

Shiloh United Methodist Church

1 Corinthians 10:13, Psalm 46:1-2 Rev. Tyler Amundson

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Half Truths: God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle

Video -

<https://www.facebook.com/shilohbillings.church/videos/1717022464986558/>

There are several phrases that are associated with the Bible, phrases that are said at different times in our culture to evoke faith, and yet they are not in the scriptures anywhere. Each of these phrases has the power to both endear people to our faith and frighten others away. Over the next 5 weeks we will be exploring some of these phrases, seeking God's presence in them, and dispelling the pieces of them that cause harm to others in the faith journey.

So today: "God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle"

I have a friend who is a teacher. He shares this story:

James Worthington runs an inner-city youth program that offer young people an alternative to the lure of gang life. James tells this story to the kids in his program.

There was an older man who lived on a corner lot in south-central Los Angeles. It was a modest house amidst a city of wealth and extravagance. Raul's wife died suddenly from a stroke, leaving him deeply depressed and filled with grief. Raul retired from his job, spent hours at his church looking for solace, and sat on the front porch his wife had loved.

As he stared out from his front porch he decided to build a memorial garden for his wife, on that corner lot. He would plant herbs and

flowers to bloom year-round, bundles of cilantro, vines of tomatoes, and beloved rose bushes began to grow from this tribute and this sign of resurrected life for Raul.

One day Raul noticed that one of his rose bushes looked mangled, like someone had taken a baseball bat to it. At first he found himself angry and upset, it must have been that car full of gang members who had driven by the house numerous times, with a look of disapproval as they stared him down.

Raul knew nothing else to do, he cleaned up the bush and wondered what he might do to combat these vandals. Afraid to do anything else, he left the situation alone. Then it happened again, and Raul was concerned he would not be able to stop this onslaught of destruction. Not knowing what to do he simply decided to hold watch that night, seeing if he might catch a glimpse of the perpetrator.

He began his vigil by sitting on that front porch watching. As he watched, it was not a strong gang member who approached for destruction. Instead, a young boy whose story Raul could vaguely recall. The young boy was being raised by a single mother, father was long gone, and his brother was in jail for killing a rival gang member. In retaliation for this, the boys home had been a victim of a drive by shooting and his leg had been hit by a bullet. Not much limp remaining the boy still walked with a cane, which he was now using to dismantle the rose bush. As he finished the assault he looked up, surprised to see Raul on the porch watching calmly. The boy looked at Raul and went from fear to defiance in his body language, and then the boy walked away gruffly.

Raul at first thought about chasing the boy down, scolding him. Instead he let the boys rage and sense of despair wash over him, and Raul let his own despair overcome him until he had an idea.

The next day Raul found the boy walking home from school, he walked up to the boy. The boy got defensive at first and began to share how it wasn't him who had attacked the roses. Raul said simply, "I know who did it, I want to invite you to help me protect that garden. I will pay you, and teach you to garden. In return I hope you will guard and help it grow."

The boy showed up the next Saturday and they worked together to plant a rose bush for the boy himself to care for, and they harvest tomatoes, and bundles of cilantro. And the next week the boy came back too.

The garden never got attacked again, James who told this story knows that to be true. He was the young boy who Raul invited to help him, and now he uses it as place to serve young people amidst the challenges of violence they must combat to avoid being drawn into gangs and a life of violence.

Our first scripture comes from 1 Corinthians. It is a letter Paul is writing to the community of Christians at Corinth. He is trying to help them overcome temptations they are facing that are causing harm in their community. Temptations of sexual immorality and idolatry were things Paul was inviting the Corinthians to move past.

1 Corinthians 10:13 CEB

¹³ No temptation has seized you that isn't common for people. But God is faithful. He won't allow you to be tempted beyond your abilities. Instead, with the temptation, God will also supply a way out so that you will be able to endure it.

The phrase "God won't give you more than you can handle." Derives from roots from this passage and in many ways, is an invitation to help us understand that God doesn't lead us into temptation, we lead ourselves that way most of the time. In the Lord's prayer each week in church we pray for God to "not lead us into temptation." It is reminder

directly from Jesus that we can easily go down this road of not seeking God's opportunities and instead see our lives as stuck.

Take Raul for a minute and even James. Both of them had temptation to stay where they were in life. James tempted by the pressures of teenage life in the inner-city, Raul on the other-hand was overwhelmed by the challenges of losing a love he had fostered for years of his life. Both of these men's stories tie to our Half-Truth for today. Temptation on one side of this truth, and overwhelmed realities on the other side of this half-truth.

Adam Hamilton the author of the book for this series shares that as he was writing this chapter he was also working on getting more physically fit. He stopped writing to go out and get a healthy sandwich for lunch. As he was walking back to his office with the healthy sandwich. He passed one of the other leaders in their church. She was pushing a cart full of Dairy Queen bags. Now he was working on a chapter about temptation. He still asked, "What is in those bags?" She replied, "Chicken strips, hamburgers, and fries with gravy." Adam Hamilton was working on a temptation chapter, he was learning about how to avoid temptation. He still ended up with one of those bags of fries on his desk.¹

While this phrase and its originating scripture started with temptation, the phrase is not just used for moments of temptation. This is where it has become a half truth, because it is now used with people who are facing overwhelming obstacles in their lives. I have heard it shared with bereaved loved ones at funerals, with people facing illness that could be fatal, with kids who have never seen the obstacles they are facing before, and with people who have severe mental illness. The list could go on, but my biggest concern is that we share this phrase with people, many times as a way of sugar coating bad news, or severe problems.

¹ Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesn't say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 85.

There is another story about a woman who goes to her counselor because she is facing some really tough patch in her life. For years she had lived by the statement, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” She happened one day to share this phrase with her counselor as a way of letting the counselor know she had control of the situation. The counselor began to laugh, and this at first upset the woman. She asked why the counselor was laughing, to which she responded, “My entire job is based on the premise that people are often given more than they can handle on their own, we are not meant to handle all the hard things on our own.” This disturbed the woman at first, but as she thought about it, she found wisdom in the counselor’s statements. God can help us overcome great challenges, but rarely even in scripture do we do this alone.²

Psalm 46:1-2 (CEB)

46 God is our refuge and strength,
a help always near in times of great trouble.
² That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart,
when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea,

There is a family I know who lost their son at the age of 20 to cancer. The father of the family, Rea, is a brilliant thinker and one of the people I consider to be a spiritual leader in this world. He wrote after his son’s death about the experience. In his writing he shared this phrase, “I am grateful to God for hope that permits us to struggle on and continue functioning with some dignity when the odds in our favor are immeasurably small.”³

² Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesn't say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 89 (Loosely based on a story in the book.)

³ Knight, R. (1985). *The Christian Ministry*. Chicago: Christian Century Foundation.

This family despite all of the pain of losing a child so young, continues to demonstrate in their lives that while this pain is insurmountable that by sharing the load of this pain, they have been able to find resurrected life after the darkness. You will never hear them say this is easy, or the pain has gone away. Only that they are thankful for the little pieces of hope they have found along the way.

The key to this hope is trusting that God does not cause the pain and evil that bring this pain in our lives. Rea and his family don't believe for a minute God caused their son's illness, instead they trust that God loved there son through the pain and challenges of the cancer, and is loving there son still. God is not meant to sugar coat life's challenges. God is meant to be a companion to us through those challenges.

Adam Hamilton in his chapter on our phrase for today shares this final story:

Annie Johnson Flint was born on Christmas Eve 1866. At the age of 3 she lost her mother and then shortly after her father became so ill he had to give up the children for adoption. She was lucky to find a great adoptive family in the Flint's, but before she graduated high school her adoptive parents both died. She continued on to be a teacher, and wanted desperately to teach. Then only to be plagued by a degenerative disease herself that left her unable to live on her own.

Annie took to poetry writing for the nearly 40 years she lived beyond the diagnosis of her disease. She then took to writing poetry, a skill she had picked up from the Flint family. She wrote until her hands became so inflamed by her disease it was too painful to continue, so she dictated her poetry as long as she could.⁴

Annie wrote this poem entitled, *What God Hath Promised*:

⁴ Hamilton, A. (2016). *Half truths: God helps those who help themselves and other things the Bible doesnt say*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. Pg. 100.

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
many a burden, many a care.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love⁵

I believe fervently that God does not give us our pain and grief or temptation. Life and we ourselves stumble across those all on our own. However, in Jesus we know that God is with us in life, our darkness, our death, and in the hope of new life found in resurrection. We need to trust not in simple phrases, instead may we trust in the love of God we have found in Jesus.

Dr. Thomas A. Andrew is a medical examiner in New Hampshire. Over the last year he has seen a dramatic increase in the number of autopsies he has done on victims of drug overdoses. Dr. Andrew can best be described as the newspaper article telling his story did, “an energetic man of 60, with a close-cropped gray beard, resembles Richard Dreyfuss.” Dr. Andrew has watched the death toll from overdoses rise. Instead of

⁵ <https://www.scrapbook.com/poems/doc/46199.html>

being overwhelmed by the problem, by giving in to the rumor that life at 60 is when you retire. Dr. Andrew is doing something different, seeing where life might call him.⁶

He is going to hang up his stethoscope and exam gloves for a collar and a new degree from a seminary. With 64,000 overdose deaths in the US last year, which is a 22 percent jump over the previous year, Dr. Andrew is trusting that now is the time for him to enter the ministry. Specifically he wants to minister to young people who are find drugs as a relief or a temptation away from their own troubles in the world.

This week as we consider this half-truth, where are we being called in our lives by God to steer away from temptation? And also where in our lives do we need to ask for help, from God and from others to support us in our darkness?

Trusting that we are never given more than we can handle can be hard. The temptations of our culture pull us back from living life, but even Paul know we can overcome those things. And when we can't overcome life we know that leaning on God and others, have helped people find their next step, and that perhaps in asking others for help we might find the ability for us to find our next steps too.

Amen.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/07/us/drug-overdose-medical-examiner.html>