



# THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

## GOD WILL GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

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SERMON BY REV. STEVE CLARK ■ JULY 30, 2023

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**A**lbert Einstein once said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” Except...Albert Einstein never said that. You might have heard this famous quote, which is frequently attributed to Einstein, but it cannot be discovered in any original source literature or conversations with him. We aren’t sure who first said it, but Einstein had nothing to do with it. Researchers’ best guess is that it originated somewhere around 1980 in Narcotics Anonymous literature.

If you look around, you can find quite a few instances of famous quotes that were never actually said by the person who supposedly said them; either the quote got garbled over time, or it was just credited to the wrong person. Leo Durocher never said, “Nice guys finish last.” Marie Antoinette likely never said, “Let them eat cake.” George Washington never said, “I cannot tell a lie.” The whole cherry tree thing was a myth! If something is quoted to us often enough by enough people, we begin to assume it’s accurate, even if we never have seen the source. It’s like Abraham Lincoln once said: “You can’t believe everything you read on the Internet.”

Is it possible that we can do the same thing when it comes to quotes from the Bible, from God, and from Jesus? If we’ve heard a statement repeated enough times by enough people, could we begin to believe God might have said something that God never actually said?

Perhaps, for example, you were once going through a hard time and someone said, “Don’t worry. God will never give you more than you can handle.” Has that happened to you? Have you ever found yourself saying that? It’s a response you might hear when you are going through a hard time: illness, grief, loss, or good old-fashioned busyness. The idea is that God would never give you *too much* for you to bear. He won’t let *too much* happen to you.

The problem is that the Bible never said that. You can search the whole Bible and you will never find the words, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.” If anything, the Bible promises the *opposite*. The Bible is full of promises of trouble and suffering for followers of Jesus.

Some of you know what it feels like when God has given you more than you can handle. You know the exhaustion of taking care of aging parents. You know the agony of yet another stay in the hospital. You know the crippling pain of deep depression that keeps you from getting out of bed in the morning. Sometimes, when you are going through a time of suffering that seems too much to bear, you hear those words: “God won’t give you more than you can handle!” People may mean well, but it comes across as a condemnation. “Is there something wrong with me or with my faith if I feel overwhelmed?”

If you feel that way today—or, if you find yourself putting your hope in the words that God won’t give you more than you can handle—look with me at 2 Corinthians. We’re going to learn about a man named Paul, a man to whom God gave much more than he could handle.

**F**or we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make

us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.<sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 (ESV)

Let me just tell you my first point very clearly. **Sometimes, God gives you more than you can handle.** Let's blow up the false idea that God won't give you more than you can handle. Paul could not have been more crystal clear about this. God gave him way, way, way more than he could handle, and our English translations can't even quite tell us just how bad it was. Let me show you what I mean.

In verse 8, there are two Greek that I hope will help you see what Paul means. The first word is "**Huperballo.**" Huperballo comes from two Greek words: **Huper** and **Ballo.** *Huper* means "above" or "beyond." *Ballo* means "to throw." So, *huperballo* means to throw something farther than someone else. For example, *huperballo* would be if you and your jock buddy tried out for the shotput team and your buddy put the shot farther than you. As language developed, *huperballo* came to mean anything done in excess, anything done better, and anything that went above and beyond. It's where we get our English word *hyperbole*. Paul used the word *huperballo* whenever he wanted to communicate excess or extreme. In Ephesians 2:7, the grace of God is *huperballo*. In Ephesians 3:19, the love of Christ is *huperballo*.

Ready for the second word? The second word is the Greek word, "**dunamis.**" If it looks familiar, it's where we get our English words "dynamo" and "dynamite." *Dunamis* is all about power. If you have the *dunamis* to do something it means you are "capable" of doing it. If you are stronger or have higher status than someone, you have more *dunamis*.

Now look with me at verse 8. Paul, writing to his friends in a

church he planted in a town called Corinth describing the great suffering he experienced while on mission work in Asia. We don't know what this "affliction" was—some suggest it was an illness, persecution, or depression. What we do know from our English translation is that Paul's affliction was so bad that he and his friends were "*utterly burdened beyond our strength*" (2 Cor 1:8). In Greek, Paul and his friends were burdened "*huper huperballo dynamis.*" Remembering the two words we learned, Paul is saying, "We were burdened above...WAY, WAY above...and beyond our power. *God gave us more than we could handle*". It was so bad that Paul said he felt he had received a sentence of death.

Look how some other translations of this verse put it. NIV: "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure." NLT: "We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we could never live through it." NRSV: "We were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself." You get the picture. This isn't just a bad day at work. This is when you have reached your limit!

Have you ever experienced a time when you passed your body's physical limits and it just stopped doing what you told it to do? I don't mean soccer practice when you didn't want to run anymore but found a way to kick it into another gear. I mean when your body starts rebelling and shutting down and you tell it to do things and it simply doesn't respond because you have nothing left.

When I was a high schooler, I was hired to work at my first job at a restaurant called "Jeat?" Yes, J-E-A-T-question mark. It was supposed to be shorthand for "Did-ja-eat-yet?" and the restaurant was as bad as its name. I have countless Jeat? stories: the time the cops were called because an employee stole money out of the register or the time the fire department was called because our air vents were not strong enough to filter the smoke from the fires.

The smell of clams stuck to my shirt and made my friends refuse to spend time with me until I had showered. The most memorable for me was when I was working alone in the middle of summer and our air conditioning broke. The restaurant primarily served fried food, and I watched our kitchen thermometer creep up...102 degrees...103...104. It was even hotter above the fryers and the temperature was higher. For the first few hours, I was tired and sweaty. But after standing over hot fryer oil in a 104-degree kitchen for hours, I started seeing spots. I started growing dizzy. I became faint and nauseous. I started to realize that this wasn't about toughing it out anymore. If I stayed there, something was going to go very wrong. Fortunately, I had the sense to call my boss, close the restaurant early, and get into a cold shower. Those of you who grew up playing sports in Florida know the signs: I had heat exhaustion. That's a pit stop on the way to heat stroke. It wasn't a matter of dealing with an uncomfortable kitchen anymore. My body had hit its limit.

That is the type of agony Paul was experiencing. Paul seemed to be experiencing heat exhaustion of the soul. He made clear, in no uncertain terms, that things had gotten so bad he thought he would die. He had hit his limit. He could do no more. The Bible makes space for this. Yet sometimes as Christians, we make space for our bodies to hit physical exhaustion but not our souls. "Just push through it. It'll get better. You'll be fine. You just need more faith. What's wrong with you?" We can easily find popular preachers today who suggest that all God wants is for us to be happy; that God wants health, wealth, success, and happiness for us if we just have enough faith. The message of Jesus is the opposite! "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matt 11:28). He does **not** say, "Come to me, and I'll make you work even harder!" But that message sinks into our culture anyway. When we experience heat exhaustion of the soul, we sometimes do the worst possible thing; we keep pushing. We try

harder. We even turn up the heat.

Maybe you know how that feels. Maybe it happened when the burden of carrying for aging parents became too much. Maybe it happened when your job became too overwhelming. Maybe it happened when you couldn't handle the thought of yet another surgery. Maybe you have fallen on your knees in tears and cried out, "I can't do this anymore!" Maybe you know how it feels to struggle with deep depression, so painful you can't get out of bed in the morning. Maybe Paul's language sounds familiar to those of you who have loved ones who have chosen to end their lives.

Let me make something very clear: whether it's anxiety, depression, profound grief, or being overwhelmed at work, Paul's antidote for you is not "Just try harder." His diagnosis is not "Something must be wrong with you." His solution is not "Just have more faith, and depression will go away." I think Paul would say, "I have been there too. I know what it's like to think that I don't know if I can get through this." Those feelings are common in the Bible. Great Biblical heroes like Elijah, Moses, and Jonah each asked God for permission to die rather than carry on with their mission. In Elijah's case, God literally told him, "The journey is too much for you." Then He gave him a snack and told him to take a nap. Sometimes, that is what you need...you heard it at church, "Go take a nap."

In all seriousness, if you have hit a breaking point, if you feel that you can't do it anymore, hear this: **you are not alone**. Having too much to handle and not knowing what to do does not mean something is wrong with you. Battling clinical depression and anxiety does not mean something is wrong with you. Pursuing counseling or spiritual direction does not mean something is wrong with you. It just means you have a lot in common with other heroes of our faith.

Sometimes God gives us more than we can handle. So, what

do we do when that happens? Why would God let this happen, anyway? Paul's second crucial idea is this: **When God gives us more than we can handle, we learn to rely on God and not ourselves.** Look at verse 9 again. *"Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead."* Paul was saying, "Here is why God gave me more than I could handle: it was so I would learn to rely on God and not on myself."

What exactly does it mean to **rely** on someone? We all rely on people for various things: we rely on our car guy to fix our car, or we rely on our bug guy to spray our home. However, most of us don't rely on our car guy to give us sage advice on life, or on our bug guy to watch our kids for the weekend while we're away. To *rely* on someone is to *trust* in them and it takes time to build a level of trust in someone. Generally, the more important something is to us, the less likely we are to rely on someone else. There are only so many people we'll let watch our dog and fewer people we'll let watch our kids. There are even fewer people we will let operate on a tumor...that is until we realize the alternative is worse and the doctor tells us, "You will die unless I operate!" We review the doctor's credentials and make sure the surgeon knows what to do. We are not likely to rely on a stranger to remove a tumor from our bodies. Often, we only rely on someone whom we deeply trust...or when we have no other option.

Throughout the Bible, people rely on all sorts of things. Jesus tells a parable about a strong man who puts his trust in his armor and is then defeated in a battle. He tells of a man who built big barns to store all his food so he could have a nice, long, easy life but who ends up dying that very night. And He told of a Pharisee who trusted in his own righteousness as contrasted with that of a sinful tax collector. You might remember who went home justified— it wasn't the Pharisee. You can trust in health, in wealth, in your intelligence, in your ability. There are a multitude of things

we can turn to that we think will get us through hard times when nothing else will. But the reality for all of us is that sometimes when we face something too big to handle, we all hit a point when our intellect, our health, our money, or our dashing good looks just aren't enough to get us through. What we rely on fails us.

In our Scripture today, when Paul had too much to handle, he realized that his great education and intellect weren't enough to get him through. His own remarkable determination and grit weren't enough to get him through. And as a result, he learned to rely on the God who raises the dead. He put his trust fully in the One who *"delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again"* (2 Cor 1:10). Paul is forced to take the very thing most precious to many of us – his very life—and to rely on God. This is more than letting someone watch the Labradoodle for the weekend. This is more than letting someone babysit our kids. This is getting on the operating table and saying to the doctor, "Okay. I trust you." Perhaps the reason God gives us too much to handle is so that we'll learn to let Him handle it!

But what does this look like for us? Few of us would debate that it is important to trust God, but what does it mean to stop relying on our wealth, intelligence, power, strength, family, or goodness to get through our challenges and to rely on the God who raises the dead?

There's a fabulous, animated Christmas movie called "Arthur Christmas" my little sister and I used to watch every Christmas. The basic plot line is that Santa Claus is unwilling to retire. He's getting older, technology is getting more advanced, and there are just so many countries! Meanwhile, Santa's extremely capable son – who of course is named Steve – is in line to become the new Santa...if, of course, his aging father ever gives up the role. Steve has built a massive spaceship, the S-1, and a giant army of elves



capable of delivering all the gifts around the world in just a few hours—except, they miss a child. Santa, desperate to be the hero, hurries to the S-1 and tries to pilot it. The driver’s seat is bouncing up and down, oxygen masks are dropping from the ceiling, and the ship lurches back and forth as Santa is unable to figure out the massive contraption. Steve tries to convince his dad to give up the controls, but Santa refuses – until he deploys the airbag on himself. Then finally, Santa steps back, resigned, and says, “You drive, Stephen.” The gift gets delivered.

**This** is reliance. Functionally, let’s face it, when it comes to our lives and the challenges we face we feel much like Santa Claus trying to pilot the S-1. No matter how hard we push, how clever we are, or how much faith we have, the time comes when we just can’t drive the thing anymore. Our back is too sore to carry the box up the stairs. No matter how clever we are we can’t find the money to get Mom into assisted living. We can’t fix the marriage no matter how hard we try. Eventually, our plans fail. Eventually, we can’t do it anymore. For Paul to rely on God is to give up the keys. It’s an issue of trust. If you’re teaching your teenager how to drive but you have a hand on the wheel you haven’t relied on your child yet. In essence “to rely” is to say, “God, I don’t know where I’m going. I don’t know how I’ll have the strength to carry on, but I trust you know what you’re doing, and I will follow.” To shift your trust from yourself to God is to stop white-knuckling the steering wheel by trying to force your life where you want it and to let the God who raises the dead get in the driver’s seat.

This is hard. You would think there would be lots of biblical figures we could look to who put their trust in God. But in fact, there is only one character in the New Testament who, using the same word Paul used, was said to have *put his trust* in God. From everyone else’s perspective, He had made a mistake. In Matthew 27:43, people mocked the broken, flogged, heat-exhausted Jesus

who was nailed to a cross. *“He trusts in God! Let God deliver him now!”* They said it mockingly—*“Look where reliance on God got him!”* And in a way, it’s true: Jesus’ trust in God did not let Him escape trials. It brought Him to the cross. But His trust was in the God who raises the dead. Three days later, Jesus came back. He rose powerfully over His enemies. A new body, a new life, a new power, declaring the devil and all his angels defeated. He is the archetype for those who trust in God. That’s why Paul said he put his trust in the God who raises the dead. *“He might not stop bad things from happening to me, but if my wholehearted trust is in Him, I know He can deliver me. And in the end, I know He will deliver me to a new life, a new body, a new future.”*

And what effect did this have on Paul? In chapter 4 of the same letter, Paul said, *“We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are pressed, but not crushed. Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed”* (2 Cor 4:7). In other words, Paul said, *“Me? I’m just a jar of clay, a clay pot. But the treasure of the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and will raise us too shows that the surpassing power to overcome trials, the surpassing power to work good out of evil, the surpassing power to deliver from heat exhaustion of the soul comes from God, not from me.”* Oh, and by the way, do you want to guess what *“surpassing power”* is in Greek? ***Huperballon dunamis!***

If you are dealing with heat exhaustion of the soul like Paul did, the solution is not to just try harder. The antidote is not to just say the right prayer. The problem is not that you don’t have enough faith. If you are heavily burdened, if you can’t do it anymore, if God has given you more than you can handle, the only answer is to draw near to the God who raises the dead. To put your trust and confidence more and more in Him and not in your power or your determination, not in hard work or therapy or family, but to know that the God who delivered Paul from affliction

can deliver you too. The God who raised Jesus from the dead will raise you too.

What does this mean for us today? What are tangible ways we can apply Paul's message that God will give us more than we can handle so that we learn to trust in him?

**First, trust God with the small things.** Trust is built over time. You don't trust someone with your whole heart until you've seen them keep a secret. You don't trust someone to watch your kids unless you've seen them demonstrate responsibility. If you want to get to the level of trust and confidence Paul describes, start by trusting God with something small. When you aren't sure how a travel plan will come together, say a prayer about it first and wait for a day to see what happens instead of going straight to problem-solving mode. Leave an hour of your day unscheduled, pray for direction, and see what happens. See how God delivers on mini-trusts.

**Second, use your comfort to comfort others.** In the four verses preceding those about Paul's affliction, he uses the word "comfort" ten times. He says that God comforted him in his affliction so that he could comfort others. Maybe you can relate to the heat exhaustion of the soul we talked about. Maybe it happened to you once and now you're in a different place, a healthy place. Paul says one of the purposes for our comfort from God is so we can comfort others who go through similar things. This doesn't mean you have to stand on a stage and bare your soul to the world, but what might it look like to find a friend, acquaintance, or stranger who is going through suffering if you walk alongside them and even share a bit of your story? It is not to say God will do the same, exact thing in their life, but that, "I know the God of comfort. He's walked me through this. Let me walk with you as He walked with me."

**Third, repeat the truth to yourself.** The most valuable thing

we can do when going through trials is remind ourselves daily what is true. Paul reminds himself in his trial, "This is the God who raises the dead." Is there a verse or a truth about God that you need to stick to your bathroom mirror or on your fridge? "He will never leave me." "He raises the dead." "He's the God of comfort." During my morning time with God, I often repeat aloud to myself the words of John the Baptist: "*I am not the Christ*" (John 1:20). I am not Jesus. I cannot fix the whole world. I can only do what He does in and through me. ■



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