

**1 Corinthians 10:1-5, 11-13**

**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. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 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.**

1.2 million people tried. 1,199,998 failed. Two made it. How do you like those numbers? Not too great, right? Of all the numbers that are tallied and bandied about in the book of Numbers those are the ones that stick out at me. 1.2 million people tried. 1,199,998 failed. Failed what? They failed to make it to the Promised Land. Sometimes the Bible takes a moment not to comfort us, but to scare the living bejeebers out of us. Sometimes the Bible intentionally puts the fear of God into us – and I do mean the fear of God! 1 Corinthians 10 is one of those places. Here are the cliff note versions to four stories that Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 10. Watch the Israelite bodies fall.

The people whined, “We remember the free fish... the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we had. Egypt sure was great!” God could have said, “Really guys? Was it really free? Was it really that great? Back when you were in Egypt, you were calling out to me telling me how bad it was and now you want to go back?” And so bodies fell there. The people even called that place Kibroth-hattaavah, which means, “graves of craving.”

God wouldn't curse his people no matter how often or how fervently Balaam asked. He wouldn't leave them. He wouldn't stop protecting them. And it was a problem for the surrounding people who wanted to end the Israelite invasion. Balaam came up with an ingenious evil solution for those nations. Get the Israelites to desert their wonderful, protecting, faithful God. Invite the Israelites to wild parties to the god of fertility. You know what the sick thing was? That vile plan actually worked. And so 24,000 bodies fell there.

The Israelites grumbled, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no food. There is no water, and we detest this miserable food.” This time serpents came and bit the people. And so more bodies fell in the desert.

“Oh, it’s a gorgeous land,” ten of the spies said. “But the people are so huge there that they make us look like grasshoppers. I don’t know about you,” they said, “But this grasshopper has no desire to get smushed.” No matter that the other two spies named Caleb and Joshua said, “Don’t fear those nations. The Lord is with us.” In fact, that just ticked everybody off. The people grabbed rocks to shut-up Joshua and Caleb for good. It was the last straw for God. And so over the next 40 years, bodies fell day after day in the desert. Of the 1.2 million people who originally started that trek to the Promised Land only two made it. Those are the scary stories that Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 10 and they are scary!

I had a guy come to me a few years ago. I had just started ministry here. He said some of the OT stories I had been preaching about scared him. He said it was difficult to come to church and hear stories like that. I know exactly what he’s talking about. It’s hard to hear them. It’s hard to study them. I think it’s even harder to preach them. But here’s what I would say to all that: God put these stories in the Bible because we need to hear stories like these. Otherwise, we’re going to get weird, bizarre ideas about God. Like God is some kind of Santa Claus figure or a Mr. Rodgers look-a-like or he’s all butterfly kisses and hugs. We need to get a true picture of who he is. He’s a God who gets bugged when people don’t trust him. We can go even farther than that. He’s a God who gets angry when people don’t trust him. A part of faith means understanding how big a need we have for his mercy.

Paul makes this point very strongly. **“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. They were *all* baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They *all* ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.” (v. 1-5)** All of the 1.2 million Israelites saw God’s cloud and passed through the Red Sea on dry land. They ate the food and the drink that God gave them and they were all fed by Moses’ teaching. All of them. So God was pleased with *all* of them, right? Wrong. God was not pleased with most of them. The result? Their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Bodies. Rated R for violence. Not a pretty picture. They fell because they failed to please God. Pleasing God is the issue here. We must please him. We must live so wonderfully that we make his eyes light up with pride or we’ll be one more body scattered in the desert. It’s simply not enough for God to say, “Eh. I guess you’re all right. I suppose you might be good enough to hang out with me for eternity.” There’s only one person I know of in history who did that. Go back with me to the Mount of Transfiguration. Do you remember what the voice boomed? “This is my Son, whom I love. With him I am well pleased.” Jesus was his Father’s pride. He pleased God. So here’s the deal: if we’re to survive, we have to be as pleasing to God as Jesus was. We have to be Jesus look-a-likes. And that’s exactly how Jesus has made you look to God. You are a Jesus look-a-like. You’ve been dressed up as a

Jesus look-a-like for as long as you've been baptized. The result? You are the Father's pride. God is pleased with you.

That's true for all of you... for now. Pastor Henzi said something to me a while ago that I haven't forgotten. We were talking about a pastor who'd fallen and that made him reflect on his 20+ years of ministry. He said, "By God's grace, there go I." He had it right. The fall from grace is only a step away for all of us. On the Bourman side, all my aunts and uncles were brought up to be faithful Lutheran Christians – literally all of them. I'm telling you they went every Sunday and they went to the Lutheran school too. Want to know how many of them are left of the five? One. One of them is even a strong atheist today. Maybe you've seen some of the same things happen to people in your families. If we're smart, we realize that inside of us we have the same tendencies toward distrust and apathy. Hopefully, that makes us say right along with Pastor Henzi, "By God's grace, there go I."

That is where Paul is coming from: **"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (v. 11-12)** Warnings. Examples. When we look at these stories we get a brand new appreciation for how fragile our standing with God really is; how easy it is to fall. That's Paul's point. It can't ever, ever be taken for granted. Paul says, "If you think you are standing firm, stop it." Instead, start thinking, "It could be me. I tend toward distrust just as much as those ancient people did." You know what sealed the deal for Peter before he fell? Spiritual arrogance. "Nah, Jesus, I won't fall. Even if all fall away, I never will." It's time for us to think, "It could be me."

Ok. Now it's time for me to really mess you up. Right after God gets done telling us, "It could be you." In the next breath, he says, "Actually, it will never be you." Seriously. Here's what Paul says, **"God is faithful." (v. 13)** That's the foundation. That's why Paul is convinced that it will never be you. He starts with who God is in his essence. In other words, this is one of the things that makes God God. He's faithful. You won't ever fall because of who God is. He's faithful. He's a faithful, always-there-for-you, ever loyal, never-gives-up kind of God.

God's faithfulness means that he's going to act this way in your life, **"He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." (v. 13)** I think for a lot of people this passage has come to mean, "God is not going to give me more than I can handle." I've even heard people joke, "God must really think highly of me because he's put a lot on my plate." That's true, but let me broaden your understanding of the passage. This passage speaks not only about the temptation to be spiritually overwhelmed, but also about every, single temptation that's out there in the world. It's saying God will never allow any temptation whatsoever to take you down.

How can God be so sure of that? **"When you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it." (v. 13)** Again to a lot of people this passage has come to mean, "God will end my temptation and so I'll be able to stand

in faith.” That understanding of this passage has led to some confusion. Look at the end of the verse. It says, “So you can stand up under it.” So what happened to the temptation? Did it go away according to the verse? No. What did happen? The Christian shouldered it. Now, many times God’s solution to keep people standing is to make the temptation go away, but not every time. Finally, God’s promise here is to provide a way for the Christian to stand up under a temptation for as long as the temptation lasts.

I’ll give you an example of why this is important. If I say to a recovering alcoholic, “The temptation to drink won’t come anymore.” I’m going to have that same recovering alcoholic on my doorstep a year later saying, “How come the cravings are still here? Did God fail to keep his promise to me?” It’s better to say, “You may always be drawn to drink. But God will provide a way so that you can stand up under those cravings.” Then I will have that same recovering alcoholic on my doorstep with their drink free tokens a year later saying, “You’re right, Pastor, God helped me stand up under my temptation.”

We spent a lot of time talking about how easy it is to fall. 1.2 million fell out there in the desert. Two didn’t. Maybe that statistic sticks out at you too. Paul referred to those scary stories to put us all on our spiritual toes. He wants us to see how easy it is to fall. He wants us saying along with Pastor Henzi, “By God’s grace, there go I.” That said, I want to leave you today with an amazing biblical comfort. Here’s the number that matters to you right here right now: 100%. That’s the likelihood that God will be faithful to you in your life and cause your faith to stand. That’s the likelihood that God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. That’s the likelihood that God will provide a way so that you can stand up under every temptation. You’re not one of the 1.2 million. You’ll make God’s Promised Land. How do I know that? God is faithful! Amen.