

NEW TESTAMENT READING: 1 Corinthians 10:6-13 pg 172 NT

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as [the Israelites] did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did; ... ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did...⁹We must not put Christ^[b] to the test, as some of them did...¹⁰And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No 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.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word... **Thanks be to God**

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Psalm 46 pg 517 OT

God is our refuge and strength, a very present^[a] help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; ³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. ⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵God is in the midst of the city;^[b] it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. ⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." ¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

Common but not Biblical Wisdom Pt 3

“God Doesn’t Give You More than You Can Handle”

It’s tough right now. I know. Everything is going wrong and the hurt just keeps coming. The weight is so heavy. The walk is all uphill. But don’t worry. The sun will come up tomorrow.

“God doesn’t give you more than you can handle”! You’ve heard or had conversations like this, haven’t you? They’re said by well-intentioned people who want to console and encourage another to not give up. But like the last two phrases we’ve considered, *“God Helps Those Who Help Themselves”* and *“Everything Happens for a Reason”*, the phrase, *God doesn’t give you more than you can handle*”, is not a Biblical wisdom, although it sounds like it might be.

In fact, in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he says, *“God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing God will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”* Sounds a little like, *“God doesn’t give you more than you can handle”*, doesn’t it? However, when we consider the passage’s context, which we always should do, we see otherwise. With every Bible passage, we need read immediately before and after it, and place it in its context within its book and the larger cannon, in fact. We need also consider any passage’s historical context, genre, authorship and any nuances in the original language. We need do these to avoid missing or even contradicting the Biblical truth.

So...the Greek word which Paul uses is *peirasmos*. It is often translated as “testing”, but Adam Hamilton suggests that it would better thought of as “tempting” because the context shows that thus far the conversation has been about the Corinthians being tempted to commit sexual immorality or idolatry. Paul’s not been talking about their being subjected to ALL of life’s trials and tribulations.¹ The Corinthians of that time were, you see, surrounded by pagan influences and very vulnerable to temptation. Corinth was the large, provincial capital of Greece on the isthmus of Corinth. It was a busy port city with harbors on both sides. People from all types of cultures were there doing business. It was a wild and rowdy place. *“Everything that happened in Corinth needed to stay in Corinth.”* To boot, the Christians in Corinth were pagan

¹ Adam Hamilton, *“Half Truths. God Helps Those Who Help Themselves & Other Things the Bible Doesn’t Say”* (Nashville:Abingdon;2016),79-102.

converts, still very familiar with worship of the Greek gods/goddesses and of temple prostitution. Ultimately, Paul is trying to encourage them in their self-discipline. He is reminding them that their experience isn't unique. The Israelites had tried to hold to their faith despite the pagan influences in Egypt too. Paul also is comforting the Corinthians by saying that God would always help them resist. They'd not be tempted beyond their abilities because God was there to give them a way out, if they would but choose it.² (*repeat*)

We all know how strong temptations can be, don't we? *Mike and I are seriously trying to diet, but oh how hard it is to resist when fried green tomatoes are on the menu, and sopapillas come with the meal. I sure empathize with Garfield, the cartoon cat, who said, "Diet is just die with a T"*. Temptations, big and little, can be strong, and we are so feeble. But it helps to first know that testings/temptations are NOT given us by God. James says, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and God himself tempts no one*" (*Jam 1:13*). Biblical scholar, John Piper, explains, in fact, that when we pray each week in the Lord's prayer for God "*to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,*" we are in essence saying "*Deliver us from the evil temptations that threaten to take us IN. Lead us, God, in a different way.*"³ It helps us to know that God does not test us.

It also helps us to know that God is there to lift us up when we are weak. Have we not all heard the Spirit whispering in our heads, speaking to us through our circumstances, through other people, through what we call our conscience or the angel on our shoulders? Haven't we all heard the Spirit's voice just before we take or don't take the bait? The devil may tempt, but the devil does not really MAKE us do anything, right? "Sorry, Flip Wilson. You were wrong". God is ALWAYS there to show us the way. And God gives us the freedom to choose that way. And then, of course, God is there to pick us up when we fall down.

So, this is what Paul is saying when he says, "*God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the tempting God will also provide the way.*" It's about God

² Adam Hamilton

³ John Piper, "*Does God Lead Us into Temptation?*" <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-lead-us-into-temptation> (accessed 6-21-18).

helping us to not choose wrongly. So, the phrase, “*God will not give you more than you can handle*”, does not appropriately apply to the Bible’s message. And on its own, it is inappropriate in other ways too.

First, it is inappropriate because when it is used to console and encourage in a time of great pain, it infers that our God is One who gives us the pain and who will then jump back in when we can’t handle it. That is NOT our God. It isn’t. That’s a fact. As the apostle John says, “*Our God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*” (1 Jn 1:5). And the psalmist says, “*Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant*” (Ps 35:27). So, how can we turn to our God in a time of great hardship if we’re made to mistrust and think that God has brought it all upon us?

In addition, “*God will not give you more than you can handle*” is not appropriate because sometimes in this world we have more than we can handle. We do. That’s a fact. Just ask a Rohingya refugee who has watched her family be brutalized or killed, their village burned, and who has fled only to arrive in a disease-ridden overcrowded Bangladesh tent city which is now experiencing a monsoon. Just ask any refugee; there’s over 60 million of them. Ask any psychologist, any school counselor, pastor, police officer, attorney, doctor, pharmacist...ask yourself. Even Paul says in 2 Corinthians, “*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life...But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God.*” (2 Cor 1:8-10) Sometimes we have more than we can handle.

And finally, “*God will not give you more than you can handle*” is inappropriate because when said to believers who have reached a point of breaking, it may cause them to feel guilty for not being strong enough to handle things themselves. They may feel so much guilt, in fact, that they do not turn to God or others for help. *Rev. Dr. Thomas Long tells a story of a young pastor who made it her goal to visit the entire membership during the first 6 months of her pastorate. She did, with the exception of one couple. “Leave them alone,” one of the elders advised. “They’re not coming back.” But the young pastor had set a goal for herself so one afternoon she drove to the family’s home and knocked on the door. Only the wife was home*

and she invited the pastor in for a cup of coffee. They sat at the kitchen table and chatted about this and about that.” “Then”, Dr. Long explains, “they talked about IT!” It seems that 2 years earlier the wife had been vacuuming and lost track of their toddler son whom she thought was playing in the next room. He later was found in their backyard pool. “Our friends at church were very kind,” she told the pastor. “They told us it was God’s will that he died. They told us that we’d get through it, because God doesn’t give anyone more than they can handle. But, but we just can’t handle....” The young pastor put her coffee cup down on the table and said, “Your friends at church meant well, but they were wrong. It’s wasn’t God’s will, and sometimes we face situations that truly ARE more than we can handle. That’s when we need turn to others for help.” Surprisingly, the mother’s jaw clenched, her face reddened, and she said in anger, (“It had to have been God’s will. God TOOK him and I can’t...”) The pastor continued, “God was as grief-stricken by your son’s death as you are.” But the woman’s face remained frozen in rage. It was clear that the conversation was over. Returning to her office, the young minister kicked herself. “I shouldn’t have touched it” “I should have left well enough alone,” she thought. But on her answering machine there was a message waiting there from the wife. “I don’t know where this is going,” the trembling recorded voice said, “but my husband and I want you to come out and talk to us. For 2 years we’ve thought God was angry at us, but now we wonder if it’s not been the other way around.”⁴

Friends, we will face adversity in our lives. No doubt. We, or someone we love, may face terminal illness or die. We may struggle with debilitating disease, depression or suicidal thoughts or grief so heavy we can’t breathe. We may experience financial problems, relationship problems, divorce, job loss or bullying that leaves no escape. And...we may become overwhelmed. But the promise is not that we’ll have a pain-free life, but a free one in which God is with us to help us. We can stand on this promise. God, in Jesus, has suffered rejection, betrayal, abandonment, torture and death, and his resurrection proclaims that evil will

⁴ Thomas Long. *“What Shall We Say?”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co; 2011), 131-2. Adapted in ().

not win in the end. We can indeed cast all our cares upon him, because he understands and he is there to help.

So, no matter how you slice it, the common phrase, “*God will not give you more than you can handle*” is not appropriate. Rev. Hamilton suggests it might better be said, “*God will help you handle all that you’ve been given.*” **This is the Biblical wisdom.**

Yes, indeed, “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult God will help us when the morning dawns.*” (Ps 46) Amen.