

7 Popular Bible Verses Often Taken Out of Context

Although the Bible's filled with breathtaking prose, certain verses tend to rise up in pop-culture's zeitgeist. People invest in art, mugs, journals, clothing or even tattoos that reference their favorite verses. However, some of the most popular verses are unfortunately understood far from their actual scriptural context.

Misapplying Scripture is dangerous. Basing your theology on sentiments that aren't biblical may leave you deeply confused when the "promises" you believed don't come to pass. We wanted to reframe seven misunderstood verses to better understand what they reveal to us about God's love.

1. **Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV):** "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" This verse was first on this list because it's so frequently taken out of context. Remember, this verse wasn't written in a context of God speaking directly to *you*, the modern-day reader. It's a promise God gives to His *entire* chosen people. In Jeremiah, God's promising the Hebrews, who are held captive in Babylon, that He's bringing them freedom. The "prosperity" here is about their practical physical needs.

It's not about modern readers magically becoming affluent just because they believe in God. This verse may also have a harsh edge when shared out of context—for someone with a chronic ailment, this verse can be prescribed to offer "magical healing." However, when a misunderstood promise doesn't come to pass, people's faith can be weakened.

2. **Philippians 4:13:** "I can do all things through him who gives me strength." This verse shows up frequently in

athletic environments, from Steph Curry writing the verse on his shoes to Tim Tebow referencing the verse on his face stickers; the insinuation is that professional athletes will have a competitive edge because they believe in Jesus.

However, in context, Paul writes this while awaiting trial (and potential execution) for preaching about Jesus' resurrection. Paul's encouraging the Philippian church to endure its suffering by remembering that Christ, who overcame death, is the source of its strength. It's about finding an inner strength when you're enduring spiritual adversity, not about being magically blessed with an athletic or professional competitive edge.

3. **Matthew 7:1 (MEV):** "Judge not, that you be not judged." Accompanied by the quote "only God can judge me," people may interpret this verse to mean that nobody has authority to assert that there's clear right and wrong. However, "only God can judge me" doesn't come from Bible, it comes from Tupac! If this verse meant that humans must stop judging each other, we ought to terminate our justice systems, trusting God to intervene and punish people who commit crimes. Certainly, our society's stronger for establishing rules to govern what behavior we'll tolerate and what must be stopped.

One reason many people avoid the church is because they're bothered by hypocrisy and self-righteousness among believers. To strengthen our witness, we need to root out "holier-than-thou" attitudes, making it clear that *everyone* is welcome in our churches.

4. **Psalms 46:10:** "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." It's incredibly easy to find Christian swag that reads "be still" or "be still and know that I am God." This implies that we need more time in stillness to find

deeper peace with God. While resting and listening to God is a great idea, that isn't what this verse is necessarily encouraging.

Keep reading to discover a more powerful message. This isn't speaking to one person isolated in their room, it's speaking to all of God's people. Peacefully unite with people across your nation and to the ends of the earth. In community, be still and know that God's plan is to reveal Himself to everyone.

5. **James 5:15:** "And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven." People may interpret this verse to mean that people who are sick must lack enough faith in Christ. Surely, their suffering's their own fault. However, this weaponized interpretation may do incredible damage. Although God's capable of miraculous healings, ultimately, we all can expect physical suffering, eventually leading to death.

This verse promises that through faith, we can be "saved" and "raised up," but what does that mean? Many people discover deeper love, greater wisdom and more peace when they suffer. Sometimes these spiritual and psychological insights are impossible to reach without first enduring sickness. When Christians suffer from illness, don't focus on just trying to pray their pain away. Lean into that suffering alongside them, discovering the saving insights that may arise within adversity.

6. **Romans 13:1** – "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are appointed by God." Taking it out of context, people interpret this to mean that we should just blindly follow any political leader, trusting God to work through them. However, what happens when authorities use their power to harm society? The

Egyptians enslaved the Hebrews, and God empowered Moses to overthrow this regime. King Darius was so upset by Daniel's worship of God that he punished Daniel to what should have been a certain death in the lion's den. Jesus became enraged to see economic leaders trying to profit off sacred worship ceremonies.

We regularly celebrate great Christian leaders for resisting oppressive governmental regimes. Christian abolitionists helped end slavery. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr elevated the Civil Rights Movement. Archbishop Desmond Tutu helped end South African's apartheid. When the government's actions prey on God's vulnerable children, it's our duty to act.

7. 1 Corinthians 13:4 (ESV): "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant." Ah, who doesn't love this love verse? It's a wedding main-staple, used as an instruction manual for those in relationships. While certainly this wisdom *is* helpful for couples, the application here is far broader. Paul's writing to the *entire* church in Corinth with this advice. Single or married, we are to love everyone in our community with this radical approach. {eo}

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