

Lesson 8

Help Along the Way

Introduction

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them from their troubles.

Psalm 34.17

For most of us, the moment we are born we started life with a cry for help. Seeking help is a natural reflex for children, but we bury and suppress it as we grow older. Giving and receiving help is a fundamental part of the human experience. We do not get very far without it. Children master the art of asking for help very early because they inherently know this—we would do well to learn from them.

God recognized this truth in the beginning—it's not good for us to try and live life as a solo mission. People aren't made to make it on our own. Humans are societal and communal in our nature. We thrive off of connections and relationships. Try to think about the number of times that someone has helped you this week in one way or another. There are likely endless examples of the different ways that we humans rely on each other day in and day out. Society works the best when people are in harmony, in community and pressing forward together with common goals and motivations. We were designed to live together in love and help one another.

Not only do we need help from one another, ultimately we need the help of our heavenly Father. Without our God, we are literally nothing. With no Creator, we have no Creation. Without a standard of Good, nothing can be Right. Without a standard of Truth, nothing can be sure. Without a connection to God, we stand in a broken condition.

There's only one thing that stands in the way of giving and receiving help along life's journey—self. Our own ego tells us that we don't need any help from anyone. Our pride leads us to believe that all of the answers are in and of ourselves, but we know it's not so. Inevitably, every person needs help from somewhere in order to navigate life's twists and turns. The first step to overcoming an obstacle that is too large to overcome is admitting the personal need for help. God has promised that those who cry out for help will not have their cries go unanswered.

For discussion:

1. Why are children so good at asking for help? Where do we lose that skill?
2. What's an example of how someone has helped you this week?
3. What's an example of how God has helped you recently?

One of the Hardest Things to Do

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10.12

Admitting the need for help is the beginning of salvation. When we find ourselves desperately lost and riddled with questions there's no shame in seeking an answer. In this way, at the base of our salvation is a certain humility. At the end of the day, we all need to learn to ask for and accept help. We need to admit that we don't have all the answers to the biggest questions.

It was so easy at our first breath to cry out for help. Now, sometimes it feels like we can't even begin to form the words necessary to ask for assistance. We pass people every day on life's journey. Many of them certainly could lend some help, but we never want to show a sign of weakness. Why?

Asking other people for help is hard in a fallen world ridden by sin. We know that there are situations where being vulnerable enough to say "I need help," can end up with disappointment. It happens to everyone at one point or another. Sometimes rather than a helping hand, we receive nothing or even worse, shame. This is an unfortunate reality of life. That's why asking for help from others can be hard. Our own sin and the sin of others often dissuade us from seeking help.

Asking God for help can be hard, too. It can be very hard. Especially when we still have so many unanswered questions. (If you do, don't worry—you're not alone.) Sometimes God doesn't always give us the things that we want, and this can jade us toward him. We have to keep in mind though he is working all things for our ultimate good, even when we don't understand. At times, he allows trials to come to us so that we can grow, but he delivers us from every trial in the end if we'll seek his help.¹

For discussion:

1. Why is it hard to admit a need for help?
2. Why is it sometimes hard to ask others for help?
3. Why is it sometimes hard to ask God for help?
4. When is a good time to seek God's help?

Vertical Help — Paul's Appeal to the Romans

So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"

Hebrews 13.6

¹ see Psalm 34.19

The most powerful and primary source of help that each of us should learn to tap into is a heavenly help. That is, the help that is promised every child of God. God has told us in the New Testament that we are adopted by grace into his loving care. As such, there are many ways we receive his help. We would do well to make an effort to regularly ask for, notice and praise God for all the ways that he assists us in this life.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul spends the first portion of the book making a powerful case that no one is holy as God is holy. The resounding message of the first few sections of Romans is just how lost we are and how badly we need help from God. After Paul argues this case though, he spends the rest of the book primarily detailing the amazing help that God does offer us. That help can come in many forms.

Providence

Paul writes in the Roman letter that God is working all things for our good.² That passage is true and straightforward. All things are working for our good. For those that love the Lord, he is weaving all the threads of our stories together to create a wonderful work of art. His providence is moving through creation and working through the difficulties, the mundane and the blessings to accomplish ultimate good for all his children on earth and finally in Heaven.

Confidence

Confidence and faith are synonyms. While we often lack confidence in ourselves, we can always find great confidence in God. Knowing that we have the King of the Universe backing us is a massive help. Life is full of trials, temptations, doubts, fear and tragedies. It can be hard to navigate. Yet, we have assurance that we have already conquered it all if we trust in Christ.³

Instruction

Paul also wrote to the Roman Christians that their faith came straight from the teachings of Christ in His Word.⁴ God has given us an instruction manual or roadmap for life. We need not view as a suggestion book or academic source, but as an absolutely necessary saving help. The scriptures provide do's and don'ts, principles, wisdom and advice for all of life's major struggles. We need only open the Book and accept his leading.

For discussion:

1. How does God's providence help us? How has it helped you?
2. How does God's Word help us? How has it helped you?
3. How does our faith help us? How has it helped you?

² see Romans 8.28

³ see Romans 8.37

⁴ see Romans 10.17

Horizontal Help — The Art of “One Anothering”

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone...”

Genesis 2.18

The Bible is not quiet about the idea of community. From the beginning, God saw that man is not meant to be without the help of another. God has always encouraged us in our own design and by his word to draw near to one another and learn from one another. We see this principle in a major way in the design of his church. Scripture paints a picture of individuals doing life together in the church in a number of different ways.

The phrase “one another” is used in the New Testament approximately one-hundred times depending on your translation, but we’ll look at just a few of the ways we can give and receive help as we pursue Christ together;

Accountability

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3.13)

Holding one another accountable is the idea of encouraging one another to stay on the narrow path that leads to Heaven.

Giving: When exhorting or correcting another Christian, it’s important to remember all the other principles of our faith about humility, gentleness, mutual respect and love. These color and motivate every interaction we have when it comes to accountability.

Receiving: When we are called into account by a brother or sister, we need to receive it with a spirit of humility.

Service

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.” (1 Peter 4.10)

When Christians see a need, as we have ability, we are called to meet it. Service is a key element in the life of a church. It’s something we should freely give, and freely accept.

Giving: When we sacrifice for our brothers and sisters, we are showing them Christ and reminding them who he is, since he was a servant himself. It is one of the most powerful acts of love we can do.

Receiving: We shouldn’t feel the need to decline help from other Christians who are seeking to

meet a need we have. Learning to ask for help with the day-to-day struggles of life gives us opportunities to exercise trust.

Forgiveness

“Be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4.32

Giving: Christ’s teachings indicate that forgiveness should be given just as much as one would like to receive it. Very liberally. We are to forgive very quickly, and release all of our grudges as Christians.

Receiving: We need to also be open to asking for forgiveness from others and accepting it when it is given. God loves restored relationships and reconciliation.

Encouragement

“Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5.13)

Giving: An encouraging word can change someone’s day. If you see someone struggling, encourage them! If you see someone doing something really well, encourage them too!

Receiving: Take the words of an encourager to heart. Don’t be afraid to believe someone when they say something kind.

Harmony

“Live in harmony with one another...” (Romans 12.16).

Practicing harmony is harder than studying about harmony... but it means humbling ourselves and bearing with each other through disagreements. Harmony means working together for God’s glory despite attitudinal differences, different ideas and struggles. Biblical harmony means making peace with one another whenever possible.

For discussion:

1. What are some of the other ways we can practice “one anothering?”
2. Why did God give us the church rather than making faith in Christ a solo mission?

Learning to Trust Jesus' Example and Plan

From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.

In Christ Alone, Stuart Townsend

When we open up and allow ourselves to ask for help, then we can learn what trust means. Our trust is in Christ as our Savior and Lord, As our Savior, he redeems us and removes the consequence of being lost. As our Lord, he provides guidance, direction and confidence of victory. Jesus was a model for us while he was on earth of how we ought to reach up to God and out to others.

Jesus was one who fully submitted himself to the plan of God and suffered for it greatly. His trust never broke. Even just before the cross he pleaded with the Father for help, and angels came to help him.⁵ During and after his earthly ministry, Jesus also commissioned other people for help in accomplishing his heavenly mission of seeking and saving the lost;

- He allowed John the Baptist to baptize him to fulfill all righteousness. (Matthew 3.13-17)
- He recruited apostles or messengers to bear his message. (Matthew 10.1-4)
- He allowed people to entertain him in their homes. (Luke 7.36)
- He borrowed a donkey to fulfill the prophecy of the coming Messiah and rode it into Jerusalem. (Mark 11.1-11)
- He was assisted in bearing the cross by Simon of Cyrene when his physical body could no longer carry it. (Matthew 27.32)

For discussion:

1. Why did Jesus rely on help from others in his ministry?
2. What can we learn from how Jesus accepted help?
3. What help does Jesus offer us when we get lost?

Prayer for today—Lord, help. Help us all.

⁵detailed in Matthew 26.36-44