

Examples
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This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. I want to read a passage of scripture taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 10, beginning with verse 1. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth. He says:

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, 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; and their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry. We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day 23,000 of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the age has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not allow you to 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.

May God bless the reading of His word.

It was absolutely amazing to me how much my dad learned while I was away at college. In fact, it seemed that the older I got, the more he learned. I can remember as a teenager having one of those father-son chats. Some of you have had those. And I remember very well him saying to me (now I'm going to clean this up a little bit from what he said), "Son, if you will listen to me you won't have to make the stupid mistakes I see you're about to make. I've already made them, and if you'll listen, you won't have to make them!"

if we don't learn from the past, we are destined to repeat at least some of those mistakes. History is so, so, so vitally important. If we don't learn the lessons of history, we are destined to repeat some of those mistakes. History is vitally important. I think that is why, when I changed denominations, I was drawn to Wesleyan theology because of something called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Have any of you ever heard of that before? Some of you have. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a way of making decisions, a way of deciding. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. It's not an equilateral, it's a quadrilateral. Scripture is primary. We start with scripture. What does Scripture have to say about what I am trying to decide? We move from there to tradition. Tradition is: 2000 years or more of history can't all be wrong. It is about history. Some of the decisions of our forerunners, forefathers and mothers, are correct. Some of them are wrong. We must learn the lessons of tradition, learn the lessons of the past. Also, God has given us a wonderful tool and that is called a brain. We should practice using it. He gave us a brain for a reason and that is to reason!

Sometimes we act as if, when we go to church, we should leave our brains at home. I want you to hear me and hear me well. Don't you swallow anything I say without testing it, without thinking about it. I have made a mistake before. (That's supposed to be funny!) Don't swallow something just because I say it. I am going to do my very best and try my best to lead you correctly, but do not swallow what I say just because I say it. God gave you a brain for a reason. Use it. And experience: what is my experience of God? What have I seen in other people? Scripture, tradition, reason and experience.

Paul is writing to the church at Corinth and admonishing them to learn the lessons of history, to learn where the path that they are on leads. We should, too. Now who is it that Paul is addressing? He's addressing the church at Corinth. But who were the Corinthians? The town of Corinth, the city of Corinth, was one of the most important ports of the ancient world. They had two ports. The city itself was known for its immorality. There were twelve temples to twelve different pagan deities, most of them fertility gods. To be called a Corinthian in the Roman Empire was to be accused of immorality. Some cities had the reputation of immorality, just like cities today have the reputation of immorality. Las Vegas: Sin City, right? I am more familiar with New Orleans. Or, as the locals call it, "Nah'lans." They don't call New Orleans "the Big Easy" for nothing.

The Corinthian church was plagued with immorality. Paul wrote them several letters. We know that he wrote to them at least four times. Two of those letters have survived the years. We know that they had a lot of sexual immorality in the congregation and, as a result, a lot of marital problems. Of course, those are ancient problems. We don't have those problems today, right? But I want you to listen to a list of the other issues Paul addressed in his two letters to them: immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy, envy, marital difficulties, sexual immorality, and misuse of spiritual gifts. Do any of those sound familiar? The times may have changed and circumstances may have changed, but the problems are the same. And the lessons they needed to learn are the same lessons you and I need to learn. Paul said, "We have history to teach us where those paths lead." He uses Israel as an example. Israel was a nation most blessed. And when God brought them out of slavery, He did so in a miraculous fashion. They had twelve plagues that God used to convince the Egyptians to let them go. He brought them through the Red Sea, gave them manna in the desert, gave them water from a rock. They had a cloud to lead them during the day and a pillar of fire to lead them by night. God protected them from their enemies again and again and again. And when they got to the Promised Land, they sent out twelve spies. And they came back and said, "Boy, it is a land flowing with milk and honey." And two of the spies said, "We can do it! Let's go in and take it!" And ten of them said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, they're too strong for us!" And they chickened out. After God had done all God did for them, they chickened out. And Paul says, "God was displeased with them." That's true, but that's a little bit like saying, "The sinking of the Titanic was a boating accident." It doesn't quite capture it. What happened to them was, everyone who came out of Egypt, all of them except two, died in the desert. Not even Moses was allowed to go into the Promised Land. Why? It was because they kept on falling away from God. This path led to this, which led to this. Moses went up on Mount Sinai to get the Ten Commandments and, because he stayed too long, they made for themselves a golden calf. They bowed down and worshiped it and then, I'm sorry be so blunt, they had an orgy and 24,000 of them died. They grumbled against God and so God sent them a bunch of snakes and 13,000 of them died. They complained about their food, that it was too bland, it was the same stuff every day, manna from heaven, and many of them died. We would like to think that if

we had been there, if we had seen those miracles, if we had experienced what they experienced, we wouldn't do that. Oh, really? One of the warnings in this passage is a warning of overconfidence.

Thankfully, in this passage, Paul ends with a bunch of promises. The first promise you're not going to like, but it's absolutely true and history bears it out. Temptations are going to come. Period. End of discussion. The word that is translated "temptation" in Greek can just as easily be translated "testing." Tests are going to come. You can count on it. Expect it. But the temptations, the tests, are not unique. Now, let me pause here for a moment. What tempts me may not tempt you and what tests you may not test me. In that way, they are unique. But the temptations themselves are common to humanity. The temptations, the tests that Israel faced, the church at Corinth faced and the church in the Tri-Cities faces. The same tests, the same temptations, individually and collectively, they are common. And history tells us that some have faced the test and overcome and some have faced the test and failed. The good news is that the same tests are common to all of humanity and they can be overcome. And I want you to hear that. Your situation, your test, your temptation is not inescapable. You can do it. You can overcome it and I want you to hear that. Paul also says that we have the promise from God that we will not be tested or tempted beyond what we are able to bear, and I love that. But sometimes I wish God didn't have as much confidence in me as He does. I have a friend who says, "You know, I don't have any problem taking one day at a time. It's when two or three days attack all at once that I have an issue!" But we have that promise that no matter what it looks like, you can do it. You can overcome. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who is my strength." And, with every test, we have the promise that there is a way out. There's a way to overcome. And that is not surrender, that is not retreat, that is conquering.

We have these promises. I want you to be reminded of that. I want you to know that what you're facing, no matter what it is, is common to humanity. I want you to know that people in the past have overcome it and you can, too. And I want you to be encouraged to keep going. In addition to that, I want you to be an encouragement to one another, to encourage one another. So, how do you do that? It's easy. It's easy. Tell your story. Tell your story. If you have faced a testing that someone else is facing, or it's similar, and you have passed that test, tell that story. And if you are facing a test that someone else is facing, or is close to it, and you have failed, tell that story. Both are an encouragement. If you tell the story of facing a test that you've overcome, the person goes, "Yes, it can be done!" And if you tell the story of failing the test, they go, "Yes, I'm not weird!" It's common. Encourage one another. Temptations and testing are the same in one era as they are in our era. And we say, "Well, if we had had what the children of Israel had, we would have passed the test." We have more tools for facing trials, temptation and testing today than any generation before in history. Any generation. We have the tools at our disposal. "Well, what about the miracles?" We are surrounded by miracles every day. They have become so commonplace that we sometimes turn a blind eye to them. I'll give you an example. My first degree is in psychology. When I was getting my degree in psychology, I had to work in a hospital as a chaplain. While I was at the hospital as a chaplain, I got to know the gentleman that at the time was the best neurosurgeon in the Southeast. People came from all over the South to have neurosurgery under this gentleman. And one day I went into a room and there was a lady in there who was so pitiful. She had a massive brain tumor and she was virtually comatose. The next day this surgeon performed a seven or eight-hour brain surgery on her. While she was in surgery I visited with the family and prayed with them, and the

next day I went into the room expecting just to visit with the family. And this lady was sitting up in bed drinking coffee, and I had a beautiful conversation with her. Now, you tell me that's not a miracle. I saw that doctor a few days later. I said, "Man, you are a miracle worker!" He laughed and he said, "John, I do surgery. I have never healed anyone. If they are healed, God heals them." For those who have eyes that see and ears that hear, God is at work around us all the time. So, be encouraged. You can do it. You can face it. You can overcome it. And if you don't, you can learn from it. Be a good example to someone else and encourage one another.

So, you're going to be tested individually and we as a church are going to be tested collectively. Other individuals and other churches have faced those tests and overcome. We can, too. Let's pray. I want you to claim your promises. You can do it. Be encouraged. Paul said, "I can do all things through Jesus Christ who is my strength." And if Paul could, you can, too. Let's pray.

God, help us to rely on these promises and claim them for our very own. Help us to live them out individually and also collectively. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.