

God won't give you more than you can handle

Intro <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q44KNpgbh8I>

- I. **Video.** (Series of events begin after I give my greeting—projector goes out, Sprouts teacher comes and says the kids are revolting, mic goes out, and end it with someone from Hospitality coming and saying, “Ron, we just ran out of coffee!” I respond, “That’s it! God does give us more than we can handle!”)

- II. Okay, I wanted to introduce this half-truth in a lighter way but that’s not normally how it is used, is it? So when do people usually say, “God won’t give us more than we can handle”? When someone loses a father or a child? To a friend who is going through a painful divorce? A co-worker who loses the job he/she loves? This age-old adage comes from the bible, right? You might be saying, “I mean, it has to be straight from the bible because my grandmother used to tell me this and she was like one step below Jesus.” I hate to be the one to break it to us, but it’s not. Let’s look at the Scripture where Christians for eons have gotten this idea...which I, along with Adam Hamilton, would add...wrongly. It’s from **1 Cor 10:11-14 NIV**. Let’s briefly explore what Paul is trying to say to the church at Corinth. “These things”? What things, Paul? We have to look at the paragraph above. And what you will find is Paul is talking about the time in the Old Testament where the Israelites were wandering in the desert on the way to the Promised Land. You see, God gave the Israelites prime real estate in the Middle East out of His goodness and generosity with the expectation that they would be His children and worship and obey Him only. But before they made it far out of the gate they began worshipping golden cows and other assorted domesticated and undomesticated animals. And this idolatry led to debauchery, which is a fancy word for like a frat party gone wild. Sex and alcohol galore. The consequence (as sin always has consequences) is death in the desert. So the Israelites’ disobedience and the resulting consequences are the “things” which Paul is referencing. Taking that into account, Paul is warning the church at Corinth not to fall into temptation sexually or to commit idol worship. And believe me, this warning is most appropriate in Corinth. As I have shared in the past, Corinth was like Las Vegas on steroids. It hosted the Temple of Aphrodite (**image**), the goddess of “love,” or really “lust.” The Temple reportedly had 1000 prostitutes for “worship.” So sexual immorality and idol worship went hand in hand. This is the battle the Corinthian Christians faced. Just imagine... “Hey Larry, instead of you going to your Christian worship service, listening to some boring sermon, and eating bite sized bread and sips of wine, how about you come with me to the Temple... I hear they have some new ‘priestesses’ in from Rome.” That wouldn’t be tempting at all, right?

- III. Okay, that is the context for this passage. Now let’s look specifically again at the verse where we get the half-truth in question. **1 Cor 10:13 NIV**. What is Paul really saying here? That God won’t give us more than we can handle? No. He is saying that the temptations the church at Corinth was experiencing have always been around. And all this has been done before and every person is going to face it in the world in which we live. Then and now. That is part and parcel of the human condition. I distinctly remember as a teenager thinking, “My mom and dad just can’t understand me. They never had to face the stuff I do. They just don’t know what it’s like to be teenager.” Like sex, drugs, and alcohol

were recent inventions. Now I am hearing the same thing from my own kids. So what Paul is really saying is that every person is going to face these things, but God will always provide a back door to escape. Let's be honest though. Too often, instead of turning away from the temptation, we run towards it, don't we? A couple of years ago I had determined that I wanted to lose about 30 pounds. Not because I thought I was entering the Jabba the Hut club for men necessarily but I wanted to compete in an event and my love handles were holding me back. I determined roughly how many pounds I was going to need to lose and what I was going to need to eat and not eat for me to reach my goal. I decided to severely reduce my sugar and increase my protein. I began eating more nuts than a squirrel and stopped drinking Southern "water" (aka, sweet tea.) And I began avoiding dessert at every turn. It was brutal at first. Life is pointless if you can't consume chocolate on a daily basis, right? Well, it felt that way at first. But then I turned a corner. And I began shedding the weight and feeling the best I had in my life since I was twenty. There was one caveat. Growth Group on Monday nights. We met at the Rac and Mandy Carmer's. Mandy Carmer, who works with our children's ministry, makes one mean double fudge brownie. I could say "no" to candy all day. I could pass on pie without a thought. I could even dismiss a doughnut without a problem. But brownies were a different matter. Especially double fudge brownies. Each week I found myself staring with what I can only describe as longing at that square of gooey deliciousness. During the session, I might have passed the plate of brownies once but by the time it came to me again, I reasoned, "Well, if she went to all that trouble, I should have at least one. It's the polite thing to do." Well you know that didn't just happen. The one became two, the two slid into three and there you go. I remember once eating six in one night, consuming probably two days' worth of calories in a span of 5 minutes. All that running, biking, weight lifting was for naught on Mondays and probably Tuesdays too. You see, I could have kept passing the plate, fled out the back door so to speak, but instead I went full steam ahead onto the double fudge brownie express.

- IV. So what is your double fudge brownie? What I mean is, what is the one or two or three things that you are tempted by that can have far greater repercussions than just gaining a pound or two? It's far more than just brownies for me, if we are to be honest. But let's hear again what Paul is saying. If you are a Jesus follower, we are never going to be put in a situation where there won't be an exit ramp, a way out of the temptation. But how can we take that exit? When I did a quick survey of all the Scriptures that deal with temptation **the two imperatives for overcoming it are to pray and flee**. And not necessarily in that order. Sometimes we need to flee then pray other times we need pray and then flee but sometimes we just need to pray. If you are dealing with a sexual temptation, the best approach is to get out Dodge. Maybe you can pass on that plate of temptation the first time but chances are that you will fall the second or third, so get away from the computer, the office, Hooters or whatever source of temptation itself, and then pray for strength. If the temptation is related to money such as cheating on your taxes (April is coming fast), to do some creative accounting, or just flat out steal from your company or organization, pray first. When we pray we put God back where He should be in our lives...number one. We put him back on the throne and kick ourselves off. **When we enter God's presence and experience His goodness and love, sin becomes less appealing.** It's kind of like for me

when I was teenager talking about girls in an inappropriate way when my grandma was around. Just didn't seem right and got my mind back on track.

- V. I know what you might be saying. "Wait, Ron. This is supposed to be about 'God won't give you more than you can handle.' Not a talk on temptation." And I thank you for getting us back on track. But I had to show us where the half-truth came from first and what the Scripture really meant. I think the next logical question is, "So how did we get that half truth from the 1 Corinthians passage?" It comes down to one Greek word *Peirasmos*. It can be translated in two different ways. Tempted or tested. Let's read the verse again replacing tempted with tested. **1 Cor 10:13 NIV**. We might ask, "What's the difference?" You see tested doesn't necessarily mean a moral dilemma. It could be cancer, job loss, etc. And if the correct translation is "tested" then one could argue that Paul is saying God won't give you more than you can handle. So there you have its origin. But in this context Paul is warning the Corinth church not to give in to idolatry and sexual immorality, so "tempted" is the right word choice.
- VI. But as Hamilton points out, there is another issue with this half-truth despite the fact it's a bad lip reading of Scripture. (You would have to have been here last week to appreciate that.) The very first two words "God won't..." What is this suggesting? Let's say we use this half-truth with someone going through a painful divorce. "Really sorry about your marriage, Melvin. But God won't give you more than you can handle." In this case, it suggests that God caused or had something to do Melvin's marriage falling apart. Or let's say someone just discovered they have terminal cancer. "Sorry, Betsy, but God won't give you more than you can handle." In this case, it's what? Suggesting that God gave Betsy the tumor...and if it's going to end her life, it certainly seems like more than she can handle. Like we talked about last week, the flavoring of Christianity I and G3 ascribe to is that God is not the author of evil. Yes, we live in a broken world where hurt and pain occur often because we don't follow His path, but He is not its source. And this half-truth is not only suggesting that God is behind the trial someone is going through, it also is clearly saying that God might take you to the breaking point but no further. Going back to poor Melvin. It would be like saying "Melvin, I know your marriage is in the tank, your dog just died, you just lost your job at the toothpaste factory, and you missed 'talk like a pirate day' at Krispy Kreme, but no worries! God is just about done raining on your parade before you start looking for a bridge to jump from." Let me ask us parents. Is that how you would treat your kids? First I am going to give my daughter a disease that wastes her body away, then I am going to take away her ability to pay her hospital bills, and then I am going to destroy all the important relationships in her life. Let's read **Matthew 7:9-11 NIV** (evil/sinful) So if we are not going to do that to our children, do we really think Our Heavenly Father will?
- VII. I like Hamilton's revised edition of this half-truth. He changes it from "God won't give us more than we can handle to ***God will help you handle all that you have been given.***" And Hamilton is not pulling this out of his theological backside but from Scripture itself. Peter Jesus' BDF- Best Disciple Forever ☺ said it this way in his first letter **1 Peter 5:7 NIV**. God wants us to lean on and call out to Him for help. He isn't looking for a spiritual version of

people who pick themselves up from their bootstraps and go it alone. He is not looking for His disciples to become Lone Rangers, Rambos, or (for our era) The Rock Dwayne Johnsons. Tough guys or gals who don't need anybody or anything. God doesn't want us to become independent but rather interdependent, depending on Him and His people, the church. It's kind of like Sawyer, my middle aged Golden Retriever (**image**). We have this kind of interdependent relationship. I depend on him protecting my home and my girls, at least in theory, and he pretty much depends on me for everything else. Not a bad gig. Likewise, God expects us to look to Him for strength during the bad times, courage during times of fear, His presence during times of loneliness. And He then expects us to be His hands and feet in this world.

- VIII. Here is the truth in all this. **Life has a habit of giving more than we can handle and this is why we need God and His people.** If you have lived long enough you know first-hand the depth of this truth. And when life does go into overload, instead of turning to our own strength, trying to muster all our inner power like we might read in *Oprah* magazine, let's turn to the One from which our power and strength come, as suggested in King David's song, or Psalm 23. Instead of simply reading it, let's listen and watch this retelling. (**Video**) The Lord is our Shepherd, our strength in times of trouble, we are not out here on our own.
- IX. As we close this morning I want to tell you about Lewis. Lewis is Al Jones' father. Al is one of our own. Meg and I have known Lewis and his wife, Doris, almost 13 years. After sixty-five years of marriage, Doris the light of his life and best friend passed away last April. Since then Lewis has been on a downward spiral health-wise. Recently, for various medical reasons, Lewis is now confined to a bed. He has an assortment of aches and pains and can barely move his legs or do anything without help. It is clear Lewis has more than he can handle. And if anyone has a right to complain, Lewis does. Bed ridden, can barely eat, lost his beloved wife, and he realizes he probably doesn't have much time left in this world. But every time I visit him, do you know what he says? He doesn't complain about his ailments or tell me God has given him an unfair shake. Lewis always asks how my family and I are doing and then says something like, "Ron, I am so blessed. I have so many reasons to thank God. Wonderful family, children and grandchildren, and church. Jesus has always been there with me through the good times and the bad. He has never left me. Now when it's time, I am ready to go home to be with Him and Doris. And I don't have any fear at all, just peace." I confess, every time I leave Lewis, I am teared up. With manly tears. To me, Lewis epitomizes Psalm 23. A man like King David who has had his ups and downs, who has experienced days of abundance in the green pastures but also seasons in the dark valley...when life simply gave him too much to handle. And in those times, instead of trying to tough it out, He turned to the God who can help us handle all the things we have been given. Lewis has modeled for me how a Jesus follower should live and now, as time draws near, how a Jesus follower should die. And his life certainly wasn't shaped by the half-truth "God won't give us more than we can handle." And I am saying this morning, our lives shouldn't either. Not only is it not in scripture, it is not true. So we shouldn't say it and more importantly shouldn't believe it.