January 14, 2017

1 Corinthians 10:13; Psalm 46:1-2

Actually, that's not in the Bible: God won't give you more than you can handle.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

1 Corinthians 10:13 Common English Bible

 No temptation has seized you that isn’t common for people. But God is faithful. God won’t allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

Psalm 46:1-2 Common English Bible

God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea,

Today we begin a new sermon series called “Actually, that’s not in the Bible.” We are going to be looking at familiar phrases like “God won’t give you more than you can handle” or “Everything happens for a reason.” They sound Christian, like something you might even find in the Bible. They capture some element of truth, but also miss the point in important ways. The inspiration for the series is rooted in a very common phenomenon that happens as we navigate life together. In our lives we will encounter pain. It is inevitable. We will be in horrible situations that aren’t fair. We have this human instinct to want to fix what’s broken, an instinct to want to help people stop hurting. Another instinct is to want to understand what is happening so we can control it somehow, so that we don’t have to be afraid. A lot of that instinct is good because it is rooted in love for others. We sincerely want to help; we want to make it better but often that instinct leads us to do or say something that is not only unhelpful but can actually do damage.

 Imagine that you are visiting with a friend and everything is going wrong in their life. They don’t like their job, they feel lost and alone, they feel like they are sinking. They are overwhelmed and have said that they don’t know how much more than can bear. You are trying to make them feel better. You are trying to encourage. You are trying to reassure them that they are going to be all right, they are going to make it through. They will survive. You innocently say, “Remember, God never gives us more than we can handle.”

I want to make a disclaimer that I don’t want you to feel like your toes are getting stepped on or that you are being called out. I have said this phrase. We have all said these phrases. We are all works in progress, counting on God’s sanctifying grace to make us a little more Christ-like every day. Maybe if we think about some of these things when we aren’t in a crisis, we will be better equipped to love others without causing unintended pain.

God won’t give you more than you can handle. There is a scripture that some folks say this phrase comes from. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “No temptation has seized you that isn’t common for people. But God is faithful. God won’t allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.” Paul is talking about temptation, earlier in the chapter he talks about sexual immorality (verse 8) and idolatry (verse 14), but not trials or hardships.

Corinth is a large port city in Greece. Port towns have people and influences from all over the world. If you purchased meat at the market, chances were good that it came from an animal that had been sacrificed to a pagan god at one of Corinth’s temples. Corinth had a reputation of being a place of drunkenness and sexual immorality. It was our Las Vegas. Around 51 A.D. Paul founded a church there and the new Christians at the church had been pagans. They were trying to leave behind idol worship and temple prostitutes that were a part of religious life in Corinth. Corinth after all had a shrine to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1 Corinthians 10:13 is about self-discipline in the face of temptation with the hope of avoiding the sins of idolatry and sexual immorality. Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Moses and the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years struggled with this same thing. They gave in to idol worship and sexual immorality and wandered some more. We are really good at saying yes to temptation. Paul is telling the people at the Corinthian Church that we all will be tempted and that God will help you and supply a way out when you are tempted. James 1:13 says, “God is not tempted by any form of evil, nor does God tempt anyone.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

You might be looking at your bulletin right now at the Lord’s Prayer and noticing that every week we ask God to “lead us not into temptation.” We are asking God to lead us, not in our own way, which is the way of temptation. When temptation appears, we are going to follow. When you hear that voice urging you to speak up when your boss says a racist joke, but you stay silent, that is listening to temptation. God is constantly speaking to us, leading us away from temptation. Help us, Lord, to follow the right path, the good path, the holy path, the way that leads us closer to you. Help up overcome temptation.

So, even if scripture doesn’t say God won’t give you more than you can handle, is that a true statement? In my own life, there have been times when there was more than I could handle. That is why therapists exist because we face situations that are more than we can handle and we need help. God won’t give you more than you can handle. God won’t give you. When we say that it sounds like we are implying that whatever difficult or painful things that are happening in your life, God gave them to you.[[4]](#footnote-5) I don’t believe that God gives us bad things to handle. It would be like saying “God gave you this horrible, painful, hurting thing, but God will stop giving you more suffering before you reach your breaking point, don’t worry!”[[5]](#footnote-6)

God didn’t cause your husband to beat you, God didn’t make your sister commit suicide, God didn’t give your best friend cancer. What are we saying about the nature of God when we say something like that? What kind of God tests God’s children by having their spouses beat them, their siblings take their lives, and their friends suffer from cancer. We will face adversity in our lives. We will face hardships. We, or someone we love, will face terminal illness. We may struggle with debilitating depression or suicidal thoughts or grief so heavy that we feel we’ll suffocate. We may walk through financial circumstances where it seems there is no way out. We will absolutely face things that are more than we can handle.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Those things are not part of God’s plan, they are not sent by God, but they are part of the human experience. I don’t believe that God gives them, but I trust that God walks with us through them. In Jesus, God has already walked through our shared human experience with us. Jesus’ resurrection proclaims that evil, hate, pain, and death will not have the final word in our lives.[[7]](#footnote-8)

There is nowhere in the Bible that it says that we won’t go through hard times. The Bible does promise that at all times, good or bad, God wants to be our help and our strength. Maybe instead of saying, God won’t give you more than you can handle, we should say God will help you handle all that comes our way.[[8]](#footnote-9) God walks with us through it all. Psalm 46 reminds us of that, it is printed in your bulletin, “God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea.”

God carries us through, and God works through God’s people, through each one of us, when we reach out to a friend who is hurting, when we pray for one another, we remind each other that we can find joy and hope in our lives again. Bad things will happen in our lives, and I know that when it does God will strengthen us, God will walk with us, God will hold us, God will comfort us, and God will care for us. God helps us cope. There will come a time when joy will overshadow the pain. As Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, “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.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

Last Sunday I had lunch with my step-niece. I had never seen her before in person. When she was born she lived in Nebraska with my stepsister and my stepsister was going to give her up for adoption. In the hospital my stepsister changed her mind, but a year later, my stepsister decided that it was in the best interest of her child that she grow up with the adoptive family. So, for the last 18 years she has grown up in a loving home, she is going to college next year, she plays the guitar, she loves school. For 18 years my dad and stepmom, her grandparents, sent her cards and birthday presents, they let her know that she was loved and that they were praying for her. When her adoptive parents would send a picture, my dad and stepmom would show me with such pride and joy, and I would pray for her. So, even though last Sunday was my first time to meet her in person, I felt like I already knew her because I had been praying for her for so long.

 When you’re facing temptation, please turn to 1 Corinthians 10:13. Remember that God will help you find a way through the temptation. But when you’re walking through hard times, it is okay to say, “I can’t handle this by yourself, I need help.” Doctors and therapists have helped me so much. Family, friends, neighbors, pastors, brothers and sisters in this church family have helped me so much. There are many in our loving community who will walk alongside us when we need their support. Psalm 46 reminds us that God walks with us, and helps us handle all that comes our way.[[10]](#footnote-11) Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. This sermon series is based on Rev. Adam Hamilton’s book, Half-Truths. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Much of this paragraph from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Much of this paragraph from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Much of this paragraph from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Much of this paragraph from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 97-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Much of this paragraph from Rev. Adam Hamilton. Half-Truths. Page 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)