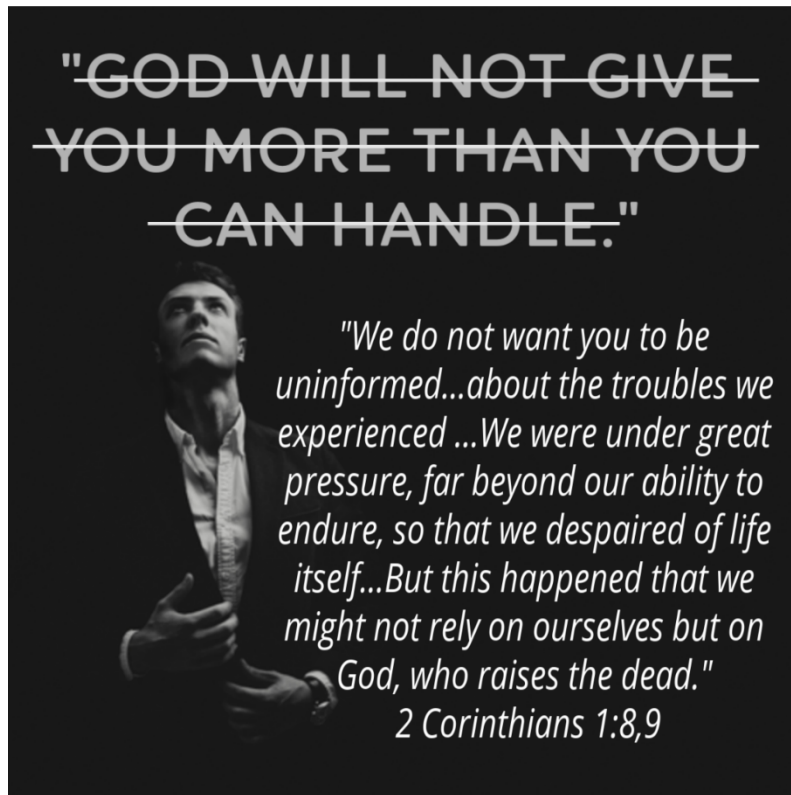


## ***Finding God in the Mess – Dan Hitz***

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I don't know who created the meme below that made its way around Facebook a while ago, but I wish I knew. I would like to thank them for speaking truth. Truth that sets us free from false condemnation because we simply "can't do it anymore", and we were told somewhere along the line that "God will not give us more than we can handle." There was even a Christian hit song some months back about that concept. Yes, I was one of those



people who cringed every time I heard the singer tell me to remember what God said about not giving us more than we can handle. And yes... I am also one of those people who has at various times in my life, experienced more than I could handle. And also..., yes... I have to admit that there were times when I despaired of life itself. I'm going to guess that you've also experienced those times when you were overwhelmed and you just couldn't do "it" anymore. Maybe you've even despaired of life itself. Turns out, we're in good company. Even the Apostle Paul, who wrote those verses in 2 Corinthians about being in "great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure" was a member of this not so exclusive club. Like us, Paul also experienced more than he could endure.

But there's actually good news in realizing that we weren't meant to just suck it up and deal with it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reads, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. 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." If we misapply that verse to mean that we don't ever experience anything in life that we can't emotionally deal with, then we're setting ourselves up for discouragement. To be fair, the Greek word for tempted and temptation can also mean trials and testing, but the entire context of 1 Corinthians 10 is sinful temptations – not trials and hardships that have nothing to do with temptations. So while it is true that God won't let us be tempted to sin beyond our ability to withstand, God does sometimes allow us to pass through trials that we absolutely cannot make it through on our own. The good news is that 2 Corinthians 1:9 gives us the answer for the times of great darkness in our lives. It is during those times that we must learn that we cannot "rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." It is during those times that we must recognize our utter helplessness and fall on the mercy of Jesus Christ to bring us through the valley. Jesus is the only way we can endure some of the worse pain and suffering that life brings our way.

I'm no stranger to seasons of life that I don't have the natural capacity to endure. I'm guessing you aren't either. Years ago my wife and I experienced the loss of many dear friends and the hope of our ministry calling after we left a spiritually abusive church we had been a part of for more than 15 years. We've experienced the overwhelming despair of a parent with a prodigal son and daughter. Those seasons were definitely more than we could endure, but nothing prepared us for the overwhelming pain and sorrow we experienced from the death of our 17-year old son. I have to admit... During those seasons. Like the Apostle Paul. I despaired of life itself. Don't worry. Neither my wife nor I are suicidal. However, I can speak for myself and say that I wouldn't have minded if Jesus would have come back right then and there. As I heard one preacher say, "Sometimes it is easier to die for Christ than to live for Him." He was right. *[Incidentally, if you are feeling suicidal, or harmful to yourself or others, please get some help. Life is very worth living. It does get better. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 800.273.TALK. Help is available]*

The good news is that I'm still here, and I'm in a pretty decent season of my life right now. I can truly attest that coming to the end of our human ability to endure and falling upon the mercy of God does provide all that we need to pass through the times of overwhelming darkness in our lives. It also equips us with more faith and power on the other side of the trial. If we can keep our hearts open to the Lord during the times of darkness, we'll learn some pretty phenomenal things about God's character and His love for us. We can't learn these things any other way. We learn more about the Father's incredible heart of love for us, in that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son to save us from our sin and despair. We learn of Jesus' unconditional love for us and that He willingly suffered far more than we can ever realize to redeem us and carry us through our pain. We'll also learn of the incredible power and strength of the Holy Spirit as we allow Him to flow through us and carry us in the darkness. These are some of the "treasures of darkness" that the prophet Isaiah talks about in Isaiah 45:3. The New International Version reads, "I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name." Many other versions, including Young's Literal Translation show us that this verse is even more precious to those of us who are passing – or have passed – through the darkness. Young's reads, "And have given to thee treasures of darkness, Even treasures of secret places, So that thou knowest that I, Jehovah, Who am calling on thy name - - [am] the God of Israel." God promises us that if we stick with Him during the dark times... If we keep our hearts open to Him... If we admit that we just can't do "this" anymore and ask Him to carry us... He will be faithful to carry us through the horrible times. He will be faithful to equip us to endure and keep going for another day... for a better season... We will learn more about God and about ourselves than we could ever imagine. And we will gain spiritual treasures that will shine brightly in our souls long after we've passed through the valley.



If you're in a dark place right now, you're probably thinking, "Dan, I don't even know where to start." I get it. Neither did I when I was in the darkness. I was in a very bad place when I walked into my first Sunday sermon at my home church about 18 years ago. For some reason the pastor had a long rope tied to a chandelier on the top end, and a knot tied on the bottom. He preached out of the book of Nehemiah, the man who was in charge of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Walls that were in heaps after Jerusalem was destroyed. About all I remember from that sermon is the pastor walking over to the knot at the end of the rope and saying something like, "When your life is in a big pile of rubble. Like the walls of Jerusalem. Dig through the rubble. Find the one thing that you still believe about Jesus. Hold onto that with all your might. Then cry out to Jesus for mercy." Those words broke through the hopelessness in my heart and I sobbed. Loudly. Right in the middle of the sanctuary. Everyone heard me. It didn't matter that everyone heard me. It didn't matter that I didn't have the strength to endure. It didn't matter that I felt hopeless. What did matter was that Jesus was at the end of that rope. I knew that Jesus would carry me through this darkness when I was in way over my head. He did. Jesus met me when I was at the end of my rope and He carried me through the darkness. He will carry you too.



I have to be real and acknowledge that the darkness didn't immediately disappear. That season lasted for a few years. But I also have to be honest and acknowledge that Jesus was faithful to carry me through the darkness when I had no clue how to go on. During that time I received many great "treasures of darkness", riches of God's presence and character, that still influence my walk to this day. God is faithful. He may allow you to go through more than you can endure. But God will carry you through the worst trials of your life if you cry out to Him for help. And if you don't have the strength to cry out to Him aloud, He responds to the silent cries of our hearts too. God loves you. God will never leave you or forsake you. He really will carry you.

If you are in the middle of a dark valley right now, reach out to the pastoral care department of your church for help. Reconciliation Ministries is also here for you. Call us at 586.739.5114. We care.