



TIME OF GRACE®

Out of Context: "More Than You Can Handle"

Study Notes

Summary

The Bible does not talk about God not allowing you to be tempted “beyond what you can bear.” Make sure to read the context! The apostle Paul wrote those words as both a warning and a comfort, a warning not to rely on our own spiritual strength and a comfort to rely on the God who can sustain us in all kinds of temptation.

- **Rumor:** God won't give you more than _____ can handle.
- **1 Corinthians 10:1:** For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors . . .
- **1 Corinthians 10:11-13:** ¹¹ These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ 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.
- **Truth:** God won't give you more than _____ can handle.

Points to Ponder

1. The Corinthians were tempted to worship Apollo, Asclepius, and Aphrodite. What do you think are the “gods” most worship in our culture today? In other words, what do people love, trust in, and fear losing more than God himself?
2. **Challenge:** Go to biblegateway.com and search for the phrase “one another.” What do you learn about the power of doing life together with other Christians as you face daily temptation in life?

Homework for Next Week

Read Jeremiah chapter 29.

Time of Grace Ministry
Out of Context: More Than You Can Handle
1 Corinthians 10
February 21, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

Well, there's a rumor floating around the world of the Christian church and I bet you've heard it before. In fact, if you're taking notes in your program, it's the very first thing I want to teach you today and I bet you could fill in this blank quickly. The rumor is that God won't give you more than you can handle. Most of you have heard that before, right?

Christians love to quote this idea when they see someone they love, a family member or a friend, just overwhelmed with life. When finances or health problems or something in their personal life is just more than they can handle, they're overwhelmed, and they feel so burdened that they can't move on, Christians love to quote this passage. "But don't forget that God has said he won't give you more than you can handle." And it's this encouraging word that's meant to be this boost spiritually and it sounds nice except there are two problems with the rumor.

Problem number one is that saying that to someone who feels like life is more than they can handle doesn't work. I mean, if you feel like the next straw would break your back and God just dropped a brick and I come up and I smile and say, "Hey! Don't worry, God won't give you more than you can handle," instead of being incredibly comforted, you'd probably turn back in anger and say, "Well, this is way more than I can handle." Instead of loving God or trusting in God or being grateful to God, instead you start to question God and maybe get angry or mad at God. Like, if you're a single mom here today and your children's father just kind of took off on you for another girl and you're trying to do the best you can and you're working two, maybe three jobs, and your youngest still won't sleep through the night and he's 18 months and your ex keeps texting you at 2:00 in the morning drunk like he always is, saying vile things, and your boss won't be flexible with your hours and then your doctor finds something on your exam and you're just ready to throw in the towel. And I roll up and I smile and, "Hey! God won't give you more than you can handle." I have a feeling you won't smile back.

If you deal with mental health struggles, if your anxiety is so intense that it's hard to even come to a place like this and be around so many people, if your depression is so debilitating it's affecting your work and your relationships and your family and it's like a job just to get yourself out of bed, and I come with some trite little Christian saying, "God won't give you more than you can handle!"

See, the statement sounds nice on paper but in practice, it rarely does what we think it will. It's not as encouraging, it's not as beautiful, it doesn't bring as much blessing as many Christians intend. But that's not even the biggest problem. The biggest problem is not that the statement itself doesn't often work. The biggest problem is that this Bible passage isn't actually in the Bible. Did you know that? Thirty-one thousand, one hundred seventy-three total verses in the Bible, cover to cover, and if you would google this, these words would come up zero times. There's something kind of like it in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 10 but I can guarantee you that when the

apostle Paul wrote those words in 1 Corinthians, he did not mean this. That life and your burdens and the things you carry on your shoulders would not be more than you can handle. Because in context, the apostle Paul wasn't talking about pain or suffering or raising kids or mental health or financial struggles. In the context of when Paul wrote words kind of like that, he was talking about temptation. In 1 Corinthians 10, the apostle Paul was trying to share with some of his friends that God will never give one of his children more temptation than they can handle. Because the apostle Paul knew some people who were following Jesus that felt exactly like that. Like what they were facing was so strong and so powerful and their spirit was so weak that they just couldn't handle it. Kind of like the musical Hamilton; you ever heard of it before? There's a scene in Hamilton where Alexander's being seduced by this married woman and he's a married man and she's coming at him strong and he sings, he raps this song where he says, "I don't know how to say 'no' to this." It's like he knows it's wrong but in the moment, the temptation is so powerful he can't handle it; it's too strong.

And I wonder if you've ever felt like that before? Like maybe you know the right thing to do or the Christian thing to do or the Bible thing to do but there's this one thing that when you come face to face with it, you just don't know how to say no to it. And if that's you, you're the kind of person the apostle Paul was writing to. In fact, I think all of us are kind of that way; we're the kind of people the apostle Paul was addressing when he wrote those famous words in 1 Corinthians 10.

You see, 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul started a church in a big Greek city called Corinth and some of his friends were facing the kind of temptation that they personally didn't think that they could handle. If you've ever read the New Testament, you might know the story. Paul shows up in this big Greek city with all kinds of ideas and philosophies and religions and he preaches Jesus. He preaches this really unique God named Jesus Christ who was so different than the Greek gods and goddesses of the Corinthian culture. That Jesus was this God who didn't demand that you sacrifice to him or else; he was a God who sacrificed for you so that God could give you something else: An eternity with him, forgiveness, and mercy, and grace. And when the Corinthians heard this, it changed their hearts. You know, they thought religion was all about the quid pro quo; you know, you do these things for the gods and they bless you. But here was a God of mercy and undeserved love. A God who would love you when you did bad things. A God who would bless you even though you were far from deserving it and that message, what Christians called the gospel, it changed the Corinthian hearts. And for 18 months, the apostle Paul said he preached Jesus Christ crucified, died on a cross, risen from the dead for the forgiveness of sins and they loved it and it changed them.

But then one day, Paul had to leave. He needed to go to other cities and tell more and more people about this Jesus and almost as soon as Paul left, the temptation came and it came strong. You see, the Corinthians lived in a culture that tempted them in some pretty massive and irresistible ways and so you see the Corinthian dilemma. They thought, "I want to say no to this but when everyone is pressuring me, when the temptation is so strong, what am I supposed to do?"

And so, they did what so many people do: They combined Jesus and something else. They still prayed to Jesus, they often gathered in Jesus' name, they would celebrate communion and they would be baptized and they would engage in idolatry. It was kind of a buffet, a mix and match religion, a unique first century spirituality and that's why the apostle Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 10.

Paul was concerned for his friends. He knew enough about Jesus that Jesus can forgive a whole bunch of things but the one thing Jesus can't handle is being second place; of being in an open relationship with other gods and goddesses.

So let's dive in together to Paul's words in context in 1 Corinthians 10. I want to start with you just with the very first verse. Where Paul writes, "I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors," dot, dot, dot and then he goes on in the scriptures for 10 verses of an Old Testament history lesson. And Paul tells his friends this sobering story from the Old Testament. Then in verse 11, he reminds them why he's giving them this history lesson. He said, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall!" Paul's saying to the Corinthians, "So you believe in God? Yeah, so did they. You pray to the true God? Well, so did they. Yet, they combined that good worship with something else and they fell. So if you think somehow that because of your past, your present, without repentance will be different, think again." The reason the Old Testament is so long, the reason there are so many pages before we get to the story of Jesus, is because God wanted every person to know, with all of these examples, that sin is serious and idolatry must be left behind. He says, "If you think you're standing firm, if you think it couldn't possibly happen to a good person like you, be careful. Be careful that you don't fall."

If you think that a miracle or a moment from your past - a baptism or a confirmation - is your ticket and it excuses any kind of behavior in the present, be careful that you don't fall. To think that because we did that back then we don't have to worry about what we do now. But that's not how faith works. It's kind of like how the law works, right? If I get pulled over from a cop and I've been smoking meth and there's some seven-year-old tied up in my trunk, I can't say to the cop, "You know what? I donated blood last year and I gave to the Red Cross." You know, I can't tell them about my past good works to excuse my present breaking of the law. No, what matters is the whole story and the whole picture and that's what Paul's saying to us today. Praise God for your past but take very seriously your present. He says, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind." This is the first of actually three comforting things that the apostle Paul wants to say and he starts with kind of this odd comfort. He says, "You know that temptation that seems like it's way more than you can handle? Did you know that it is common to mankind? That what you're facing is something that literally billions of Christians have faced before?" You're struggling financially and you don't know if you can be generous. You are far from the first Christian that has ever been in that dilemma. Think of this: God has helped billions of people through that exact same temptation. You're dating in a culture that doesn't date in God's way. There will be billions of brothers and sisters who are in the exact same position and God is helping them to make good choices and wait for long-term blessings. Someone has hurt you in your past and you find it really, really hard to forgive and not be bitter. God has helped tens of billions of people deal with that exact same temptation and forgive at the foot of the cross. You find it hard to be pure or to stay sober or to trust God when life falls apart. Like, Paul is saying that when you pray to God, like "God, this is my temptation." The one thing that God will never, ever say is "Huh. Man, wow. Never heard of that before. Can you give me a second? I'm going to google that and see what I find." No, God is like, "Oh yeah, that! Sure, I was just helping her and him and them," and all these billions of people deal with that exact same thing. That you can pray to a God who's not ignorant about how to fix this but he has helped people just like you through

temptation just like this. Here's this incredible comfort that your temptation is common to mankind and your heavenly Father knows exactly how to fix it.

And then Paul moves to comfort number two. Same verse, next words. He says, "And God is faithful." Here's my favorite part - not only is your temptation common but your God is faithful. The word "faithful" means dependable or reliable or trustworthy. That God has made all these promises to you about dealing with temptation and he has to keep his promises because he's God. And so when you read the Bible and God makes you a promise, you can trust that he is faithful. So let's say you're facing a temptation; you find it really, really hard to forgive someone in your life. But God is faithful. God has said, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. I will be with you always." So when you come face to face with that person and all those emotions start to swell up in your heart, who is faithfully by your side to help you? God. And God is faithful. He said if you ask him for the Holy Spirit, the one who produces forgiveness and love and self-control, he will give it. Jesus once said, "If human fathers like me imperfect and sinful know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" And so, when you pray in the face of that temptation, "God, I don't think I can do this; I need your Spirit," he's faithful and he will give it. And when you mess up and you feel ashamed and guilty, God is faithful. 1 John 1 says, "God is faithful and just and he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." And when you're struggling with regret, when you're living in the past, when you just can't get past that shame, God is faithful. And at the cross of Jesus, and because of the empty tomb of your risen Savior Jesus Christ, there is full forgiveness. You don't have to earn it, you don't have to work for it, you don't have to deserve it. God just gives it because he's faithful. He says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble. Cast all of your anxiety on me and I will help you." So whether you struggle with self-control or shame, ask God. He is faithful.

But then Paul saves the best for last. The third and final comfort deserves a lot of attention. He says, "God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." That's where that rumor comes from. "But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. Therefore, my friends, my dear friends, flee from idolatry." I love this verse for so many reasons. Notice that Paul says, "When you are tempted, God will provide a way out." He says he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. You will never face something that's so heavy that you can't handle it together.

Which is why I brought this. I actually put a Facebook post out on our church's site the other day to see if we could get some weights and one of you generously offered to bring this in but you brought me a weight set from the late 1980's, alright? So this is the Competitor model 343, which really makes me question when the last time this dear volunteer has ever lifted weights. So, I'm not going to embarrass him by saying his name but if anyone could bring this back to Nate Paul's house after church. You know, here's what this Paul is saying: That God won't let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. It's like you're trying to push back on this temptation and you know what the enemy, the devil, would love to do? He would love to put so much weight on the bar of your life that it just crushes your heart and soul but God won't let him. God is holding him back. There's temptation that he would love to just devour you but your heavenly Father loves you so much. He says, "Nope. I'm not going to let you do that." Like in the story of Job in the Old Testament, God keeps the enemy on a leash so he can't devour you like he would like to. You will

not be tempted beyond what you can bear. Instead, your Father in heaven will give you a way that you can endure it.

And actually, I bet you missed the power of that verse because I'm preaching to you here in the northern part of the United States. You know, here in the north, we don't know how many "you's" are in the word "you." Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, if I'm talking to you or you and you and you and you or all of you together, I use the word "you." But if we were doing church down in Alabama, it'd be a bit different, wouldn't it? I mean, I could speak to you or y'all individually or I could speak to "all y'all," right? Did you know the Greek language of the New Testament is a lot more like Alabama than Wisconsin? That if you could read Paul's original Greek, you could tell the difference between you, one person, or all y'all together, and in this verse, Paul actually switches from the singular to the plural. He starts by saying, "If you," singular, "think that you're standing firm be careful that you," singular, "don't fall." But then here in this verse, he switches it and he says, "God won't give you more than all y'all can handle." What Paul's saying is you're trying to push back on this temptation and it feels like it's more than you, singular, can handle and you're right. That often in life, God lets more temptation than you, as an individual Christian, can handle but not all y'all. Not if you stop just having some personal relationship with Jesus but you live in community with other people who worship Jesus. Not if you ask a brother in the faith to grab this end of the bar and a sister to grab that one, and a trusted friend, to heave in the middle. That there's no temptation that you will ever face if you rely on the family of God that you can't endure and that is the way that you flee; that is the way that God provides a way out. That is the way that every Christian can endure it.

So the rumor is not exactly true. Sometimes life, sometimes even temptation, is more than you individually can handle. But if you will reach out for help, you can handle it. In fact, I want you to write that down. Let's pretend we're in Alabama for a second and we'll say, "God won't give you more than all y'all can handle." And if we will give up this American ideal of a personal relationship with Jesus and "I'm fine without you," if we would actually embrace the family of God, if we would leverage all those "one another" passages in the New Testament and we could pray for each other and you could know me and I could know you, and I could forgive the real you and you could encourage the real me, there is no temptation that we would have to give in to. There is nothing that we would have to say yes to. We could honor God in all that we do because the truth is God won't give you more than all y'all can handle.

And I can tell you that I'm just learning how to do this? I'm not sure if it's me or the church that I grew up in, but I never did for about 30 years of my life as a Christian. I would go to church every Sunday and I would read my Bible in my bedroom, I would pray to Jesus every day. But I didn't really know people and people didn't know me. My temptation was mine and my parents and my roommates and my friends didn't know about it. That was between me and God and it crushed me. But then a few years ago, I found out how to do life together. I realized that God didn't bring churches and congregations together just so they could all individually worship Jesus in the same place but so they could actually love and help each other. At my last church, we started this ministry called small groups where we actually started to do that. We would confess sins to each other and forgive each other in Jesus' name. We would be real with each other and bear burdens together and pray for each other in the midst of real temptation. And that's what I'm asking you to do today. Do you do life with people? Are you connected with fellow Christians? Could you sign

up, maybe even after church today, to join a group and to actually be real - maybe for the first time in your Christian life? Instead of getting crushed day after day by that temptation that is more than you can handle, would you let the family of God be the family of God? Because it works. No, we won't be perfect. Sure, you'll still need Jesus' forgiveness but it works.

That's what happened to Latisha; not the Latisha from our church. There's a Christian woman named Latisha who lived in Guatemala and one day, she showed up to church pregnant, except she wasn't married. And she knew she had kind of done things backwards according to Jesus' model of relationships and she felt kind of embarrassed, kind of ashamed, but her church did the most amazing thing. One day, with Latisha's permission, the pastor, Roberto, called Latisha up front, put an arm around her shoulder; a visible reminder of Jesus' forgiveness and love for her mistake. And then he asked her church family a simple question: "So what are we going to do now? We can't change the past so what are we going to do in the present?" And that family of God responded as a family of God. One man raised his hand and said, "We're going to support Latisha." Another woman spoke for the group; she said, "And we're not going to gossip about her." And others offered to help financially with whatever she needed. And when that baby came, the church family all pitched in and brought him a brand-new stroller and helped raise that little guy close to the family of God and, most importantly, close to Jesus himself.

Maybe the shame, the guilt, would have been the temptation that she couldn't handle but they grabbed the end of the bar. Maybe the temptation to gossip and treat her as some kind of worse sinner than they themselves would have been more than they could handle but they confessed and they pushed back together.

So brothers and sisters, part of the family of God here in the 21st century, you will face temptation this week that is more than you can handle. But it's not more than all y'all can handle so let's be real. Let's love one another. Let's gather at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Let's grab an end of that bar. Let's do life as God intended where all y'all do life together.

Let's pray.

Dear Jesus, we thank you for your crazy love. Sometimes temptation gets us and we fall into sin but sometimes our greatest temptation is looking back on our sin, to forget that you're faithful and you're forgiving and you're so full of grace and mercy. God, despite all the idolatry of the Corinthians, you still forgave them when they cried out to you in confession and we love the fact that you still forgive us. Thank you, God, for being the kind of heavenly Father who is so unlike those Greek gods and the karma that we hear about in our culture. You're a God whose love is free and you love to forgive us in Jesus' name. And so, I pray that you can make this church - and not just this church, but every church - different. I think of a conversation I had a half hour ago, heavenly Father, of a person who said the church should be the place we run to when we royally mess up; not the place we run from. And my heart's prayer is that we can become that kind of church.

God, when we fall off the wagon, when we end up pregnant, when our name is in the paper, when we have a court date, I pray that this family could be the one place that would encourage and love and pray for us and most importantly, lead us back to Jesus. God, so many people don't think of

religion or Christianity that way but I pray that this could actually be what you intended it; a place of forgiveness, love and grace.

God, I thank you for the heritage of our church. I thank you that this place was founded not on individual Christians but on a community of faith that could actually do life as you intended. I pray that we can take what's been handed to us and even take it a step further. God, this fall, help us to be more honest, more real, and more gracious as we remember the gracious way that you've treated us. Thank you, Jesus, for your incredible love. Thank you for being an amazing Savior. Thank you for calling us your people. We pray all these things in your amazing, powerful name, Amen.