

**DID GOD REALLY SAY: “GOD WILL NEVER GIVE YOU
MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE”?**

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July 31, 2022

TEXT: I Corinthians 10:1-13, II Corinthians 1:8-9

As I was growing up, I had all sorts of advice given to me, by my Grandmother in particular and by my brothers. Some of these wise adages came from friends at school. And this was when I was growing up in Oklahoma and Texas – but I am confident you all may have received some of the same advice growing up in the Midwest or other parts of the country.

So, let's see if any of these sound familiar:

Don't step on a crack - or you'll break your mother's back.

I really worried about that as a child. I didn't ever want to do anything to harm my mother. Any body else ever feel that way?

Don't swallow chewing gum or it will stay in your stomach for 7 years.

Or how about this one? Don't walk under a ladder – or you'll have bad luck! Any body still walk around ladders?

Or how about: Don't break a mirror or you'll have seven years of bad luck!

Or – don't swallow watermelon seeds or you'll grow a watermelon in your stomach. I distinctly remember my brothers thumping on my tummy as a child and exclaiming – “look that watermelon has already started to grow!” That kind of worried me – I must admit!

How about this one: If a black cat walks in front of you, you'll have bad luck! Did you know that is particular to the United States? Apparently in Britain and Japan, a black cat walking in front of you is good luck!

Now I heard this a lot from my Grandmother: “If you sit too close to that television, you will ruin your eyesight!” And this one: “If you cross your eyes, they will stay that way!”

Now all these adages had all sorts of origins – some were just based on senseless superstitions – but others may have had some truth and wisdom to it like – you really shouldn't probably swallow your gum or maybe it is safer not to walk under that ladder.

Well – we have been hearing through our sermon series about some statements that we all have been known to say from time to time that we assume are found in the Bible – but aren't. And sometimes, the statements may actually be confusing or hurtful – and give us some mixed-up views about God.

How about this one. Have you ever been struggling – going through a hard time. Maybe you feel like you’ve got all the burdens of the world weighing down upon you – and someone comes up and says to you: Remember, God never gives us more than we can handle.

I am sure many of us, from time to time have had someone tell us that. Perhaps you yourself have said those words to someone. Usually – when those words are said, they are meant to encourage or support someone. I find it is particularly said when we don’t really know what to say to someone – there has to be some reason that the person is going through such a bad time – surely God has a reason.

I’ve heard people even joke around about this – much like Mother Teresa did when she said: *“I know God won’t give me anything I can’t handle – I just wish He didn’t trust me so much!”* Has anyone heard that before?

Well, I have to tell you – these words are NOT in the Bible! You can scour through all the Scriptures – in different versions of the Bible and you won’t find them there.

So, where did we get this notion – and is it true to who God is?

Well, it is believed that this saying may come from a misinterpretation of our passage for today from I Corinthians 10:13. I invite you to open your Bible to I Corinthians 10 and we’ll read verses 12-13. But first, in order to understand Scripture –we always need to remember several things: who wrote the Scripture, to whom was it written and what was the context that passage.

So, before we start reading our passage, take note that this was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, around 51 AD. Corinth was a large city, located on the coast of Greece, which had pagan influences everywhere. As you can see from this picture, the temple of Apollo was just one of a dozen or more temples that would have been standing and in use during the time of the Apostle Paul. It has been said that there was a temple on nearly every corner and with that came all sorts of immorality. In fact, Corinth had a reputation in the Roman world at this time. “To live like a Corinthian” was synonymous with drunkenness and sexual license.”¹ Such was the environment where these new Christians were living. They were trying to live a Christian life but the temptation to go back to their former pagan life was, I am sure, very strong. So, Paul wrote to encourage them to not give into the temptation. Such is the context of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. So, let’s read what he has to say to them in chapter 10, reading verses 12-13:

¹² If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. ¹³ The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.

Paul tells us that we *all* face temptations in life – but the good news is that, even when some of the temptations are overwhelming and powerful – we don’t have to give in to them.

Because God can be trusted to provide a way to escape from the temptations. He will be there to show us the way out!

Notice – temptations are about choice. We have a choice to say yes or no to the temptation that is placed before us. God will give us the strength to make the right choice. But we have to be alert, listening to God’s leading and depending on His strength – and then He will help us overcome temptation! There will never be a temptation so big that God won’t be there to help you find a way out – and endure! That’s what this passage is all about.

But notice this passage doesn’t say anything about trials and sufferings. This passage does not say that God won’t give you more trials and suffering than you can handle. In fact, you can be sure throughout Scripture that the exact opposite is true. So many examples are in the Bible showing that many people suffered – and were crushed and overwhelmed beyond their ability to endure. A great example of this is seen again in Paul’s letters to the church in Corinth – this time found in II Corinthians 1:8-9. Listen to his description:

⁸ We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁹ In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ And he did rescue us from mortal danger; and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.

Paul and Timothy were crushed and overwhelmed through their experiences through the province of Asia. In fact, it seemed beyond their ability to endure – and they thought they would die! They had more than they could handle!

But what happened? They stopped relying on themselves and started relying on God who gave them the help and hope they needed. As they placed their confidence in Him – and not their own abilities – they could see that God would rescue them and carry them through this overwhelming circumstance in their lives.

I think this is so important to note. When we say “God won’t give you more that you can handle” – it is really focusing a lot on “our ability” – more than ‘you’ can handle. We are falling into that trap of trying to “rely on ourselves,” as Paul shared – and thinking, “God must trust me a lot to handle all of this that He has laid upon me.” No – it is not about our ability to handle things. We can’t. We don’t have the strength and all the power. It is only God’s power and faithfulness that will get us through. We have to stop relying on ourselves and rely on God!

The Apostle knew so many times of suffering and feeling weak. I think he had so many things that he had trouble handling. In particular we hear about, is in his second letter to the Corinthian church, we read that he had a thorn in the flesh. We don’t know exactly what that thorn in the flesh was – but we know it bothered Paul greatly. He begged God to remove it from him. I am guessing he would say that it was more than he could handle! But how did God respond? We read in II Corinthians 12:9, God says, “*My grace is enough; it’s all you need. My*

power works best in weakness.” God didn’t remove the overwhelming burden – but He gave Paul the grace and power to endure.

You see, really what is a more accurate way of talking about our trials and burdens is this: *God doesn’t give us what we can handle ~ God helps us handle what we’ve been given.*

We are always going to have problems and suffering in this world. Jesus even said that *“In this world you will have troubles and trials.”* (John 16:33) And we just DON’T have the power to handle the burdens and suffering that life dishes out – BUT – God does! Jesus says we are to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world – and He has the power and ability to help us handle whatever we have to face in this life.

Another way of saying it goes like this: *There may be things that are more than we can handle. But there is nothing too big for God to handle.* God is our refuge and strength – and there is nothing – no burden or trial – no divorce or death – no sickness or pain – no struggle we face that seems too much to bear – NOTHING will be able to separate us from God’s love. We will be able to be to get through those difficult times, not because of how good we are BUT only because of how good God is – and how HE will carry us through them. It is HIS ability and power and grace that we need, and it is sufficient for our every need. And He can take those burdens and even turn them into something good that will glorify His name – if we open ourselves up to His leading and care.

Consider the story of Annie Johnson Flint. She was born in 1866. By the time she was six years old, she had lost her mother and father to illnesses and was adopted by a wonderful Christian family named Flint. And she herself gave her life to Christ at a Methodist revival. But both of her adoptive parents died just before she finished high school. Imagine losing two sets of parents by the time you were 18!

Well, after graduating from high school, Annie went on to become an elementary school teacher, but in her second year was afflicted with arthritis that worsened to the point where she was unable to walk. She was to spend the rest of her life, roughly another 40 years, bound to a wheelchair and living in a sanitarium where others could provide for her physical needs.

She could no longer teach – but she became a writer of poetry whose words appeared in gift books, greeting and Christmas cards, and even wrote several hymns.

The commentary on her life reports that “later in life she was unable to open her hands and could no longer write but continued to compose many of her poems on a typewriter using her knuckles.” And that “she sought healing, but in the end, she was thoroughly convinced that God intended to glorify Himself through her, in her weak earthen vessel.” She passed away at the age of 66.

Annie is probably best remembered for a poem she wrote called “What God Hath Promised.” And it goes like this:

*God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flowers strewn pathways all our lives through
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.*

*But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way.
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.²*

Oh, how grateful I am that even though there will be things too hard for me to handle - God is bigger and stronger – and He helps me handle whatever I've been given. *"Whatever you are facing today, God sees it! Whatever it is that you can barely even whisper in a prayer, God hears! Whatever it is that is weighing you down, God feels it and God is more than able to handle all of it!"*³

PRAYER

O God – thank You! Thank You for Your promises! And for being a Promise- keeper! Thank you for being our refuge and strength and for giving us the help we need in times of trouble. We have nothing to fear – even when our world seems to be falling apart – for You will help us handle everything we've been given. Thank You so much Lord for this great promise and hope! We love you Lord and pray this in the name of our loving Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN

INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹Adam Hamilton, *Half Truths*, 2016 Abingdon Press, pages 81-82.

²Ibid., pages 99-101. Story also found in "Feeling the Burdens of Life" by Chas Lyons.
<https://stonycove.medium.com/feeling-the-burdens-of-life-339c40ca33aa>

³Heather Zempel, "Did God Really? God Will Not Give You More Than You Can Handle?", August 2, 2015, National Community Church.

Other resources –

"God Won't Give More Than I Can Handle" by Jim Kilson as found in sermoncentral.com

"Half Truths: God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle" by Pastor Jeff at St. Andrews United Methodist Church, www.saumcfindlay.org

God will Never Give You More Than You Can Handle" by Steve Johnson.
www.insightforliving.ca