

Does the Bible Really Say That?

Rev. John M. Young



Opening prayer: O Lord, I thank You for revealing Your Word in Holy Scripture. Help me to distinguish truth from error and Your sacred wisdom from conventional wisdom. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Psalm 119:11 says: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." It is good to know the wisdom of the Bible. Many times it is the true source of a quotation that has been changed slightly from the original.

On the next page you will find a number of familiar quotations. Some are commonly thought to be in the Bible when they are not; others *are* in the Bible without many people realizing it. Can you identify whether or not each quotation is in the Bible?

Bible references are from NIV unless noted otherwise. [Answers are included below.]

▲ *God helps those who help themselves.* **No.** More than 80% of Americans did think this was in the Bible according to a Barna survey. Benjamin Franklin is credited with putting this saying into its familiar form. Aesop tells the story of a wagoner who prays for help from Hercules to get his wagon unstuck. Hercules tells the man to "put his shoulder to the wheel," for the gods help those who help themselves. In the Bible, on the other hand, divine grace apart from human effort is evident in passages such as **Romans 5:6**: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."

When have you been told, "God helps those who help themselves"? How did it make you feel? How does that compare to God's promise of help for the powerless?

- ▲ *'Tis more blessed to give than to receive.* **Yes.** This quote of Jesus is unusual in that it is found nowhere in the Gospels but in **Acts 20:35**.
- ▲ *A penny saved is a penny earned.* **No.** **Proverbs 13:11** does say, "Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow," but the familiar quotation is from *Poor Richard's Almanac*.
- ▲ *I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.* **Yes.** **Job 19:20**.
- ▲ *Pride goeth before a fall.* **Yes.** This is a compressed version of **Proverbs 16:18**: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." (KJV)
- ▲ *Consider the lilies of the field.* **Yes.** Jesus says this in the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 6:28**, and similarly in **Luke 12:27**.

What are we supposed to learn from the lilies? What promise of provision is attached to Jesus' words?

Quote in the Bible? Source

God helps those who help themselves.	_____	_____
'Tis more blessed to give than to receive.	_____	_____
A penny saved is a penny earned.	_____	_____
I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.	_____	_____
Pride goeth before a fall.	_____	_____
Consider the lilies of the field.	_____	_____
You reap what you sow.	_____	_____
Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.	_____	_____
Idle hands are the Devil's workshop.	_____	_____
Hate the sin; love the sinner.	_____	_____
Neither a borrower nor a lender be.	_____	_____
To err is human, to forgive divine.	_____	_____
Go the extra mile.	_____	_____
The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.	_____	_____
Cleanliness is next to godliness.	_____	_____
Read the writing on the wall.	_____	_____
Spare the rod and spoil the child.	_____	_____
Lend me your ears!	_____	_____
Be slow to speak and quick to listen.	_____	_____
Don't cast pearls before swine.	_____	_____
That which does not destroy us makes us stronger.	_____	_____
Blood is thicker than water.	_____	_____
Turn the other cheek.	_____	_____
Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.	_____	_____

▲ *You reap what you sow.* **Yes.** **Galatians 6:7** and **Job 4:8** both express this warning of the Law. Interestingly, **Psalm 126:5** uses this same terminology as an expression of God's grace: "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

When have you reaped what you had sown, experiencing the Law? When have you reaped with songs of joy after sowing in tears, experiencing the Gospel?

- ▲ *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.* **No.** We have Ben Franklin to thank for this one also. It is not necessarily bad advice, as the book of Proverbs gives several admonitions to be industrious and not lazy, such as **Proverbs 6:9**: "How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?"
- ▲ *Idle hands are the Devil's workshop.* **No.** This saying is centuries old in English, but it is not a direct quote from the Bible. In addition to Proverbs' injunctions against laziness (see above), look up **Proverbs 19:15**; **1 Timothy 5:13**; **Ecclesiastes 10:18**; **Proverbs 31:27**.
- ▲ *Hate the sin; love the sinner.* **No.** This form of the saying is actually attributed to Mohandas Gandhi. Christians will point out that St. Augustine wrote, "*Cum dilec-*

tionem hominum et odium vitiorum,” which translates roughly as, “With love for mankind and hatred of sins.” As for Scriptural references, **Jude** wrote that we should be “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh” (**v. 23**), and Paul wrote in **Romans 7:15**: “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” Clearly we should hate sin. The Gospel shows God’s love for the sinner, as in **John 3:16**; and Jesus did not “cast the first stone” in **John 8:3–11**, but told the woman caught in adultery to “go and sin no more” (KJV).

▲ *Neither a borrower nor a lender be.* **No.** This advice is given by Polonius to his son, Laertes, in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Perhaps, however, he was thinking of **Proverbs 11:15**: “To guarantee loans for a stranger brings trouble, but there is safety in refusing to do so” (NRSV).

▲ *To err is human, to forgive divine.* **No.** This is from Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*. A finer point of Christian doctrine maintains the distinction that it is an attribute of *fallen* human nature to err, but Jesus Christ became a true human being and was able to live without sin. He did this for us as a part of accomplishing forgiveness for everyone. Forgiving each other, then, is a reflection of what God has done for us in Christ (**Ephesians 4:32**).

▲ *Go the extra mile.* **Yes.** So many companies promise that their customer service will “go the extra mile” that we might forget that Jesus said in **Matthew 5:41**: “If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

▲ *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.* **Yes.** Jesus’ disciples were unable to stay awake while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His arrest. See **Matthew 26:41** and **Mark 14:38**.

When is a time that you felt like the disciples, whose spirit was willing but flesh was weak?

▲ *Cleanliness is next to godliness.* **No.** *Poor Richard’s Almanac* again. True “cleanliness” is not something we can achieve on our own but is a gift of God in Baptism, “not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God” (**1 Peter 3:21**).

Why do you think this saying is so popular?

▲ *Read the writing on the wall.* **Yes.** Though not an exact quote, the image of a finger writing on a wall in **Daniel 5:5** is the source of this saying encouraging someone to acknowledge what is plainly in front of them.

▲ *Spare the rod and spoil the child.* **Yes and No.** Give yourself credit if you knew that this exact phrasing is not found in the Bible (it is attributed to Mark Twain), but you may also give yourself credit if you knew that the importance of discipline in raising children is emphasized by passages such as **Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15**.

▲ *Lend me your ears!* **No.** Marc Anthony gets the attention of “friends, Romans, [and] countrymen” in this speech from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*. If you missed this, you

may have been thinking of “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” which appears numerous times in the Bible.

▲ *Be slow to speak and quick to listen.* **Yes.** **James 1:19** is sometimes paraphrased as “God gave you two ears and only one mouth.”

When is a time that you wish you had been quicker to listen and slower to speak?

▲ *Don’t cast pearls before swine.* **Yes.** **Matthew 7:6**.

▲ *That which does not destroy us makes us stronger.* **No.** Paul did write, “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (**Romans 5:3–5**), but the quote as given is from Friedrich Nietzsche.

▲ *Blood is thicker than water.* **No.** First cited by Sir Walter Scott. Blood and water are mentioned together in **John 19:34** as flowing from Jesus’ side (interpreted by some to represent the two sacraments, Communion and Baptism), and one of the plagues in Egypt was turning the Nile to blood (**Exodus 7**).

▲ *Turn the other cheek.* **Yes.** **Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:29**.

▲ *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* **Yes.** Not a trick question! Jesus says essentially this in **Luke 6:31** and **Matthew 7:12**. Similar aphorisms are also found in many world religions, testifying to the truth that God has written His Law on human hearts (**Romans 2:15**).

For further discussion:

Which of the misquotations of the Bible do you think are most prevalent? Which ones might be the most damaging?

What are some concrete steps we can take toward increasing biblical literacy?

When you hear these sayings come up in conversation, how might that provide you with the opportunity to share the Gospel?

Closing:

Sing or speak “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” (*LSB* 655; *LW* 334; *TLH* 261)

**Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.**

Rev. John M. Young grew up in Illinois and has served parishes in Texas and New York. He served as pastoral counselor for the Atlantic District LWML 2002–2006. Pastor Young and his wife Raquel have two daughters.