

**Russell Kelfer**

# **The Keys to Testing**

**519-B**

**Series: Testing**



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# The Keys to Testing

For us to put the Word of God into our hearts is not to be an end within itself, but is a means to an end by which we might meditate therein day and night. In other words, the purpose and the will of God for the Christian is that the Word of God become so operative in the life of the believer that every moment of every day the Scripture is being breathed through our lives. We are meditating therein day and night.

Now the reason, again, for meditation is not to be an end within itself. We read:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but  
yo shall meditate in it day and night, (Joshua 1:8 NKJV)

Why?

that you may observe to do according to all that is written in  
it (Joshua 1:8c NKJV)

The end result for the Christian is obedience.

For the last few lessons we have been studying the subject of obedience in the Christian life. We studied four basic principles:

1- The perspective of obedience. This principle pointed out the four basic pillars upon which God builds foundations for obedience in the Christian life.

2- The practicality of obedience. This involves the real areas in real life that require obedience.

3- The performance of obedience.

4- God looks at four things in our lives when He requests obedience.

- a) He looks at the quickness at with which we respond.
- b) He looks at the completeness of our obedience. Do we obey to the letter and to the end?
- c) He looks at the consistency of our obedience.
- d) He then looks at the joyfulness of our obedience.

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We then looked at seven basic principles of obedience:

- 1- What is the relationship between knowing God and obeying Him? Do we know Him better as we obey Him more?
- 2- What is the relationship between eternal rewards and obedience? What is the Bema Seat of Christ? What will take place there?
- 3- How did God illustrate in nature the principle of obedience as the seas and the heavens and the elements and the demons obeyed Him?
- 4- Where do we get the power to obey?
- 5- What does wrong or right counsel have to do with our obedience? What do we do when we receive wrong counsel?
- 6- What does remembering have to do with obedience?
- 7- Can fear be a motive for obedience?

This lesson will begin the last section in which we look at portraits of obedience. Basically, now we want to see it work. By now we should know something about obedience. We should know something about how it works. We should know something about God's perspective. We ought to know about the practicality of it, the performance of it and the principles of it. These principles could leave us painfully educated, but frightfully disobedient. Knowledge, in itself, is not an end within itself. It is a means to an end. The end is that you and I become obedient through the Spirit.

We will begin to look into the Word to see an illustration of obedience and see how it works in real life. Take special notice of the underlined words as we go through these verses. Let's turn to Hebrews 11:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;

it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDENTS SHALL BE CALLED."

He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him in back as a type.

(Hebrews 11:17-19 NAS)

Genesis 22 is the *experience*; Hebrews 11:17 is the *explanation*.

Now it came about after these things, that God tested

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Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”  
(Genesis 22:1 NAS)

God called his name. We will learn what it means when God calls your name as we pass through this study.

He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”  
(Genesis 22:2 NAS)

This is future tense, Abraham did not yet know where.

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

(Genesis 22:3 NAS)

Now he had the information.

On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance.  
(Genesis 22:4)

There had been three days of continuous travel.

Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.”

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”

He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and

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do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.”

Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven,

and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son,

indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” (Genesis 22:5-18 NAS)

Now God had already made this promise to Abraham prior to this time. The deliverance of the promise could be predicated on his obedience when the promise was made beforehand.

In this lesson, however, we will look at a portrait of obedience. Abraham was called to climb a mountain. In fact, He was called to climb life’s most difficult mountain. I believe that every Christian needs a mountain—a mountain to which he can retreat. The word “mountain” in Scripture literally means a place to be drawn away from unto God. I looked up the word “mountain” in a concordance that related to time away from. I found that God has five reasons for giving us mountains. An interesting promise to claim is that every Christian might claim the passage, “In the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

Every Christian needs a mountain. Where you live it might be hard to find a mountain. You can, however, find a substitute for a mountain. You might be able to find a hill or a secluded place. You could find a spot out in the country that is away from your normal activities. It will be a place to go apart for a reason. If you don’t have one, ask God to give you a place to go just long enough for Him to get your undivided attention.

OUR MOUNTAIN WITH GOD

I found at least five reasons in Scripture why God wants us to have our mountain:

1- To be with God to worship

First, we need to be with God to worship. In Exodus 24, 33 and 34 we read of Moses' mountaintop experiences. We read the words "mountaintop experience" and I think it is misused to mean an emotional time that we can come down from and forget. In Scripture a mountaintop experience is much more than that. It is an experience or relationship with God that changes life thereafter. The mountaintop experience that Moses had transformed him. He was there for two reasons: to receive instructions from God and to behold the person of God. That is why we ought to go alone to be with God.

Matthew 5 begins by telling us that Jesus went up into the mountain and took the disciples. There He instructed them and taught them. The mountain is a place of instruction by God and a place to behold the person of God in order to worship.

When Moses came down from the mountain something was very different about him. Because he had spent so much time with God, he was so changed that the people literally could not look upon him.

In Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, we read of the Mount of Transfiguration when the disciples went up into the mountains with Jesus. They beheld the glory and they worshiped. They fellowshiped and they wanted to stay. They did not want to come back down, but they had to because of the reality of the life they had to live.

In John 6:15 we read about one of the many places where Jesus went up into the mountain. An interesting study on your own would be to look in the New Testament at all of the times Jesus went up into the mountain. Look at why He went, what He did and how it affected His life. In John we read:

Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone. (John 6:15 NAS)

2- To pray or intercede

We need a mountain to pray or intercede. In Exodus 17:12

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we read that Moses went up into the mountain to pray. He had to have two friends help lift up his arms to intercede on behalf of Joshua in a battle. Matthew 14 tells us about another mountaintop experience in the life of Christ.

After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.  
(Matthew 14:23 NAS)

In Matthew 15 we read:

Departing from there, Jesus went along by the Sea of Galilee, and having gone up to the mountain, He was sitting there.  
(Matthew 15:29 NAS)

In Mark we read:

And after bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.  
(Mark 6:46 NAS)

You can add to these verses Luke 6:12 and Luke 9:28.

We don't have the time and our attention is not undivided enough until we somehow go apart to intercede. I wonder how many of us in the last month have taken two hours, three hours or even a day apart, and done nothing but interceded in prayer for others? Many of you have done it before and know that God has changed your life and the lives of those for whom you prayed. Yet, we get so busy and life is so pressurized that somehow, we just don't get around to it. That is why you need a mountain. You need an occasional appointment to go apart to that mountain to intercede.

### 3- To see the purpose and the plan of God

We need the mountain to see the purpose and the plan of God as we read in Numbers 27:12 and II Peter 1:18. Sometimes our vision gets blurred and our perspective is not clear. We need to get away from the midst of it all so that we can see from God's vantage point what He is doing in our lives.

### 4- To be anointed or prepared for a task

We need a mountain to be anointed or prepared for a task as we read in Exodus 24:12 and Mark 3:13,14. In Mark we see that Jesus called the disciples apart and then went up into the mountain.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him.

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He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach  
(Mark 3:13,14 NIV)

There are times we need to get alone in the mountain to be anointed or prepared for a task God has for us.

### 5- To surrender or give back to God that which He has given to you

The last reason for the mountain is to surrender, or to give back to God that which He has given to you. I think that there are times in every Christian's life when God wants to call us back to the mountain and recall some things He's given us to find out whether we have a hold on them, or they have a hold on us.

Jesus went up to His mountain, Golgotha, in Luke 23:33 not by His choice, but by an act of supreme obedience. In Matthew 26:39 He had said,

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (NKJV)

Abraham went to Mount Moriah in Genesis 22. What a strange experience! God had kept His Word. God had fulfilled His promise and now God needed to test His chosen one. I'm not sure all of us fully grasp what this means, but I am sure that there is a principle here that God wants us to fully grasp. The principle is that it takes passing through a valley to climb that mountain, and there are things in each of our lives that are given to us by God to test us so that He can find out if these things are His or ours. We will get to this more in a moment.

I believe that every believer comes to places in his or her life where God puts him to the test. And I believe that test, similar to the one that Abraham went through, is a time when God wants to find out where our heart is. I also believe that you and I can come to that point and pass that test in a modified way. I believe we can come to that test and resign ourselves to the trial but respond with inner hostility and be anxious for the trial to pass. I believe that God can force into our life a measure of maturity but we will not become the spiritual giants He has designed us to be. I call it “Modified Maturity”. I believe that it is the process whereby you can achieve your ministry goals and even your personal disciplines without achieving the mind of Christ. You can go through the motions for the rest of your life. Your ministry can grow, your affect on other people can grow, your time in the



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Word can grow. You can discipline your life, you can have the rubber stamp of all the things it takes to be a mature Christian and not develop the mind of Christ because of resistance to the mountain of surrender.

To get to this mountain you must first pass through a valley. I believe that there is a gate of choice at that valley. Circumstances force some change whether we respond rightly or not. But I believe that a partially broken will leaves jagged edges that the Spirit of God cannot effectively use. What is the valley at the foot of the mountain? Here is a poem that reflects that thought.

### THE DEEPER VALLEY

The valley is where man meets with God  
And really begins to discern  
What makes the heart of God to respond,  
And what makes man to learn.

The valley is where priorities change,  
Where money and houses and fame  
Cease to glitter and start to melt  
At the mention of His name.

The valley is where life is precious—  
Life that's hard to grow,  
That which only by sheltered palms  
Can handle the summer's glow.

The valley is where the heart aches  
And deepens for others in its care,  
And learns to reach out to other hearts  
And show them that God is there.

But the valley is also a mystery  
For learning its message will,  
Strangely enough, prepare a man  
For a deeper valley still.

A valley that rests beneath it all  
Where few men e're have been,  
A valley below where few seem to go  
That stretches the heart of men.

Call it a deeper valley,  
Call it whatever you choose,  
But the man in that deeper valley  
Has all but Christ to lose.

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He has nothing left to clutch or hold,  
Has nought to call his own,  
For every trace of what was his  
Now rests beneath God's throne.

And all he has to cling to  
And all he has to claim,  
Is the quiet, calm assurance  
That he owns the Master's name.

But through that deeper valley  
With all its cliffs and stones,  
He has the inner confidence  
He doesn't walk alone.

Are you wrestling in the valley?  
Are the lights so dim and drear?  
That through tears of endless weeping  
You yet doubt that God is near?

It's yet the finished work of God  
For you to know in part,  
For few have known His deeper work  
And fewer know His heart.

So cease your crying in the valley,  
Cease claiming what is yours.  
Cease clawing for the surface,  
Cease seeking all life's cures.

Rather, seek the deeper valley  
And if God should take you there,  
Simply yield yourself into His hands  
And rest within His care.

Few men reach that deeper valley  
Even fewer learn to rest,  
While the careful hand of Jesus  
Molds and shapes them through the test.

But the ones who make the journey  
And in God's power return,  
Become search lights in the darkness  
To which other men can turn.

What is your prayer when pressure comes?  
"From the valley rescue me!"  
Or is it, "Lord, the deeper valley,  
Is the place I long to be."

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For I know a God of sorrow,  
I know Him when the storms increase,  
Yes, now in total darkness  
May I know a God of peace.

This is the deeper valley. It is the prerequisite for the mountaintop of surrender. In the future we will take a journey with Abraham through that deeper valley and to the top of that tallest mountain that God wants us to climb. God's best visual aid in Scripture is a life. Somehow I think we can get "principalized". We can go to Sunday School, go to church, read books and listen to tapes until we know so many principles that we have a lot of head knowledge but not heart knowledge. But God's best visual aid is seeing it work. We can hear principles, and we can go through experiences, but as we do character studies in the Word of God, we can see the principles and the experience in balance. We need to find out all we can about Abraham as he passed through this experience.

### LEARNING THROUGH CHARACTER STUDIES

We need to remember that everything we ever need to know about Abraham is found in the Word of God. God told us everything He wants us and needs us to know about everyone that He wrote about in the Scripture. And I want us to remember three things we learn through character studies.

#### 1- God uses real people.

We learn that God uses real people. Abraham wasn't perfect. In fact, he had just been tested prior to this at the very point that he was being tested now and he failed twice. He was tested in trusting God where his family was concerned and he blew it. Read Genesis 20. It is interesting to note that God tested him again at his point of weakness until he passed the test. God desires to turn your weaknesses into strengths so that He, through you, can get the glory. If He glorifies your strengths, so what? If He glorifies Himself through your weaknesses, praise His name. God uses real people. Through patience, time and experience, Abraham had learned to trust God with his family.

#### 2- Spiritual life is a battle.

We learn through character studies that the spiritual life is not a picnic; it is a battle. The goal is victory. You might have temporary calm circumstantially, but you cannot have victory

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without conflict. People may tell you, "I have real victory in this area but I've never been involved in warfare in that area." I heard someone say, "I know exactly what to do with teenagers." Another person asked them, "Have you ever had teenagers?" He answered, "No." "Then you don't know what to do with them," the second person replied. The point is you cannot be an authority until you have been through the conflict. That is where the victory comes from.

### 3- It works.

We learn through people that character studies in the Word of God works. If you have to determine whether or not the principles of God work based upon your own experience, you may not know. If you have to determine whether or not the principles of God work based upon those around you, you may not know because you don't know their heart. You cannot always relate to what they are going through. Oftentimes one of three things happens. We get spiritual indigestion from having so many principles we need relief. We can get cynical and begin to decide that nobody can handle this life, and neither can we. Or we can get out the pity and say, "I'm doing the best I can, and God will just have to take it as it is." These are all wrong. The idea is that by seeing a life in Scripture we find that God uses real folks with real problems. The spiritual life is a real battle, but it works.

I want to ask you to superimpose upon your mind a test pattern. The title of this lesson is "This Is A Test." When television was new, the stations only broadcast a few hours each day. The rest of the time there was a test pattern on the screen. We would be so excited to even have a television that we would sit and stare at the test pattern. Now you talk about priorities in life, what have you given your life to? We gave our lives to a test pattern. We would look at the pattern of lines going up and down and the lines going sideways to see if the television set was in focus.

All of us need to focus on our minds the test pattern of the will of God, and realize that as certain things pass through our lives this test pattern should cross our minds. There should be a cross in the middle of that pattern and we should say to ourselves, "This is a test. This is a test. This is a test!" Then we ought to turn to the only one who can pass the test, because you can't and I can't. Christ in us is perfectly sufficient to meet any test He'll ever bring our way.

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Let's set the stage for the test as you visualize God's test pattern. First of all, look at the joy of answered prayer. Remember the promise that Abraham had. Then, he tried in the energy of the flesh to do what God alone could do for him. He then had a long wait. A changed life developed out of that long wait until hope was gone. This is how God likes to work. He likes to use time. We don't like it. We want to do it yesterday. We want to grow quickly. God says, "Just relax, be available to Me. In due time, if you faint not, I will do it."

After the long wait comes the miracle, the answer to the prayer. At long last all of the dreams and all of the hopes come to fulfillment when Isaac is born. He is born at a time when nobody but God could get the glory for it. After the miracle and after the celebration comes the norm. That which was supernatural settles down into that which is natural. Abraham and Sarah were going to raise Isaac.

At this point in time we read these three arresting words, "God tested Abraham." We ask, "What kind of God is this? Is He playing games with His children?" The answer is, "No." God has loaned you, not given you, certain blessings, certain possessions, certain people and certain ministries. He has maintained the ownership. He has simply given you stewardship. But like the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 8, He has watched us and cautioned us to find out, after we have received what He has given us, whether we will begin to discern that it is ours.

The instant we have taken ownership of that which we only have possession of, the Spirit of God oftentimes will very sweetly steal into our lives, tap us on the shoulder and say, "This is a test. We are going to have recall time. Is this your ministry or Mine? Is this your wife or Mine? Is this your husband or Mine? Are these your possessions or Mine? Is this your job or Mine? To whom does it belong? Suppose I decide to take it all away in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Then, what would you have? How would you respond?"

Most of us squirm at this point because we don't like to think about that. We don't like to think about being tested at the point of ownership. But, it is necessary in the plan of God if we are to climb that mountain, because the purpose of that mountain is to continually remind the believer, before God, that all that he has is by grace, and all that he has is God's and nought that he has

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is his. It has been on loan by the grace of God. All he needs is Christ Himself. If a ministry, friends, family or possessions would be gone tomorrow; Christ would still be as ever sufficient then as He is today.

We sing that chorus, “He’s all I need, He’s all I need, Jesus is all I need.” We don’t mean it most of the time. He is all we need, but. So there are occasions when the sweet Spirit calls us to the mountaintop. He may take away your job, which had become the center of your life. He may virtually destroy your ministry. He may take a loved one. He may take from us the very thing that means the most to us. Or at least He may test us to see if we are willing to give it up.

This is what we will find that God did in the life of Abraham. Our goal is to journey up that mountain with him to discern with him how it feels when God calls and says, “I’d like back what I gave you. It is Mine.” What is a test in the Christian’s life? In the future we will look at four things:

- 1- What are three keys to remember?
- 2- What are the ways God tests His children?
- 3- What kinds of tests does He give us?
- 4- What are the thirteen purposes in Scripture for God testing His children?

### THREE KEYS OF A TEST

Let’s start with the first one, the keys to remember. There are three keys we need to remember when God tests us.

#### 1- TESTING IS BY DIVINE APPOINTMENT.

Every time a test comes into your life, there is spiritual warfare going on. You are in the middle being tugged in both directions. Satan on the one hand, has as his goal to draw you from God and prove you are a failure. When Satan and God were talking about Job, Satan turned to God and said, “Job is faithful because you have blessed him so. If you take away all of the things You have given him, he will curse You to Your face. He doesn’t really love You. He is a phony.” This is Satan’s goal.

God’s goal is different. God initiated the conversation and said, “Why don’t you test Job?” His goal is to draw you to Himself and prove Himself to be adequate. He wanted to change Job’s

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perspective. Remember that God cannot tempt you to do evil as we see in James 1:13-15.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Then, when desire [lust] has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

(James 1:13-15 NKJV)

He cannot tempt us, but He can use Satan's temptations to read our spiritual blood pressure and teach us what we need to know. Remember that Satan's temptations are often God's permissive tests.

### 2- Testing is more often a commendation than a condemnation.

Let's consider a general's responsibilities. He had many troops to send into battle. He knew it was going to be the toughest battle of the entire conflict. Who would he send? Would he pick out someone who had never used a gun? Would he pick someone out who had never read the manual? Would he pick someone out who had never been trained? Would he pick somebody who had never proved himself faithful? No, not if he is a good general. Even a good businessman knows better than that. He would pick out the one most likely to be faithful when the heat was at its highest point. Remember this in the midst of your testing that this is a commendation from God that He trusts you. What were His words to Satan when Satan came as an uninvited guest? He said, "Have you considered My servant, Job? There is none like him in all of the world. I love him. I believe in him. He is Mine. Why don't you test him?"

If you were a teacher and you were to have a National Honor Society quiz that was the toughest of the year, who would you choose, your weakest pupil or your best? We read in Matthew 4 that Jesus was filled with the Spirit and then was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the Father and tempted by Satan. You and I would have sent Lot or Peter or somebody who was expendable. But the Father sent the Son.

In Hebrews 11, we read of God's hall of favorites. These people were His favorites because they were trustworthy when the heat was on. We also read in James:

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My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4 NKJV)

### 3- Tests of life, being initiated and limited by God, are therefore under His sovereign control.

As the conversation continued between God and Satan concerning Job, God said, "You can do anything you want to with Job but you can't touch his body." God came back again and said, "You can touch his body, but you can't take his life." The Father was in total and complete control of the boundaries under which Satan was allowed to operate.

In closing, remember that I Corinthians 10:13 has not been scratched from the Word of God. This is God's thermostat verse. It says that there is no test that will come into your life that is not common to man, but God is so perfectly faithful that He will not allow the thermostat to be turned to burn. God will not allow you to be tested above your ability to bear it. He will not test you to destroy you. He will only test you to cure you. God loves His children. He has confidence in His children. The more confidence He has in them, the more He tests them. He tests them by calling them to that mountain. He says, "I have given you everything you have asked for, now I want it back." For you and for me, we need to visualize that He has every right to do that. As He desires to do that, it means that He trusts us. Our job is to have Abraham's response and trust Him in return.

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