
FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

WHAT TO DO WHEN **LIFE IS HARD**



DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHAT TO DO WHEN LIFE IS HARD

Modern life can seem like an obstacle course of problems, temptations, and hardships. If we're honest, these obstacles sometimes feel insurmountable. As a follower of Christ, where can you find help and hope?

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul looks down through the centuries and speaks to our contemporary world. He analyzes the problem, diagnoses the malady, and does one thing no philosopher has accomplished: He prescribes God's remedy.

Second Timothy is Paul's "swan song"—his deathbed statement. Soon after writing it, Paul was martyred for his faith. Knowing his earthly journey was coming to an end, he said, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Timothy 4:7). He gave his last will and testament to those of us still running our races. His gift to us: A reminder of God's solution for the hardships and heartbreaks of life.

FACING THE PROBLEM

According to Paul, we first need to face the reality of our circumstances. It's pretty bleak, I'm afraid:

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. –2 Timothy 3:12

You may think you can run away from the pressures and tensions of the day, but really we can't escape it. Even David, when he was up against hard times, was counseled by his friends to simply run away from it all—to fly away from his troubles, free as a bird. But David knew better, responding with, “*In the LORD I put my trust; how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain?’*” (Psalm 11:1). He knew there was nothing to do but face the stark reality.

If you're a child of God, you need to face up to this: You will suffer persecution. It's not a “maybe.” There's no way around it.

Get ready, because there's more. Paul then answers the question, *Is the world getting better?*

But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. –2 Timothy 3:13

Some may say this is pessimistic. But, my friend, isn't it time we face the truth instead of holding onto a baseless hope that tomorrow will suddenly be better or all the problems of the world will somehow be saved by a government policy? We cannot expect help from politicians—no earthly government can straighten out the world because the governments themselves need straightening out. It's time for believers to face facts: Things in this world will only get worse. You can be like an ostrich and put your head in the sand if you want to, but the Bible puts it in black and white.

Sincere and well-meaning folk sometimes offer a solution. I'm sure you've heard it or seen it on a sign at some point: *Christ is the Answer*. That's true, yes. But it's also a vast oversimplification. Trying to make it this easy and simple does a disservice to the one seeking a true solution to the hardships of life.

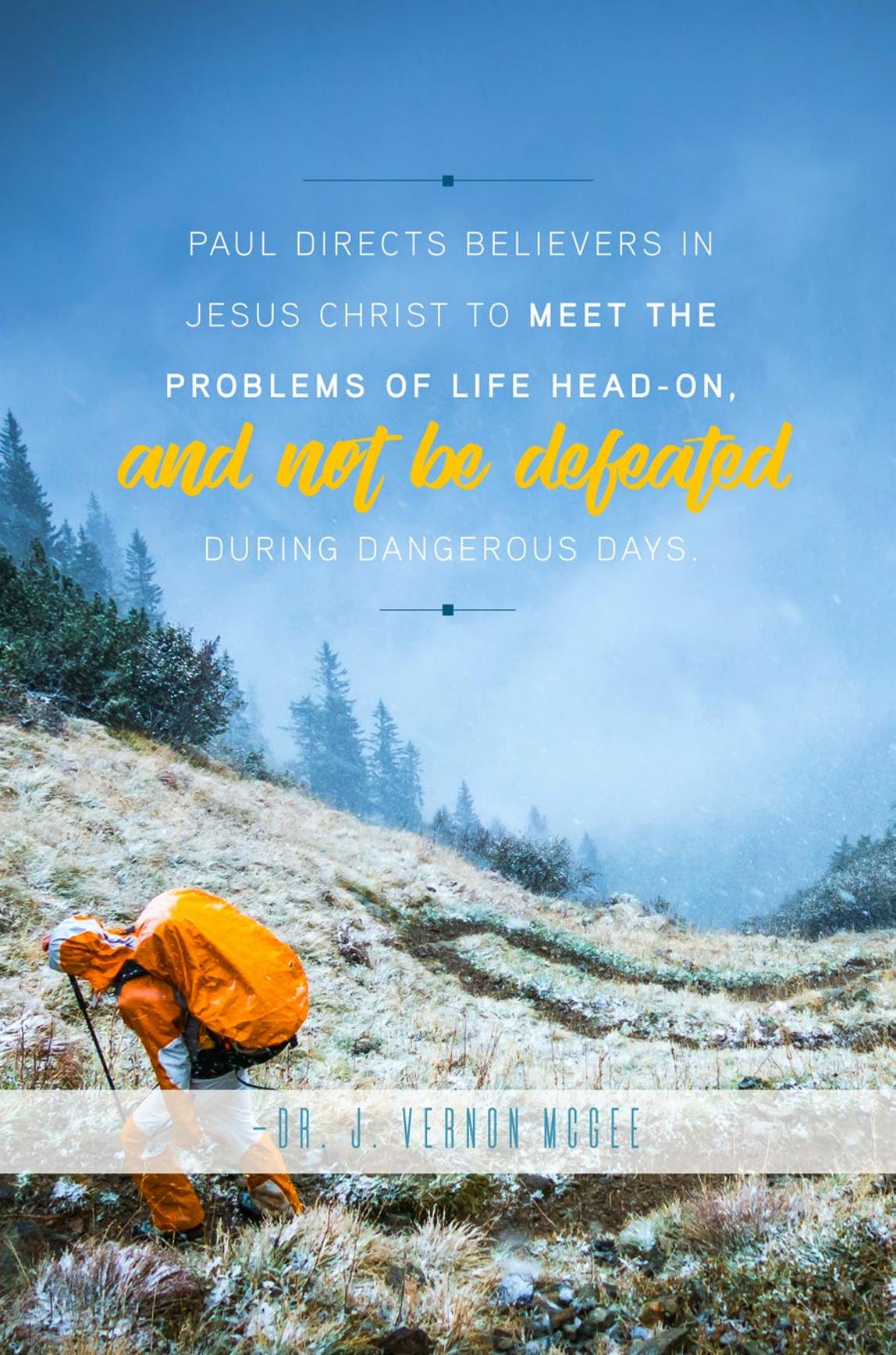
Paul wrote this letter to a man named Timothy. Thanks to the faithfulness of his mother and grandmother (named Eunice and Lois—see 2 Timothy 1:5), Timothy from childhood had a wonderful knowledge of Scripture. Keep that in mind as you read Paul's words to him:

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. –2 Timothy 3:14, 15

What does Paul mean “able to make you wise for salvation”? I warn you, don't try and oversimplify it to just “believe in Christ Jesus and you'll be saved.” Why not? That can't be all Paul is talking about because Timothy was *already* saved. He had been taught the Scriptures since his youth, and it was during Paul's first missionary journey through Asia Minor that Timothy accepted Christ as his Savior. As we'd say it today, he was born

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again. So what is Paul talking about then, if it's not coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? In other words, if it's not simply "Christ is the answer"?

Birth is just the beginning of life, not the end. When you're born, you've only just started, friend. We sometimes overemphasize the beginning so that we forget there's a life to be lived in these perilous times! *That* is what Paul talks about in his last letter. This is so important. He directs believers in Jesus Christ to meet the problems of life head-on, and not be defeated during dangerous days—that's the kind of salvation he's talking about.

I need that salvation today. Don't you?

WHAT IS THE REMEDY?

Now to the remedy. It's actually a prescription only God can fill.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. –2 Timothy 3:16

Allow me to make a correction to this translation. It's not *all* Scripture but every Scripture. Every one of these words are God's words to you and me, and they contain the prescription for living successfully for God today. There's no other place to get the remedy except in God's Word.

Like with most medicines, you're not done after just one dose. A man once approached evangelist Dwight L. Moody and said, "I hope to get enough religion out of your meetings to last me the rest of my life." Moody responded, "Did you eat enough breakfast this morning to last you the rest of your life?"

My friend, the Word of God contains the medicine you and I need to live in these hard days, but we must take *all* of it. The trouble today is that folks try to take just a part of the prescription. They read a daily devotion or a few verses and think

they're taking God's medicine. My beloved, *you've got to get into the book*. You don't get the answer with memorizing ten or even 150 verses. You need all of it.

Paul says "*you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them*" (v. 14). We need salvation today and tomorrow and the day after that. The word "continue" here can mean to be always at home. It's the same word our Lord used when He said, "*In My Father's house are many mansions*" (John 14:2)—abiding places.

Christian, do you live in the book? How much do you really read and study it?

YOUR GUIDEBOOK FOR LIFE

Paul paints a bleak but accurate picture of the times we live in:

For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. –2 Timothy 3:2-7

Are you a lover of self? Do you love money? Are you always criticizing, always finding fault? “*Having a form of godliness but denying its power*”—we can get mighty skilled at putting up a good front. Does that describe you? Do you have that form of godliness or do you have the power? We say these are characteristics of the last days, but these characteristics are also in the lives of believers! We need a salvation that delivers us from these things.

The life of the believer is a journey. If you are a Christian, you are a stranger down here, a pilgrim in a foreign land. You feel that, don't you? Then how are you to navigate these things throughout your life's journey? You need a road map, a chart, a compass. You need something to point the way. Where do you find those things? Look to the remedy—God's Word contains it all.

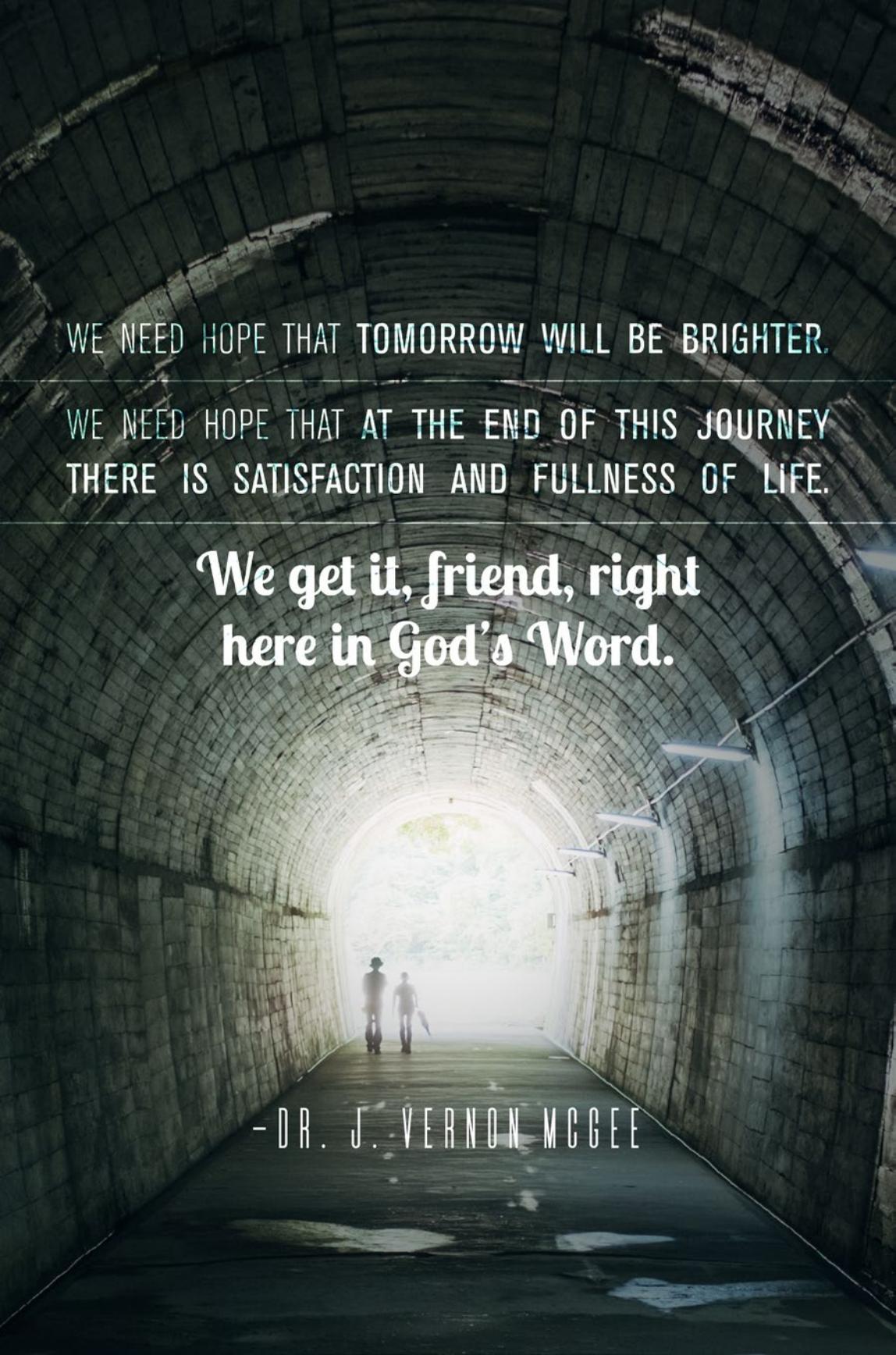
Do you believe that's true? Let's take a look at our specific needs and the Bible's answer to each one.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path ... The entrance of Your words gives light"* (Psalm 119:105, 130). The Bible is the only flashlight God has for you.

BREAD TO EAT: Jesus quoted Moses when He told Satan, *"Man shall not live by bread alone"* We need bread for hungry souls. Not physical bread, *"... but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4).

WATER: *"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10, 11). The psalmist says *"the river of God is full of water"* (Psalm 65:9). You hold the river in your hand, and it's full of water. Have you drunk from it recently?

A WAY TO KEEP CLEAN: One of the most difficult things to do on a long trip is keep clean. *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word"* (Psalm 119:9). There's water for bathing in the Word of God. *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:17). *"You are already clean," our Lord said, "because of the word which I have spoken to you"* (John 15:3). Have you had your spiritual bath recently?



WE NEED HOPE THAT TOMORROW WILL BE BRIGHTER.

WE NEED HOPE THAT AT THE END OF THIS JOURNEY
THERE IS SATISFACTION AND FULLNESS OF LIFE.

*We get it, friend, right
here in God's Word.*

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PROTECTION: Paul said perilous times would come, and we need a defense. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12).

FIRST AID KIT: Are you wounded? Brokenhearted? The Bible has in it the balm of Gilead to heal the brokenhearted and bind up their wounds (see Psalm 147:3).

COMPANIONSHIP: Our modern society suffers from an epidemic of loneliness. The Word of God says, *“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you”* (Deuteronomy 13:6). May I say, you won’t have a vision of the Lord Jesus today; He doesn’t speak that way anymore. He speaks through God’s book. If you want His companionship and fellowship today, the way to get it is through His Word.

HOPE: You’ll never complete the journey without this one thing. We need hope that tomorrow will be brighter. We need hope that at the end of this journey there is satisfaction and fullness of life. We get it, friend, right here in God’s Word: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jeremiah 29:11).

Have confidence in the Bible, my beloved, and you will find in it all you need to face the hardships of life.

*Not my opinions may I speak;
If so, my witness will be weak.
Not what in human books I find,
Or the conclusions of men’s minds,
But what my God has deigned to give,
The teaching whereby we may live;
The Book of Heaven, the Sacred Page,
The Rock of Faith in every age!
That only must my message be*

*If I shall bless humanity,
I am not left to seek, forsooth,
In learning's page to find the Truth,
But here it is beneath my hand
The Word which shall forever stand.
Unalterable, enduring, sure
Flows the Divine Fount fresh and pure.*

—William Olney

“The Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation,” Paul says. Just as with Timothy, a saving knowledge of Jesus as Savior must come first. But perilous times are coming, and these things characterizing the world seep into the hearts of Christians. How will you overcome these things? The remedy is right here in God's Word, but you have to take the entire prescription—there's no shortcut.

Your status as God's child is secure, but are you “wise for salvation”? Does the Word of God work in your life to deliver you? Jesus offers, *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink”* (John 7:37). This is the only condition: Come to Jesus. Learn of Him and His ways in God's book.

» MY TURN

Life is a journey for a Christian—a relationship with Jesus and inviting His Word to provide what we need. **Look up the following verses from God’s Word and reflect on what you’ve packed for the journey when you take His Word to heart.**

- A roadmap**—Psalm 119:105
- A light**—Psalm 119:30
- Bread to eat**—Luke 4:4
- Water**—Isaiah 55:10
- A way to keep clean**—John 15:3
- Protection/defense**—Ephesians 6:17
- A first-aid kit**—Psalm 147:3
- Companionship**—Psalm 119:165; Hebrews 13:5

Hope that tomorrow will be brighter, that at the end of the journey you’ll find satisfaction and fullness of life
—1 Peter 3:15

Which of the (above) packing supplies are you grateful to God for today?

- Check them off.** Then, **star one or two more** you’d like to specifically pray God will provide for you in this season.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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THE MOST
IMPORTANT
MESSAGE OF
YOUR LIFE.**

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from the TTB.org website. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
BIBLE AND LIVING THE
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