesis 49:10](#)). David didn't "follow his heart" to the throne of Israel. He followed His God along the path laid out for him ([Psalm 119:35](#)).

God gives us passions and desires and uses our lives to prepare us for His purposes—just as He prepared David during his time as a shepherd, soldier, and court musician. But that only works if we completely surrender our lives to His leading. On the other hand, if we spend our lives pursuing that "whatever we want to be," we may very well end up disillusioned and dissatisfied even if we achieve our goal.

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