

Does God ever give us more than we can handle?

September 9, 2018 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Part way through the summer, someone passed along to me another question for our Q's from the Pews series and I thought that it was worth extending our series one more week in order to include it.

Does God ever give us more than we can handle?

When things get rough, when tragedy happens, when a series of events pile up and make us feel overwhelmed, it's quite easy to wonder – does God ever give us more than we can handle?

And the answer to that is yes and no.

In a sense it's true – there are situations where God does give us more than we can handle – but it's also true to say that when we rely on His strength, He will never give us more than we can handle. So – yes and no.

Let me show you why I say that. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 8. 2 Corinthians 1:8 – I think we can learn a lot from Paul here on the question of 'does God ever give us more than we can handle?' Verse 8, Paul writes:

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia = Turkey/Greece. We were under great pressure, *far beyond our ability to endure*, so that we despaired even of life.

Point number one – God does give us more than we can handle. Look at what Paul says – we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure – that sure sounds like they had more on their hands than they could handle. God allowed them to experience more than they could handle

(and brief aside - I'm going to use the language of 'God *allows* us to experience more than we can handle' rather than 'God *gives* us more than we can handle' because a lot of these trials we go through are simply consequences of living in a fallen world – God doesn't GIVE cancer, God doesn't take away a job – these are simply trials that happen that God allows in order to grow our character and deepen our faith in Him - end of aside).

So I think that yes, God allowed Paul to experience more than he can handle, and based on Paul's on records, God allowed that A LOT – later in 2 Corinthians, Paul lays out all the trials he'd faced -

Prison, flogging, exposed to death, beaten with rods, beaten with lashes, stone, shipwrecked, spent a night and a day bobbing up and down on a piece of driftwood in the middle of the ocean -

have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea... (2Co 11:23-25 NIV).

We don't know which of these he was thinking of in chapter 1, but take your pick. In many situations it seems, God allowed Paul to experience things that were well beyond his ability to handle. Paul even talks here about despairing of life – these things that he was going through were so serious that he had serious doubts as to whether or not he would survive them.

Verse 9 -

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death.

BUT... (verse 9) ... this happened ... that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Point number two – God allows us to experience more than we can handle so that we will trust our own strength less and trust in God's strength more. Paul was no different from other human beings = just like us he was tempted to place his confidence in his own power rather than on God (paraphrase of Calvin in Garland) and God allowed these trials to shift Paul's confidence away from his own strength and on to God's.

Over the summer, Anna and I were in a lazy river – you know, with the current that pulls you along on inner tubes – and she had finally decided that it was time to get off. Problem is, she decided to get off about ten feet past the stairs that led out of the lazy river. So there she was struggling against the current to make her way back to the stairs and it was a little more than she could handle. I kept offering her help but she didn't want it until finally she took my hand and in my strength made her way against the current and out of the water.

That's a picture I think of what it means to rely on God and not ourselves. God is not diminishing our intellect and wisdom and strength, but He is reminding us that our intellect and wisdom and strength are limited. His, on the other hand, is limitless. And so He allows us to experience things that go well beyond our ability to handle, so that we will rely on His limitless strength and not on our own limited power.

And look what happened when Paul took God's hand and walked in his strength – verse 10 -

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2Co 1:8-11 NIV).

Point three – As we rely on God's strength, He delivers. I love the repetition of that word 'delivered' there in Paul's voice – it rings with confidence. God has delivered us from deadly peril; He does deliver us, He WILL deliver us, again and again. Past, present, future – God can be relied on to deliver.

So let's ask our question – does God ever give us more than we can handle? What does Paul's experience tell us? Yes, God does sometimes allow us to experience things that go well beyond our own ability to handle. But He does it so that we will rely on His superior, unfailing strength to make it through.

So let's modify our question – does God ever give us more than we can handle? Yes.
Does God ever give us more than HE can handle? No. Absolutely not.

He is capable of handling every situation that comes our way;
He is wise enough to untangle even the most complicated circumstance and not even death can thwart His plans. He is the God that raises the dead!

The storms that threaten to overwhelm us are little more than whispers to Him and so He invites us to rely on Him to make it through. And when we rely on Him, we *will* make it through.

So let's ask our question one more time –

Does God ever give us more than we can handle? Yes – to remind us to trust in Him.

Does God ever give us more than HE can handle? No – His power is limitless.

So knowing that, does God ever give us more than we can handle? No. When we lean on His strength, the answer is always no. There is nothing we can't handle when we rely on Him.

As Paul says in Philippians - ESV Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phi 4:13 ESV).

We will never be overwhelmed when we rely on God for strength.

I think that Adam Hamilton is right when he says -

It's not that God won't give you more than you can handle, but that God will help you handle all that you've been given (Adam Hamilton, Half Truths).

So let's see – let's think about the ways that we can apply this. Let me give you three.

1. You may be here today, feeling completely overwhelmed by the circumstances of your life. I think we all feel burdened by Shannon's cancer; I think we all feel burdened by Sandra's cancer; I had the joyous privilege of marrying Leah and Matt and within an hour of that ceremony, I got the call that Wendy Balfour, had died. And I thought – 'how are we going to handle this?' It was actually the Sunday before that that this question came to me – and God knew I'd need that reminder.

How do we handle it? By relying on God's strength.

2 Corinthians 12 – God reminds Paul – 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' and then Paul says 'Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, because when I am weak, then I am strong.'

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12:9-10 NIV).

If you are here and feeling overwhelmed by the circumstances of your life, I want to invite you to take God's hand and rely on His strength. He has allowed these circumstances to remind you that you don't need to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders – that's His job. Our job is to lean on Him and follow in His footsteps.

How do you do that? You reach out in prayer to say 'God, I can't do this on my own – I want your infinite help.' You remind yourself 'In my weakness, He is stronger.' You train yourself to see your situation through God's eyes, not your own and you evaluate your circumstances based on God's strength, not your own. He has delivered, He is delivering, He will deliver – that needs to become a source of confidence in our lives.

So first – rely on God – second – Accept help from other people. Relying on God doesn't mean ignoring other people. Often times God works through other people to carry us when we feel overwhelmed. His power is often expressed through other people. That's the way that God planned for it to work – Galatians 6:2 – says very clearly - 2 Carry each other's burdens, ~~and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.~~ (Gal 6:2 NIV). Flip it and I think you can hear it even more clearly – fulfill the Law of Christ, that is, to love one another by carrying each other's burdens.

If you are weighed down – talk to someone. Allow God to work through them to carry you. I observe that a couple of generations above me are really reluctant to accept help from other people – the world that you grew up in really encouraged self-sufficiency – and that's ok. There's nothing wrong with being self-sufficient. Just don't allow that to prevent you from accepting help from others in hard times, because that's one of the ways that God carries us along.

And third – the other side of the coin – support someone. Pray for them. You might be in a situation right now where everything's going fine. You're in a good season of life where things are under control but the person next to you might be struggling. Help them. Carry their burdens. If you say 'how's are you' and they say 'oh, good' but their eyes don't agree, ask them. Love one another.

And don't diminish the power of praying for people. Sometimes, the instinct is to think 'praying isn't helping' – but look again at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:10 –

~~10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us.~~ On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many (2Co 1:8-11 NIV).

In Paul's mind, praying is helping. God delivers people and sustains people and supports people in answer to prayer. Make a point of helping people who are struggling by praying and by carrying their burdens.

Rely on God. Accept help. Help others.

If you are feeling overwhelmed this morning – let me say this clearly to you – God will not give you more than you can handle. He will not allow you to be overwhelmed and overtaken. He is holding out His hand to say 'trust me.' Rely on My strength. And you will never fail.

Let me conclude with this –

I've said this before and I'll say it again, it has been really encouraging to me to watch Shannon walk through this experience of cancer. It's the sort of thing that could devastate a person and yet I get the sense that Shannon has taken this message to heart. God will never give us more than we can handle when we rely on Him.

I asked her if I could share a couple of her text messages to me with you and she agreed – she writes –

There is only so much I can do. I have to let God be my shepherd and lead me on my path. That really helps alleviate the stress, fear and anxiety... It's been an eye-opening journey for me. Aside from the medical side of it, I have never felt this close to God. It's truly a marvel, feeling the way that I do. I know it's all because of Him and who He has put on this path with me.

I know that Shannon is relying on God.

I know that many of you are helping her.

And I know that God is working through you to carry her and strengthen you. That's the way God intended it.

God will never give us more than we can handle in His strength and He will help us to handle all that we've been given. Let's pray.

BENEDICTION

Eph. 3:20-21 - Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.