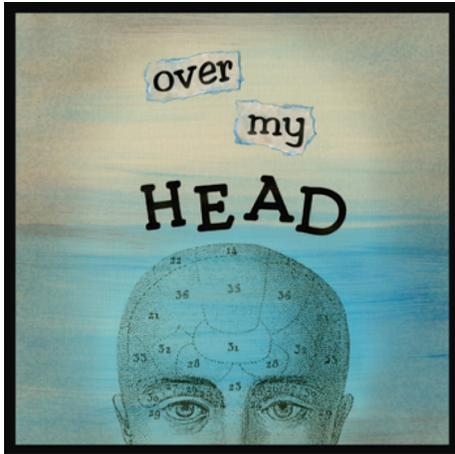


**SERIES: DETERMINING GOD’S WILL IN OUR LIVES**  
**PART I: DOES GOD GIVE US MORE THAN WE CAN HANDLE?**  
**By Pastor Matthew Woods**



Have you ever gotten into a situation that was bigger than you imagined? I know I have. Consider working on cars for example. I can do a lot of stuff when it comes to fixing a vehicle but I have my limits. Last year when my son, Josh was having issues with his truck engine we took it straight in for repairs only to find out that another truck was in the next bay for the same problem. Only, the other owner tried to fix it himself. The result was that it cost him much more to get it fixed right—he messed up his timing chain and all kinds of internal stuff—(“When it gets past what I know I just call it internal stuff”). Knowing my limits has saved me a bunch of trouble. But it hasn’t saved me from all trouble.

Trouble finds everyone. And sometimes it can be more than I can handle.

**“GOD PROVIDES A WAY OUT.”**

So, as I write to you I just want to offer some food for thought. The statement, “God will not give you more than you can handle” is well-known. The idea is drawn from 1 Corinthians 10:13 which reads, *“No Temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”* The context is focused on the problem of temptation not trials or tribulations. Since scripture is clear that temptation comes from the devil and that it is “common to man” the Lord seems to limit the strength of that temptation as he once limited the damage Satan could do to Job. On the other hand the verse reveals that the Lord provides an escape route. In other words the temptation itself is never bigger than the opportunity to escape it. When temptation stalks us faith is given an opportunity for obedience and grace.

**THE LORD IS NOT NECESSARILY THE SOURCE OF WHAT TROUBLES ME.**

The context of 1 Corinthians 10:13 may be about temptation but the question remains. Does the Lord give us more than we can handle? For the sake of our time here I will not dive too deeply into the question of the Lord as the source of what we can handle or not handle. I will just say that the source of things is not always identifiable. Trouble can be brought on by poor choices. I could choose to smoke, practice an idle lifestyle, and eat unhealthy every day and then when my health fails I could say, “Why did God let this happen to me?” The Lord is not going to interfere with my choices but ultimately my choices may result in a problem.

Sometimes however, the source has no rhyme or reason to it. For example, consider a sudden failure of a digestive system resulting in the need for a transplant or an aneurysm on the heart which turns into life-saving surgery. These are much more random. Then again not even a

sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of the Lord. So when I hear “God does not give” this assumes God has ordained something to happen. I do not believe God gives cancer nor desires illness for anyone even with the idea that he would test or discipline his children. In short, the source of things that are difficult are not necessarily from the Lord.

However, as I look at scripture I don’t have to look too hard or too far to see that His people are regularly in over their heads and facing more than they can handle. Noah was in over his head so Noah built an ark with explicit instructions. Noah certainly built the ark through many years of hard work, the Bible calls him a righteous man, but in the end it is the Lord who saves Noah and his family. Moses didn’t beat Pharaoh, nor bring about the plagues, nor cross the Red Sea by himself, the Hand of the Lord was with Him. Same can be said of Joshua and the Israelites. They did not bring down the giant walls of Jericho because they were strong, but because the Lord had given them the city. I would suggest to you that the Lord’s people are regularly over their heads and beyond the scope of their limitations and thereby allowed to be in a position where they must rely on the Lord even only for manna and water in a place where there is none. Which brings us back to my food for thought.

### **THE LORD IS THE SOURCE FOR GRACE**

The Lord may not be the source for troubles but He is definitely the source for handling them without being overwhelmed by them. Even in Temptation as stated above the Lord provides an escape from temptation. For the Apostle Paul it was grace. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 gives a familiar text. *“Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.”*<sup>8</sup> *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.*<sup>9</sup> *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.*<sup>10</sup> *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.”*

Paul has more than he can handle with his “thorn”. Three times he begs to be rid of it but in the end the Lord allows it to remain. Paul calls it his “weakness”. He also makes clear that God did not give it but identifies the source as Satan who’s goal was to torment and break the spirit of Paul. The Lord does however gives something else—His grace. With this grace Paul is able to carry on without being overwhelmed. We also note that Paul develops a greater understanding of himself—it keeps him from becoming conceited. It keeps him centered on Jesus.

### **THE LORD IS THE SOURCE OF DELIVERANCE, CONFIDENCE, AND GRATITUDE**

Consider another passages in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11. <sup>8</sup> *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. **We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.***<sup>9</sup> *Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*<sup>10</sup> *He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,*<sup>11</sup> *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.”*

Here I would encourage you to consider the result of the experience. First, Paul describes dire circumstances. “We were under great pressure, *far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. It felt like a sentence of death.*” Paul’s experience got pretty dark to the point death was assumed to be next, perhaps even preferred. Again the circumstances were allowed to exist but this time the source of events that led to this dark experience is not clearly stated. But what results is a greater reliance on the Lord for deliverance. Paul developed a reliance on the Lord not unlike David.

Just before facing the giant he refers back to his experiences as a shepherd rescuing the sheep from a bear and a lion. David learns to rely on the Lord. In 1 Samuel 17:37 David confidently tells Saul, “The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

The result for Paul is similar. **“If got me through the last thing he will surely get me through this too.** God did not send the problem but Paul certainly gives credit to the Lord for deliverance. He also expresses gratitude for those who prayed for him. In the end the better path was to allow the weakness in order to also find the strength in Jesus. Experience with weakness seems to develop a greater confidence in the Lord.

**SOME ONLY COME LOOKING FOR THE “FIRE EXTINGUISHER JESUS” --SOME ACTUALLY MEET THE LORD THROUGH GRACE.**

Not all have a faith mature enough to rely on the Lord, however. I’ve seen this in folks who normally don’t see the inside of a church will all the sudden walk through our doors. A major shift happens in their life; a job loss, a spouse suddenly leaves, facing criminal charges, or discovering something like inoperable cancer. The brokenness brings them to church carrying guilt, or fear, or desperation. And usually by this point they have at least realized that their trouble is more than they can handle alone. So, they come hoping that the church will somehow fix their problem.

Instead of looking to the Savior, too often people come looking for a kind of fire extinguisher to put out their personal fire. Fire extinguishers are great when you need them but most of the time they are ignored. A fire extinguisher hangs humbly in the hall until its needed to put out a fire. Otherwise most days folks just walk by it unconsciously. Somewhere in the back of their mind they know it’s there but if asked they are not even sure exactly where it hangs because they haven’t needed it. The Lord, if he is perceived as not needed most of the time will be treated a lot like this.

Here is a common pattern. Rather than looking for the Lord many persons who suddenly show up are really looking for a new resource to maintain control over their situation, to put things back where they were happy. A lack of quick fixes often then results in a resignation that the new reality is here to stay so they stop looking for help. Then what follows is a sudden absence along with a new resentment or at least a disillusionment toward the Lord or His church or myself as the pastor for not giving them the miracle then came looking for.

But once in a while we will see one who begins to lean on the Lord to the point that acceptance of their “weakness” leads to discover the sufficiency of God’s grace. They find wisdom as Paul did about the Lord and about himself. A confidence begins to grow in the Lord that may not have been there before. With this comes a greater appreciation in the Lord rather than a focus on self, or the trouble that started it all. The trouble doesn’t necessarily go away but

the perspective changes. As Paul once said, “I’ve *learned* to be content in all circumstances” (Philippians 4:11). As long as we are willing to learn we will learn.

**DEATH MAY BE MORE THAN WE CAN HANDLE BUT JESUS HAS GIVEN US A RESURRECTION TO PROVIDE THE ULTIMATE ESCAPE.**

Perhaps then the ultimate form of facing more than we can handle is death itself. A time eventually comes when the brokenness of our bodies cannot be overcome by doctors, or good-diets, or medication. Eventually we literally come to the end of ourselves and our bodies stop working altogether. Death comes to us all. No one can overcome death without the Lord dying and rising again. He changed death from an ending into a gateway home to the Heavenly Father’s house. Easter is so significant because of this. The Lord’s resurrection is our resurrection from death. But here again are all the gifts. Jesus is not the source of death but He is the solution. He gives grace to overcome the grave. Hope is designed to instill confidence in Jesus’ resurrection. And we find ourselves more willing to trust in His deliverance. We find ourselves living a life of gratitude as Paul did while confident in a perspective of life that only faith in Jesus can maintain.



**CONCLUSION—JUST FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Do we get more than we can handle? Often. Does the Lord give it? Not necessarily. Jesus does however, give us the tools needed when we face trouble all with the goal that we grow closer and more confident in our Savior. The benefit is the exercise of our faith to rely on and realize a fuller measure of Jesus working in our lives. To know Jesus more fully is certainly within the realm of God’s desire and will for our lives as we live out our days.

Coming Up:

**Series: Determining God’s Will in Our Lives**

**Part II What is God’s will for us?**

**Part III How do we determine God’s will when making decisions?**