

**February 20, 2022**  
**More than you can handle?**  
**1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

"*God will not give you more than you can handle.*" That's in the Bible, right? Look all you want. It's not there. Nowhere is Scripture does God say He will not allow us to face more than we can handle. What Paul does say is, "*God is faithful. He will not let you be **tempted beyond what you can bear***"(10:13). That's quite different. In fact, in Scripture (and history) God regularly allows people to face far more trouble than they can handle ...

- Noah has to build a huge ark with a looming time deadline.
- David has to face giant Goliath, with the weight of a nation on his young shoulders.
- Daniel is thrown into a den of lions; his friends into a fiery furnace.
- James, John, Peter, and others leave their livelihoods to follow Jesus.
- Peter, Paul, and Silas are thrown into prison for their faith.
- Eleven of the twelve apostles will be killed for their faith.
- Believers from the earliest martyrs to Christians – today – in the Middle East, North Africa, India, SE Asia, and China, endure more than they can bear.
- Some of us face health crises, personal losses, chronic pain, and other problems we cannot possibly bear in our own strength.

But God is faithful (10:13). What we have discovered is that, by depending entirely on Jesus, His strength gets us through. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12, writes, "*I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.'* So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me"(12:7-9).

Paul goes on to say that it's only when we are pushed beyond what we can handle on our own, when we are forced to depend on Jesus, that we really grow in our faith: "*That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong*"(12:10). We're tempted to buy into the cultural narrative we can and should handle everything on our own. It is incredibly humbling to have to admit that we cannot handle things on our own. It is also incredibly liberating. Because when we genuinely choose to depend on Jesus – because we have no one else to turn to – we discover that His grace is really all you do need.

God may, in fact, allow us to face more than we can handle on our own. Then, perhaps for first time, we really have to have faith. Then, perhaps for first time, we really grow in faith

***Tempted ...***

Let's focus on what Paul DOES say ... Corinth was a bustling economic powerhouse of trade

and commerce. The Corinthian believers lived in a cosmopolitan melting pot of cultures, a crossroads of people from western Europe, eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

The way to win friends and influence people in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Corinth is to be active in the local guilds, business groups, and community organizations. The problem for Christians is these business and community organizations are all associated with the various pagan temples in the city. So, Christians who want to be "successful" have to participate (a little bit) in the life/ethics of the pagan temples. How can you be "in the world but not of the world"?

One of the temples, for which Corinth is famous, is the Temple of Aphrodite, the protector of the city, and the goddess associated love, lust, beauty, pleasure, and passion. Strabo (64 BC-24 AD), a Greek geographer, philosopher, and historian, comments, *"The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, prostitutes, who were dedicated to the goddess. It was on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich; for instance, the ship captains freely squandered their money, and hence the proverb, 'The voyage to Corinth is not for every man.'"*

If you read through 1 Corinthians, Paul, again and again, talks about divisiveness, sexual immorality, idol worship, food sacrificed to idols, greed, pride, anger, lying, cheating. Obviously, these were issues many Christians in Corinth were struggling with.

Paul goes back to Jewish history to remind the Christians of the challenges of living faithfully as God's people. When the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt, they enjoyed incomparable status as God's chosen people. Yet, as they journeyed to the Promised Land, gratitude gave way to complacency. They deliberately disobeyed God's clear commands. They grumbled and complained. They made an idol of a golden calf and worshipped it. They were easily led astray to follow other gods. As a result, many of them perished in the desert.

Paul uses the example of Israel as a warning. If the Israelites, who had experienced God's deliverance firsthand, could be tempted to fall away from God when wandering in empty wilderness, imagine how much more easily the Corinthians could be tempted. Some Corinthian Christians thought they could openly participate in pagan ceremonies, where idolatry, sexual promiscuity, including prostitution, and other "interesting" ethics took place. What do you think is going to happen?

Right before this, Paul had written, *"Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So, I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified"* (9:24-27). If athletes competing for the momentary glory of a gold medal at the Olympics submit to rigorous discipline to win the prize, in the race of life/the race of faith/the race of virtue, can we imagine it should be any less so?

Jesus often talks about the importance of self-denial and self-control. In Luke 14:26-33, a

large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, *"If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple."*

*"Don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and everyone would laugh at you. They'd say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!'"* He goes on to talk about a king, going to war, and not counting the cost either. It won't end well. Jesus concludes, *"You cannot become my disciple without giving up everything."* Not surprisingly, when Jesus talked like this, a large number of people walked away.

Jesus says, *"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it"* (Matthew 7:13-14).

The path of following Jesus calls for virtue, holiness, and humility. The Corinthians didn't like that message. It didn't "sell" well in anything-goes Corinth. They liked the *"The gate is wide; the highway is broad/I am allowed to do anything"* mantra (6:12, 10:23).

Let's bring this forward to today, however. After all, we don't live in a world of pagan worship services, temple prostitutes, and meat offered to idols.

Paul reminds us (and the Corinthians) it is not just those obvious sins that are problems, but also grumbling, complaining (10:10), divisiveness, greed, drunkenness, slander, dishonesty, pride, sexual immorality, anger, judgment (5:11, 6:10). Those are still relevant in 2022. The path of following Jesus still calls for virtue, holiness, love, and humility. We still don't really like it. We also prefer, *"The gate is wide; the highway is broad/I am allowed to do anything."*

Paul wants us to be prepared. We are all tempted, all the time. In big ways. In small ways.

1. **Be prepared.** If we think we're not tempted by anything, we're fooling ourselves. We often think of temptation in terms of sexuality. Paul asks us whether we are judgy, divisive, angry, greedy, dishonest, gossipy, unkind, unloving, ungracious.
2. **Be honest.** Be honest about those things that take your heart, mind, time, and devotion away from God. Be honest about ways in which you do not always love your neighbour as yourself. When I was in Lebanon, a panel of faith leaders was asked, "What is the biggest challenge with passing on faith to younger generations?" As a Canadian, I was not surprised they identified temptations around drugs, sex, and alcohol. The temptation they all identified that surprised me was "western consumerism." As a Canadian, it seems almost heretical to imply there is anything wrong with "consumerism" – it's who we are. It drives our economy. But Christians in the Middle East saw it a huge temptation, leading youth away from Jesus. This was

one of my blind spots. I never saw that as a serious temptation before. Now I do.

3. **Be on guard.** We need to recognize the temptations coming our way. When you notice a temptation, name it for what it is. When we admit we have temptations, we can begin to deal with them. As long as we're in denial, we're vulnerable. *"If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall"* (10:12).
4. **Be disciplined.** Oscar Wilde once said, *"I can resist anything except temptation."* Don't be Oscar Wilde. You can resist.
5. **Be strong.** Get tough with yourself. Refuse to give the temptation a parking spot in your head. Drive it from your mind. It's tempting to just entertain the idea a bit: "What if ..." Then, as our minds play with the picture, we're tempted to take a little step. Just a baby step. "Well, maybe if I cheat on my taxes just a little bit ..." but then it gets easier, and easier, and easier ... (Watch Veggie Tales, "Larry Boy and the Fib from Outer Space"). Pray about it. Flee from it (discipline!).
6. **Be busy – positively.** Proverbs 16:27 can be translated, *"Idle hands are the devil's workshop."* One way God helps us when we're tempted is by inspiring us to keep busy doing right things – calling a lonely person, helping out a friend, reading, picking up broken branches, going for a brisk walk, praying ...

### ***Good News!***

The good news is this: *"The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure"* (10:13).

- **God helps us when we're tempted.** Contrary to the popular excuse, *"The devil made me do it,"* the devil has no power to make you do anything. Jesus does have the power to help you withstand temptation if you ask. And if you have the resolve to try. One of Jesus' promises of is that His Holy Spirit is within us. He helps us.
- **When we fail, God forgives us.** *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness"* (1 John 1:8-9).

We are all tempted in all sorts of ways. Be prepared. Be diligent. Be honest. Be disciplined. Be strong. Be busy. Do what you need to do to deal with it (don't excuse it). If you do fail, pick yourself up and try to succeed next time ...

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