

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/14/12
1 Corinthians 10:13 “The Promise of a Way of Escape”^{**1}

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Main Idea: According to God’s promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13, we can be sure of three things every time we face a difficult situation.

- I. We can be sure of something regarding each difficulty.
 - A. It is common.
 - B. It has a history.
 1. Be a student of Bible history.
 2. Be a student of church history.
 3. Be a student of your own history.
 - II. We can be sure of something regarding God.
 - A. He is faithful.
 1. He will always be what He has always been.
 2. He will always do what He has promised to do.
 - B. He will never give us more than we can bear.
 1. That’s not because we have inherent strength.
 2. That’s also not because He will shield us from difficulties.
 - C. He will always give us exactly what we need.
 1. He will always give us a way that does not lead to sin.
 2. He will always give us the strength to do what pleases Him.
 - III. We can be sure of something regarding ourselves.
 - A. If we are in Christ, we have the resources to stand.
 - B. If we depend on Christ, we will stand.
- Make It Personal: We need to live by the promises of God.
1. Start today by memorizing this promise.
 2. As you live each day, affirm what God says regardless how you feel.
 3. When God fulfills His promise, make sure you give Him the glory.

Our lives are full of challenges. Every day we face difficult situations. Temptations. Things that test our faith. Health challenges. Stresses at work. Family difficulties. Financial strains. People that push our button. Every day. Every one of us.

And whenever that happens, whatever *it* is, we find ourselves asking an important question. *Is there any way out of this?* By *out*, I don’t mean to avoid the situation, but to face it in a God-pleasing way. When you’re in the midst of a trial, you find yourself asking that question time after time. What should I do next? Is there anything I can do in this situation that will please my Savior? Is there a way out?

I have good news. The answer to that question for the Christian is always *yes*. There is always a way out, a way of escape. How do I know? Because we have a guarantee, a promise from God Himself.

This morning we’re going to begin a series I’m calling “*Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering*.” Almost 25 years ago Sherry and I had a home Bible study with about ten people, and we used some material prepared by the Navigators called, “Growing Strong in God’s Family.” In that 10-week course, we did something that I have benefitted from countless times since. We memorized several verses that contain bedrock promises of God. The truth is, God’s promises give assurance. For example...

The assurance of salvation—1 John 5:11-12

The assurance of answered prayer—John 16:24

The assurance of forgiveness—1 John 1:9

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For further help, see the development of this text in a sermon preached at WBC on 9/13/09 as part of a series on Temptation.

The assurance of guidance—Proverbs 3:5-6

The assurance of victory—1 Corinthians 10:13

These promises, and others I've learned from God's Word since, have been so helpful in my life personally, that I'm excited for us to ponder them together as a congregation in the next few weeks. Specifically, we're going to look at promises that will help us live for God when times get tough.

I'll admit, the selection is rather arbitrary. God has given us hundreds of promises in His Word. I'm choosing ones that I have found particularly helpful in my own life.

The Promise of a Good Outcome—Romans 8:28-29

The Promise of God's Provision—Matthew 6:33

The Promise of Forgiveness—1 John 1:9

Today we begin with *the promise of a way of escape*, something God guarantees He will give us in times of testing. We find this promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13. This is a promise that will bring hope to your life no matter what you are facing!

1 Corinthians 10:13 is a wonderful, hope-giving verse of Scripture. According to God's promise in this verse, we can be sure of three things every time we face a difficult situation.

But of course, this verse has a context, so let's consider that for a moment. Acts 18 tells the story about how Christianity came to Corinth.² Paul took the gospel there during his second missionary journey, and though he faced opposition, he kept ministering God's Word. The Lord actually gave Paul a word of encouragement in a vision, as Acts 18:9-10 records, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

Eighteen months later Paul left Corinth and left behind a young church with all kinds of potential. As you might expect, these young Christians faced some tremendous challenges, and problems developed. Paul heard about the problems and so in AD 55 he wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians to address them.

Our text appears in a section of the letter in which Paul addressed the subject of whether Christians should eat food that had been previously sacrificed to idols (chs 8-10). At the beginning of chapter ten he points them back to the Old Testament example of Israel who also faced the challenge of dealing with idols, and even the temptation to engage in sexual immorality as a part of idol worship.

Notice verse 11, "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." You're not the first to face the lure of idolatry and immorality, Paul reminds the Corinthians. And then he says this in verse 12, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Two verses later Paul offers this firm charge, "Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry (14)."

² There were some 250,000 free people and as many as 400,000 slaves living in Corinth. There was also a lot of temptation to sin in Corinth. Corinth was a commercial and cultural center in Greece and was known for its sexual promiscuity. There were at least twelve temples in Corinth, the most famous dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In that temple alone there were one thousand sacred prostitutes who engaged in sexual activity as an expression of so called worship. So widely known was Corinth for its loose morals that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" meant "to practice sexual immorality." Observations about Corinth taken from *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1734.

But right in the middle of this strong warning and challenge about fleeing idolatry and immorality, Paul inserts one of the most hope-giving verses in the Bible. It's our text, 1 Corinthians 10:13, and in this text Paul wants us to know that in every difficult situation we will ever face, we can be sure of three things. One, we can be sure of something regarding the difficulty we're facing. Two, we can be sure of something regarding God. And three, we can be sure of something regarding ourselves. This is God's promise.

I. We can be sure of something regarding each difficulty.

Verse 13 begins, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." What's true of temptation? We learn two things about it here...

A. It is common. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man," as the KJV puts it.

It makes a big difference when you know you're not the first person to face something, and an even bigger difference if you know that it's possible both to face it and succeed at the challenge. When I get on a roller coaster, that's what I want to know. Has anybody ever done this before? When the doc says he wants to try a new treatment plan, I want to know, "Has anybody else ever successfully endured what you're proposing for me?"

Brothers and sisters, when you find yourself facing a particular difficulty in life, whatever it is, you can be sure of this. *Your situation is not unique.* There is no temptation that can enter your life except for that which is *common to man.*

The truth is, *others have faced what you are now facing.* You are not an isolated case. That won't make the difficulty easy to face, but it will make it easier. This thing you're battling has a track record, and the track record shows it can be overcome. You're facing something that's *common.*

By the way, in the Bible the words "temptation" and "test" come from the same Greek word *peirasmos*. Interestingly, the NRSV uses the word "testing" in 1 Corinthians 10:13, while the NIV, KJV, ESV use "temptation". So which word is right?

We need to do a little word study. In the Bible the context of *peirasmos* helps us know whether the writer has in mind a *temptation* or a *test*. In English both words speak of pressure from the outside, but the intent of the pressure is where the difference lies. If the intent of the pressure is to produce sin, it's called a temptation, whereas if the intent is to produce growth in righteousness, it's called a test. God tests us that we may grow in Christlikeness, but God never tempts us to sin (James 1:13). Satan is the agent of temptation.

We see both elements in Matthew 4:1, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Why did the Spirit lead Jesus into the desert? To test Him, that is, to demonstrate His righteousness. But to do that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. What was the devil's intent for the three temptations he launched at Jesus? In each case he did his best to entice Jesus to sin. But of course, Jesus resisted the temptations and therefore passed the test.

So which word does Paul have in mind in 1 Corinthians 10:13, temptations or tests? Again, the same Greek word communicates both aspects and I think Paul has both aspects in mind here. Actually, there's a closer relationship between temptation and testing than we often realize.

Let me illustrate. I'm on a restricted diet right now as the doctors are trying to help eliminate my migraines. No gluten. No dairy. No chocolate, just to mention a few. So is a piece of chocolate cake a temptation or a test? In one sense, it depends on the outcome. If I resist the cake, it's a test that can make me stronger and better able to resist the next test. But if I give in and eat the cake, it proved to be a temptation that will produce negative consequences for my body.

God told Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. God was testing Abraham, and Abraham passed the test. But if Abraham had resisted God's command, this test would have turned into a temptation for him. And suppose he listened to the voice of the tempter who whispered, "Are you really going to kill your own son? What kind of God would ask that of you?" If that happened, if Abraham had loved his son more than he loved God, the temptation would have resulted in him sinning against his God.

Jay Adams offers this helpful explanation, "This term takes its meaning from the context in which it is used. That, in itself, is instructive: the same experience may be viewed from either of two perspectives... The same event can go either way; it can become a trial strengthening you or a temptation weakening you—depending on how you respond to it... From God's perspective, the event is an opportunity, designed for your good; a trial that can strengthen. From Satan's perspective, the event has potential for evil that will weaken you. In every trial, you should remember the double possibility."³

Think of the challenging situations you face on a daily basis. You're surfing the television and hit the shopping channel. They're selling a gorgeous necklace at a great price, but you still can't afford it and would have to use credit to buy it. Are you facing a test or a temptation? It depends what you do with it.

The guys in the locker-room are passing around a magazine. Is that a test or a temptation, men? Again, it depends, for in every trial there is a double possibility.

But here's the good news. Regardless of whether the pressure from the outside is a temptation or a test, you can be sure of this. You are not facing anything new for it is *common to man*. What's more...

B. It has a history. That's the point Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 10. The Corinthians were facing some huge temptations, but so had their spiritual forefathers.

Verse 1—"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea."

Think about your forefathers, says Paul. They faced the temptations to commit idolatry and immorality, just like you. What's that tell us about temptation? Simply this. If temptation is common to man, that means it has a *history*, and if we're serious about resisting temptation we would do well to learn that history.

Let me give you three practice assignments that can help you honor God in difficulties.

1. *Be a student of Bible history.* Why is it that God saw fit to record the ugly details of Israel's sin and consequent punishment? Here's one reason, says Paul. Verse 6—"Now these things occurred as *examples* to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." And verse 11—"These things happened to them as *examples* and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come."

What happens when a person engages in sex outside of marriage, or worships idols, or grumbles against God and tests Him? And what makes a person vulnerable to those

³ Jay Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness: How to Gain Wisdom from the Book of James*, pp. 27-28.

temptations in the first place? We need not wonder. We've got a Bible full of case studies. Joseph faced the temptation of the promiscuous Mrs. Potiphar, but he resisted. David saw Bathsheba bathing, and he followed his lusts. These things happened as *examples* for us, says the apostle. So if you want to learn how to overcome temptation, then be a student of Bible history. But don't stop there.

2. *Be a student of church history.* If temptation is common to man, and it is, then we would expect church history to be filled with examples, positive and negative, of individuals who've faced temptation. And that's exactly what we find. So let's take advantage of that history. Augustine was a slave to his sexual passions. He took a concubine and lived with her for fifteen years and even had a son out of wedlock with her. How did he overcome his bondage to sin? That's a vital question to answer if you're serious about overcoming your own bondage to sin. So become a student of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others. Read biographies.

Ladies, get to know Suzanna Wesley and how she dealt with challenges of raising 19 children, how she lost nine of her children as infants, how a maid accidentally smothered one child, and by the time of her death, only eight of her children were still alive. How did she honor the Lord as a wife and mom?

Facing challenges as a student-athlete? Get to know Eric Liddell. Struggling to honor God as a business owner? Become a student of R. G. LeTourneau. Dealing with depression? Spurgeon and Cowper have been down that path before you. So be a student of church history. Furthermore...

3. *Be a student of your own history.* For starters, your own family history. It only makes sense. Temptation is common to man. Where did your parents struggle? How about your grandparents? Since their nature and nurture have helped shape your life, it would be wise to ponder that from time to time.

But also ponder your own personal history. Temptation is not only common to man, it's common *to you*. Where have you struggled in the past? Take inventory of your past temptations.

On my birthday around the age of 8 I learned about the power of my selfish desires in the temptation process. I got some money for my birthday and I decided I wanted to buy some baseball cards. The problem was, I wanted to buy them *now*, right in the middle of my birthday party. I wanted to leave my guests and go to the local store where I could buy more baseball cards. When my parents rightfully said, "No, not now," I began to sulk and brood and ruined the party for me and everyone else.

I learned something about myself that day. By nature, I'm a very selfish person. It's one of the many reasons I desperately need a Savior, not just to save me from hell, but to save me from myself. When I study my own history I discover that I've always struggled with wanting things I shouldn't want, or wanting legitimate things and pursuing them in illegitimate ways. That's the way temptation works. The evil one entices us to pursue our desires in ways that will displease God. And he uses variety. In my childhood past, it was baseball cards. Then came computers.

I bought my first computer in 1987, a Mac 128 k that today's cellphone can outperform, but it was quite a machine at the time. I lost sleep over that box of circuits. I just had to have it. Nothing wrong with a computer, mind you, but isn't there something wrong with wanting a *thing* so badly that it consumes you, especially when you know

you don't lose sleep over your desire to possess greater knowledge of God or your desire to reach people for Christ?

It wasn't long after I became the owner of that Mac that I faced a new temptation, one that didn't exist prior in my life. It had to do with something called "software." I learned about something called MSWord 1.0. I learned that you could buy it in the store for a chunk of money (\$100?). But I also learned you could make a copy of someone else's store-bought MSWord 1.0, and it wouldn't cost you a thing. Actually, that's not true. It wouldn't cost you any money, but you would pay a price since the duplication was illegal. And even if you didn't get caught, you'd still pay a price, for your action would produce a dulling effect on your God-given conscience.

My point? Every difficult situation you and I face is common and has a history. That's actually very good news. It means we won't be facing anything unique this week. We have God's word on that.

II. We can be sure of something regarding God.

"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 stand up under it."

We learn three wonderful things about God in this verse. First...

A. He is faithful. Paul actually began this letter emphasizing God's faithfulness back in 1:9, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." To say that God is faithful is to affirm two realities about God.

1. *He will always be what He has always been.* Dependable. Reliable. Trustworthy. Consistent.

2. *He will always do what He has promised to do.* Always. And what has He promised to do? We find a double promise right here, one negative and the other positive.

B. He will never give us more than we can bear. "He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." Yes, God allows us to be tempted, but never beyond what we can bear. That's a promise. We will never face a temptation that must lead to sin. That won't happen.

1. *That's not because we have inherent strength.* That's certainly not the case, for the strength to resist temptation comes from Christ, not ourselves.

2. *That's also not because He will shield us from difficulties.* "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," Paul told the young converts he led to Christ in Acts 14:22. James put it this way in James 1:2, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever [not *if*, but *whenever*] you face trials [*peirasmos*] of many kinds."

When a person accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, that new believer doesn't receive a difficulty-proof bubble that blocks out all enemy enticements. That's not what God offers us. But this He does. He will never give us more than we can bear. Never.

"I just couldn't help it," said the intoxicated Christian man as he looked at the six empty bottles he'd just downed. "The temptation was just too powerful for me to resist." Not true. God will never give us more than we can bear.

"I've got a right to be bitter," replied the angry divorcee. "After all I've been through, it's just more than I can bear." Again, not true. We have the promise of God's Word that He will never give us more than we can bear.

By the way, is that true for a non-Christian? No. If a person doesn't know Christ, he or she lacks the necessary power which Christ alone provides. The trials and temptations of life *are* more than we can bear if we don't know Christ. And God's intent is to use them to show us our need for Christ.

But for the believer, this promise is bedrock truth. God will never give us more than we can bear. In fact...

C. He will always give us exactly what we need. “But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out.” In fact, not just *a* way out, but *the* way out (there's a definite article in the Greek text). I like how the *Young's Literal Translation* puts it, “But He will make, with the temptation, also the outlet.”

There's always an outlet, beloved. I read one commentator that pointed out that the Greek term translated “the way of escape” (*ekbasis*) is almost exactly the same word as “exodus.”⁴ As Craig Blomberg explains, “There is always an escape-hatch, which is defined as a way to persevere without sinning in whatever difficult situation we find ourselves.”⁵

Let the reality of God's promise sink in...

1. *He will always give us a way that does not lead to sin.* When we're facing tests and temptations, the Lord will provide a way out.

I told you about the baseball cards. Later when I was in the seventh grade, it was candy bars. I used to walk with a couple of my friends to track practice, and the walk took us right passed a little store that sold, amongst other things, candy bars. When you're 13 years old it seems like you're always hungry, especially in the middle of the afternoon before track practice. The problem was, we didn't have any money. “No problem,” said one of my buddies. You don't need money to get a candy bar. Just watch. And into the store he went, and then out he came with a candy bar he'd shoplifted.

What's the “way out” when the guys you're hanging with are stealing candy bars? Solomon tells us in Proverbs 1:10-15, “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, ‘Come along with us... We will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse’—my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths.” In other words, the way of escape is to stay out of that store, and it'll probably involve finding some new friends.

This is such good news, my friend. We're going to face all kinds of tests and temptations this week, this very *day*, in fact. That's a given. But so it this. God will always give us an escape route that does not lead to sin. What's more...

2. *He will always give us the strength to do what pleases Him.* Look at the final phrase, “So that you can stand up under it.” The word “can” comes from the Greek term “*dynamai*” which means “to be able, to have power.” God promises to give us, not only an escape hatch, but also the strength necessary to go through that hatch and keep living a life that pleases Him.

This is God's promise, my friend. In every difficult situation, there are three things of which we can be sure. One, we can be sure of something regarding the difficulty itself—it's common and has a track record. Two, we can be sure of something regarding God—

⁴ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians*, p. 171.

⁵ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, p. 193.

He is faithful, and will never give us more than we can bear, and will always give us exactly what we need. Now, one more certainty...

III. We can be sure of something regarding ourselves.

Listen to the verse again, “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 stand up under it.”

At first glance the promise at the end of the verse sounds contradictory. It says that when we face a temptation, God provides a *way out* so we can remain *under it*. So which is it? Does God want us *out* of the temptation or to stand *under* it? He wants both.

Remember what we learned in point one, that in every trial there is a double possibility? The devil wants to use an event to turn us to sin, but the Lord wants to use the event to grow us up in righteousness. And He gives us exactly what we need to bring that about, a way out and the strength necessary to endure.

So here’s the promise regarding ourselves...

A. If we are in Christ, we have the resources to stand. To stand rather than *fall*.

Jesus Christ came to earth as the God-man, faced temptation in our place and resisted it perfectly. He never sinned. But He did die for sins, not His own but for the sins of every person who would repent and put their trust in Him. That’s why He went to the cross, dear friends, to take care of our sin problem. And three days later our victorious Savior defeated death and came back to life, so that today God offers forgiveness for sin and power over sin to all who put their trust in His Son.

Do you know what that means? It means that if we are in Christ, we have the necessary resources to stand, no matter what we’re facing. We have them because Christ has given them to us. It’s a fact. The deposit is in the bank. We can stand. And...

B. If we depend on Christ, we will stand. He will provide a way out, and He will walk with us through that way out. But we must take it, and we must take it in total dependence on Him.

How do we do that? How do we depend on Christ? Good question. Right now you’re depending on your pew to hold you up so you don’t fall. That means you’ve assessed that seat, concluded that it’s reliable to hold you, and then put your weight on it. You are *depending* on it. So do that with Christ. Do it every day, in every difficulty you face. Put your weight on Christ. Lean on Him. Trust in Him. Rely on Him. Take Him at His word.

And if we do? Please notice what the text does *not* say. It does not say that God will provide a way of escape so we don’t have to stand up under temptation any longer. This is not a promise of smooth-sailing. This is a promise of stability while the storm continues to rage. God doesn’t say He will remove us from difficult situations. Sometimes He does, but that’s not His promise. He says He will give us exactly what we need, when we need it, so we can withstand the difficult situations for His honor.

Make It Personal: We need to live by the promises of God.

To help you do that, let me offer three suggestions...

1. *Start today by memorizing this promise.*
2. *As you live each day, affirm what God says regardless how you feel.*
3. *When God fulfills His promise, make sure you give Him the glory.*