

# “GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES”

## Prayer Requests

### Focus

Where did this lie come from? Is it in the Bible? No, but you will find a form of it in the Koran: “Indeed, Allah will not change the conditions of a population until they change what is in themselves” (Ar-Ra’d 13:11). This lie about God has its roots in pagan religion. Five hundred years before Christ, Aesop wrote, “The gods help them that help themselves.” Our current wording was used by the deist Ben Franklin, who said in *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, “God helps those who help themselves.” Satan often couches his lies in half-truths. Today, we seek to expose this lie and to give an answer for the hope that we have!

### Introductory Activity

- ❖ On the internet it is possible to find many examples of messages that reflect what we often call “prosperity theology,” a theology based on the idea that God wants us to be successful and rich. And we will be, the message proclaims, if we only do our part. A common theme expressed in these messages is that your determination and your positive thinking will produce good things in your life.
  - In your opinion, why do people want to believe this lie?
  - Often, an element of truth is contained in lies about God. Perhaps that is one thing that makes them so appealing. Read the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16 as well as 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (*you can find them below and on the next page*). Identify an element of truth in the lie “God helps those who help themselves.”

*Matthew 20:1-16 “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.*

*<sup>3</sup> “About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went.*

*“He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’*

*<sup>7</sup> “ ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’*

<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

<sup>9</sup> “The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

<sup>13</sup> “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

<sup>16</sup> “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

## Where Does My Help Come From?

1. Our sinful nature leads us to believe that we can do something to be right with God. This is called the *opinio legis*, which means “the opinion of the law.” Give specific examples of how you see this truth in other religions, denominations, and even in your own hearts.
2. The Bible makes it clear that by nature we are dead and blind. Point out how the following passages refute the *opinio legis*.

*Ephesians 2:1—“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”*

*Acts 26:17,18—“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”*

3. God must do 100% of the work to make us alive. Read the passage below. Paul compares our conversion to God’s work at creation. In what way is God’s activity in creation like conversion?

*2 Corinthians 4:6—“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.”*

4. The following passages underscore the truth that God helps only those who can't help themselves!

*Luke 18:9-14—To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

*<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*

*<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

- In what ways do we sometimes behave like the Pharisee?

*Romans 4:4,5—“Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.”*

- Why is righteousness credited to us as a gift?

*Romans 5:8—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

- What advice would you give to someone who says, “If I can just kick this habit (or sin), I’ll feel closer to God”?

5. Read Titus 2:11-14. What fuels our desire to obey God’s Word?

*Titus 2:11-14—For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

## Discussion

- ❖ In Acts 14:22 we read, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” The truth is, even if we are living faithfully, God does not always help in a worldly sense. Using your Bible knowledge, give an example of someone for whom this was true. (*Think prophets, apostles, patriarchs, and even your own life.*)
  
- ❖ In his explanation to the conclusion of the commandments, Martin Luther said, “God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear his anger and not disobey what he commands. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands.” Is Luther saying, “God helps those who help themselves”? Explain. (For help, consider below the passages of Matthew 5:3-10; Luke 17:10; and Romans 11:35.)

*“Matthew 5:3-10 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

*Luke 17:10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’ ”*

*Romans 11:35 “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”*

- ❖ Describe what life will be like for those who believe “God helps those who help themselves.”

## Closing Prayer

By our sins, heavenly Father, we forfeit your blessings and should hear nothing but wrath in your commandments. But your obedient Son covers us with his perfect life of love. Yes, and he covers up all the sinful stains on our acts of obedience and love. Now we hear your commandments as the guidance of a loving parent, kindly making promises to entice the children to listen. Repeatedly, you promise that you are gladly watching and ready to reward – in your grace for the sake of Christ – our every attempt to serve you. Use these promises to increase our zeal to serve. Amen.