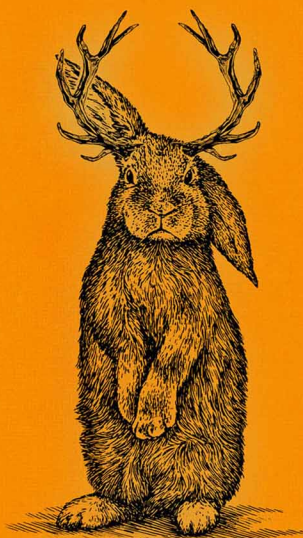


# 9 COMMON LIES CHRISTIANS BELIEVE



AND WHY GOD'S TRUTH  
IS INFINITELY BETTER

## SHANE PRUITT



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MULTNOMAH

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This book is dedicated to the love of my life, Kasi. Also to our children, Raygen, Harper, Titus, Elliot, and Glory. Getting to take this journey called life with you is an absolute joy and privilege. May we always walk in God's truth.



Oh, magnify the LORD with me,  
and let us exalt his name together!

—PSALM 34:3

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## INTRODUCTION

# The Truth Shall Set You Free from Bad One-Liners



One one-thousand. Two one-thousand. Three one-thousand. Deep breath. Keep it in. Just breathe . . . It took every ounce of willpower within me to suppress the urge to scream at the top of my voice. But with God as my witness, I never uttered a word. Instead, if you could have seen the thought bubble above my head, well, let's just say it wasn't one of my most spiritual moments. Yes, rather than completely freaking out my neighbors who were outside at the time, I bit my tongue (almost off) and set my sights on an orange flowerpot and viciously spiked it into the ground like a football. That helped, a little. No, not really.

Here I was, a church planter and pastor of a rapidly growing congregation. My wife and I were happily married. We lived in a multiple-bedroom house. We had friends and family surrounding us with love and encouragement. Yet I was standing in the

backyard, screaming in my head and spiking flowerpots with my hands. In case you don't know, here's the deal. We pastors consistently feel extreme pressure to mask our weaknesses. We don't have the freedom to be ticked off. We must always keep it classy and cheesy with an arsenal of Christian clichés at our disposal. On the outside, we love for you to believe we're walking in the freedom of truth, but on the inside, we know it's fake. Sadly, we're too good at selling the fake, and we're trapped by common lies that we believe all too quickly. Or at least I was.

One of my neighbors gave me a puzzled look. "Shane, you all right, brother?"

Almost without thinking, I said, "Absolutely! You know me. I'm too blessed to be stressed, my man!"

I cannot believe I really said that. The truth is, it was a lie! I was broken, confused, and flat out sick and tired of hearing one-liners wrapped in pretty Christian paper but offering no power to help us in what we were going through as a family.

And what were we dealing with? All right, sure, I'll tell you.

As a couple, Kasi and I always knew we wanted to adopt. It was something we talked about from the minute we got married. We planned on having biological children first and then starting the adoption process. We had it all figured out, or so we thought. After we'd had two daughters, both of us had a picture in our minds of what our son would be like. We envisioned him playing with our girls, excelling in football, and growing healthy and strong. Needless to say, we imagined *The Blind Side* version of adoption. However, our creative God had a plan to put to death our shallow view of the picture-perfect family.



When we began the process to adopt, our two biological daughters were six years and eight months old. Kasi and I had no idea what this journey would entail, but we knew without a doubt that God was calling us to adoption in this particular season of our lives. We started researching agencies, found one, and began praying through the countries the agency worked with. Initially, we decided to pray about it for several days, but that first night, we had a feeling of peace that Uganda was the place we'd find our son. We did all the paperwork and training, and then the real wait started. We were on a waiting list and soon found out it would most likely take much longer than we'd ever imagined. So we waited and prayed for the son we knew was there but had never met. Ironically, Kasi would often pray that God would bring us a child no one else wanted—a child who needed love and a family but had little to no hope of either. Still, we both visualized what our son would be—big, muscular, and Christmas card photo ready.

Kasi woke up one morning and discovered an email from someone she knew only through Facebook. The person asked if we were open to adopting a child with special needs. Kasi wrote back asking for some clarification. We knew very little about special needs but enough to understand it is a very, very broad term. Special needs could describe something as small as a missing finger or as big as needing constant in-depth care. Kasi found out the little boy in question had gangrene and needed surgery as soon as possible. After she shared the email with me, we both decided to take the next step of finding out more.

Soon we received an email from the director of the children's

home, telling us more about him. This baby, named Praise, was severely malnourished and had a huge infection on his head. And then we saw his picture. Tiny. Precious. We fell in love immediately. Could this be our hoped-for son?

We asked for as much medical information as possible. What followed was a picture we'll never forget. On the first picture we received, his infection had been covered. Not on this one. When we viewed this picture, our stomachs dropped. We could hardly speak, and Kasi began weeping.

We prayed, hugged, prayed, cried, and prayed more. It was as if we both knew what God was clearly telling us to do, even though we initially didn't want to admit it. We struggled with thoughts like *We can't handle this. This is going to be too hard. We have no clue what we're doing, what he needs, or how to take care of him. We certainly don't have time to take on something like this.*

After much information and even more prayer, we decided this sweet, tiny boy was indeed our son, the one we had been praying for all along. *Okay! We can handle this after all*, we thought. *We're ministry leaders, which means we have a huge S on our chests for being Super Christians, right?*

Kasi and I traveled to Uganda to complete the legal process to adopt. When we met our son, whom we named Titus, we could tell he was developmentally delayed, but we attributed this to his being in the hospital his entire life. As time went by, we began to sense something more going on than we were initially told.

Upon our return, Kasi made an appointment for us to see an

international adoption doctor. One of the things we'd noticed in Uganda was that our son was very stiff. He also had some spells of jumping and jerking. We explained all this to the doctor, and he admitted Titus for observation. What was initially supposed to be one night turned into four. During this stay, we learned that there was much more going on with our son and that our suspicions were correct.

The short version is that Titus was experiencing seizures—a lot of seizures. At the time, he was having over twenty a day. He also had some trauma to his brain, and it wasn't quite the size it should be for a seven-month-old boy. The doctors couldn't give us any clear picture of what his life would be like. Would he catch up? Would he walk? Would he talk? These were answers we desperately wanted, but they were answers the doctors couldn't provide.

One day his doctors came into the hospital room, shut the door, turned off the television, and said they needed to talk. That day our life changed forever. We sat in shock while our son was diagnosed with epilepsy and cerebral palsy. Most likely, he'll always be in a wheelchair, we won't ever get to play catch with him or see him run up and down a hill, and we'll never be empty nesters.

*Lord, what are You doing? This is not what we asked for, nor is this what we agreed to. Right, God? We had an agreement. After all, we're doing something spiritual here. We're caring for orphans like You commanded! This was Your idea! We're being obedient, unlike other "superficial" Christians. Come on, God,*

*we're probably Your favorite pastor and pastor's wife, so You should honor our wishes and our good and perfect plan for our lives! We can't handle this!*

### A Most Dangerous Game

Over the next year of constant doctor's appointments, an MRI, an EEG, and three surgeries, we fell into a routine, almost a kind of game. It was a game of convincing everyone around us that we were okay. In fact, hey, we were doing great! Kasi turned inward, and I hid in busyness. We kept it spiritual and repeated lies to ourselves that sounded very Christian. We told everyone, "God won't give us more than we can handle. We just need to work harder and try to have more faith." But we were playing a most dangerous game.

Kasi was sad, angry, and even bitter. I was aloof and was romanticizing the "superspiritual" thing we'd done. However, inwardly we both knew this was not what we'd wanted. We'd wanted to come home with a perfectly healthy child. Kasi and I had filled out a checklist of special needs we were open to when adopting. This checklist ranged from learning disabilities to HIV to the inability to walk or talk, and I am sad to say we were not open to much on the list. *God, You didn't honor our checklist, and that really ticks us off!* Yes, we both had overflowing thought bubbles above our heads.

During this extremely challenging year, a steady flow of well-meaning Christian clichés flew our way, but they had little to no impact on our daily lives. No, I take that back. The clichés had a

very high impact—in fact, they stirred a lot of annoyance and guilt, which is a nice way of saying they drove us completely nuts. While we tried to hold on to truth like “God is in control. He is with us. He has not forgotten us. He is doing all things for His glory and our good,” those statements were being drowned out by pop psychology one-liners that aren’t Christian at all but have been adopted by Christians, integrated into their belief systems, and are now a part of the Christian vernacular. Kasi and I were wrestling to separate what we knew to be truth from what we’d allowed to creep into our thoughts. We had both been to Bible college. I have four degrees in biblical studies, church history, theology, and Christian counseling. I’d read dozens upon dozens of books on Christian doctrine and orthodox beliefs. As a preacher of the Word of God, I would preach verse by verse through the Scriptures. However, when all hell broke loose in our lives, we chose to be entrapped by common lies instead of finding freedom in biblical truth. As a family, we were not prepared to walk in freedom in the midst of suffering. At this point, we were mad! Maybe we were mad because we were confronted with our own entrapment, or maybe we were mad that God was in control and not us. The bottom line is, we were mad.

At the same time, we felt guilty that we were struggling, hurting, and wanting to be in control. *Please, Lord, if You’re really in control, could You control people to stop telling us lies that make it seem as though we are in control and You’re just here to make us happy?*

The game went on until Kasi and I broke. We shattered, and for a season we simply fell apart. The common superficial lies that

we believe as Christians and pass off to one another as truth were not the least bit helpful when things got really hard. They were like sand to a thirsty man.

### Truth, Freedom, and Intact Flowerpots

Back to the backyard. As I was throwing my aforementioned hissy fit, Kasi sat down to talk to a friend who also has a special-needs child. She gave Kasi advice that would change everything for us. She said, “It’s okay to grieve. You have to. What you imagined you were getting is not what you got, and it’s okay to be sad. Be honest before the Lord. He knows how you feel anyway. You may be able to convince everyone else you are okay, but He knows you are not. Stop with the canned clichés you think you’re supposed to say and others want to hear and get authentic and real about what is going on inside you.”

We had convinced ourselves that we had to be okay. After all, we were not only Christians but also Christian leaders. We’re supposed to put on a happy face no matter what and toss around a bunch of one-liners that sound spiritual, right?

No, that’s not right. Not at all. Kasi and I decided to stop playing the game. We committed to move past the religious jargon and turn our focus back to the intended truth of the Word of God. Once we dug deeper than what cultural Christianity has to offer, we began to get real with the Scriptures again. Thankfully, this caused us to be honest about our struggles and become authentically unafraid to speak about our failures and letdowns. Then and only then did we begin to walk in freedom, the sweet

freedom that brings the beautiful comfort and transformational power to walk through any storm and face any mountain. The truth of God's Word reminded us that God is doing all things for His glory and our good. It's only in this freedom that we can truly experience a peace that is beyond understanding. Now, please hear me: It wasn't like the clouds parted, angels started singing, and everyone lived happily ever after. Our season of life was still hard. But instead of playing a game, we began to live honestly before God, each other, and the people around us. And that's made all the difference.

My hope is that the pages of this book are an invitation for you to do the same. Together, let's tackle head-on the most common lies Christians believe today. You know, the ones that cause our faith to lose its voice of relevance, power, and effectiveness. Some of the lies we'll address are based on incorrect views of Scripture, and they hinder our spiritual maturity because we are not walking in truth. Other lies deeply affect our thinking and actions because we have forgotten what the Bible teaches about the character of God. Then there are lies Christians believe that are not based on Scripture at all. Rather, they are cultural teachings and spiritual-sounding clichés that snuck into the church, got baptized, and then joined the ranks of actual truth. But regardless of the kind, these lies are all enslaving.

### Why the Jackalope?

Tales of rabbits with horns can be traced back to the thirteenth century. However, this mythical animal was popularized in

Wyoming in the 1930s when two brothers with taxidermy skills grafted deer antlers onto jackrabbit carcasses. They sold the combination to local hotels and retailers. Over recent decades, the jackalope has grown into a symbol of folklore, urban legends, and fables—much like Sasquatch, the Loch Ness monster, and the chupacabra.

Unique characteristics have been attributed to this horned varmint, such as being so dangerous that hunters are encouraged to wear shin guards on their legs to keep from being gored by this cantankerous creature. Another legend teaches that this elusive minibeast causes tons of confusion and chaos because it can imitate the human voice. This legend was popular during the days of the Old West when cowboys would gather around the campfire and sing at night—the jackalopes would allegedly join the choir by singing along as tenors.\* Interestingly, some researchers believe the creation of the jackalope can be tied to sightings of rabbits that were infected with a very real and life-threatening virus that caused large tumors to grow on the head, resembling horns and antlers.

Jackalopes are like many of the lies Christians believe. The clichés we hear may seem harmless, innocent, or even cute in the moment. However, we need to realize what they are—lies. And if they are believed for too long, they may become a very dangerous virus to our faith.

What's the best way to deconstruct a lie? Shine the light of truth on it. So we're going to return to the basics of who God is by

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\* "Jackalope," Wikipedia, last modified June 15, 2018, 22:20, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackalope>.



diving deeply into His Scriptures. “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Freedom can be found where the Spirit is, and what does the Spirit stay close to? Truth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The road to the freedom God desires for us is found by walking in spirit and truth (see John 4:24). You can’t have one without the other. Really.

## God Won't Give Me More Than I Can Handle

Well, Actually . . .

“God won’t give you more than you can handle.” Yeah, right, tell that to Jay and Suzanne Faske. In the middle of 1990, they were sitting together watching a documentary on the orphanages in China. They were engaged to be married in January 1991. At that time, little did they know that what God was placing on their hearts would eventually lead to the adoption of many children—and when I say many, I mean over twenty.

By the time the Faskes had celebrated their five-year wedding anniversary, they had been through two miscarriages but had also been blessed with two biological sons. God gave them two beautiful babies to love, but the images of unwanted orphaned children still flooded their minds. At that very moment, they decided that if they were going to have more children, it would be through adoption. They remember saying that they were planning on having a big family one day, one with four children. That was

probably the moment when God had a good belly laugh over their determined plans.

Often when we believe or regurgitate the statement “God won’t give you more than you can handle,” really what we’re saying is that we don’t want more than what we believe we can handle. If we’re honest, we make plans for ourselves that keep us comfortable, and we want God to bless those plans and stay inside those boundaries. However, God hardly ever operates that way. He almost always gives us more than we can handle on our own so that we’ll seek Him for help and guidance.

When the Faske boys were three and two years old, they were in a terrible accident. One of them sustained minor injuries, while the other had to be hospitalized for a dislocated hip and major lacerations to his legs. After going home, he spent six weeks in traction. Watching their son in so much pain opened their eyes to realize there are so many children in this world who go without the love of parents to comfort them or the medical care they desperately need when they are hurting. That accident proved to be a turning point for the family. It was time to start the adoption process. They soon left the States for India.

Like so many families who start the adoption process, Jay and Suzanne had a mental picture in their minds of how magical the moment would be when they met their child for the first time. Surely it would look something like them running across a field of flowers, jumping into one another’s arms, and hugging necks while twirling in the wind. That would be something they could handle. But instead, their story turned out to be forty-nine children running their way, screaming and pulling on their legs, while

one frightened little girl ran crying in the opposite direction. That little girl eventually became their daughter! The experience of living a life they could not handle started to become more real to them when they got on a plane to bring their baby girl home and a man asked to be moved away from her, stating that she was cursed because she had a cleft lip and palate.

A few months later, they were on their way back to India to adopt another child, this time a little boy. They believed their family was now complete. It was perfect. This is what they had planned. They believed they could handle this. God had answered their prayers. Amen.

But these were *their* plans, not the Lord's. God is good at giving us more than we can handle. Before long, the Faske family was at it again after hearing about a sibling group of three in Russia who desperately needed a home and a family—two boys and a girl. Surely now their family was complete, right? Nope. Their family would keep getting bigger.

As the Faske family continued to grow, so did their influence in the lives of others. They approached their church family about starting an orphan ministry to help find families for orphans around the world. At this same time, they were asked to consider coordinating a summer host program for older orphaned children. That summer they watched God work in a very powerful way as they helped almost forty children join their forever families. They had stepped into an area that was unfamiliar to them. You could even say it was overwhelming and more than they could handle. Until this point, the oldest child they had adopted was six years old. However, most of the children they had begun

working with were between the ages of eleven and fifteen. These children had been through some of the most horrific things you could imagine and had come from the darkest places on the planet. Not only was the Faske family exposed to more than they could handle, but these children had experienced a life that was more than anyone should have to handle. Very quickly, the line that “God won’t give you more than you can handle” was being uncovered as a lie, plain and simple.

As these hurting children who had experienced so much trauma were being incorporated into families, it became clear that some of them might never attach and bond fully to their new surroundings. Even though all the host and adoptive families were required to go through training, there was nothing that could prepare them for some of the challenges they would face. As the wheels began to fall off and families couldn’t cope any longer, the Faske home became a refuge for children whose adoptive families could no longer continue to parent them.

All these scenarios, woven together by an intentional God, created a very unique story for the Faske family. The description “big family” would be an understatement for them. Jay and Suzanne have twenty-eight children: twenty-five through adoption and three who are biologically theirs. This family is nearly equivalent to the diversity of the United Nations. Their children are from India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Ethiopia, and the United States. When the Summer or Winter Olympics are being held, this family wins because they have so many countries representing them!

“Well, you know what the Bible says: ‘God won’t give you

more than you can handle.’” I can imagine the Faske family hearing that and bursting into laughter. Twenty-eight children? Plus the adoption process itself? Then dealing with the trauma the kids experienced and overcoming cultural differences and barriers from seven different countries? Yeah, right.

I know, I know. Using the Faske family as an example is a pretty extreme way to expose this lie. But let’s look at “God won’t give you more than you can handle” in a little more detail. First of all, this statement cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. Most people who say it claim it’s because they’ve heard others use it. But as far as it being something God actually said? No, it’s not in there.

Now, some people might point to 1 Corinthians 10 as justification for the statement: “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (verses 12–13). Sounds a little similar, right? However, context is key here, and these verses are talking specifically about temptation. Basically, the verses are teaching that everyone is tempted. Each one of us has different weaknesses and different enticements that will grab our attention, but the point is that we will all face temptation. So when temptation comes, we need to have a game plan in place. The promise we have from God in those moments is that we will not be tempted beyond our ability to overcome it. Yet we still need God in those very moments. Notice the comforts given: “God is faithful” and “he will also provide the way of escape.” Even in this scenario it’s more than we can handle, because we are completely dependent

on God to keep His promises. For example, when that inappropriate image pops up on your computer screen, the way of escape is the power button. When gossip springs up at your office, the way of escape is shutting it down or walking away. God remains faithful to provide the way of escape and therefore gives us the ability to endure temptation when it comes our way.

If you think about it, all of life is more than we can handle. We don't exist without a God who creates us. We don't breathe without the breath He places in our lungs. We can't comprehend and make decisions without the brain He has given us. We can't feel, love, and care without the heart and soul He has placed inside us. We can't navigate through this journey called life without the wisdom that comes from Him. We can't endure suffering without a God who gives us hope of a brighter tomorrow and a promise that He has a plan and purpose for everything and everyone. We can't truly heal unless there is a God who can heal us.

Yes, all of life is more than we can handle. But it is not more than God can handle through us.

### God Won't Give You More Than He Can Handle Through You

One of the greatest promises that God gives us in Scripture is not that He will keep us out of difficult situations or that He will make sure we never experience suffering. Rather, He promises to be with us in those difficult situations and be an ever-present help in times of suffering. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

He also doesn't promise us that we'll face only things we can handle. If we were able to handle everything in life on our own, then why would we need God? Often the biggest blessing of being in over our heads in life is that we have an opportunity to rely on a God who can take on anything and everything. He is able. "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

The promise is not that He won't give you more than you can handle but rather that He won't give you more than He can handle through you. As overwhelming as the Faske family's life appears to be, they have learned the valuable lesson of depending on their Lord for the power to live a life that glorifies Him and helps others. This hasn't always been easy or natural for them. There have been times when trusting in the Lord was a real struggle. As their family grew over the years, not everyone was as supportive as you'd hope they would be of a family who has helped so many. It's a hard thing to handle when you feel as if you're obeying God and being a blessing to others and yet you endure a barrage of negative comments. They'd hear things such as, "How can you possibly love that many children? How do you have the time? Why would you choose this? How can you afford to raise that many children?"

However, if everything that comes with being a family of thirty, plus receiving some pretty disheartening comments, seems like a lot to handle, there would be even more. A day. The day. April 23, 2017, would bring a change that once again proved this life always has turns and difficulties that are too much to handle.



That day a few of the Faske children rose from bed early in the morning and headed to a cattle show in Rockdale, Texas. After the show, Nathaniel, now living on his own, dropped his siblings off at home, then headed toward his new place of residence. Sadly, he never made it.

Mr. Faske and one of the sons were fishing in the pond in front of their house, and Mrs. Faske walked down to the pond to sit on the dock with them. Shortly after, a police officer showed up at their gate. At first they thought he was trying to turn around, but then he moved closer, as if he wanted to come in. Mr. Faske went to meet him, and his wife could see them talking. The officer passed Mr. Faske the wallet that belonged to Nathaniel, and in that moment Mrs. Faske knew. She dropped to her knees and begged God not to let this happen, to bring their son back. There was no way they could handle this. No person should have to. Kids are supposed to bury their parents, not the other way around.

Nathaniel had fallen asleep at the wheel and lost control of his car. He was only twenty-one years old—too young to leave this earth. He had been a part of the Faske family since they adopted him from Russia when he was six. When he joined the family, he had a hardened look in his eyes. He had been through a lot and was filled with pain. He didn't know how to express everything he had been through and wasn't sure he liked the idea of letting the Faskes be his parents. Over time, he softened and grew into a wonderful young man, the kind of guy who would be there for others when they needed him, no matter what he was doing. He was the type of person who paid attention to what others liked and then showed up with the perfect surprise. But on April 23, all

that ended. Nathaniel died way too soon, and now this family of twenty-nine was feeling the heavy weight of sorrow, loss, and heartache. It was more than they could ever handle on their own.

The next few days were a blur for the Faske family. Just as for any loss of a loved one, there were many arrangements to be made for the funeral. As difficult as it was for the parents to process, they also had a lot of little ones who didn't understand what had happened to their older brother. How do parents who have lost a child in a horrible accident help their other children understand why this happened when they can't even understand it themselves?

Surely everything was about to calm down for the Faske family. It would have to, right? What else could this family possibly face? They slowly tried to return to a routine. About a month later, they attempted to have a typical family day on their farm, riding horses and going swimming in the lake near their house. The kids were really excited because this was the first thing they had done that seemed normal since their brother's death. They saddled eighteen horses and prepared for a short trail ride to the lake. Two of the daughters, Lily and Cherish, were the last two kids to get on their horses. Cherish was only six years old and needed help getting on, so Lily was helping her. It's crazy how things can change in a heartbeat. As Lily put Cherish on the horse, the horse moved in a way that jerked one of the reins from Cherish's hands. As the rein hit the ground, the horse stepped on it, panicked, and began backing up in such a hurry that the horse tripped over backward. The horse fell on top of Cherish with such force that it knocked itself out and injured Cherish badly. When the horse came to, it started paddling in a circle on its side while Lily pulled

Cherish out from under it. Suddenly, a peaceful routine day turned into ambulances, emergency lights, and medical workers filling the driveway.

While Mr. Faske and one of the grown sons tried to restrain the horse, Mrs. Faske held her little girl's face and screamed for her to keep breathing. Praise God, she had been wearing a helmet, but her chest had been crushed by the saddle horn. Cherish kept falling asleep, and it was obvious she was dying. When her mother could get her to wake up, Cherish would say, "Mommy, I don't want to die."

"God won't give you more than you can handle." Yeah, right. As a loving parent in this scenario, you would have to think and plead with the Lord, *Not again. How can this be happening again? This is too much!* With these thoughts rolling around in Mrs. Faske's head, she told her daughter, "Just pray, sweetie. Pray to Jesus. Keep praying to Jesus, Cherish."

What seemed like hours for this fragile family was probably less than thirty-five minutes. The ambulance took them to a location where they met a helicopter that transported them to a hospital. As they were loading Cherish onto the helicopter, they heard one of the medical workers say, "I know this family. They lost their son just one month ago. Please do everything you can for her." Cherish immediately went into surgery at the hospital when the helicopter landed. She spent about two weeks in the intensive care unit, but now she is a healthy and happy little girl.

Without a doubt, the Faskes are some of the most incredible people my wife and I have ever met. The first time we heard their story in its entirety, we were blown away, to say the least. I'll never

forget them talking about the pithy statements people shared with them. Statements we've all heard—and most of the time hated.

During their most difficult days, people would tell them, “You know, God will never give you more than you can handle.” The truth is that God is sovereign. If we trust that He is sovereign in the good, then we also need to trust that He is sovereign when we think things are bad. He is in control, and His timing is perfect. It's not always easy. Sometimes it is more than we can cope with on our own, but it is still perfect.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every

matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1–4)

The Faske family can tell you from firsthand experience that they believe God has given them far more than they can handle, but they're still leaning on Him. They trust He will never give them more than He can handle through them. Even in the most extreme circumstances, He has carried them through it all. They have survived because of His grace. They can't explain it, but sometimes the greatest gifts are those you can't explain. There's just a peace, even in the midst of the storm. It's a storm you can't

handle, and yet you still endure. Why? Because He is with you. Somehow you feel the strength to stand firm because you're standing on Him as your foundation. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10).

God chooses what to reveal to us and what not to reveal. The primary truths He has revealed to us are that He loves us, is with us, and can identify with us. No matter what we're going through, He can handle it. We can't, but He can. One of the main reasons He can handle whatever we're going through is because He is a God who can identify with His creation.

### A Great God Who Identifies with You

We've all said it, or at least thought it: "Jesus couldn't possibly understand what I'm going through right now. After all, He never had to experience what I am dealing with!" Often, this thought is brought on by physical suffering, feelings of being alone, or thinking you are the only one who has had to wrestle with a particular temptation, trial, or conflict. In a way, this thought process has been made worse by a common reading of Scripture that skips right from the birth of Jesus to His death and resurrection, ignoring the fact that most of the Gospels deal with Jesus's life—His

very human life. The truth is, if there's anybody who can understand what you're going through, it's Jesus.

When the Son of God came to earth two thousand years ago, He was fully God, but He was also fully human. In Jesus, the qualities of God and the qualities of mankind were slammed together into One. With this reality came all the experiences of what it means to be human—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Therefore, He can completely identify with everything humans go through. He personally knows what it's like to suffer and experience hardships. He understands and can empathize with you in ways no one else can.

Let's take a look at some of the very familiar yet very incredible ways that Jesus identifies with us in our humanity.

### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Experience Poverty*

Living from paycheck to paycheck can be a very real struggle for anyone. Surely God can't understand what it is like to go to sleep hungry and cold, can He? Well, Jesus, the Son of God, knew exactly what it was like to be poor. After all, He was homeless, so He can identify with those who have to do without. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58).

### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Experience Exhaustion*

It's okay to admit it: some days, maybe even most days, we're T-I-R-E-D tired. Jesus knew all too well what it was like to experience weariness. It's good to remind ourselves that Jesus walked

everywhere He went. On top of that, He had to deal with His disciples arguing about who was the greatest while often completely missing whatever lesson He was trying to teach them in that moment. Not to mention having religious leaders plotting His death while He did nothing but good, such as healing people, raising folks from the dead, and feeding the hungry. Many times He would keep on walking and go off by Himself to pray. He knows what it is like to be physically and emotionally exhausted, and He knows what the remedy is.

#### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Be Betrayed*

Unfortunately, Jesus was well acquainted with the pain of betrayal. Not only was He betrayed by religious leaders who were jealous of the crowds that were following Him, but He was also betrayed by those very close to Him. For example, His own family! “When his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21). One of His closest friends also betrayed Him: “Immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept” (Mark 14:72). And ultimately one of the Twelve sold Him out for thirty pieces of silver. “[He] said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver” (Matthew 26:15).

#### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Suffer from Grief*

Jesus knew what it was like to experience heartache, sadness, and sorrow. A couple of instances in the Gospels show Jesus weeping,

first over the condition of Jerusalem: “And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19:41), and second due to His grief at the death of a beloved friend: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). He was also sorrowed by humanity’s rejection of God: “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3).

#### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Be Tempted*

Maybe you can accept that Jesus knew grief and exhaustion, but when it comes to fighting temptation, surely Jesus cannot relate. But the writer of Hebrews reminds us that nothing could be further from the truth. Although Jesus never committed a sin, He was still tempted. Therefore, “because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (2:18).

#### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Experience Suffering*

When we search for meaning in our suffering, it can be hard to find on this side of eternity because we cannot know all the purposes of a sovereign God. But we have a savior who knew exactly what it was like to suffer. He confided His emotional pain to His disciples, saying, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). And He obviously endured the physical pain of His extremely gruesome death on the cross.

#### *Jesus Knew What It Was Like to Feel Forsaken by God*

Even when we feel as though God has forsaken us, Jesus can identify. God the Father had to turn His face away from His Son while



He became sin on the cross in our place. “About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matthew 27:46). However, we need to remember that although it was a reality for Jesus at that time, being forsaken by God is only a feeling for His children. The truth is, He has told us, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).



Plain and simple, Jesus knows what it’s like to live as a human. He got hungry. He got thirsty. He slept. He had to learn things. He grew. He loved. He was glad. He was angry. He was troubled at times. He prayed. He exercised faith. He read the Scriptures. He hurt when He saw another person’s illness. He cried when He saw death. As the old hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” says, “Jesus knows our every weakness.”

What a massive comfort to know that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Yes, Jesus knows.

### He Is Your Strength

You will experience the ebb and flow of life. Ups and downs. Good days and bad days. Times when everything makes sense and times when nothing makes sense. There will be seasons when you have resources at your disposal to pay all your bills early, and

then there will be other times when you look at your bank account and start pleading for Jesus to come back before that bill is due. Life throws a ton at you. It's a lot to bear. It's more than you can handle on your own. But it is not more than He can handle, because He has already experienced it Himself and conquered it. Trust in Him. Find your strength in Him. Relying on Jesus means you don't have to figure out how to be victorious over rough times, because His victory will be your victory. Rest in that truth. Walk in that freedom.

Hopefully you'll get to live a full life and live long enough to get the senior discount at restaurants. When you approach the last chapter of your life here on earth, the goal is to be able to say something similar to what the apostle Paul penned to the believers at Philippi: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11–13). No matter what Paul was going through, he had learned how to remain content. Why was he able to be content regardless of the circumstances around him? The answer was that he had a secret (see verse 12). What was his secret? Well, verse 13 is the secret.

Philippians 4:13 has to be one of the most misquoted and misused verses in all of the Bible: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." This verse has nothing to do with dunking a basketball, hitting a game-winning home run, bench-pressing a bus, winning the lottery, or closing a business deal. On the other

hand, in its context, this is an extremely helpful and encouraging verse. When the apostle Paul wrote these words, he was under house arrest awaiting his trial, where he might possibly be put to death for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. However, instead of being defeated by unfortunate circumstances, Paul used this opportunity to teach the young church in Philippi that he could endure any and every circumstance—ups and downs, highs and lows—because he had a strength that comes only from Christ. This supernatural strength to endure all seasons and situations was always with Paul because the Holy Spirit of Christ was always with him, even in prison.

Just ask the Faske family. They have learned by experience, through the good and the bad times, that Christ is always there with them. They have suffered more than any family should. They have taken on more than anyone else I can think of. And yet, through these times of highs and lows, God has molded them. Each of their adoptions has come with its own challenges, but the blessings have outweighed the struggles. The life transformations they have seen in their children, and in the lives of others around them, are unmeasurable. Suffering has brought their family closer together and has given each member of their family compassion for others who have experienced extreme hurt. God has given the Faske family much more than they could handle. It hasn't all been pretty, but it has definitely been beautiful.



## QUESTIONS FOR COMMON LIE 1

1. Before reading this chapter, what came to your mind when you heard the statement “God won’t give you more than you can handle”?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 10:12–13. What promises are made in those verses? What does God want you to know about Him from those verses? What are some examples of ways of escape in the midst of temptation?
3. The story of the Faske family is an extreme example of going through difficult situations and seasons of life. You may not experience what they did, but you will experience your own struggles. Recall your most recent significant struggle (you may still be in it). Was your faith strong or weak during that time?
4. How did this chapter change or reinforce your view of God? How did it change or reinforce how you view struggles and suffering? How did it change or reinforce how you view faith?
5. How did the examples of how Jesus can identify with your life experiences change or reinforce your view of Jesus?



## A TRUTH TO MOVE FORWARD WITH

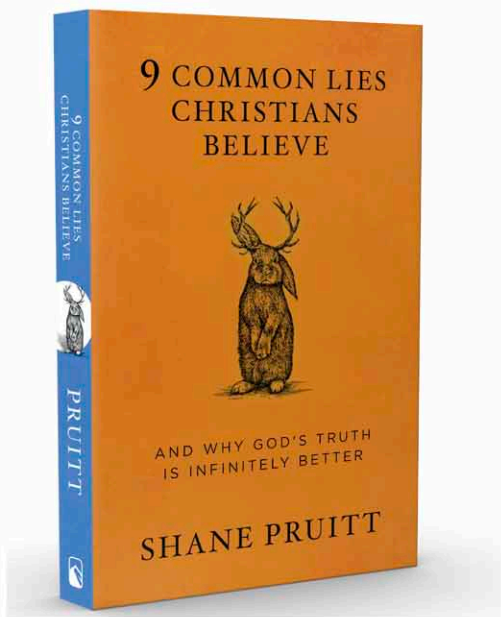
Sometimes God gives us more than we can handle, but He never gives us more than He can handle through us.



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