

May 19, 2019

Mythbusters: God Will Never Give You More Than You Can Handle

1 Corinthians 10:13; James 1:12-18; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Last week we kicked-off our teaching series called “Myth Busters.” And for the next few weeks we are taking a deeper look at some familiar “Christian” sayings or beliefs that are just not true, or “half true” and in fact can be more harmful than helpful.

This week we are tackling the myth that, “God will never give you more than you can handle!”

Initially it sounds good. Sounds like something from the Bible, right? Spoiler alert- not there

Chances are pretty good that many of you have heard this saying. Maybe you heard it being said to someone. Maybe it was said to you... or maybe you have said this to someone. I confess have said this many of times in my life.

And the thing is, it’s usually said with good intentions as words of comfort and encouragement to those going through difficult times.

But phrases like this and others like “it’s all part of God’s plan” or “everything happens for a reason” are often said because we don’t know what to say to suffering and people faced with difficulties. So we end up repeating what we have heard or what has been said to us, and keep the myth alive.

This morning we are going to look at some bible passages to bunk the myth “God will never give you more than you can handle.”

Before we do that though I can say personally, without a doubt, not even needing a bible verse, that “God will never give you more than you can handle” is false. It is a myth. And I can say that with confidence, because God gave us a Penny :) Many of you have heard stories about, or have encountered Penny, who is four and the youngest of our 4 girls.

After Tina and I had our three girls and expecting our fourth I was feeling pretty good as a parent. Confident and ready to handle another female addition to the family. Pretty much I had the whole parenting thing down...After all “God wouldn’t give me more than I could handle”.

Well... God gave us a Penny.

And to give you just a glimpse of daily Penny life and what I’m talking about, I have some recent Penny footage from just a couple weeks ago. And well, it involves nap time and a blue permeant sharpie marker. Check it out

Penny Video. (Just to Follow up on that. Penny did give me permission to show it. And it became a great opportunity to talk about lying).

So where does this myth, this saying, “God will never give you more than you can handle” come from?

Most often people point to and use 1 Corinthians 10:13 which we read this morning, to support this saying and belief.

Let’s look again at what it says:

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.

“God is faithful, and will not let you be tested beyond your strength” sounds a lot like “God will never give you more than you can handle” right?

But If we look closer and read it in context we see they are saying two very different things.

That is what makes so many of these myths difficult in that there is just enough of a nugget of truth that makes them believable, and even sound good, and something the Bible would say.

This is why context is so important and why it is important for us to not just cherry pick verses but to look at context and focus on what it is actually saying and not what we want or need it to say.

That word “testing” we get from the Greek also translates as temptation or trials but Paul in his letter to the Church in Corinth is specifically talking about temptation. Temptation that leads to sin.

Corinth was a wild city, full of idolatry, pagan worship and practices, sexual immorality, and so on. And Paul is writing to this young church as they face all sorts of temptation just by being in Corinth.

He not only encourages them but keeps it real with them letting them know their situation with all those temptations is not unique, and that everyone is tempted. We all face temptation but we can be encouraged and find hope in the promise of God’s faithfulness.

That He is with us when we are tempted and will always provide a way out.

What Paul is not talking about here is suffering, pain and loss, or the hardships we may face.

Paul is not giving us a picture of God authoring and handing out all sorts of hardship and suffering in your life. Making bad things happen to you just to see how much we can stand before we break,

Paul is not saying “God will never give you more than you can handle.”

But what Paul is saying is God is with us even when we face temptation and trials. And to be clear, God does not tempt us to sin.

As we read in James chapter 1:

13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Temptation comes out of our own sin and evil desires. When we fall into temptation, and face the consequences of that we cannot say God did this to me.

When we use to live in California my favorite store was Trader Joes. The thing about Trader Joes is that it has everything you need that you didn’t know you needed.

Every time I would go there, I would be like “I didn’t know they could chocolate cover that”. This was/is a great weakness of mine.

My constant downfall was when I would forget something for dinner on a given night and would quickly run to TJ’s to pick something up. Except I would go without a list and very hungry. Bad combination.

After going about my shopping business I would get home excited to show and tell Tina all the new and amazing goodies I found at Trader Joes . “Honey you won’t believe what I got at Trader Joes- Chocolate covered potato chips.” And she would say, “but did you pick up dinner?” Oops... How do you feel about Chocolate covered potato chips?

But God did not put those chocolate covered potato chips into my path to test me and distract me from the thing I actually needed. God wasn’t just sitting around seeing a world of people in need and dealing with issues of poverty, injustice, and such and thinking. “What should I do now? Oh look Jason is going to Trader Joes, bring out the chocolate covered potato chips.”

No, I was responsible and created my own falling into temptation. God had given me the way out. Make a list, stick to it, or just avoid Trader Joe’s in those moments and go to Safeway.

Now that’s just a small temptation and I recognize we are prone to even larger and more destructive temptations.

But even in the face of all those temptations we are not on our own. God is faithful to us, God is with us, and will provide a way out. And we need God all the more in those very moments because it is more than we can handle, and we are dependent on God to keep His promises.

Again. Paul is talking about temptation, and not suffering or hardships or pain and loss. With temptation, we have a choice (mainly we make the wrong choice), but with suffering we often don't have a choice.

The truth is, God and His Word never says He won't give us more than we can handle. In fact what we find throughout scripture is quite the opposite as the Bible is full of examples of God's people faced with situations, difficulties and suffering, that are more than they alone can handle.

Just to mention a few:

There is Job. Or the prophet Elijah running for his life and overwhelmed with fear. All through the Psalms we hear echos of what the Psalmist cry's out Psalm 88: "I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death."

Then of course there is Paul. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 Paul again is writing to the church in Corinth. He says:

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; (But praise God he didn't give us more than we could handle, NO! Paul doesn't say that)

He says: for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. (sounds like they were faced with more than they could handle)

And then let me tell about Jesus. God in flesh. Jesus experienced all that it means to be human, to know personally what it's like to suffer and experience hardship, pain and loss. And approaching his death on the cross for us for our sake he says to his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane.

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

And so I want you know, I want you to hear today... God wasn't us to know, it is ok to admit and to say "this is overwhelming. This is more than I can handle". And like Jesus we can cry out to God, the One who loves us and cares for us more than we can know, and we can say, "my soul is overwhelmed."

And when we do this and stop just trying to tough it out, to rely on our strength, and our own abilities and when we stop perpetuating the myth that God will never give us more

than we can handle, and instead cry out to God... I need you, this is more than I can handle!

It is there we can then experience the truth of God's promises and presence - the One who meets us, and is with us, wherever we are at. The one who in Jesus, suffers with us.

You see, one of the dangers of this myth is that it a self-focused saying. It is all about what we can handle, what we can do.

And if we believe that we can handle anything that comes our way, because God won't give us more than we can handle, then what do we need God for?

But we know the truth. We now from experience and failure trying to do it on our own. We need God. We can't rely on just our strength, and our abilities, and ourselves to handle it all.

Listen to the second part of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:9.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.

It is God who does the delivering, It is God who gives us His strength, It's God who gives us His amazing Grace. And God can do this because He is the resurrection God. The one who brings life out of death. Shines light into darkness.

We need Him. We need His strength, we need His grace. We need God because on our own we can't handle those difficult things that come are way.

One of the greatest promises that God gives us over and over again throughout His word is not that He will keep us out fo difficult circumstances or that we will never experience suffering but rather He promises us that He will always be with us, that He is close to the brokenhearted.

He is our refuge and our strength and an ever-present help in times of suffering .(Psalm 46)

Later in 2 Corinthians Paul again reminds us "it is not that God won't give you more than you can handle" but that God gives us all the grace we need in every situation we face.

But He(The Lord) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Life certainly seems to give us more than we can handle. But it is never more than God can handle in us and through us. Believing that His grace is sufficient and relying on Him doesn't mean we have to figure out how to overcome and be victorious over difficult time, because he has already done it. His victory is our victory! Jesus experienced it all, and conquered it all.

God cares for us so much and when it feels like more than we can handle He gives us His promises and presence, He gives us His strength and peace, He gives us His sufficient grace and if that wasn't enough He gives us one another.

Because sometimes when we are in that place of hurt, and suffering, of more than we can handle, God can seem far away and silent. And yes His promises are still true and His grace is sufficient, but sometimes that grace needs a face.

God created us for one another and has given us one another, because He knows it is more than we can handle alone and by ourselves.

In the more than we can handle moments we need to be willing to reach out and to walk with and sit with one another in the mess in the hard and difficult places. When we do this we can be the presence of Christ. We can be an embodiment of God's promises. We can give grace a face.

Brene Brown has a wonderful talk on this that I think illustrates this very thing. She frames it as sympathy vs. empathy. Check it out.

Brene Brown Video

And as we actually connect with each other, in and through difficult times, instead of just offering sayings from a distance and perpetuating myths, we will find ourselves connecting deeper to God's love and God's promises and grace as it is at work in a tangible way between one another.

Life can throw a lot at you. It can be difficult. Very difficult. And truly it is more than you can handle on you own. But it is never more than He can handle. He is faithful to His promises. He gives us His grace. He gives us one another. We can trust him, We can rely on Him, We can lean into him, we can find strength in Him.

As we connect with Him and with one another, together we can move forward when faced with more than we can handle.