I Can Handle It

# (Romans 7:21-25)

Today I want to talk to you about something that we’ve all dealt with in one way or another. And that’s the pressure of uncertainty, the fear of failure, the worry about the pain, that situation, the bad news, the temptation to give up, the torment of anxiety and regrets, the fear of the unknown. You know, where we find ourselves tormented and our minds are all wrapped up in “what if”, and yet so many times “what if” never happens. And so, today we’re going to talk about handling it, when the enemy comes, when your spiritual enemy tries to confound you, to confuse you, to distract you, to tempt you and keep you from God’s purpose for your life you can just turn to him and say “I Can Handle It”.

Now, some of you may remember when you were a kid and someone bigger than you would torment you. Maybe it was that kid down the street, the one on the school bus or maybe that had a locker near you at school, but they would tease you, call you names, and just pick on you. For some of you it may have been physical, they would push you, trip you, or hit you, just tormenting you and bullying you. Anybody ever been tormented like that, living day in and day out with the fear of that confrontation on the bus, in the hallway, the locker room, or whatever it was? It’s like mental torture, it’s painful, and it’s significant, maybe even dangerous, like what a lot of people go through in the world today.

For example, just last month in Nigeria, 500 jihadis attacked the mostly Christian areas of Barkin Ladi and Jos killing an Assemblies of God pastor, his wife and son, among over 200 other people who were massacred by these Muslim Fulani herdsmen. Dalo, a young 8-year-old boy lost his family in the attack as well as personally suffering second-degree burns over most of his body. But young Dalo was handling it, like the apostle Paul said,

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13).

And Dalo was tormented, he was in great pain, but when he arrived at the hospital he was praying without ceasing; not only praying that God would heal him but praying for the others and asking God to forgive his attackers. And so, even though he had experienced very real torture, suffering, and persecution, he was handling it. Even today, the reality is that you and I are going to experience pain in this life. As a matter fact Jesus said,

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Now, usually when we think about being tormented we think about great suffering, physical torture, but what I want to talk about today is not physical, it’s a spiritual torment within our own minds. You know kind of like living in some of our communities, where we feel safe and protected, until the house across the street gets broken into. Then it happens to another neighbor and you begin to find yourself tormented with fear and anxious thoughts. Maybe you even order a security system, but suddenly, every time you see a stranger walking down the street or a car that’s driving slowly you’re on high alert because you realize that there’s an unseen the evil presence in your neighborhood just looking for an opportunity for sin.

Today, you and I need to be aware of the same thing in our spiritual lives because there is a very real unseen evil presence in our lives that’s looking to seize any opportunity for sin. And so, we need to be on our guard, we need to prepare, because we don’t want to give the enemy the opportunity. That’s why the Bible says,

“Don’t let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life…” (Romans 6:12-13).

And so, we need to be on our guard, we don’t want to give sin an opportunity, so if you can’t behave when you’re online, then don’t go online, or maybe put your computer in the living room or kitchen. But whatever you do, be aware that you have an enemy that’s always trying to seize the opportunity, that’s always trying to get the best of you, trying to get you to give in to temptation, and yet if you give it an inch, it’ll take a mile.

This is actually something that the apostle Paul wrote about many times and you may be able to relate to this struggle he describes it in Romans chapter 7. He said it this way in verse 21,

“When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my (body)” (Romans 7:21-23).

And so, he writes about this tormenting, internal battle within his flesh, the members of his body, and he’s overwhelmed, crying out, being really transparent. He’s speaking of a time when he himself was tormented by guilt and shame; and today there may be many of you who can identify with what he’s saying, because you’ve been believing the lies of the enemy. You’re tormented, you’re suffering, and you’ve become a prisoner of something that’s not even true. But listen to these words of the apostle in verse 24,

“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).

You see, today, God wants you to know that you can handle it! You don’t have to be tormented by your flesh, becoming a slave to the members of your body, because there’s a better way through Jesus Christ! And so, you don’t have to live with this anxiety, being tormented and suffering because of guilt and temptation. You don’t have to live that way, you can handle it, because you can do everything through Christ who gives you strength. This morning you can be free; as a matter of fact, the Bible says that you’ve been called to be free.

## 1. Called to Be Free

You’ve been called to be free from that secret, free from that anxiety, free from that lusting, free from the lying, free from that whatever because whomever the Son has set free is free indeed. And so, since Jesus Christ paid for our sins, we can trust him, receiving his work on the cross personally for ourselves, knowing that we’ve been set free from sin, we’ve been healed, and we’ve been changed. That’s why the Bible tells us,

“You were called to freedom... Only don’t use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13 ESV).

Now, I just want to comment if you’re reading along in another translation such as the New International Version, it translates the Greek text as “the sinful nature”. And I don’t think that’s an accurate translation of the meaning of this word, because when you’re born again, when you become a Christian, you no longer have a sinful nature, because God has made you a new creation in Christ. Therefore, you have a new nature and the Bible says it this way in second Corinthians, chapter 5,

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And so, the real issue here is a conflict between the flesh and the spirit. This is an important distinction when you’re struggling, tempted, and tormented, because you need to know that you’re not fighting for victory, but you’re fighting from victory. When you’re not even sure that you can handle it, you need to know that you’re more than a conqueror, you’re an overcomer through the cross of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans chapter 6, he says,

“Because of the weakness of your human nature, I am using the illustration of slavery to help you understand all this. Previously, you let yourselves be slaves to impurity and lawlessness, which led ever deeper into sin. Now you must give yourselves to be slaves to righteous living so that you will become holy. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God…” (Romans 6:19-22, NLT).

And so, you’ve been called to be free, you’ve been given a new heart, you’ve been sealed with the Spirit of God, you’ve been made new in the attitude of your mind, having put on the new self created to be like God in holiness. Now I know that’s deep, but the reality is that if you’re a Christian, if you’ve been born again, you’re a different person and even now God is in the process of creating a new and improved you. He’s the potter and you’re the clay. He’s reshaping you, he’s given you a new nature, and you’ve been called to be free.

Now, for you to understand how to be free in Christ, first you’ve got to know that it’s this tent, this body of flesh in which your new nature, your new self lives, that’s tormenting you. The Bible tells us that there are two things at war within us, the flesh and the Spirit, and they’re constantly in conflict with one another. And so, the apostle Paul is going to give us two examples of this struggle, describing how if we live by the flesh our lives will look a certain way and if we live by the Spirit another way. And so, number two, I want to share with you the difference, comparing works versus fruits.

## 2. Works Versus Fruits

The Bible tells us that there’s this war raging inside of us, we’re tormented inside, because we’re still living in this flesh, these tents, and so we have this seed of rebellion to resist God, to resist God’s Spirit, and to pursue our own passions and desires. In Galatians chapter 5, Paul is going to give us some comparisons to help us to consider ourselves in relation to God, but even more so, I think that he’s trying to get us to look beyond the effects, beyond obedience or disobedience, beyond morality or immorality; to the cause of this conflict, this tormenting, this opposition between the flesh and the Spirit. And so first, in verse 16 he encourages us saying,

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Galatians 5:16-18, ESV).

And then in verse 19, Paul gives us two examples, saying if we let our passions and desires go, out of my flesh my life will look a certain way and if by the Spirit another way. And so, Paul tells us,

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:19-23, ESV).

Here we find Paul presenting the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. He listed some examples of ways that the flesh will come out that are sexual in nature, ways that exhibit a false spirituality, ways that are socially unacceptable, and lastly in ways that are compulsory. And he says it’s evident, and so we may fight it, we may deny it, we may try to suppress the truth, but there’s nothing we can do, because it’s evident. And so, whatever it might be, we look at the effects of the way that we’re living, we’re tormented by it, and we want something better. So, Paul says in verse 16,

“Walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

He tells us, if our passions and desires are connected to the Spirit of God, to the new nature that God has placed within us, then it will come out looking entirely different. These are not works of the flesh, but the fruit of the Spirit; and yet as the Galatians, as we consider our lives, the struggles and the torment, we realize that even though we want to be dead to the flesh and alive to the Spirit, it’s often as if we’re alive to the flesh and dead to the Spirit.

This was the struggle that the Galatian believers were wrestling with, they were tormented wanting to be free, wanting to be alive to Christ, but just the opposite was true. Today, you and I face the same war waging inside of us, we want this life of fruitfulness in the Spirit, one of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We want that. And what we don’t want is to be sexually perverted, socially divisive, spiritually compromised, and just caught up in this downward spiral of sensuality, addiction, and consumption.

The question is, “How do we go from the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit?” You know, “Where’s the freedom that’s promised to us in Christ? The Galatians were trying to stay away from the works of the flesh, but they’re tormented by the:

“…sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these” (Galatians 5:19-21, NLT).

In the same way, you and I, we’ve tried not to be found on this list, but time and time again we’ve failed. We’re overcome by our emotions, lust, and the cravings of our flesh. We’re discouraged by our weakness and we’re tormented in our souls. Some of us even give up. You know, we stop praying, we stop reading the Bible, which is exactly opposite of what we ought to be doing. And so, the apostle Paul tells us how to get out of this situation, if you’ve spent years circling the cul-de-sac, he tells us how to get out. Number three, he says, it’s by belonging to Jesus.

## 3. Belonging to Jesus

You see, you either belong to Jesus, putting to death your sin, killing your flesh, or your sin will put you to death. The problem is that most of us don’t fight the cause, we fight the effect. We don’t grab it by the head, we grab it by the tail. And so you might say, “You’re going to stop the pornography, you’re going to stop the fits of rage, you’re going to stop the drinking, you’re going to stop doing this or stop doing that.” And you’re going to try to kill those things, instead of going to the cause, crucifying the flesh, killing the flesh, which is what really needed to die in the first place. The Bible says it this way,

“If you live according to the flesh you’ll die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you’ll live” (Romans 8:13, ESV).

You see, when the flesh dies, the works die with it, because it’s cause and effect. When the flesh dies, the sin dies, and so we need to understand how to kill the flesh. And Paul tells us in verse 24, he says, “Belong to Jesus because…

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24, ESV).

And so, you belong to Jesus, you’re becoming more like Jesus, you’re crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires; you love him, he loves you, and the Holy Spirit is changing you. In fact, the more that you love God, the more your flesh dies, because the closer we get to Jesus, we’re moving farther away from sin. And it’s amazing because it’s not even like you’re trying, but it’s just a byproduct of your relationship with Jesus, because the flesh can’t thrive in the presence of Jesus, sin can’t remain in the presence of Jesus, and so it fades, it diminishes, and it dies. That’s why Jesus invited us saying,

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it…” (Luke 9:23-24).

Now, we may consider the works of the flesh and we may desire the fruit of the Spirit, but that’s a misdirected desire, because our desire should be for Jesus. That’s why the apostle Paul boasted in Galatians chapter 2,

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

And so, we want to live with him, we want to walk with him, because we get the fruit of the Spirit by drawing closer to Jesus. You see, just as the Spirit is a person, Jesus is a person, and God the Father is a person. And so, Paul tells us in verse 25,

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, ESV).

As we belong to Jesus, we’re becoming more like Jesus, we’re daily crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires, and this is all the work of the Spirit of God. And so, since we’re living by the Spirit and we’re walking by the Spirit, God is with us causing the flesh to shrivel up and die. The fruit of the Spirit is blossoming, it’s coming out of us, because our roots are in Christ, and we’re getting life and nourishment from the living God.

As the Spirit of God brings that in us and through us, we bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; because we’re keeping in step with the Spirit and we’re bearing fruit from the very presence of God. Therefore, we no longer need to be tormented by the works of the flesh. We can handle it, because we belong to Jesus and we’re living by the Spirit of God. This is the key, this is so important, because we don’t know how to love Jesus, we don’t know how to fully obey Jesus, we don’t even know how to draw closer to Jesus or experience intimacy with Jesus, but the Holy Spirit does. And this is such good news, because the Spirit of God knows God the Father and the Son perfectly. Not only that but he knows us perfectly and so the Holy Spirit is actually going to prompt us, to push us, moving us toward Jesus so that we will be in love with him, and as we grow deeper in intimacy with him our sin is getting further away.

Now this doesn’t happen overnight, it’s a process as the Spirit is drawing us to Christ. Christ is reconciling us to the Father, and God is more fully revealed in us as our flesh is dying. But the choice is yours. Are you ready to begin the process? If so, you’ve got to keep in step with the Spirit. And so, it’s about spending time with him, being transformed by him, so that you can be with Jesus and end up being like him. All I can do today is push you towards Jesus and as you walk with him you can handle it.

Let’s pray together.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

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