

# Don't lose heart: how to persevere in the face of discouragement

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When St Paul described the Christian life as a race, he wasn't referring to a sprint. Following Jesus can be hard: trouble and doubts assail us, and sometimes God's promises seem so far from fulfillment. But the Scriptures are full of encouragement for us when our faith is weak.

Scripture taken from *The Holy Bible: (NIV)*

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.	2 Corinthians 4:1-2	Paul's second letter to the troubled church in Corinth chronicles the agony and the ecstasy he had in his ministry to them. There is a lot of encouragement here for the tired, the doubting, and the disillusioned. Here he talks about a kind of simplicity at the heart of his work: he shares the message of Jesus without trimmings, without tricks. Sometimes it feels like the message at the heart of our lives is yesterday's good news, but Paul challenges us to be plain-speakers, pointing people straightforwardly to Christ.	Father, help me to share you with others, straightforwardly and simply. Amen
2	The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.	2 Corinthians 4:4-6	It is so difficult not to 'preach ourselves'. It is so easy to fall into the trap of moral superiority, to clock up our good choices and our sacrifices (papering over the cracks) and presenting our lives as models to emulate. Too often the church as a whole has got into serious trouble preaching itself, forgetting that the knowledge of God is found not in our buildings, programmes or even our families, but in the face of Christ himself.	Lord Jesus, may my faith be bound up totally and completely in you. Help me to remember that you are Lord, especially when I am disillusioned by the failings of my fellow-believers. Amen

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3	But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.	2 Corinthians 4:7-10	It's a simple and beautiful truth that the life-giving power of God is entrusted to us, unassuming and fragile jars of clay. It's the last place you'd expect to find treasure, hidden in plain sight in the lives of ordinary people. And it's the power of God at work in us that can stop us falling apart when the pressure is on: even our suffering and struggle can point people to God.	It's a simple and beautiful truth that the life-giving power of God is entrusted to us, unassuming and fragile jars of clay. It's the last place you'd expect to find treasure, hidden in plain sight in the lives of ordinary people. And it's the power of God at work in us that can stop us falling apart when the pressure is on: even our suffering and struggle can point people to God.
4	It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.	2 Corinthians 4:13-14	Faith is so often characterised as wishful thinking. A hopeful step into the dark based on...not much. But Christian faith is something different. It's still a step into an unknown future, without answers to many of our difficult questions – but it's based on something solid. A historical moment: an empty tomb, a personal reality. This is where we find the confidence to keep stepping into God's future.	Lord, may the glory of the resurrection empower me to trust you. Amen
5	Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.	2 Corinthians 4:16-18	It's hard to see many of our troubles as light and momentary. Often they are weighty, chronic and soul-crushing. Yet God challenges us that eternity can give us a completely different perspective, one that transforms and renews us here and now in the midst of our pain.	Father of lights, give me a glimpse of your perspective on reality. Help me to see that my everyday life is part of your immense tapestry. Help me understand the value of my life from your all-encompassing perspective. Amen

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6	Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.	Hebrews 12:1a	This is all about hometown advantage. As part of the church throughout time and space – the communion of saints – we actually have countless Christ-followers cheering us on as we journey through this life. Let God's people throughout history and throughout the world challenge and inspire you as we race together.	Lord, As I run the race of life, help me to know that you are always beside me and before me, cheering and beckoning me onward. Amen
7	And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.	Hebrews 12:1b-3	Jesus is our example as well as our Saviour. It's easy to read the moral challenge of the Sermon on the Mount and forget that Jesus actually lived his life this way. He literally took up his cross. He literally turned the other cheek, and walked the mile. He actually did deny himself for others. But it had a goal: the joy set before him, the praise of his Father and the reconciliation of the universe.	Father, when following you is costly, help me to see the joy that is set before us: your coming kingdom of justice and love. Help me to fix my eyes upon Jesus. Amen
8	And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."	Hebrews 12:5-6	Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls our time a 'secular age', not because religious faith is being wiped off the map but because belief in our time is no longer the assumed background of our world. Many of us, he suggests, experience faith a little bit more like this man who encountered Jesus after his transfiguration. We want to know God and seek his face, but doubt is often not far from us. This doesn't catch God unawares. He can handle our doubts, our questions, our wavering. But he calls us to keep moving forward, closer to him, to find a deeper confidence in his power and presence.	Lord, we seek you in world filled with doubt. Help me to find you and trust you. Amen

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9	<p>Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"</p> <p>"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."</p> <p>"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."</p> <p>Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"</p>	Mark 9:21-24	<p>Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor calls our time a 'secular age', not because religious faith is being wiped off the map but because belief in our time is no longer the assumed background of our world. Many of us, he suggests, experience faith a little bit more like this man who encountered Jesus after his transfiguration. We want to know God and seek his face, but doubt is often not far from us. This doesn't catch God unawares. He can handle our doubts, our questions, our wavering. But he calls us to keep moving forward, closer to him, to find a deeper confidence in his power and presence.</p>	<p>Lord, we seek you in world filled with doubt. Help me to find you and trust you. Amen</p>
10	<p>Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."</p>	Daniel 3:16-18	<p>There are five words in this passage that make it remarkable: 'even if he does not'. One of the most difficult parts of the Christian life to make sense of is God's apparent inaction in the world, especially in response to our prayers in times of desperate need. These three Hebrews seem to have a sense of God's goodness and trustworthiness that transcends their own dire, fiery circumstances.</p>	<p>God, give me the faith to trust for impossible things, but also the faith to trust you when the answer seems to be no, not yet. Amen</p>

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11	<p>“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:</p> <p>These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name”</p>	Revelation 3:7-8	<p>Jesus' words to the seven churches of Asia Minor are often fierce, but not to the church in Philadelphia. He sees believers struggling to hold on, struggling to live faithful lives of service and his assurance is powerful. No one will shut the door in your face, he says. I'm not going to let you down.</p>	<p>Lord Jesus, when my strength is weak, help me to see your open door of grace. Amen</p>
12	<p>Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.</p>	Psalm 73:1-5	<p>Psalm 73 is a classic psalm of disillusionment and frustration. Asaph, the faithful poet and worship leader of God's people, sees those around him as sleek, sanguine and prosperous while he struggles to clamber up the rocky face of faithfulness. It can be so easy to forget that the gleaming lives around us may not be the whole story, that a life without God is not the anxiety-free 'open sea' that it sometimes seems.</p>	<p>Father, help me not to be deceived by false promises of fullness, by attractive sideshows which distract me from pursuing you. Amen</p>

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Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
13	<p>Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.</p> <p>All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.</p> <p>If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children.</p> <p>When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.</p>	Psalm 73:13-17	<p>The choices we make as we follow Christ: sacrificial generosity, sexual chastity and fidelity, self-giving love, weathering disdain from friends and family can be difficult work. And they can seem thankless, unrecognised, pointless. But Asaph challenges us, before you lash out, before you throw it all away, enter the sanctuary of God. Regain some perspective. For us in New Covenant times, this means encountering Christ, in amongst his new temple: the people of God.</p>	<p>Lord, help me to wrestle well with my doubts and frustrations. Help me to constantly seek your presence and perspective. Amen</p>
14	<p>Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.</p> <p>You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.</p> <p>Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.</p> <p>My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.</p>	Psalm 73:23-26	<p>This is what it can look like when we regain perspective: we find the God who walks with us, holds us by hand. The God who is enough for us, even if our own bodies and desires fail us. The God who promises to be enough for us in this life and the next, world without end.</p>	<p>Creator and Redeemer, be the strength of my heart and my portion forever. May you always be enough for me. Amen</p>