

# "You Can't Handle the Trial"

*Second Corinthians 1:8-11*

If you have ever been told that God will not give you more than you can handle, then this will be encouragement for you.

If you have ever been the one to tell someone else that God will not give them more than they can handle... This study is for you, too, I suppose, only it won't be as encouraging.

**You absolutely do find yourselves in situations you cannot handle.**

Before you think I'm a heretic, listen to these words of the apostle Paul:

2Co 1:8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

I generally prefer the NKJV, but it's a little weak translating those words into English. Let's hear the verse in a few other translations.

NIV - 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.

ESV - For 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.

Berean Study Bible - We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about the hardships we encountered in the province of Asia. We were under a burden far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

NASB - For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.

The J.B. Phillips paraphrase of this verse is insightful: "At that time we were completely overwhelmed; the burden was more than we could bear; in fact we told ourselves that this was the end."

Elsewhere in scripture we can find similar sentiments:

- Ps 38:8 CEB "I'm worn out, completely crushed; I groan because of my miserable heart."
- Ps 38:4 CEB "My wrongdoings are stacked higher than my head; they are a weight that's way too heavy for me."
- We read of Elijah being told by an angel: "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you" (First Kings 19:7).

If Paul could be "so utterly burdened beyond [his] strength that [he] despaired of life itself," *so can any believer.*

I'd go so far to say, *so will every believer, at some point or another.*

When I tell that burdened believer "God won't give you more than you can handle," not only is it false, it heaps a greater burden upon them.

I understand that we mean well, that we are not trying to overburden them. But that's no excuse for our lack of compassion.

If I give you a task, and you ask for help, and I say, "You can handle it," aren't I refusing to come to your aid and laying it all on you?

Besides, that particular phrase is not in the Bible, and it's always better to use Scripture than clichés.

Let's start by asking, "What happened to Paul in Asia?" There are at least five suggestions commentators give for his trouble:

1. In Acts 19, we read of a city-wide riot in Ephesus when the silversmiths accused Paul of ruining their business of making idols to the goddess Diana.
2. Paul mentioned other troubles in Ephesus, describing them as as "fighting with "wild beasts" (First Corinthians 15:32).
3. He had recently suffered by being beaten with thirty-nine lashes after being brought before a Jewish court (2Co 11:24).
4. There is a hint in First Corinthians of a particular but unspecified persecution shortly before he left for Troas (Acts 20:19;First Corinthians 16:9).
5. It may have been his recurring physical malady, perhaps his infamous but unknown "thorn in the flesh." Or some acute, but deadly, condition.

We can't be certain, and that is, I think, on purpose, so that we can apply his words to a variety of trials, instead of the one he was going through.

He described the intensity of his trials in three ways. First, he was "burdened beyond measure, above strength." Physically and psychologically, he could not cope with his situation.

When you go to the doctor they have those charts of emojis to gauge how much pain you are in. Paul said his pain was off the charts. It was a 20 on the ten-scale. And he meant his psyche as much as his body.

Second, "despaired of life" captures the thought that his life was dominated by these troubles so that he could not see the way out. In fact, the word for "despaired" can be translated "no exit," or "no way out."

Third, he fully expected to die as a result of his troubles. He said so in verse nine:

[2Co 1:9](#) indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves...

"Sentence of death" might mean that Paul knew of death threats; or simply that martyrdom was a constant reality for him; or, if his trial were a physical malady, that it was threatening to kill him. Either way, he fully expected to die.

I'd wish that most of you never experience trouble so severe that you feel crushed and despair of life, but I'm betting most of you have already.

Maybe you're going through something like that now and see no way out, no exit.

Paul has the proper encouragement for you in such times. But first he describes something he has learned by going through such times. God can use them to a particular purpose, namely,

[2Cor 1:9](#) ... so that we would not trust in ourselves...

For as long as I remain in this body of flesh, I will need to learn how to quit trusting in myself, and how to rely on the Lord.

When I tell someone "God won't give you more than you can handle," I'm encouraging them to trust in themselves. We all need to be taught how to rely solely on God.

If I am to rely solely on God, what is it, exactly, that I am to understand about Him?

2Cor1:9 ... so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

God has the power to raise the dead. It's no small thing, and it can be quite powerful in motivating us to trust God.

We all recall Abraham's willingness to obey God by sacrificing Isaac on the altar. In the Book of Hebrews, we're told, "[Abraham concluded] that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (11:19).

Being told to sacrifice your son on an altar. Talk about despair - about no way out. God's power to raise the dead ministered to Abraham.

2Co 1:10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us,

We, too, have experienced the power to raise the dead. God has already "delivered us from so great a peril of death."

Now that you are a Christian, you can look back and understand the peril you were in from death. If you had died without receiving Jesus Christ, you would have been lost forever, consigned by your rejection of Jesus to spend eternity in conscious torment in Hell.

Instead, you have been "delivered" from that peril. You might still die, but then you will be absent from your body and immediately present with Jesus.

Then again, you might not die - if you are alive, remaining on the earth, at the rapture of the church.

You have been delivered, in the past; you will be delivered, in the future, through resurrection or by the rapture

This all powerful God, Who has already delivered you from such great peril, can, and will, deliver you either *from* or *through* your present trials.

I've had trials that ended so suddenly I couldn't believe it.

Ah, but other trials, God wants to deliver you *through* them. Those are the ones I don't like.

If I have a messenger of Satan buffeting me, I don't want to hear God tell me that His strength is sufficient in my weakness. I don't want Him to tell me that what I cannot bear, He will strengthen me to bear, so that it is evident to all onlookers that the power comes from Him.

But then, it's really not up to me, is it? My life is no longer my own; I belong to Jesus.

There is another necessary source of help when I cannot bear things, and when I despair of life. It is the prayers of other saints for me.

2Co 1:11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

The "favor bestowed upon" Paul and his companions was deliverance. Since we do not know what trial or trials Paul meant, it could be that, by their prayers and with God's strength, that Paul had been delivered from the trial.

Or it could be that the trial was continuing, but that by the prayers of the saints and with God's strength, that Paul was being delivered through the trial as he endured it as unto the Lord.

God involves other saints, praying, to accomplish His deliverance in your life.

I'm always saddened when saints withdraw from fellowship in the midst of their trials. God will deliver you - but He wants others involved.

All this brings us to a catch-22 moment. A huge part of my being delivered from my present burden and despair is the prayers of other saints. But too often those other saints only offer me cliché comfort, like telling me God won't give me more than I can handle. So I don't share my burdens. Or, worse, I withdraw.

If someone shares their burden, their despair, with you, it's probably better for you to talk to God about them, rather than talk to them about God.

If Paul is right - and he is - prayer is better than counsel.

I'm not saying you can't talk about the situation. You should. Just make sure you're also talking to God about it.

I've seriously considered turning the typical 'counseling' session into a prayer meeting. In light of this verse, I may yet have the courage to do it.

I'm not sure if there is a more clever way to word it, but I should tell burdened, desperate saints, that the God Who has power to raise the dead, and Who has delivered them in the past, and Who will deliver them in the future, can and will deliver them *from* or *through* their present trouble.

Then we pray!