

Escape Clause

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Recorded on June 21, 2025

today

I'm going to talk about a legal term today. I used a free dictionary online and of course it has an encyclopedia and a legal dictionary—but I looked up a term recently, “*escape clause*”. That's a noun, it's a legal term and I think most of us have heard of that at one point or another. That's my title:

Escape Clause

A couple of quick definitions. This one is from the American Heritage Dictionary:

“A clause in a contract that specifies the condition in which the promisor is relieved of the liability for failure to meet the terms of the contract”.

It's just like this facility that we rent here. We lease it by the year; we are under a contract for that. If there's an escape clause, I don't know what it is. Maybe if we died or something they would let us out of the lease. The Collins English Dictionary puts it a different way but all of them say the same thing. It says,

“Legally it's the provision in the contract that enables a party to terminate contractual obligations in specified circumstances”.

That's a pretty clear definition of the term.

When you think about that in relation to our spiritual lives, we have to consider that we too, are under a contract. Whenever we come up out of that baptismal pool, we did a couple of things.

First: We promised to follow Jesus Christ—follow Him no matter what or no matter where that might lead us in our lives.

When you think about that—and we'll look at some scriptures to support this—there is an escape clause in that contract. We would all like a trouble-free, stress-free life; no problems, no issues, blue skies, sunshine, all of that—“*smooth sailing, never rough seas*”. I know that's a navy metaphor. It usually takes years after we have been baptized that we come to the point where we start to understand some things that we didn't understand at first. We understand that life is not necessarily easy. I don't know if you remember the movie, “Forest Gump; *life is not a box of chocolates or a bowl of cherries or a bed of roses*”.

Let's turn over to Psalms 34. If you notice we just sang that. You might find some familiar words if you recall the song. I like to use the NLT.

Psalms 34:17 *The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.*

18) *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.*

19) *The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.* (NLT)

Some translations might say *He delivers us each time*. That's a Psalm of David. David was discouraged many times in his life. He was attacked and had all kinds of problems. He wrote that psalm as an encouragement for when we are beaten down by issues and problems. Telling us that no matter what the problem is, what the circumstances are, Yehovah is still there. He still hears our prayers even when we think He doesn't. If we cry out in anguish and despair, which sometimes we do, David is just pointing out that Yehovah rescues or delivers the righteous and that describes us. It should. We're trying to live the life that God called us to. We accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we're sanctified by God's Holy Spirit and from that point, we do embark on a righteous life. That's our goal in life. It tells us that we are righteous, that we will have afflictions. Many are the troubled, many are the afflictions of the righteous. That's just a fact.

If we think about it, I think sometimes we have this naive idea that when we are baptized, (I talked with someone about this recently), we think everything is going to go smoothly, we're not going to have any problems. We have this idea of a neat package or we're just going to slide into God's Kingdom. No troubles, we're not going to get old with aches and pains. It's just going to be easy. We used to call it the "Health and Wealth Gospel" and unfortunately, I think that this had a lot of negative impact on our lives. God doesn't put us in some kind of protective bubble; He just doesn't do that. A lot of times we tell someone who is newly baptized, *"Don't be surprised if you have problems. It could come from any quarter to you, from Satan, could be from God allowing it, could be anything."*

Look at 1 Corinthians 10:13. I heard someone say, when looking at this scripture in the context, that whenever trials or troubles happen and we are dealing with a crisis in our lives, that this could be one of the most important scriptures in the entire New Testament for us. In some ways, when we look at these scriptures like this one—I hope I can point this out clearly enough—they show us something that should be foundational to our beliefs. Paul is telling us something about being human, being converted—whether you're converted or not actually.

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man;* (NKJV)

I like the Thayer's definition of that. I'm quoting Thayer's definition of the word *temptation*. It means "adversity, affliction, trouble, sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith and holiness". That's a pretty good definition. The second part of that is, "it's enticement to sin from God or Satan when God is the agent, temptation is for the purpose of proving someone". We see scriptures where God does

prove us—He tests us, He gives us things to test us. The definition goes on, “never for the purpose of causing him to fall”. God doesn’t do that. God doesn’t let something happen to you to make you fail—He doesn’t do that. “If it is the devil who tempts, then it is for the purpose of causing someone to fall”. That is the difference between the two. God is active in our lives; Satan is active in our lives. Then it says, “common to man”. Verse 13 from the NLT puts it in a little different way.

13) Temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. (NLT)

In other words, God made all humans—all similar trials whether we have God’s Holy Spirit or not, humanly we have different challenges that we go through in life. That’s just a fact. It doesn’t matter if we are 80, 10 years old, male, female—doesn’t matter. We’re still going to have human issues. It’s the same for all of us. The last part of verse 13.

13) but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (NKJV)

Comparing that to the New Living, it says:

13) He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand, when you are tempted, He will show you a way out so you can endure. (NLT)

A way of escape; there’s that *escape clause* that is built into what God has given us. That should be a vital part of our faith, believing that when God says it. It clearly says you won’t be tempted more than you can handle. He’s going to show you a way out. Provide you a way where you can ride it out and survive spiritually because that is what is important in the end. It’s an important topic. A lot of people base their faith on their view of God—the promises and they might think, this will never happen to me. I don’t know if you have read the book, which was a popular book years ago—*When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner. It’s a really good book. He deals with this. He wrote that book in response to a personal tragedy in his own life, when his son died. It’s a good read. If you didn’t know it, Harold Kushner is a Rabbi. He also dealt with the grief in his congregations.

People think that, this can’t happen to me; it happens to other people who don’t share my beliefs. It won’t happen to me because I have faith in God—at least the faith that I think that I have. The problem is, they think the idea of faith that they have insulates them from the things that are common to man. That may be a zealous idea, you can’t discount that, but it’s a false confidence. Not looking at the scriptures that very clearly point out what God might allow to happen to us; He just does. In that thinking, when something does happen, they automatically think, “I’ve sinned”. Cause and effect or something has happened to me; I didn’t deserve this, I don’t know why I’m getting it. It could be from sin but other things happen too. Time and chance happen. You know what *time and chance* is; it’s just randomness. God allows for randomness to happen on earth. Sometimes things happen just to glorify the name of God. It tells us this in John 9.

John 9:1 Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.
2) And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (NKJV)

That's what people think—I did something and God is punishing me for something.

3) Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. (NKJV)

There are situations that happen that are not directly traced to evil actions or thoughts. Sins are *cause and effect*—they just happen. So that kind of thinking, that God will never let this happen to me, lacks understanding when you look at it that way. God just might let things happen to us and when it does, we have to deal with it. Not thinking, why did God let this happen to me. People get angry with God; that comes out in Kushner's book. He goes through a bunch of the reasons where he tries to counsel people and help them when things have happened. This is a critical verse to understand. If you don't understand, if we don't believe it then we have pretty shaky faith.

God says that He is faithful and He won't allow us to have something happen to us that we are not able to hold up under—that we won't survive. We have to really listen to what that says. We might think that God would never allow something to happen to me. But that's a lot of wishful thinking and unfortunately, we labored under that idea in our past. The fact is, our faith should be that God will not allow trials above what we are able to bear. That's the way we should look at that. He will be with us no matter what. We'll look at some examples that talk about that. Christ had to bear up under torture, under people driving nails through his body. He could have said,

"Father why are you doing this? Why are you disappointed in Me? I thought You said, this is My Son in whom I am well please. Why are You allowing nails to be driven through parts of my body like this? Why all this torture? Why are You allowing people to do these horrible things to me?"

You see, we have to believe that God will not allow anything to befall us that we are not able to bear, even when we think we can't handle it. Sometimes we get there.

He says when bad things happen to us, He will provide a way to escape out of it. There's a little escape clause in that contract. Then you have people who will criticize you. You have this religious crutch that you use whenever you are in bad times, whenever you are having a hard time. They think that because they don't know the true God, they don't know the true Jesus Christ or the power of God's Holy Spirit. They don't know that. They see religion as some kind of a game we play. We just do these traditional emotional things, but the true religion is much more than a game. They don't know the scriptures that talk about real trials. God has told us that we are not different than the rest of mankind. I'm going to let things happen to you but in the end it's for your

good. Remember Job? He was very righteous. But God wanted him to go to another spiritual level, so he piles all those trials on him. Of course we have this prayer, we ask God to please don't let these bad things happen to me. God understands that kind of prayer. He promised He would never let something happen that we are not able to bear.

If you look at all the biblical examples that we have—Job, Jesus Christ, Stephen, all the people in Hebrews 11, even what has happened amongst the brethren—we see that all the time, things happen to good people and they have to deal with that. We have to hang on to these scriptures. These biblical principles that tell us these things. God tells us He will make a way of escape and we have to count on that. We have to look to God for that. He will show us how to do that. We don't know what form it's going to come. We have to trust God and believe that He's faithful of what He says. He makes some way out so you can survive.

What are some of the ways of escape that God may provide. I have a handful of them. These should be fairly obvious. Hopefully you can think of other ways. We can never tell in what form a trial we have or face—we can't cover every possible scripture that helps us deal with it but we will cover what we can and lock onto these scriptures that give us some insight into this.

1. Sometimes the escape or the way out of a trial is through a miraculous miracle.

There are times when God will provide a miracle to give you an escape. It could be dramatic or subtle. Sometimes we look back and say, that didn't happen by accident. There was something providential there; God intervened, I can see His hand in it. I don't know how many times that we could tell stories of what has happened in our lives and you could pull all the brethren through the years, even going back to Christ's times and there would be thousands and thousands of stories like that. Most of the time this is what we want—we want a miracle. We just want out; we don't want to suffer. We might pray this way. We might ask God:

“I would like a job right now so bless me with a good interview.”

“I've been a terrible financial manager so help me to be prosperous.”

“God, I would like you take this lump off my breast.”

“Please make people stop persecuting.”

Those are common prayer requests and there's nothing wrong with those. It's not wrong to ask God to open doors for you, to heal you, to ask for you to become prosperous. In 2 Kings we will do a brief survey of a couple of miracles that we have in the Bible that show us something. There are lessons for us.

2 Kings 6:8 *Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place."* (NKJV)

In other words, he's staging his army in different places in Israel so he can attack Israel.

9) And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." (NKJV)

The whole context is, this Assyrian king, every time he tried to figure out a strategic location to stage his army, Israel would find out about it. He's accusing his own people. He was probably cutting off heads—accusing his own army, own officers or whoever. How are they finding out about this? They finally discovered it was Elisha. God was helping Elisha miraculously know their plans, so he would intervene. Yehovah would intervene. Of course, the king wanted to find him and kill him.

Verse 14.

14) Therefore, he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

15) And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. [They were actually looking for Elisha] And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (NKJV)

He looked up and here is the army, wall to wall. Everywhere he looked there was nothing but an army. You can imagine today if you woke up and walked outside your front door in the morning and looked and saw 1000 tanks there. Or the air was full of helicopters. You would probably freeze up—you would choke up. That's what happened to this poor guy. He was scared to death. Elisha felt sorry for him.

16) So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (NKJV)

This poor guy probably thought,

"I don't think so. I can see with my eyes, we are outnumbered—we're dead."

17) And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (NKJV)

What God did, was open his eyes so he could see the spirit world; He could see that spirit army that was there. All the angels that were in support of God, in support of Elisha and in support of God's plan for Israel at that point. The point is, God did a miracle and let that man know that no matter how bad it looks, who was really in charge

and on his side. It's a simple lesson for us. We always have to remember who is on our side when things look bad. When it looks like there is no way I'm going to survive this—there is no way, I just can't handle it. We ask God, I'm looking for deliverance, for a miracle, for an escape kind of help like this.

18) So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. (NKJV)

All of a sudden you have this massive army that is nonfunctional. You can't do anything if you can't see. That was a dramatic way that God intervened. We probably think, God has never intervened for me like that. I wish something like that would happen to me. But who knows how many miracles God has actually performed in our lives. We don't know. I could tell you a few stories you probably wouldn't believe. It was a miraculous intervention, I think. We can all recognize that, when things happen in our lives. How He's caused things to happen in our lives and how He's always in some way provided, in one form or another, that way of an escape many, many times. Let's go to 2 Kings 20, here's another miraculous healing. It's a familiar story—King Hezekiah. People say these days that God doesn't heal anymore. But God does heal. We see that even today. Sometimes it's dramatic and sometimes God allows a health condition to go on. Other times he intervenes very quickly.

2 Kings 20:1 *In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.'"*

2) Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,

3) "Remember now, O LORD, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what was good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4) And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

5) "Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD.

6) And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.'" ' (NKJV)

God is going to preserve them; He's going to rescue them out of this. Look here, two miracles. 15 years of life and no invasion from an army, from an enemy. We can ask God for a miracle when we pray and that's a miraculous escape—that's one way. The whole point is, when you think about it, it's not a bad idea to put things in God's hand and let God handle it. We don't know how He will respond. We have biblical examples of that.

2. Through death.

We would rather the first way—we would rather have miracles. We would rather not have death. We just talked about Hezekiah; he was healed and given 15 years to live, but not everyone gets a miracle like that. Sometimes, unfortunately, people in deep depression might consider a self-inflicted out. That's when they should seek help. Enough said on that. Sometimes death is God's escape as it says in Isaiah 57.

Isaiah 57:1 The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil. (NKJV)

They don't look at it that way. The King James says:

"the evil to come."

The New Living puts it like this:

Good people pass away. The Godly often die before their time but no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come.

The whole point is, sometimes God allows someone to miss the evil. I don't know whether you have heard this before. We've heard people say that they thought most people would be taken away before the Great Tribulation; that's how we would survive the Tribulation. We don't know—who can say that? Many of the brethren have died and God allowed that to happen to them. This scripture is saying that these folks will miss the evil that comes and it's surely coming. Who knows what the near future holds. All you have to do is turn on your TV and we have prophecies unfolding right before our eyes. We have wars everywhere. We're sitting on a powder keg. The whole world could blow up tomorrow. We don't know that. Even looking at earthquakes—Christ talked about that in Matthew 24. That's very prophetic and those things are coming to pass. The earthquakes and seismic activities are increasing in intensity. You can just see that. The point is, many have died and they have had their escape because the next waking moment will be the resurrection for them. We bring that out many times when we do funerals.

Sometimes people think that people die because there is a curse on them. That's not true. It may actually turn out to be a blessing for them to be taken away from the evil to come. We don't know, that's in God's Hands. Turn to Revelation 6; here's another thing we don't often talk about. It says that some will be slain for the word of God; just for being a Christian. It's talking about the 5th seal.

Revelation 6:9 *When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. (NKJV)*

Just for being a Christian.

10) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11) Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. (NKJV)

Yes, as some of us may be martyred for the word of God—we know the 2 witnesses will be, that's very clearly spelled out. There are people out there who claim none of that is going to happen to you. Martyrdom isn't going to happen to you if you belong to our groups. I remember that place of safety thing—that was a control mechanism. Getting back to the point, no one knows how many will be slain for the word of God. That is just an unknown but it does say it will happen. Turn to John 19. It even happened to our Savior—to Christ.

John 19:28 *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!"*

29) Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

30) So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (NKJV)

His ultimate escape was death, from what was happening to him at that point. In Acts 7, it has the same account of Stephen being stoned to death. Again, from the New King James.

Acts 7:54 *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*

55) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,

56) and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (NKJV)

Here's a miraculous vision that God is showing Stephen—exactly the same thing.

57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;

58) and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59) And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60) Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (NKJV)

He died. That was his escape. So, death is an escape. Many brethren have died. We've had mates die, parents, sometimes a child—we've lost two children. They are awaiting the resurrection. They are not facing any pain anymore. They are not facing any evil anymore.

3. Through hiding or just exiting/leaving a situation.

It might seem an odd way of escaping, until we find it in scripture.

1 Kings 17:1 *And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."* (NKJV)

Essentially, no agriculture—there wouldn't be any food. We have to remember that King Ahab was the most evil king of all of Israel's kings and he brought curses on Israel.

2) Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying ... (NKJV)

Ahab wanted to kill Elijah. God could have just killed Ahab. What did he tell Elijah to do? He told him:

3) "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

4) And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."(NKJV)

We're familiar with the whole story and the lesson but the point is, God took care of him by removing him from the situation. He told him to go hide. We have Christ's example. Go back to John 8, dropping way down to verse 57. We know the context, Christ was in one of His typical squabbles with the Jews—the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Scribes.

John 8:57 *Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"*

58) Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." (NKJV)

A lot of people jump on that "I am" and try to make something out of that that it's not. If you have a Moffitt, look it up in sometime and what Jesus was saying, what it means in the Greek was, I was before Abraham.

59) Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (NKJV)

He got lost in the crowd. We have these examples of hiding, exiting, or just leaving a situation but it's an appropriate method of escape from a given situation. Sometimes

there is a time and place to find an exit and leave. I think back to our history in the church when the church was breaking up, all the heresies were creeping in. People hid a little in the congregation. They would hear a sermon and think, "That's not right." Fortunately, we have folks here that never lived through that thankfully. That was just a time back then when people were trying to sort through all the issues, the church was breaking up, heresies were creeping in and people just didn't know what to do—we weren't faced with that before. Kind of a battle going on in our mind—we just blended in. But the point I'm getting at is, it finally came to the point where we just had to leave. We just had to exit. There was no choice. We had to leave the situation. In many ways, the escape can be just hiding; a temporary thing. God told Elijah to do it—go hide by the river. Also, Christ on a number of occasions, did that. Escaping by leaving is sometimes just getting yourself out of the situation and a biblical principle. Sometimes it's best to leave a job or something like that. Sometimes things become untenable—you can't function there. In 1 Corinthians 7. I don't know if you have noticed, there's an example, to leave and escape slavery in New Living Translation.

1 Corinthians 7:20 *Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you.*

21) Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. (NLT)

We have the account of Joseph and his family. God told him to leave Egypt. He sent an angel to direct him to get out of the country for their safety. We find that in Matthew 2—we won't turn there. Sometimes you just leave. Sometimes the escape is at the hand of God. He provides that exit for you. We have the example—we won't turn there—of Paul and Barnabus. They parted company at one time—they had a disagreement and I guess it was pretty intense. The friction was so bad that they had to get away from each other. That even happens to leaders in the church in the early church. Later on, they got back together again, but they had some disagreements. The point is, sometimes the situation dictates that it's better to separate, to get out of the situation. If you want to look that up, it's in Acts 15. 2 Corinthians 6 and it tells us something else about leaving.

2 Corinthians 6:14 *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*

15) And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? (NKJV)

We have other scriptures that we are supposed to be lights to the world. Yet at the same time, we know we can't avoid interaction with the sinners of the world, but when you put those scriptures together and think about this in the context, there comes a point when the unrighteousness is so great that you have to leave. Personally, we should want to be away from unrighteousness. We shouldn't want to snuggle up to it.

16) And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

17) Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate ... (NKJV)

Paul is saying, get your butt out the door if you are in that situation.

17 continued) ... says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." (NKJV)

If you do have a center reference or other references like I do in my software, there's a whole bunch of Old Testament scriptures that support that. Paul is directly quoting from the Old Testament. The point is, if we leave a situation under those circumstances, we have these scriptures that tell us that God will receive us. God will appreciate that. He will see you doing that. It might be tough sometimes but God says He will be your Father and we will be His children.

18) I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." (NKJV)

That's where our confidence should be. If we find ourselves in a physical situation, that's not going to save us. What is going to save us or get us out of that is our relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ.

The fourth way is kind of self-evident.

4. Coping.

God just helps us cope. This is different. It's not a miracle. There's no death. No hiding. No exiting. In this case, when troubles and trials arrive on our doorstep, you find yourself in the coping phase of your conversion. You have an active part to play. All of us do. When you think about it, most of the time this is the one we deal with. We would love to have God just do a miracle for us every day of our lives, but most of the time God says, you're just going to have to do with this one—just going to have to cope with it. Let's turn to Daniel; a very familiar story but look at it from this angle. This is the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3. We know the context here; because of Nebuchadnezzar's decree to bow down to the golden image and all that, this is the point they have come to. Notice their answer. This is called coping—this is how you cope. This is how they did it.

Daniel 3:17 *If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.*

18) But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (NKJV)

People sometimes will criticize that if you say you have faith when you say God may or may not do this—people say using the word ‘may’ is not definite. ‘May’ is a lack of faith. I remember one time we were on a work party helping someone. We were cutting down a tree. I’m up in a tree with a chainsaw and I didn’t want to crawl out on this big branch—this tree was huge. Somebody yelled up, “Don’t you have faith Jack?” Yeah, but I’m not stupid. It’s interesting what they said—they said “*if it be so*”. I think one of the other translations says, “*if that’s the case*”. Notice that big “if” there. That’s a strong statement. God indeed spared these men. They had faith but their concept of faith included the word “if”. They had absolute faith in God, no matter the outcome. That didn’t change.

A lot of times people will say, God will be with me and won’t let this happen but that idea in and of itself is not faith. Sometimes we try to talk ourselves into that. We think that if we mouth the word faith enough times it’s actually going to happen. Just saying things won’t make it happen and I’ve heard people do this. God will be with me—that won’t make it happen. God will heal me—that won’t make it happen. God will get me that job—that won’t make it happen. I’m not saying we shouldn’t be positive, but we should also deal with the world of reality. It’s just there. That’s where these 3 men found themselves; in reality. If it be so our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the furnace—that’s trusting God. Christ even said, if it’s possible—speaking to the Father—take this cup from me. But I will do what you say because I trust you. Same thing with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God can and is able and if He chooses to deliver us, fine. But if not, we have to handle that. Whatever hand we are dealt with at the time, God will provide the faith and the strength to carry us through. That’s called coping. It’s the right way. It can be done when we know who God is and believe His promises. When we know the way it works and know He’s with us no matter what happens or how bleak things may look to us. Sometimes they look pretty bleak.

Coping just means we understand and believe God and trust Him. We have a tremendous confidence in Him not giving us more than we can bear. We trust that. He will provide a way to manage the situation and problem and sometimes that’s through coping. Christ gave us this tremendous example, turn to Luke 22 from the New King James. A tremendous example that Jesus left us. Breaking in on the context.

Luke 22:39 *Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him.*

40) *When He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”*

41) *And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed,*

42) *saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.”*

43) *Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. (NKJV)*

That must have been a pretty amazing thing. We don’t always understand things that happen to us. But we wish that would happen to us in a time of personal crisis.

44) And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (NKJV)

A lot of times when we're going through trials and hurts in our lives, we need an escape. That may come in the form of God just giving us the strength and faith like He did with Jesus, to cope with the situation. Whatever the case, it's not going to be our human strength to get us through. It's going to be total dependence on God to get us through something. I read somewhere once—I don't remember where it was—that said,

*"Faith is not about everything being okay.
Faith is about being okay no matter how everything turns out".*

In 2 Corinthians 12 we have an example from Paul in verse 7. Where Paul tells us something about his problems and trials. Here's something he couldn't get out of. We don't know what this was—we can guess.

2 Corinthians 12:7 *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*

8) Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9) And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (NKJV)

What God in affect is telling him is:

"Paul I know you want a miracle but I'm not going to give you that right now. You're going to have to learn to deal with it. You're going to cope with it and handle it for a while. But I'm going to be with you."

and obviously God was. We look at all the things Paul went through; it's a long list. Paul understood this and trusted God.

9 continued) ... Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (NKJV)

Then he goes on to say, switching over to the New Living.

10) That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses [he knew he was a physical creature], and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak [in circumstances where I can't depend on myself], then I am strong. (NLT)

Paul is saying in affect,

“Christ if this is the way you’re going to help me, rather than just whining and begging about it, why don’t I just accept this as the way you are working with me right now and just cope with this thing. I’ll do my part.”

He trusted God. He knew that God could do that if He chose to do that. He knew also that He would provide a way of escape that he could hold up under it.

He said:

“I accept that way of escape; I asked for your help, I accept your help so let’s move forward.”

The way he did that was to cope with his infirmity. Paul expressed the same thing in Philippians 4. Again, a familiar scripture for us.

Philippians 4:11 *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

12) I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned ... (NKJV)

Paul had to learn to take the good with the bad.

12 continued) ... both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. (NKJV)

How did he do that?

13) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (NKJV)

He learned that he could cope with that strength. He could draw on that strength under any circumstances that he encountered and he had a lot of problems. Things that none of us could even begin to survive. He accepted that Christ knew the outcome. He was content; he was okay with that understanding. A little bit of a positive attitude, but he also understood something important. There is a real Jesus Christ—not the image of Jesus Christ that the world likes to entertain—but the genuine article and he knew he could do all things, he could cope with all things, through those rough times. Let’s turn back to 2 Corinthians 1, again from the New Living.

2 Corinthians 1:6 *Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. (NLT)*

In other words, Paul then let all the troubles and trials—he didn’t let that stop him from doing what he needed to do. What he knew was that his commission was from Christ.

6 continued) ... Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. In other words, it can help them through the things he endured that he learned to cope with, he could help other people cope with those things.

7) We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us. (NLT)

Remember Paul said in another place, follow or imitate me—he was leading by example. The comfort he is talking about is through the understanding that we should have.

8) We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it.

9) In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.

If we're going to trust someone, why won't we trust someone who can resurrect us no matter what happens to us. Why would we want to trust anything less than God?

10) And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. (NLT)

God did it for them, He will do the same thing for his people all through time. So wrapping it up. We discussed that sometimes “escape” can come through a miracle. Escape may come through death. It may come from hiding or just getting out of a situation; taking ourselves out of a situation. But many, many times, the escape will come through coping. God will give us the means to be able to do that. That can take any kind of form.

I hope we can remember these scriptures and understand that when we do have these temptations and trials—and there will be many, God says that—God because of His love for us won't give us more than we can bear; He will provide a way of escape. When you think about that, that's because Jesus Christ and the Father are our escape clause.