

Russell Kelfer

This is a Test!

520-A

Series: Testing

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

This Is a Test!

“This is a test.” Now when you say that, three things happen. First of all, I get your attention. You want to know what is happening. “I’d better pay attention”, you think. Secondly, there is recall. You ask yourself the question, “What have we been studying?” “I can’t remember what this character has been teaching on,” you tell yourself. “If there’s going to be a test, I ought to have at least some semblance of remembrance.” And then, the third thing that happens is apprehension or concern. “How did I do? Will I fail?” Or, “How can I keep from taking the test?” That is what most of us would think.

Well, you can rest easy. We’re not going to have a test, but you can realize the minute you know a test is involved, those three things happen. That’s really what we are talking about in this series of lessons. Abraham, you recall from the last lesson, had just received some fulfilled promises in his life. In fact, the culmination of all his hopes and dreams and prayers had been answered. God had rung the school bell and said, “This is a test.” We are trying to learn the ways God tests his children so that we can become excited when the tests come, if possible, and if nothing else, learn to pay attention and allow some remembrance to take place so we can realize what it is that God is trying to do. We need to replace that apprehension with the peace of God as we relax in the Spirit and begin to pass the test.

Abraham had been on a long journey. He had a long life with a long list of experiences. He had tasted success, that is, he had exercised faith in leaving home as God commanded him. As he went, he experienced the faithfulness of God. He had also tasted failure by exercising fear as he misrepresented Sarah as his sister. As a result, in both cases he learned of the sovereignty of God. Through success and failure, he learned more of the character of God. But Abraham had matured. He had been through a long, hard life and had reached a level where God, over the long haul. God had worked a lot of new things into his life. He had received

This Is a Test!

a promise from God only to taste years of disappointment before he received a miracle. The very thing he had been promised and the very thing he had prayed for came. Now he had found victory circumstantially. Then God said, "This is a test! You have received everything I have told you that you would get. Now, I want to see what you'll do with it."

Circumstances, by divine plan, are never constant. If you draw a picture of a roller coaster, you have the perfect picture of circumstances in the life of the Christian. God will never, as we will learn in this series, allow circumstances to be constant in the Christian's life. If circumstances were constant, we would have nothing to rise above. But it's the highs and lows in our lives that God uses to get our attention and to draw us above those things which the world has to offer us.

Now God had spoken to Abraham. He said, "Take the thing that you had wanted the most, the thing that I had promised, the thing that I delivered and give it back to me." God said, "I'll take him for your good. He's not yours anyhow, Abraham, He's mine. I loaned him to you, but now He's mine. Give him back." Immediately Abraham walked into the den of his apartment, turned on his television and the test pattern came on and flashed in red, "This is a test! this is a test!" And old Abe remembered that in Sunday School the week before, he had studied that at least three things were true about tests.

PRINCIPLES OF A DIVINE TEST

First of all, he had remembered that tests were by divine appointment. James 1:13-15 says that the temptations of life don't come from God, but that the tests do. We learned that in Job.

Secondly, tests were more commendations than condemnations. God chooses to test His chosen the hardest.

Thirdly, the tests are initiated and limited by God and are therefore under his perfect control.

Being a good student, Abraham knew that God tests his children in several ways. His mind began to race back in time. He thought, "What should my response be? How does God test His children?" If we were to superimpose ourselves into Abraham's experience, I think that we would find that when we experience much simpler tests than this, we can fail with a flair.

GOD'S WAYS OF TESTING

There are at least seven ways God tests his children:

1- He creates needs to create dependence. Now turn back to Deuteronomy 8:2. I know that many of you are thinking that this is a pet passage of mine. Now I believe that any Christian could take Deuteronomy chapters 8 and 9 and invest a year in digging out of that passage the principles and not totally exhaust the power that is there. Almost all the concepts of the relationship between man and his walk with God, in terms of God's provision in his responses and in the testings of God, are all found in Deuteronomy 8 and 9. We will just skim over it since we have used this passage so many times. Deuteronomy 8:

“All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers.

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

(Deuteronomy 8:1-2 NASB)

Your mind ought to race back two weeks to Deuteronomy 13 and remember that same phrase. God tests you to find out if you love him with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul. He tests you. What did He want to do? He wanted to get your attention. That's what happened when I said, “We're going to have a test.” You perked up! It got your attention.

God wanted to teach truth after He got the Israelite's attention. The method He used was to make them dependent. He humbled them and let them be hungry. He took away their food. The principle is that God's program for teaching them truth was to take away something they had to have. Remember, His goal was greater than their response. Their response was greed. They wanted to save food when He told them not to. There was murmuring. They didn't like the quality of the provisions. They became bitter. They wanted to go back home. They didn't like the deal. Have you ever heard of that kind of response in your life? Perhaps, we can relate to somebody else sitting next to us. Basically what happened was that God took away something they needed to test their response and find out what they were made of. His goal was greater than their response. He produced in them

This Is a Test!

what He was seeking to. In Exodus 15, we get another picture of this very same principle.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea. They went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. (Exodus 15:22 KJV)

Now God's springs were not dry. He had just turned the spigot off. God had turned off the spigot. They found no water.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. (Exodus 15:22 KJV)

God created a need: the water. They were thirsty. They had to have water. After He had created a need and gave them no water He tested them further. He gave them some water, but it wasn't what they wanted. He did the same thing with the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 8:1-3. He created a need for food. He gave them food but it wasn't what they wanted. It was what they needed to learn and what God wanted to teach them, but they grumbled and complained. The people grumbled at Moses and had the same response.

Can't you just imagine how much better it would have been if we had been there with our good responses? We would have stoned him. They grumbled at Moses and said, "What shall we drink? There are no Cokes, no Dr. Peppers, nothing."

Then he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. (Exodus 15:25 NASB)

The test pattern came on again. This is a test! This is a test! God said, "I could give you all the water you could drink or drown in. I wanted to find out how you would respond when I gave you none. Then I wanted to find out how you would respond when I gave you some that wasn't drinkable, knowing all the while that My provision never wanes, never changes, never ceases to be. I wanted to find out how much faith you would have in My ability to provide, when I didn't." Of course they answered the question, "Very little."

How big a test does it take for God to get your attention? Do you have to lose your job? Does your ministry have to collapse or be on the ropes? Do certain relationships have to suffer before God gets your attention? Or is your antenna fine tuned enough

This Is a Test!

that the small tests of life alert you to the fact that God is trying to say something, do something and be something in your life? Do your ears perk up? Do you listen and respond? Or does God have to hit you with the proverbial spiritual brick bat? While you're rocking and reeling do you say "Oh, Lord, do You want my attention?"

2- God tests recent instructions for the sake of application.

A friend of ours had been teaching some women's Bible studies on the subject of handling pressures. Lo and behold, the next thing God did was put pressures in her life. She made a list of the pressures she received. How many can testify that you have led small groups or discussion groups on marriage and the family, only to find out that you had more family problems at that time than any time in your life, at least in terms of tests? You say, "I wonder why this is? It must be coincidental." Exodus 16 gives us a little bit of an illustration:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion everyday, that I might test them, whether or not they will walk in my instruction. (Exodus 16:4 NASB)

God said, "I told them what to do. They have just received instruction. Now I am going to give them a test to find out whether they pass the test or not." How many of you here are school teachers? What do you do when you go to class in the morning? Do you have a test on what you just taught the children, or do you have a test on material in an earlier grade? You test on whatever you taught them this week. You test them on this week, because a) you want to find out if they learned anything, and b) you want to make another impression that before long they will not only intellectually, but experientially have the information as part and parcel of their life. You test them on recent instruction.

God uses exactly the same methodology. Let us suppose that you've been studying the concept of the provision of God, maybe in the worship service or in Sunday School class or in a Bible study group. All of a sudden you have a tremendous need in your life financially. All of a sudden it seems like God just pulls the string and all sorts of things happen to this nest egg you had. Somebody else nests in it and you realize that there is nothing left. You begin to grumble and moan, at least in your heart and maybe to your spouse. You say, "I wonder why that happened now?" Your test pattern ought to come into your brain. It ought

This Is a Test!

to be superimposed by now and flash off and on. It ought to say, "This is a test! This is a test!" You've received recent instruction in this area, you know how God works, you know the provision of God, so now you have a chance to trust him.

You study the concept of unjust persecution in I Peter. All of a sudden you go to work or pick up the phone the next day and somebody said something bad about you or gives you credit for something bad you didn't do. Your boss comes in and says, "You know I really appreciate you trying to do your job, but this is awful." You start to say, "But sir, I didn't do that." Then he says, "Besides that, this is wrong, and this is wrong." You realize you hadn't done any of those things wrong. You think to yourself, "Good grief, why now? I just learned about that. Why in the world would I have a test like that now?" Just go back to your school days and remember it's likely that you will be tested in the areas you have just received information.

The timing of this test is crucial. It may be the same kind of test that you had two months ago, but now you are more accountable. Tomorrow you ought to be even a little more accountable to be sensitive to the tests of God than you were yesterday. So the whole concept is that timing is important, but God tests recent instruction in our lives to make application.

3- God allows prosperity to test allegiance. Let's turn back to our ALOT (A Lifetime of Truth) passage in Deuteronomy 8 again. It tells us to keep His commandments now and pay attention:

Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in His ways and revering Him.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; (Deuteronomy 8:6-7 NIV)

After all these years, He gave them a land of brooks and water.

An interesting study would be to take the parallel of all of these parenthetical phrases in these few verses about the land and make spiritual application to them.

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills;

a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;

This Is a Test!

a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. (Deuteronomy 8:7-9 NIV)

Sounds like paradise doesn't it?

When you have eaten and are satisfied, shall praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.

(Deuteronomy 8:10 NIV)

But beware, this verse reminds us,

Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down,

and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,

then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.

He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

(Deuteronomy 8:12-16 NIV)

Sometimes God tests his children by making them successful. Many of you might wish that would happen to you. Often times it is because we can't handle it, and God knows that.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it

(I Corinthians 10:13)

Some of us have never tasted success because we can't handle it. But there are some that He gives success to, at least some in the worldly realm, some in the emotional realm, and some in the spiritual realm. I think that sometimes we forget that success is a test because God wants to see how we will handle what He's given us. Where will our priorities be?

How do you handle prosperity? You say, "I've never had much." What about the little you've had? How have you handled it? Have you had a rising level of expectation? Have you said, "God give me more, give me more. I'm doing well with what I've

This Is a Test!

got, will you give me more?” Does the old greed factor come in, or do you relax and faithfully figure out a way to give it away? I think you can tell as much or more about your children by the way they handle prosperity more than adversity. You watch them when everything is going well and they’ve received everything they want and see what they do with it. You’ll probably learn more about their character than you will when they are down. God’s children learn about the same way.

Some of you say, “Well, I’d like to have that kind of a test to see whether or not I could pass.” Be careful and remember the children of Israel. They begged for it until finally the Lord gave them what they asked for. He gave them their request but sent leanness to their soul.

4- God allows choices to test our discernment and the ability to make wise decisions. Deuteronomy 13 says that God tested His children. He brought people into their fold who were successful prophets and what they said came true. But their prophecy was not scriptural. It says that God did that to them so that they would have to make a choice to find out whether they loved the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind. They had an open door. They had a choice to make. Here is a good illustration of the principle:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

(I Peter 1:6-7 NASB)

When you are testing something by heat, like gold, that which is not good rises to the top. God has to give us choices to find out how we will do. Do you remember the other test that God gave Moses? He was praying and God gave him a choice. Neither of the choices were scriptural. Moses went for it and God had to rebuke him and straighten him out. He didn’t wait for God’s best. He thought that because there was an open door it had to be the will of God. Don’t live your life by open doors.

If you have a decision to make, remember that old story of the Scottish seaman who was sailing into port, and as he was sailing into port, there were a myriad of lights along the shore. There was an old Scottish fellow standing alongside of him and he asked,

This Is a Test!

“How can you tell with all of those lights how to reach the shore?” The man looked at him and said, “Well, there are three lights that are brighter than the rest.” And he said, “Yes, there are, but one’s there and one’s there and one’s there.” The captain replied, “You steer the ship until all three of those lights line up, and you only see one. Then, you follow that light all the way to port.”

I think in the Christian life, as the story goes on, those three lights are the Word of God, the peace of God, and circumstances. If you wait until those three lights line up and become one and follow it into shore, you will find the will of God. Most of us see that light flashing off and on that says “Circumstances” and we lose sight of the other two. We go off chasing that one, then we run ashore, or we run into a big rock. We get up and patch the boat and put it all back together. Then, we go running back into that one called experiences. We are not willing to wait until God lines up the three. It is the timing of God that lines up the three that gives him a chance to prepare us for the will of God that he wants to do. We need to remember that old story that God gives us tests by giving us choices. He wants us to wait until we have the answer before we make a decision.

5- God gives impossible tasks to test our faith. An impossible task for one person may not be impossible for another. God delights to work in His children as they realize they cannot do the task themselves in areas in which they realize they are weak. Moses was tested in Exodus 4. God said, “I want you to go to Pharaoh, and I want you to tell him to let my people go. I want you to be my spokesman.” Moses said, “No sir. I can’t do it.” And God said “Why not?” And he said, “I... I... don’t talk well.” God said, “Good, that’s why I chose you.” Moses replied, “I won’t go!” He wouldn’t go without Aaron to go along with him. Why? He failed the test. He made a D-. He did learn, so he didn’t fail it totally, but he failed the first test. The test pattern went on and he didn’t respond properly. God was trying to find out if he was willing to trust Him in a situation that he couldn’t handle. It was an impossible task.

Look at Jonah. God said, “I want you to go to Ninevah. It will be an impossible task, but I want you to preach repentance and the city will repent.” Jonah replied, “I’ll be right with you, Lord. Wait there!” He found the nearest bus station and got a ticket heading the other way. He failed the test. He made an F. God was testing him to see if he would assume an impossible task.

This Is a Test!

Look at Noah. God came to him with an impossible task. God said, "I want you to build a shipyard for one boat. I don't want you to hire men. I want you to do it. I want you to follow My instructions to the letter. Besides that there is no water." An impossible task. And Noah said, "Yes Sir!" He made an A. For long years of faithfulness he said, "Yes Sir." He did it without a drop of water.

The problem many of us have is that we will say, "Yes, Sir." Then we will look around and when we realize that it's not raining, we think either we misunderstood God's instructions, or He really wasn't paying attention to the weather forecast. Then we will begin to slide back and compromise and say, "Maybe the Lord didn't really mean this, and besides that, gee whiz, anybody would know, and surely God knows, that it's a waste of my good valuable time. I can do better than this." That's the way we treat the Lord.

Abraham passed the test. He was asked to go to a country he didn't know. He didn't get a road map. He was just too old to go. An impossible task.

Joshua was told to lead the children of Israel into the promised land, an impossible task.

David was given impossible tasks. He was a little fellow against a great big giant. He didn't have any real ammunition, except God. It was an impossible task, but he passed it.

An impossible task for you may be in an area of weakness. Maybe God wants you to speak before a group. That is one thing you said you would never do. I can remember saying to the Lord as a young Christian, "There are two things I will never do. I will never teach adults and I will never speak before a large group." I think that is probably why you are having to listen to all this today. God is trying to prove that the only thing He can do is what we can't.

God may give you an assignment in an area. You will say, "I can never speak before a group." The phone rings and someone asks you to give your testimony. There are so many areas that God can test you. It may be with your children, or may be with your finances. Impossible tasks. Usually He will create impossible tasks in the areas that you think are possible. He loves to work through weakness. Remember the only things God can do for you are the things you can't do for yourself. Have you ever thought

This Is a Test!

about that? The only things God can do for you are the things that you can't.

God tests you by giving you impossible tasks. They seem impossible to you. They may not be at all impossible for the person sitting next to you. They could handle it easily.

6- God tests some of His children by afflicting them physically to test their patience and perspective. It was Satan's ultimate weapon with Job, wasn't it? First, he was allowed to take away his cattle. He was allowed to take away his family. He was allowed to take away his money. He left him his wife. He was allowed to take away all these different things. Job was afflicted to the maximum. At the very last minute God said, "Okay now you can touch his body." This was the final test. Satan's ultimate weapon. Do you know why? You can run from circumstances, you can run from people, but you can't run from a body that's racked with pain or suffering. You can't do it. You have a padlock. You're in there.

Paul had the same problem. Transformation is God's ultimate goal. This is Satan's ultimate weapon but it becomes God's ultimate tool to change people's lives. He may afflict people physically, and instead of becoming bitter, the test pattern needs to go on that says, "This is a test! This is a test!" It is a commendation from God, but it is a test.

7- God tests His children by taking away their fondest treasures to test the depth of their love for Him. Not many people qualify for this test. Not many people want to. We see this in Genesis 22:

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

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 22:1-2 NASB)

In this passage God took the one thing Abraham wanted and cherished the most and He asked for it back. It was a test that God put Himself through. God so loved us that He gave His only Son. He did not withhold Him. He held back nothing. He never puts us through a test that He hasn't gone through Himself in prayer. It's what he did with Job. He took everything. That's what

This Is a Test!

He did with Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac.

These are the seven ways that God tests His children. If any of those seven things come into your life this next week, and they possibly will, may I encourage you to allow the Spirit of God simply to superimpose on your mind, instead of panicking, "This is a test! This is a test! This is a test!" Remember:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;
(I Corinthians 10:13 NASB)

You are not alone. God is the faithful one. We are not. He will not allow you to be tested above that which you can stand. He knows what you can handle. Because He does, the test is proportionate to what He knows your spirit can respond to, nothing more. With that in mind, you can relax and begin to praise Him in the midst of the test because you know it will not overwhelm you, even though it overtakes you.

KINDS OF TESTING

1- Tribulation- This is the God originated, God-limited process through which He refines and develops character in us. This happens through exposure to that which stretches, humiliates, debilitates, and makes us dependent. That was Job. He got a C+ I'd say. Compared to me, he got an A+. Abraham failed when he was tested. Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister. He got a D-.

2- Temptation- This is exposure to situations or thoughts that arouse the old nature and reminds us of that which satisfies itself. There are two kinds of temptations: Satan's onslaught from without and our own onslaught from within. The garbage gobbler within us snatches up things that the flesh likes. Then, as we learn in James, it feeds ourselves back the material we have stored there and we're tempted. David experienced this kind of temptation with Bathsheba. He got an F.

3- Persecution- This is abuse or misuse of the rights of others as a result of their convictions. Study the story of Stephen sometime if you want to see a perfect response to persecution. He got an A+.

4- Chastening- The word doesn't mean punishment alone. It means training, instructions, corrections, and punishments all together. It's the process of training and preparation for service. It can come through the Word, people or circumstances. You

This Is a Test!

may be reading the Word and all of sudden you are chastened or instructed and tested at that point to find out whether you'll obey it or not. It may come through people who may be discipling you. They may be sitting across the table from you, and all of a sudden they say, "I see a problem in your life I want to talk with you about." You are chastened over it. It's a test to find out what your response will be. Regardless of whether the assessment is right or wrong, your response is what God is after.

5- Suffering- This is the act of enduring hardships as a part of the learning process of discipleship. I would say it is the mental anguish of entering into the fellowship of His sufferings. Persecution deals with the physical realm. Chastening deals with the spiritual realm. Suffering with the emotional realm. Even though they deal with different realms, they are all closely related to each other.

6- Divine Discipline- This is God's direct punishment for sin. There are two reasons: 1) to bring us to repentance, and 2) to allow us to reap what we have already sown. You could take the words of almost all of the great Old Testament saints. In fact, take the lives of the children of Israel, looking at the way that they strayed from the will of God. God had to bring divine discipline into their lives in order to correct them.

These are six kinds of testing. There are at least seven ways that God uses those six kinds of testing in our lives.

Let's go back to Abraham for a moment and just imagine what was going on in his mind. At long last he had everything going for him that he always wanted. Can you relate to that? Maybe spiritually? Maybe emotionally? Maybe in regards to your family? Maybe financially?

At long last Abraham's prayers had been answered. The one thing that had been missing in his life was filled in. Then God, in His mercy and love, turns the test pattern on. God got his attention, called to his remembrance and gave him what could have been a spirit of apprehension over the outcome. He said, "Abraham, I want you to take your son, the one you love the most, and go up to that mountain and slay him. I want you to give him as an offering to Me. I want to test you Abraham and find out if when the chips are down, whether you love him or Me the most. It's good for you to love him, Abraham. I promised him to you. I gave him to you. But if he now becomes your god and

This Is a Test!

if the answers to your prayers become your new god, you're in trouble."

You may have prayed for a church, and God led you here. But if this church now becomes the center of your life, not just the center of your worship and ministry, rather than Jesus Christ, then you have a problem. You may have prayed for your family, and God gave you a new family situation. But if that family becomes the center of your life when it usurps the throne of Jesus Christ then God will test you because His goal is to find out if you love Him the most. What did we learn in the last lesson? He tested the Israelites to find out if they would love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. He tested them to find out whether they were willing to give back to Him the thing they cherished and held onto.

You might ask yourself if there is something in your life that you cherish more than the person of Jesus Christ. Anything? More than being in His presence? More than walking with Him? More than spending eternity with Him? It isn't wrong to love those people or those things, but it is wrong to love them in the place of God.

Perhaps in the days to come, God will tap us on the shoulder and say, "By the way, whose is that, yours or Mine?" That's what He did to Abraham. Abraham said, "Yes Sir! I'll do it!" No questions asked! No arguments! No second guessing! Just, "Yes Sir!" That's the response God is looking for. It is called obedience.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer