

Half-Truths - Week 4 - God Won't Give You More Than You Can Handle?

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

God won't give you more than you can handle. Now, we save this one mostly because we want to encourage people.

We say it to people because we want to help them. You know, say you've got this like it's going to be okay. Like, God, you can handle this. We say it to usually give people strength and hope. Now, sometimes we do say it to get them to get out of helping somebody, Like, oh, you've got this as we slowly back away.

Oh, God. Won't give you any more than you can handle. As we turn, turn and run. Right. But God won't give you more than you can handle. Implies that God gives us everything that we are going through. And a better phrase, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago, when we talked about the saying everything happens for a reason, a better phrase that we might use is God will be with you and walk with you.

When life gives you trials, it's like that old poem, The Footprints in the Sand. If you're over 35, you know this poem. It's this poem where these there's this person walking in the sand and there's these two, two sets of footprints like the person and God. And then all of a sudden the person goes through some trials and things are happening in their life and they turn around and there's only one set of footprints.

And the person questions God, like, God, like, where were you when I was lonely? Where were you when I was suffering and in pain? And then God just simply replies, It was then that I carried you. It's a beautiful full poem, isn't it? Now there is this experience that I recall that I had recently, and that experience came.

Thanks to some people from Horizons who connected me with other people in Lincoln when I first moved here for the first moved here last year and because of these connections that were made, I was able to participate in leadership Lincoln this last year. Now leadership. Lincoln is a great experience, especially for someone who was new to the town.

And so I got to tour all sorts of different places in Lincoln. I've toured the Morning Hope Grief Center, which if you don't know about this place, it is it is an incredible place for children and youth who are who are mourning the loss of someone. They also do some things for adults there, too. But I got to do other things, more exciting things, like I got a ride in a Black Hawk helicopter.

I went to the capital. I went behind the scenes at the zoo. I was up close and personal with the giraffes and met some city officials and did some other things and learned more about Lincoln. And each time, each month we had a different topic. Public safety, Education Day. We had government day, a civic engagement day, quality of life day, and on the focus month for human services day, we participated in what's called a poverty simulation.

Now, I know some of you have also experienced this through different organizations or businesses, but a poverty simulation, it's not a game, but it's kind of set up like a game. You have fake money. The other stations set up around the room. There's a bank and there's a grocery store and there's a school and a job and so forth.

And then you are given a various scenario. And these scenarios allow you to experience the stress of the reality of how easy it is to go from making a living to living in poverty. Now, during the poverty simulation, we were all given a scenario. Now, my scenario was pretty good. I thought we I was I was married and I had two kids.

We lived we rented a house. We both had jobs. Now, the problem was that both of our jobs together, the money that we made from our jobs, just barely covered the bills that we had to pay. So you can imagine what might happen the first day we sent our kid off to school and I rode the bus because we only had one car and my husband took the car to his job.

I rode the bus to my job. We get home from work and school, and one of the kids has a field trip that costs money. And so at that point we had to decide like, ooh, do we have enough money to pay for this field trip and to pay the rest of our bills? And so we decided to send the money with our kid to school the next day.

Our other child woke up sick and now he had been kind of chronically ill. And so I stayed home from work again with my sick child because we didn't have anybody or we couldn't afford anybody to pay as a sitter. So then I decided to take the child to the doctor, which was more money for transportation. And then we have this medical bill and I went back for a day of work, but then it was fall break.

And since I had to stay home with the kids again, and eventually I lost my job because I took off so many days of work. And then our car, our one and only car broke down. And as you can imagine, like this began this spiral. And then we sat there and my husband and I, we sat there and we had to decide like, which bills that we were going to pay and which bills we were going to just not pay.

And it reminded me of an I Love Lucy episode again. Let's go back, Right, I Love Lucy episode. There was this episode where Lucy, she spent her budget oh, how her budget for the month. And so her friend Ethel comes over and Ethel's like, What are you going to do? You don't have money to pay your bills. And Lucy was like, Don't worry, I have this figured out.

I have a system. And she says, I put all the bills on this Lazy Susan, and then I spent it and whatever bills, stay on the lazy Susan. That's the one I pay. And it was funny in the I Love Lucy episode, but in the poverty simulation, it wasn't funny. In fact, it was stressful, it was chaotic. It was it was too much to handle and it was only a simulation.

But I felt the stress of how I was going to take care of my family. Now, in my role as a pastor, I've walked through some pretty awful situations with people, things that I know that I wouldn't be able to handle. I sat with parents whose child was just diagnosed with leukemia. I sat with a young mom and her son who just lost their husband and father with this awful bad long battle of cancer.

I sat with parents of a young man whose face was plastered all over the news. In breaking news. And then he was arrested and he was a he was sentenced to 30 years in prison. I sat in the home with children who lost their 14 year old sibling who died suddenly in his sleep. And I planned a funeral with parents who had lost their ten year old to suicide.

I'm not sure I could handle those kind of situations by myself, and I think I'm pretty sure that those people would say they didn't handle it alone either. Now, there are stories in the Bible of people who

reached that point in their life where they just they can't handle it any more. And one of those stories is the story of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and it's found in chapter 11.

If you have your Bible, pull it out. We're going to spend a long time in chapter 11. If you have it on your phone, you can look at it, look it up that way. If you have the you version Bible app, you can search for events and horizons. Community church will pop up and you can follow along that way.

Now, this story of Mary and Martha and Lazarus is only found in the Gospel of John. So this is John, Chapter 11 starting at verse one, a certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair.

Her brother Lazarus was ill, so the sisters sent word to Jesus saying, Lord, the one whom you love is ill. Now, while traveling around, Jesus knew that Mary and Martha's home was a safe place, a place of comfort and love and rest. And if you can imagine traveling around for a long time, not having a place to lay your head, the Scripture says, knowing that there is this home where they where he feel safe, that that's important.

And here's Mary and Martha. And they knew that they needed help. And the Scripture doesn't say that they sent for Jesus. The Scripture says that rather, Hey, the one you love is ill. But I think that they knew that Jesus would come to them and help them. So the first lesson we can learn from this is when we are going through times of trouble, when our lives seem to be falling apart, we should call on Jesus.

All right. Starting again at verse four when he heard this, Jesus said, This illness isn't fatal. It's for the glory of God so that God's son can be glorified through it. Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. And after two days he said to his disciples, Let's return to Judea again.

Now the Gospel, according to John, connects multiple times the glory of God to Jesus on the cross. This was important for John to get that message out. Now, maybe you're wondering why Jesus heard about this news and then he just stayed for a couple days where he was. And that's a great question. And maybe it's because he wanted to make sure Lazarus was really dead in order for this miracle to be more impressive, to make it clear about God's glory and how, what would soon be revealed on the cross back to the Scripture, starting at verse eight, the disciples replied, Rabbi, the Jewish opposition wants to stone you, but you want to go back.

And Jesus answered, Aren't there 12 hours in the day? Whoever walks in the day doesn't stumble because they see the light of the world. But whoever walks in the night does stumble because the light isn't in them. He continued, Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I'm going in order to wake him up. And the disciples said, Lord, if he's sleeping, he will get well.

They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was in a deep sleep, but Jesus had spoken about Lazarus death and Jesus told him plainly, Lazarus has died for your sakes. I'm glad I wasn't there so that you can believe. Let's go to him now. This again is about showing God's glory and sometimes the blessings of life. Sometimes the blessings of God are right in front of us.

And either we choose not to recognize them or we just miss them. Or sometimes we're like the disciples and we're like, Hey, I'm comfortable here. They want to kill you there. Why would we go back there?

Let's stay in this place where we're safe. And sometimes when we do that, we miss God's blessing. Now there is this pattern in the Gospel of John.

Jesus says something that seems pretty simple and it's misunderstood. And then Jesus goes on to explain a little bit more. He's asleep and they're like, Well, if he's asleep, you can just wake him up, right? And then Jesus explains, No, he's dead. And I'm going there to so that so that he will be dead no more, so that you will believe back to the scripture.

Verse 16. Then Thomas, the one called Didymus, said to the other disciples, Let us go to so that we may with Jesus on a pause right here. That's Thomas, right? We often call Thomas Doubting Thomas. But here the faith of Thomas, like Thomas is like willing to go with Jesus, even though he's dead. I mean, he might die, right?

That that Thomas that might be in danger. Now, that is some pretty great faith. And I think that oftentimes in our real life, somebody does one thing or makes one mistake or is one part of them. We we label them in that way. Okay. Moving on. When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. While Mary remained in the house. Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now I know that whatever you ask, God, God will give you.

And Jesus told her, Your brother will rise again. And then Martha replied, I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day. And Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live. Even though they die. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this, Martha?

And she replied, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ Godson, the one who is coming into the world. Now think about this. Martha and Mary are going through the same thing. They're going through the same thing. Their brother has died. Now, Martha seems to be handling this a little bit better than Mary. Martha has hope and faith that Jesus will help them.

Martha has the kind of faith that is so strong that she's certain about what Jesus, who Jesus is and what Jesus will do for them. But where's Mary? Mary stayed in the house. Mary didn't leave her house. Have you ever been through something so hard, so difficult that you didn't want to leave your house? Mary is not handling the situation very well.

It seems like she's lost the hope and the faith that her sister Martha still has. First, 28 after Martha said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister, Mary. The teacher is here and he's calling for you When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. He hadn't entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him.

When the Jews, who were comforting Mary in the house, saw her get up quickly and leave. They followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb. Mary needed Martha in this moment. Mary needed Martha too, to bring her to Jesus. In this moment, Martha gave Mary hope for the future, gave her a little light in her dark, in her time of darkness.

Verse 32. When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died when Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. He asked, Where have you laid him? And they replied, Lord, come and see.

And then verse 35, This is the whole verse. It says, Jesus began to cry, a picture that some other translations say. It simply says, Jesus wept. When we translate that that word, it probably means more like a quiet sob. But picture the darkest time in your life and imagine Jesus walking up to you, seeing your pain and standing beside you weeping.

Now this shows that Jesus was fully human. I mean, Jesus, Jesus knew what he was about to do. Jesus was also fully divine. Jesus knew what He was about to do, and he knew the end of the story is this. This, this God's glory is going to be revealed. Yet He saw Mary and Martha and the others crying and Jesus began to cry.

Verse 36 The Jews said, See? See how much he loved him? But some of them said he healed the eyes of the man born blind. Couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying? Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave and it was covered with a stone at the entrance. And Jesus said, Remove the stone.

And Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, Lord, the smell will be awful. He's been dead for four days. And Jesus replied, Didn't I tell you that if you believe you will see God's glory? So they remove the stone. Jesus looked up and said, Father, thank you for hearing me. I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me and having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out!

And the dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied and his face covered with a cloth. And Jesus said to them, Untie him and let him go. Now, as the reader of this amazing story, we are prepared. We are prepared for something big. We're prepared for a sign that displays the glory of God. But the people in the story, they are living in confusion.

The whole thing doesn't make sense to them. They've seen the miracles that Jesus has had had performed. They healed the blind man and cured sicknesses and cast out demons and yet Lazarus lay dead for four days. And I highlight this confusion because it's more it's where most of us live when we go through hardships, when we go through trials or suffering or pain, we ask why.

And then as Christians who believe that Jesus is wise and all powerful and all good, the worst part is often this confusion. Why did this happen? Why is this happening to me? God doesn't give us a bunch of things piling up just enough so that we can handle them, but rather God comes when we call and gives us to others to support us.

Mary had Martha and others around her. I heard this this week. It was a it was a Bible study testimony. And this man was talking about grieving the loss of his spouse. And he said that the church and the and his faith gave him the survival skills that he needed in that moment. And he said that while losing his spouse, he had to live his faith out more than ever and that he'd be nowhere without his faith in Jesus and without the church to surround him and support him.

God sometimes does allow for opportunities to strengthen our faith and our church can and should be that opportunity for us to gather around and support one another. Jesus literally walks into tombs and brings forth life. We're going to sing a song at the end of our service, a song with these lyrics that he turns graves into gardens, He turns morning into dancing.

He turns beauty into from ashes He turns shame into glory. And that is the kind of God that we serve. And it means that sometimes we can't handle life, that we can't do it on our own, that we might need a team of people to surround us like Mary did. Maybe. Maybe we feel that our faith is it isn't enough to get us through life's possibilities and difficulties.

And sometimes life gives us so much. It doesn't mean that we can handle it all by ourselves. Sometimes we need professional help, sometimes we need medication. Sometimes we need things to get us through. But it doesn't make your faith worthless if you feel like you can't handle life right now because Jesus will turn your grave into a garden.

He'll come with you, He'll come to you and weep with you. Even though he knows the ending, he'll meet you where you are if you invite him into your life. And if you're uncertain of what inviting Jesus into your life looks like, let's have a conversation. If you're not sure what that next step might be, let's have a conversation.

Jesus turns, Graves into gardens. Would you pray with me, God, As we prepare our hearts and our minds for communion, we praise you for the glory that you've shown us through life and death and resurrection of Jesus. And we are thankful for the community of believers who come together to share worship, to share in the Holy sacraments and God.

We call out your name in a time of praise and worship, but we also call out your name. If we are struggling, we reach out to you. We bravely ask for you to help us and God when we see others who are struggling and hurting. When life seems too difficult to handle, let Jesus's light shine through us to them.

Let us bring to those the hope of Jesus with the help of the Spirit. And we say all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.