

SERMON: God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle?

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 10:13

It was the worst pain I have ever felt in my life. Even worse than giving birth! It felt like someone was twisting the muscle that crosses the middle of my back. Twisting it and pulling it as though it were a wet towel, and they were wringing it to get the water out. These terrible spasms began about 24 hours after I received an infusion of a drug to prevent loss of bone density.

So, I called my oncologist and reported to her nurse that I was experiencing this unbearable pain and was finding no relief from the common pain relievers. I was hoping that they might order a prescription for a muscle relaxant or something stronger than Tylenol. After checking with the doctor, the nurse called me back and told me that my pain was a "common" side effect, but they could not prescribe anything more than over-the-counter pain medicine. If I needed something stronger, she said I would have to visit the ER.

I could barely get up from my recliner or my bed and get to the bathroom. There was no way I could get in the car, much less sit for hours in an uncomfortable waiting room. I tried to explain to the nurse how excruciating the pain was. "Common" was not even among the top one hundred adjectives I would use to describe it. But she just kept saying that this was "common" and expected, and I would just have to ride it out.

I was reminded of this experience when I read the chapter in Adam Hamilton's book, *Half Truths*, about that phrase people use to make us feel better about our suffering: GOD WON'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE.

One woman I knew in Iowa worked as a hospice nurse. She witnessed terrible suffering, often untimely death, and heart wrenching grief nearly every day. Filled with frustration and anger, she described the idea that GOD WON'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE as "total B.S." Though she felt no need to hide her true feelings behind an abbreviation. If you have ever

been told this while drowning in your own time of trouble, you may be familiar with the feeling.

But we just heard it read from the Bible, didn't we? Well, not in those exact words. Let's hear some different translations of 1 Corinthians 10:13. In the New International Version, we read, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

The New Revised Standard Version: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

The Good News Bible reads: "Every test that you have experienced is the kind that normally comes to people. But God

keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm; at the time you are put to the test, he will give you the strength to endure it, and so provide you with a way out.”

Eugene Peterson writes it this way in *The Message*: “No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.”

There seems to be some disagreement about whether Paul was originally writing about *testing or temptation*, or both, as Peterson used in *The Message*. Adam Hamilton confirms that the original Greek word can be translated either way, as “tempted” or “tested.” So, he looked deeper, beyond the language. “... a look at the context of Paul’s words shows that he was talking about temptation, including sexual immorality (v. 8) and idolatry (v. 14) but not trials and hardships.”

Hamilton continues, "Paul is writing here to the Christian community at Corinth, a large port city in Greece. Around A.D. 51, during one of his missionary journeys, Paul founded a church there. Corinth was like many port towns: people and influences from all over the world were on display there. Pagan influences were everywhere.... If you purchased meat in the local marketplace, chances were good that it came from an animal that had been sacrificed to a pagan god at one of Corinth's temples. Such was Corinth's reputation in the Roman world that "to live like a Corinthian," a phrase popular at the time, was synonymous with drunkenness and sexual license."

"Most of the new... Christians Paul was addressing had been pagans until the church was founded. They were trying to leave behind the idol worship and the temple prostitutes that were part of religious life in places like Corinth's shrine to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love...." It was like a recovering alcoholic trying to stay sober while living in a town with a bar or liquor store on every corner. "The Corinthians were trying to follow Jesus, but

some of them also were going back to their former ways, and Paul was trying to help them.”

Prior to the verse we’re looking at Paul writes of how the Israelites in the wilderness had similar temptations for idol worship and sexual promiscuity, and God had struck them down because of their sin. Like the Israelites, the Corinthians were also being tempted. It’s a fact of life for all of humanity. We all face temptations of all kinds. The temptation to lie. To cheat. To steal. To hurt one another. Even Jesus was tempted.

Hamilton writes, “This passage is not about God declining to give you more burdens in life than you can handle. It is about God helping you when you are tempted.... Temptation is indeed a test of your resolve, your character, and your faith. And that is what Paul is talking about here - not about adversity and the difficult circumstances that come into every life at some point. The good news, according to Paul, is that God will not allow us to

be tempted beyond our abilities. Instead, God will always supply us with a way out so that we can endure temptation.”

Many of you will remember way back in the 1970’s when the comedian Flip Wilson made this saying popular: “The devil made me do it.” Had the internet been in existence at the time, this would have gone viral. It would have been a meme. It was used by people of all ages and colors all around the country. Most of the time, we were just going for laughs with a well-known and well-loved punchline. But I’m sure there were also times when people legitimately tried to blame their bad behavior on a more powerful force of evil outside themselves.

Of course, our God is more powerful still. And Paul assures the people of Corinth and beyond that *when* we are tempted, God will always give us a way out - IF only we are alert to it and willing to take it.

It is also important to remember that God does not *give us* trials or temptations of any kind in the first place. But stuff happens. And sometimes it's just too much. Sometimes we become overwhelmed with trouble. Sometimes we can't handle it. The good news is that God will be there to catch us when we fall and to carry us when we can no longer continue on our own.

Paul's words to the Romans are comforting to me when I have no other answers. "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor

powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When life gives us more than we can handle, may we all hold fast to this truth... to the glory of God!

AMEN.