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A busy person's brief guide to spiritually

surviving & then thriving



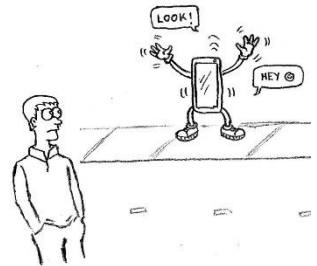
The challenges of life right now

Thank you for reading this. You're probably very busy. Many people are today, including me. And you may well be weary cumulatively from the last few years - Covid, political instability in the UK, Donald Trump in the US, the war in Ukraine, environmental change, expensive fuel prices, rising mortgage costs. It's not just you!



Throw in a few extra things such as illness, bereavement, work pressures, inter-personal tensions, family issues and new prevailing social norms on issues such as 'can a man be pregnant?' and it is a wonder any of us are still keeping going!

We live with a multiplicity of distractions too... TV, the internet and social media. Oh so easy to get distracted! And advertising constantly tells us we should have a wonderful body, great clothes and amazing holidays. Oh so easy also to get discouraged!



Life affects all of us – mentally, physically and emotionally. And it also affects us spiritually. How can we get our lives into some sort of order where we get the rest and refreshment we need?

Suffering, surviving – even thriving

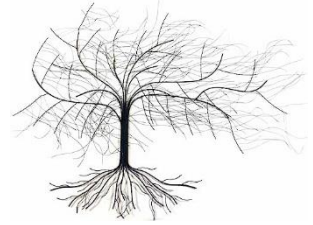


The Bible tells us that Jesus “empathises with our weaknesses,” (Hebrews 4v15). Jesus was tired (John 4v6), “wept” (John 11v33,35), and “overwhelmed with sorrow” (Matthew 26v38). Sometimes he was so busy he didn't have time to eat (Mark 6v31). Ever felt any of those things? Jesus knows.

The Bible also paints a very positive picture of how we can keep going and even flourish. It pictures such a person as “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither,” (Psalm 1v3). It's a bit like the local picture on the front – windblown and battered by storms, but standing, surviving and thriving...

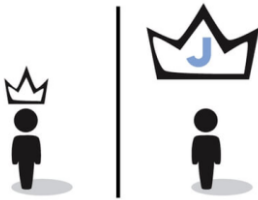
How to survive and thrive

To survive and thrive even when constantly battered by a storm, a tree needs strong roots.



‘Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, you must continue to follow him,’ the New Testament encourages us. ‘Let your roots grow down into him... Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness,’ (Colossians 2v6-7).

But before we can grow those roots, those verses say, it’s important we have ‘accepted Christ Jesus as Lord’. You can read about this in the booklet ‘Two Ways to Live’ available in all our church buildings and also on the website twowaystolive.com, and if you haven’t done so, reading that now is the best thing you can do before proceeding.



In a nutshell: there are only two ways to live. The picture on the left shows someone living a life where they themselves are king or queen of their lives. It is a life with self or “i” in the middle – sin. The alternative is a Jesus-centred life where we bow to him as Lord and we orientate

our lives totally around him and what he says. It’s the way to life in all its fullness, Jesus promises. So if we are clear that Jesus is our Lord, how do we survive and thrive?

1. Roots

To be rooted in Christ means to keep growing in our relationship with him. Like any friendship or relationship, it takes time.

What does it look like in practice? One way is just praying off and on through the day: ‘*Lord, help me!*’ at work or if you feel stressed; ‘*Lord, guide me,*’ as you face a decision; ‘*Lord, help me keep on loving,*’ as you face a difficult person; ‘*Lord, forgive me,*’ for the times we mess up; ‘*Lord, fill me afresh with your Holy Spirit*’ on the way into work or walking to the shops. Pray in your own words, in your own way through, the day.

2. Refreshment



We want to eat or drink physically to give us energy! In the same way, spiritual food keeps us going spiritually.

Jesus says, 'No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken,' (Matthew 4v4). The good news is that if you have time to eat any meal at all in a day, even if only a granola bar, however

briefly, you also have time to feed on God's Word, the Bible, however briefly also.

How to do this? There's plenty to help. You can order Bible notes such as 'Explore' from the Good Book Company, or 'Daily Bread' from Scripture Union. We also have Bible notes in our churches. You can use a free phone app such as 'Youversion Bible,' 'The Bible in One Year,' 'Lectio 365,' or 'Pray as you Go'. Please ask for help if you would like.

When it comes to prayer, many people find the app 'PrayerMate' a great help. Other people like books such as 'A Way to Pray,' edited by O.Palmer Robertson. To read about the 'how to' of praying try 'A Praying Life,' by Paul Miller which is great for all levels. I'm always happy to chat about prayer! The important thing is to start.

3. Rhythms

Most of us probably don't think, 'Whenever shall I brush my teeth today?' We have our own routine which has become a habit. Most of life in fact consists of habits. The important thing is to be aware of what our habits are, and to make positive, little changes step by step. (You can even get apps to help develop habits!)



As a disciple of Jesus, there is an important daily rhythm to grow into: it is our daily time to spend with the Lord, praying and reading the Bible. It might be 10 minutes over a morning cup of tea. It might be on the bus or train. It might (even) be in the toilet at work. It might be at lunchtime. It might be travelling home. It might be after your evening meal. The important thing is to start, and to stick with it.

4. Rest

Jesus gives us a day of rest. In the Old Testament it was called the Sabbath. Nowadays we call it the Lord's Day. For most people, this day is Sunday, though for me as a minister it is a Friday. The idea is the same: one day set apart for Christ-centred rest, refreshment and worship.



Many people today suffer stress, burnout and a feeling of relentless pressure because the UK as a whole has forgotten this natural rhythm of life. Like a smoker who ignores warnings about lung cancer, we ignore this gift of a day at our spiritual peril. Ignoring it can mean we spiritually shrivel up and wither, and who wants to be like that? It's a gift, for our health, and God wants us to enjoy it and be blessed by it.

5. Relationships



Your human family will probably be rightly important to you. Jesus says our church family is even more important (Matthew 12v46-50 and other very clear teaching elsewhere). The relationships we can develop with fellow disciples of Jesus are often stronger and deeper and even better than with the best blood relatives. There's a whole extra dimension.

Following Jesus is like a team sport – you can't have a football side with one player, everyone is needed week by week. So it is with the Body of Christ, the picture the Bible uses of God's family. Every person, like each part of the body, is vital, and each part brings something unique without which the Body doesn't function at its full capability. A church without you is like a body without a vital organ.

A church minister, writing in a recent book, says he was once asked, '*Do I have to go to church if I become a Christian?*' He says he answered: '*If you are a Christian, you are church, you are one of the family.*'

Tony Payne says in his great book *How To Walk Into Church*:



‘One of the most important acts of love and encouragement we can all engage in is the powerful encouragement of just being there—because every time I walk into church, I am wearing a metaphorical t-shirt that says, “God is important to me, and you are important to me”. And on the back it says, “And that’s why I wouldn’t dream of missing this.”’

He adds: ***‘Similarly, when we stay away for no good reason one week out of three (or more), we send the opposite message.’***

Of course, all of us go away for holidays etc sometimes. That’s one thing. But in general: ***‘None of the important things God has for us to do in church each week can happen if we’re not there. We can’t love people; we can’t talk to them and encourage them; we can’t gather with them to listen together to God’s Word. All of this hangs on the rather simple prerequisite of actually being there. And so perhaps the most important thing you can do before you walk into church is simply to plan to show up—every week—unless some emergency intervenes.’***



‘Church needs to move into that category of non-negotiable fixtures around which we plan other things.’

Perhaps our service times are genuinely impossible for you. We will happily start new weekly services in the afternoon or evening if you will commit to that instead. If you are serious about Sunday worship, we will organise it as best we can when it works for you.



Perhaps you find someone at church really difficult. This is normal (Philippians 4v2; Acts 6v1)! A church is not a gathering of clones – we are all different, and rightly so. There will inevitably be people we struggle with in small ways or big ways. There is no perfect church.

How to respond when that is true for us? A disciple of Jesus does not



'opt out' but 'opts in'. How? One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given was when I was finding someone very difficult. A friend said to me: 'You just gotta keep on loving.' Now that difficult person is a lifelong friend – amazingly! The gospel, through the church, can transform impossible relationships. So 'keep on loving' – even if you have to grit your teeth! The Bible has a lot to say about this.

Church is not only about our relationships with other Christians: it is about our relationship with Jesus. It is one of the main ways he asks us to serve him, by using the gifts he gives us for the Body of Christ.

Jesus also tells us – in fact commands us – to take bread and wine regularly in Communion, or the Lord's Supper. 'Do this in memory of me,' he says. And so, we do. This remind us of the cross, to bring us back to it humbly, and to renew our perspective away from everyday things to the things of eternity. It is a way we build and renew our relationship with him at the same time as renewing relationships with other Christians on a Sunday.

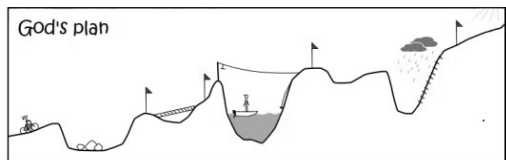
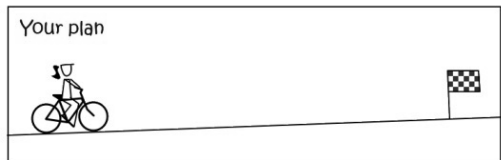


So, 'let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another...' as the New Testament reminds us. If you have been away for a while, or lost the habit for some reason, Jesus welcomes you back with open arms when we return to him (Luke 15v11-32). The important thing is to do it.

6. Realism

It's important for a Christian life which survives and thrives to be Biblically realistic!

Jesus says, 'In this world you will have trouble.' And he's right! The first church leaders told those coming to faith, 'We must go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.' And they too were right. Sometimes we will be perplexed by what Jesus is



doing in our lives, but we keep on walking with Christ. 'Let whoever who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on their God,' says Isaiah 50v10.

As Christians we will suffer just like any human with sickness, sorrow and the trials of life. As Christians we may additionally, like most Christians across history, be regarded as odd, deluded and possibly shunned or even persecuted. This is normal.

We will be tempted, and sometimes we will sin. This too is normal. Every time we mess up, we keep short accounts with the Lord, confess, repent and return to him. Each time, we find forgiveness from God. How many times? Well, at least 'seventy times seven' – in other words indefinitely, each time we mean it.

The great thing is that *in spite of* whatever life throws at us, 'nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love.' (Romans 8v38-39).

Not only that but God will take the rough stuff life throws at us and make something good out of it: us. God's aim is to make us 'Christ-like' – even through the tough times. 'Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...' (Romans 5v3-5).

Conclusion

So: 'Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him... Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness,' (Colossians 2v6-7).

And as Psalm 1 says: 'Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers...'



Further reading: 'Being a Christian – the basics of Christian discipleship,' by Stephen Kneale (Day One publications, 48 pages). Available via bookshops and online