



Half Truths

Week 3: “God Won’t Give You More Than You Can Handle.”

Brian Mattson - 09/21/2025

Welcome to week 3 of our Half Truths series, based on the book by Adam Hamilton. If this is your first week during this series, let’s first define a half truth. Half truths are these sayings that have become so commonplace in our society, and the Christian lexicon, that we just assume they are straight from scripture, or at least reflect a Biblical truth.

The first week we discussed the importance of interpreting scripture, something we all naturally do, even subconsciously. Taking ancient texts as literal in our modern worlds can be irresponsible and sometimes quite dangerous. And as we contemplate ancient words, we must use Jesus’s life and teachings as our ultimate filter for our lives today. We interpret scripture using Jesus as the lens through which we see the world.

Last week, we broke down the phrase, *Love the sinner, hate the sin*, and how it does more harm than good. It draws lines, categorizes our neighbors as sinners, and leads to judgment and hate. The safest way to move forward is to love our neighbor, as Jesus taught, and leave it at that. Our neighbors are those people we know, will never know, even our enemies. Love is our guide and defining characteristic as Christians.

This week, our half truth is *God won’t give you more than you can handle*. Seems reasonable, I must admit, but let’s dig a little deeper.

My first real job after college was at KSPR and KY3 covering sports, and later news, of all sorts here in the Ozarks. It was a typical office workplace, besides the hours and shifts. It was kind of like a professional office environment had a baby with a hospital shift schedule. People work weird hours, holidays, any time—and it can all change at the drop of a hat or a house fire. It was common, in the chaos, for employees to bring their lunch and some grab it to go when they can find 30 minutes.

When I worked at the TV station, sometimes I had enough time to run home and eat with Jess during my “lunch break,” which was her normal dinner time, before I had to get back to work. Other days, I hit the drive-through on my way to a breaking crime story or out-of-town interview. Rarely did I bring lunch to work, but some folks did. And like other office environments, when there was food lying around, it was usually leftovers from an office party or birthday. Two-day-old cupcakes or a picked-over veggie tray.

When I switched jobs in 2010 and began working in churches, lunch breaks were completely different. Here’s what I quickly learned: there is always leftover food at church. At its worst, there is always peanut butter and jelly. But sometimes it’s amazing like leftovers from youth dinners or pizza parties. Other times it’s divine because the United Methodist Women had met earlier in the morning, and they all brought homemade cakes and cookies and snacks.

When I came downtown full time in 2016, the church was smaller, yes, but the desserts were just as delectable. And superfluous. There were leftovers from meetings, youth, women’s studies, and—for some reason—people often bring *extra* cookies, cakes, and other goodies to church for the benefit of the believers. I was very much a direct beneficiary of the whole lot. And as the years went by a couple things happened: I rarely said “No,” and my bloodwork got worse.

Now, I don't place all the blame for my elevated cholesterol and blood pressure on the United Women in Faith. These were my choices, and, honestly, partly my genetics. But I could've said, "Thanks, but not today." Usually I said, "Yes, please."

These kinds of tests and temptations are more akin to the scriptural context for today's half truth. When people use the phrase *God won't give you more than you can handle*, the reference is likely from 1 Corinthians:

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

- 1 Corinthians 10:13

God will not let us be tested beyond our strength, but when tests come, God will provide a way out. Other translations substitute the word 'testing' for the word 'temptation' to align it more with the context of the passage.

Adam Hamilton says in his book that the larger theme of this passage relates to the temptations of everyday life, especially in the large port city of Corinth, Greece. In fact, this letter was written to the early Christian community in Corinth, which was likely composed of former pagans or followers of other Greco-Roman gods and goddesses. Hamilton writes:

Most of the newly minted Christians Paul was addressing had been pagans until the church was founded. They were trying to leave behind the idol worship and the temple prostitutes that were part of religious life in places like Corinth's shrine to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love... And so the context for this verse in 1 Corinthians is self-discipline in the face of temptation.

- Adam Hamilton

This is a universal human truth: We are all tempted by things that we know are not good for us. This was true for the ancient Israelites wandering in the

wilderness who gave into idol worship and sexual immorality. Scripture says Jesus was tempted. The early Christians were tempted and we, too, are tempted today. We all sometimes give into those things that are not good for us, as Paul writes.

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

- Romans 7:15

This passage in 1 Corinthians is not about God not giving us more burdens than we can handle. Rather, it's about God helping us through. During these temptations and tests of our character, resolve, and faith, God provides a way to escape. The problem is that we may not always be trying our hardest to see the exits in front of us. Humans tend to move through life like water, taking the paths of least resistance. God promises that when the temptations come—and they do come—they won't be so strong that we can't resist them.

Let's revisit our half truth again: *God won't give you more than you can handle.* This is something that is usually said to comfort or reassure people in times of true adversity. When we feel overwhelmed and overburdened with life, faith and hope are of great consolation. The loss of loved ones, a change in employment, or struggling with mental health. Perhaps a combination of things. It feels comforting to hear that God won't give us more than we can handle.

But using this half truth does two very harmful things. The first is that it damages our perception and understanding of God. The second is that it fosters the idea that our ability to make it through life is a personal responsibility.

Our half truth last week—love the sinner, hate the sin—altered our perception of people. It changed them from neighbors to sinners. The first four words of this week's half truth—God won't give you— change our perception of God. Hamilton writes:

When we say those words, we are implying that whatever difficult or painful things are happening in your life, God gave them to you.
- Adam Hamilton

And when we turn bad things that happen in life into a God-given situation, it can be quite damaging to people's understanding of God. Heather is going to talk about that change in perception much more next week, so today I want to talk about the damage we do to ourselves when we say or hear this phrase.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we might find ourselves saying this half truth to try and comfort someone who is struggling with life. This phrase, or one like it, could be uttered in a hospital room or during a moment when terrible news is received. We say these things without bad intentions, but it can be very easy for someone to hear this as a reminder that *surely God won't give you anything else. You can make it through all of this because God promises it won't be more than you can handle.* The problem is that life is often more than one person can handle. If you don't think that's true, have you tried living before?

And while I admit, the American ideal of individuality is often a beautiful and creative thing, it also leads us into a false sense of self-sufficiency. It's kind of baked into our culture that I can do anything I want, be anything I dream of, or succeed at the things I try. I don't doubt the sentiments of those statements, but it sure is a lot of me, me, me. Have you noticed that Jesus was a big fan of humility? Have you heard how Paul's letters encourage us to be part of a larger community? Do you remember how often the Psalms tell us to trust God, not ourselves?

Adam Hamilton encourages us to do away with the phrase *God won't give you more than you can handle.* Instead, he rephrases this half truth by saying *God will help you handle all that you've been given.* It might not sound awfully different from our original phrase, but the theological implications are much

healthier. In this version, we understand that life happens, but God is with us through it all. God is a willing partner on our journeys. In the joy *and* the sorrow. In the smooth times *and* in the adversity. In fact, I believe God gives us people as help along the way.

There's a humorous modern parable about a man who climbed onto his roof for safety during a flood. He was praying to God for help when a canoe was coming by. The man in the canoe shouted out for the stranded man to jump in and grab onto his oar. The man on the roof said, "I'm good. I've prayed to God for help."

Soon a motorboat zipped over and a rescuer said, "Jump in, I can save you." The man on the roof declined saying he had faith in God's providence, and the motorboat went away.

The waters continued to rise when a helicopter showed up and dropped a rope. "Grab the rope and we'll take you to safety," he heard from the helicopter. "No thanks," was his reply. "I'm praying to God to save me."

By that time, the rushing waters were too much and the man drowned. Once in heaven, he had a chance to discuss the situation with God. He said to God, "I prayed and had faith that you would save me from the flood, but you let me drown. Why!?!?"

God replied, "I sent you a canoe, a boat, and a helicopter. What more did you need?"

Sometimes it feels like you are out there doing it all alone, but you are not. There are so many people who are willing and able to go through the valleys with you. The people around, our church families, are what allow us to make it through the truly tough, terrible parts of life. The idea that God won't give you more than you can handle is tough to hear when you are struggling. In fact, if someone said that to me in crisis or adversity, I might think I wasn't a strong enough Christian if I couldn't make it through it on my own. Or that

God is mad at me and finally decided to give me more than I can handle. But God is always with us and for us.

This is why the Bible has been a source of comfort and guidance for generations. Its words speak the truth of the human condition—bad stuff happens—and assure us that God nonetheless remains. This is the crux of faith and hope. Even though we walk through the valleys of shadows and death, we don't fear darkness, for God is with us. That's a paraphrase of Psalm 23.

So the next time you are with someone in grief, sorrow, or the pain of living this life, just be there with them. You don't need to offer them the hollow positivity that *God won't give you more than you can handle*. Just be there with them, in those moments. Offer your presence. Bake some cookies. Do their laundry. God has placed you in their life to help them through.

And when you face those everyday temptations as a human being, remember that God provides those windows and doors to escape, if we are only willing to look for them. But in the harrowing times of life, God provides people and professionals to be the roads of our journey when we can't see the way forward. You don't have to do it alone.

When you can't see through the tears or have the strength to walk the road ahead of you, lean on others. Your community—our community—is God-sent. And it's okay to admit that you can't do it on your own. There are counselors and therapists, pastors and parents, who will be the ear you need or the steady hand to guide you. All of the staff here at the church put their highest emphasis on helping people. These are the kinds of folks God has placed in your life to help you through. God will help you handle all that you've been given.