

# A pain in the neck



Caroline Hodgson *reflects on* Galatians 6:[1-6] 7-16

I'm struck by the personal statement that Paul makes, quite out of context, in the middle of this passage: "See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!" Looking into it in a bit more depth, I discover that this is probably a reference to the poor eyesight that dogged him, to which it's thought he was referring in Corinthians when he wrote about his "thorn... in the flesh".

Yet for all Paul's physical eye problems, here was a man of great spiritual vision and, indeed, visions. Acts recounts a number of them – the Macedonian man pleading for help in a dream, God telling him, "speak and do not be silent". Later, before King Agrippa, Paul tells him, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision".

Today I'm troubled by a neck ache which makes me grumpy. It's a symptom of an ongoing back problem that I can't shift, which puzzles the physiotherapist and prevents me from doing as much physical activity as I'd like. Frankly, it gets me down. But what if, like Paul, I could learn to compensate spiritually for my physical limitations, precisely where those limitations lie?

The dictionary definition of "stiff-necked" is "haughty and stubborn". Could I use my experience of, and insight into, physical neck pain to learn how to be the spiritual and emotional antithesis? Could I learn to turn freely to look at others and, in so doing, be soft, supple and humble? 🙏

Lord, thank you for the revelation of your word, and for the wisdom, willpower and example of your servant Paul. Amen.

## World Chocolate Day

by Caroline Hodgson

Did you even know there's a World Chocolate Day? Well there is, and it's tomorrow – as if you needed an excuse to treat yourself to a bit of chocolate!

But, to be serious for a moment, let's think what chocolate represents – it's a treat, an indulgence, a luxury. And there's nothing wrong with that every now and again. Of course, we traditionally celebrate the end of Lent and Christ's resurrection by tucking into chocolate eggs!

The problem begins when we turn our treats into everyday essentials – the novelty wears off and the joy evaporates. Serious addictions develop in this way, but also smaller habits that can be very hard to break.

So by all means have a bit of chocolate tomorrow to mark World Chocolate Day, but as you do, give some prayerful thought to your habits and compulsions, and ask yourself whether they still bring you joy, or whether a little restraint might be called for. Bon appetit! 🍫

“God has entrusted me with myself.”

Epictetus (c. AD 50-135), Greek Stoic philosopher

## People of the New Testament

### James, the Lord's brother

by Caroline Fletcher

Many people are surprised to learn that Jesus had a brother, even though there are a number of references in the Bible, not only to James but to other brothers and sisters. In Mark 3:32, for instance, as Jesus is teaching, he is told: "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside".

James plays an important role in Acts and is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Galatians and 1 Corinthians. We also have the letter of James, which scholars believe was written by Jesus'

brother, and the letter of Jude, traditionally held to be written by another brother, which opens with the words, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James".

The Gospels suggest that James and his siblings were not followers of Jesus during his lifetime. John 7:5 says, "not even his brothers believed in him". Mark 3:21 says that Jesus' family arrived at a house where he was teaching "to restrain him". These are strong words. Yet James went on to support the Gentile mission and Christianity in becoming the worldwide faith it is today. 🙏