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GOD

tough times

DR. JOHN H. MUNRO



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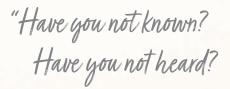


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CALVARY CHURCH

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The Lord is the everlasting God,

The Creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary;

His understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;

but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

ISAIAH 40:28-31



IFE CAN DIFFICULT, unpredictable, and even frightening. Each day brings its own challenges and struggles. They threaten to defeat us, discourage us, embitter us. Everyone, including followers of Jesus Christ, may feel overwhelmed.

What are we supposed to do? How are we meant to handle all that life brings?

Throughout this guide I reference many Scriptures, but our central passage is Isaiah 40:28–31, in which we find a brilliant promise:

"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."

ISAIAH 40:31

What does this mean? God-centered living gives us hope, grace, and strength in the struggles of life.

I encourage you to trust God more deeply in ways you never thought possible. In life's tough times, wait on the Lord. He promises to renew your strength, so that you soar high in life's challenges.

The purpose of this guide—and my prayer for you—is for you to experience this supernatural strength and peace which comes from God through a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. He loves you, and He cares for you no matter what you are facing.

Dr. John H. Munro

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BEHOLD YOUR GOD

SOMETIMES IT SEEMS THAT EVERYTHING is happening all at once. An excruciatingly difficult, devastating situation has come into your life. You may or may not believe in God, but if He is there, He is silent, and seems to have abandoned you. It's frightening. Painful. Totally draining. And you can't understand it.

Down through the centuries, the people of God have had such experiences.

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"Why, O LORD, do you stand far away?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"
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PSALM 10:1

"How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?"

PSALM 89:46

What do you do in tough situations?

We live in a self-help age where bookstores are full of solutions and techniques. Experts are around every corner to provide external solutions, or encourage you to find the answer within yourself, your own efforts and abilities. None of them have the answer.

Recognize that you are powerless to handle these difficult situations in life. Look away from your own ideas and the views of our culture. They are fleeting and will imprison you in your own thoughts and feelings. The heavens and the earth will pass away, but God and His Word will never pass away. Here is where you can find your help, the very anchor of your soul.

Why should we trust God?

God is supreme. We describe ourselves by our background, what we do, our family, our interests, and so on. But the Lord God does not derive His being from anyone. He is independent of any other being or cause for His existence. He has no beginning and no end. He always has been and always will be. He is ever-present—eternal in His being. I AM who I AM—uncreated, the uncaused cause, the first and the last. There is no God besides Him.

We are born, grow old and die, but God is eternally Himself—self-existent and self-sufficient. He doesn't need anyone or anything. God is never in process of becoming something else. In a world where we are constantly trying to improve or reinvent ourselves, God is our unchanging and unchangeable Rock.

Constant in His character, God is faithful to His eternal truths. He absolutely can be trusted and is completely dependable.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

PSALM 46:1

God is sovereign. God not only knows the end from the beginning, but He is in control of all things. When we describe God as sovereign, we mean that God is the ruler over all things. God controls all of the affairs of people and nations. He will always accomplish His plans and purposes, unlike us. You are not in control of the events and circumstances of your life. God is in control and knows how everything will unfold. Therefore, doesn't it make sense to trust Him, particularly in dark and confusing times?

God loves us. We trust friends and family members when we know that they have our best interests at heart. They love us, and they care what happens to us. Does it surprise you that this great eternal God who is the supreme, sovereign Creator, loves you and wants to have a personal relationship with you?

As imperfect, sinful people, we are unable to reach this almighty, holy God by ourselves, so He reached out to us. In Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself and offered a way of salvation, a way to live in peace with God and the promise of heaven. Jesus Christ—the Son of God and God the Son—died in your place on the cross. A God-centered life begins by receiving God's love in Jesus Christ.

"God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through Him."

1 JOHN 4:9

No matter how far away you are from God, no matter how deep the hole you are presently in, the love of God and the grace of God embrace you. You may feel overwhelmed. You may feel that your life is pointless. You may feel

that it doesn't matter whether you live or die. But you matter to God. The eternal, sovereign God loves you and me.

Take comfort and refuge in this awesome, all-powerful, incomparable God.

Are you beholding your incomparable God? Consider the stars. Not only did God create the stars, but He also has names for all of them.

"Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing."

ISAIAH 40:26

That's power! That's strength! That is wisdom. And that is knowledge. I know you have struggles and challenges, but take comfort in your incomparable, awesome, unique God.

God may sometimes be silent in your life. But God never abandons His children. He is Immanuel: God with us. The cross of Christ declares that God has not abandoned you. He loves you. He is on your side. He is for you!

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" ROMANS 8:31

The more you behold your God—the more you are focused on Him and on your personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ—the less your struggles and challenges will overwhelm you.

"Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."

ISAIAH 40:31

This waiting is not like being in the doctor's waiting room. This waiting on the Lord is admitting that you cannot handle the situation on your own. This waiting is looking away from your struggles, challenges, and tough circumstances—and placing a confident and patient trust in God. He will act even though you are uncertain of His timing and of what He will do. Your hope is in the Lord.



FACING TRIALS & STRUGGLES

SOMETIMES PROBLEMS, SUFFERING,

disappointments, and confusion come slowly into our lives. At other times they come like bolts from the blue—unexpected, unpredicted, unwelcome. A serious illness. The death of a loved one. A betrayal. A business failure. A financial crisis. Loss of employment. Devastating news about a family member. A virus. In a split second, our lives are turned upside down

When we go through the struggles and challenges of life, we often ask, "Why?" Is God punishing us? What have we done wrong? Why is life so difficult? If there is a God, why does He allow terrible things to happen?

One day during the ministry of Jesus, His disciples saw a man blind from birth. They wrongly deduced that either the blind man or his parents had sinned. Before healing the blind man, Jesus corrects them:

"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

IOHN 9-3

Two Christian couples put their houses on the market to be sold. Both of them are faithful followers of Jesus Christ. On the first day it was listed, one home sells for more than the asking price. After six months, the other house is still not sold. The owners of the first house (which sold) tell their friends it is "a God thing." But was God not involved with the status of the second house?

Do you believe that when things happen in accordance with your plans, God is at work? But when things don't go according to your plans, God is not at work? Isn't that a bit trite? We must understand that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are often unfathomable.

"His understanding is unsearchable."

ISAIAH 40:28

Struggles and trials are part of life and the Christian experience.

In the first chapter of the book of James, the apostle writes, "when you meet trials of various kinds..." (James 1:2). James does not say "if" you meet trials, but "when" you meet trials. Trials are to be expected. Jesus taught:

"In the world you will have tribulation."

JOHN 16:33

Trials are not a mere possibility or something to be avoided; trials are unavoidable and play a purposeful part in your life.

Think of the life experiences of those in the Bible. Joseph suffered in an Egyptian prison after he was falsely accused and sentenced unjustly. The Apostle Paul was shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and slandered. Following Jesus is sometimes painful and difficult.

Some Christ-followers are persecuted. Some have serious health issues. Some have family crises. Some know the pain of being abused or treated unfairly. Some have profound challenges when serving the Lord. Some children and students are bullied or ridiculed when they say they are following Jesus.

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

1 PETER 4:12

Followers of Jesus are not sheltered from trials or granted some kind of immunity from them.

Having a biblical, God-centered perspective is essential.

Every single one of us faces struggles and challenges in life. Still, so often we focus on our difficult circumstances, our hurts, our needs and expectations—rather than focusing on God. I want to keep pointing you to the greatness of God, to the grace of God, and to the beauty of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we wrestle with tough questions and the struggles of life, it is essential that we have a biblical view of God and a Godcentered perspective.

We don't have a small god—a god which looks remarkably like ourselves—a god who serves us, a tame god, a god of convenience, a god who exists to make life comfortable and happy for us. God is the Lord God Almighty and answerable to no one! He doesn't need anyone's permission to do anything. His authority is unlimited and unrestrained. He is the sovereign King, the Creator.

Don't treat God as if He were a genie in a bottle doing what you want Him to do. He is the supreme Lord God, who is sovereign over the whole universe. When your life is turned upside down, it is not a matter of luck or coincidence or chance or fate. There are no surprises to God. What is unexpected to you is all part of God's plan. A deep understanding of this truth gives us great comfort when our life turns upside down.

No matter the circumstances, God has a purpose.

The most painful times of our life have a purpose. Biblical joy is not the emotion of feeling happy, rather it is understanding that our trust is in a good God whose plans and purposes are being worked out in our lives.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." JAMES 1:2

God is doing something in my life or using my life to impact the lives of others. That's exciting, and we "count it all joy"! It is not that we enjoy the trials, but when we have a God-centered perspective, we trust Him and find peace knowing that He is accomplishing His purposes in our lives. In some situations, His purposes may eventually be revealed. Other times we may never understand, but we trust our all-powerful heavenly Father.

"For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." JAMES 1:3

Trials produce endurance and spiritual maturity. In these dark nights, we learn to trust God in deeper and more profound ways. We are stripped of selfreliance, pride, self-sufficiency, and of taking God for granted. Amid these challenges and trials, we learn not only to trust God more but to love Him

more deeply. Someone has said endurance is "faith stretched out." When your faith is stretched out, you begin to understand that although God's hand is often invisible, it is always a loving hand!

Through these trials, we can rely on our heavenly Father and receive God's supernatural comfort.

"So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

2 CORINTHIANS 1:4

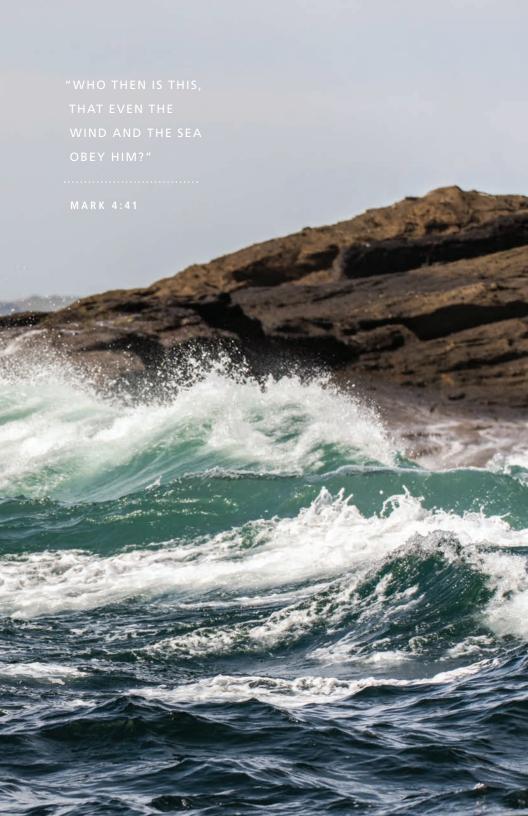
Our own experiences enable us to reach out to others who are suffering in similar ways with compassion and comfort. Not sure what to say or do? God will grant you His wisdom to deal with these trials in a practical way if you ask in faith.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord."

JAMES 1:5-7

You may be facing a tremendous trial right now. Stand strong. Don't be overcome by self-pity. Don't be bitter. Don't run from God.

Count it all joy and trust in God's purposes.



FAITH, NOT FEAR

SO MANY PEOPLE ARE ANXIOUS AND AFRAID. We are fearful about our health, our future, our kids, money, employment, school, relationships, politics, a virus, world events, and the list goes on.

Fear is one of the most common of human emotions. Every one of us experiences fear. However, did you know that one of the most frequent commands in the Bible is "fear not"?

Why should we "fear not"?

Remember who our Lord is. He is the Almighty God! He is our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. This supreme and sovereign Lord loves us and is our Helper and our Guide. An old woman in a village was asked why she was not afraid during an earthquake. Her answer? "I rejoice that I know the God who shakes the world "

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"God is our refuge and strength,
    a very present help in trouble.
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Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea."

PSALM 46:1-2

The Lord can be trusted. In a changing world of fear and anxieties, God is our faithful and unchanging Rock.

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"Fear not, nor be afraid;
   have I not told you from of old and declared it?
   And you are my witnesses!
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Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

ISAIAH 44:8

He will never leave us or forsake us. Friends and family may change, people may let you down, but God is 100% faithful. He never gets tired of us; He never acts unkindly or with irritation towards us. His character is constant. He is the faithful God. Whatever your fears, the Lord is with you.

Replace fear with faith and your trouble with trust.

In our world, it is often difficult to know who to believe and what to believe. Think of all the spin and false promises we hear. But God's Word is absolute truth. See Numbers 23:19, John 17:17, and Titus 1:1-3. When the Bible speaks, God speaks.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

For every situation, you can absolutely depend on God's Word for all of life and all of eternity. So when God tells you not to fear because He is with you, trust Him. When God tells you not to worry because He will strengthen and help you, trust Him.

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" PSALM 118:6

The answer to your fear is faith. Faith not in yourself, not in a doctor, not in an employer, not in a stock market, not in your family and friends—but faith in the eternal God, the Rock of Ages. His purposes are unfailing; His promises unassailable. His faithful promises flow from His immutable faithfulness. Obey the command—fear not! ■



EXCHANGE WORRY FOR THE PEACE OF GOD

WHEN LIVING IN THE REAL WORLD, it is hard not to feel stressed, to feel the weight of our problems, and be upset and discouraged by world events. Anxieties, stress, tension, and persistent worries attack all of us. Is there a cure?

Is it possible to experience peace during the storms of life?

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives a challenging command:

"Do not be anxious about your life."

MATTHEW 6:25

And in Matthew 6:25–34, He gives us several reasons that we should remember. Read these verses and reflect on the teaching of Jesus on anxiety.

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

MATTHEW 6:26

Your heavenly Father is watching over you. Learn from the birds! You are of greater value to Him than the birds. Do you know God as your heavenly Father?

"And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

MATTHEW 6:27

Worrying produces absolutely nothing. Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but it gets you nowhere! Worrying is a totally pointless exercise and is ultimately counterproductive. The philosopher Seneca said, "He suffers more than necessary who suffers before it is necessary." We must humbly accept what we cannot change.

"And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

MATTHEW 6:28-34

God knows all your needs, and He provides.

As a loving parent, you know what is best for your children, and our sovereign God knows exactly what we need. Parents, what would you think if your toddler was worrying about whether she was going to have clothes to wear this week?

Your heavenly Father provides all the needs of those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (v. 33). What peace and security! People who hold tightly to what they have are often worriers. Put Christ first, and God will provide.

God gives you all of the strength, wisdom, and grace you need for today (v. 34). Did you notice this? He does not give you the strength, wisdom, and grace that you will need for tomorrow. He gives you provisions for today. Being anxious about tomorrow will rob you of today's joy and strength. The future belongs not to you but God. Jesus is saying, "Stop worrying!"

What should you do with your time instead of worrying? As we obey Jesus' command not to worry, God's Word also gives us essential guidance on what we should be doing.

Bring all your worries and anxieties to the Lord.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Have you been losing sleep due to worry? The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. All of your cares, all of your worries, all of your anxieties are to be brought to the Lord in prayer. All means no exceptions! When you do that, the power of the worry is broken!

As you pray, give thanks.

"Then they believed his words; they sang his praise."

PSALM 106:12

Thanksgiving is essential and often forgotten in dealing with anxiety and worry. Don't be self-pitying, bitter, complaining, or whining in life's difficulties. These habits not only stop you from being thankful, but they also make you feel worse. When we are thankful, we acknowledge God's goodness and grace to us in the past and our dependence upon Him for the present and future. Your life is in the hands of your Heavenly Father. There is no better place to be!

Cast all of your cares on the Lord.

"Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you."

1 PETER 5:7

Why are you trying to carry your anxieties, worries, problems, and cares by yourself? They are not for you to carry; they belong to the Lord! Do you have a burden you can't handle? Give it to the Lord.

Claim God's promise. Release your worry, and receive His peace in Christ Jesus.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:7

God receives all of your cares, and you receive His peace. What an exchange! Take all of your worries, all of your cares, all of your anxieties, and cast them upon the Lord. Stop holding onto them. In the midst of all of the storms, stress, anxiety, and problems, you will receive a supernatural peace and divine peace. God's very peace will stand guard in your heart and mind, and you will no longer feel mentally and emotionally exhausted.

However, the promise of this supernatural peace of God is not for just anyone. It is for those who are "in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). If you have not received Jesus Christ as your Savior, your greatest problem is not your personal worries or anxieties. Your biggest problem is your sin, and about that you should be concerned. Your sin against God—that separation and hopelessness—is a very heavy burden. There is no way in which you can free yourself from it.

Before you can experience the peace of God, you must first have peace with God.

Jesus Christ came as the sin bearer; He is our burden bearer. At the cross, He took all of our sins and paid the price for them with His own blood. Now in exchange for your sin, you can receive salvation. You can be "in Christ Jesus."

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

ROMANS 5:1

Exchange your burden of sin for the salvation which comes from God when you place your faith in Jesus Christ. And in Christ Jesus, claim the glorious promise of the peace of God.

God is well able to deal with all of the stress, strain, worries, and anxieties of your life. Exchange all your worries for His peace. ■

"THEN YOU WILL CALL UPON ME AND COME AND PRAY TO ME, AND I WILL HEAR YOU. YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME, WHEN YOU SEEK ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART."

JEREMIAH 29:12-13



LIVE A GOD-CENTERED LIFE

DO YOU NOW HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING of what it means to live a God-centered life and to have a God-centered perspective?

It is trusting God. It is living by faith. And this means being different from our world, standing on the unchanging promises of God, and having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Trust God for life and hope.

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

JOHN 17:3

He is the eternal, living, and life-giving God. To know God through Jesus Christ is to live and have the assurance of eternal life. Not to know God is to live an empty life with no meaning and no hope.

Trust God for strength.

"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

ISAIAH 40:31

Draw your strength not from your own might or achievements but from the living God who does not faint or grow weary.

Trust God for wisdom.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

JAMES 1:5

Lacking wisdom? Ask God. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows how every situation in your life is going to turn out. He is all wise. Doesn't it, therefore, make sense to trust God for wisdom?

"For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.'

ISAIAH 46:9-10

Trust God for peace.

"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."

ISAIAH 26:3-4

Those who know God don't panic. In times of crisis, those who are Godcentered are at peace. Their trust is in the Lord, not on the superficial things of this world

REMEMBER... In the difficult, dark, and fearful situations of life, trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Don't be anxious at the size of the crisis or the circumstances of your problem. Focus on God to whom you are now bringing all of your cares. He is all powerful. No situation is too difficult for Him or too insignificant. He is the God who can move mountains. And He loves you with an everlasting love.

When you are trusting God and living a God-centered life, you will not fall apart when struggles come. Following Christ is a life of trust—a life of faith each step of the way. It is a daily dependence on God. When you trust Him, He will give you all of the strength, all of the grace, all of the wisdom, and all of the peace you need.

DO YOU KNOW JESUS CHRIST?

WITHOUT OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, the unique and perfect Son of God, we are unable to have a personal relationship with the living God. Without Jesus, we are without purpose, without hope, without joy, and without peace. We're merely surviving in a dark and chaotic world without a firm foundation or a place of safety. His endless love compelled Him to die for your sins in God's plan of salvation. His resurrection conquered fear and death!

Place your faith in Jesus.

Jesus is the only One who can save you and transform your life. Turn from your sins and place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

JOHN 3:16

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

IOHN 8:12

"Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

ROMANS 10:9-10

Do you have questions about Jesus Christ? Would you like to talk with a pastor or have someone pray with you or for you?

Contact us at **theverdict@calvarychurch.com**.

"Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with
my righteous right hand."



THE VERDICT

"Where the Gospel is preached, the lives of men and women and boys and girls are transformed. Through His death and resurrection, Christ gives us peace with God, present power for living, and future hope for eternal life."

— PASTOR JOHN H. MUNRO

The Verdict is a daily and weekly radio program featuring the passionate expository Bible teaching of Pastor John H. Munro.



John H. Munro

Born and raised in Scotland, John graduated from the University of Edinburgh and practiced law in Scotland before God called him to full-time ministry. He and his wife, Gudny, moved to Texas, where he attended Dallas Theological Seminary.

For more than 30 years, John has dedicated his life to pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching the Word of God. He has served as Senior Pastor in Kalamazoo, MI, Pittsburgh, PA, and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Since February 2006, he has served as Senior Pastor at Calvary Church in Charlotte, NC.

Each day on The Verdict, listeners are challenged to turn to the Bible and render a "verdict" as they consider their personal response to the truth of God's Word. John Munro presents a clear examination of Scripture, offering insight and application for all backgrounds, from those unfamiliar with the Gospel to mature believers following Christ.

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