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Why God Tests Us

520-B
Series: Testing

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Why God Tests Us

Some of us are like grasshoppers, hopping from one thing in life to another. Some of us are like skunks that raise a stink over anything and repel people. Some of us are similar to flowers. We are pretty to look at but we are quick to fade. Some of us are like horses, racing across the field making a good bit of noise. Some of us, like fish, just want to stay submerged.

The problem is that the Scripture tells us that we ought to become like trees. Scripture says:

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also
shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

(Psalm 1:3)

This is not just any kind of tree. Take time to go out some place to study the characteristics of the tree. There are many shapes, many sizes and many types. Compare the trees with people you know as well as people you find in the Scripture. It is a fascinating study. Look at trees and imagine which tree you would like to become in the Spirit of God.

Where the tree is planted will determine its growth. How close is it to the river? He will be like a tree that has been put down next to the source of growth and spreads out its roots by the river. The words “spreads out” literally means it reaches out while standing still. Most of us don’t know how to do that. This tree reaches out for nourishment while standing still.

Most of us don’t want to be trees because we don’t want to stand still that long. Have you ever realized that as a tree begins to grow, even though they grow slowly, it begins to obtain maturity and people begin coming to the tree? The tree doesn’t have to move. People come to the tree for shade when they are hot and tired. Birds nest in its branches and find

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refuge there. People tie things to a tree that they don't want to get away.

One day, all of a sudden, fruit will show up on the limbs of that tree. People will partake of that fruit and be filled and satisfied. As the tree stands still, people are drawn to the tree. If the tree is planted by waters, and its roots are going down deep, it can provide for others.

As we looked at the life of Abraham, we saw that he had become like a tree. The Scripture showed us what happened when he was tempted. He did not panic when the test came. You can also develop this character trait, to not panic when tests come. Why not? You are a tree. Have you ever seen a tree run when it is about to be struck by lightning? Have you ever seen a tree dig a hole and try to hide when the sun gets too hot? Maybe it didn't like the lightning or the sun, but it stood there planted firm. It didn't panic when the test came. This is Abraham. "His leaf also shall not wither." This is a reflection of health.

"It shall not be anxious in the year of drought." We need not be anxious when there are no visible signs of growth or visible signs of nourishment. Don't be anxious, just wait. It will come. The key is the last line: "Neither shall it cease from giving fruit." The tree will never ever stop giving fruit. Even in a drought, it will continue giving fruit.

How many of you would like to become as a tree? Let me make a suggestion. This week ask God to begin the specific process of making you like a tree. You may have a specific type of tree you might like to be like. I wouldn't limit God too much, but I would ask Him to make you like a tree. Then get busy planting yourself by the rivers of Living Water.

Abraham had done that. We have been journeying with him through these last few lessons. His life had become a fixture. He had become firm in his faith. He had waited and waited and waited on God. God had delivered His promise.

Abraham called God one day on the phone. All of a sudden there was an interruption. A tape recorded announcement

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came on and said, “This is a test! This is a test!” Then the voice of God came on the line and said, “Abraham, I’d like for you to take a trip. Take Isaac with you, the one you have waited for so long. I want you to take him up to the top of Mount Moriah and kill him for My sake. This is a test!”

Have any of you had an occasion to use that phrase, at least in your mind, this week? Some tests range from tragedy to misery, from the sublime to the ridiculous. A friend was telling me about calling home this past week to find out that the air conditioner had gone out in his house. It was an important test. We had a test this week. The electric company was planning on erecting a big electrical box in our yard. It didn’t seem too pleasant to us. Then, we had a large appliance break. This was a major test in our lives. I don’t think that when we get to heaven the one thing we will be concerned about is whether or not our appliances got repaired properly and on time. Another friend shared how he had left his windows down on his car overnight and a strong rainstorm came. We might think it is funny, but my friend kept saying, “This is a test!” How we respond to these situations is what God is concerned about.

The key is that all of the tests seem to be relative. Make a list of all of the tests you had this week and your response to those tests. Then, imagine in the light of eternity, if that is the first thing Jesus is going to want to sit down and talk with you about. I doubt that most of these things are going to be of eternal importance.

KEYS OF TESTING

We need to remember that there are three keys to testing.

1- Testing is by divine appointment.

Every time a test comes into your life, Satan and God are vying for a response on your part. Satan wants to prove you inadequate, which you are. God wants to prove Himself adequate, which He is. Even as Satan proves his point, God has the victory. There is no way for the Lord to lose. Every test that comes into your life is that kind of a situation.

2- Testing is more of a commendation than a condemnation.

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The more serious the test, the more commendation that God believes in you.

There has 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)

He has a barometer and He knows the quality of your life. He tests accordingly.

3- Tests of life are initiated and limited by God and are under His control.

GOD'S WAYS OF TESTING

There are at least seven ways that God tests His children.

1- He creates needs to create dependence. The car won't run. The air conditioner breaks down. He does this in order to create dependence and test our responses.

2- He tests recent instructions for the sake of application. I think some of you would be willing to admit that you had a few more tests this week than you had the week before, or perhaps you just recognized them as such.

3- He allows prosperity to test allegiance.

4- He allows choices to test our discernment and the ability to make wise decisions.

5- He gives us impossible tasks to test our faith.

6- He sometimes afflicts us physically to test our perspective and patience.

7- He takes away our fondest treasures to test the depth of our love for Him. This is what God did with Abraham. God used at least six techniques to accomplish His purposes: tribulation, temptation, persecution, chastening, suffering and divine discipline.

Let's ask ourselves, "What are God's purposes in doing all of these things? Why does He so patiently deal with us as the Scripture says, as with sons?" Surely He is not doing this

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for His amusement. Definitely not. We know that He is not doing it to harm us. He is not capable of that. Why then is God testing us so continuously? We know how He does it. We know the ways He does it. Why does He do it? We know that it is an expression of His love. We know it is an extension of His patience.

The next time you realize, “This is a test! This is a test!”, you can begin to search out His divine purposes for that test. It is one thing to say, “God is testing me. I need to respond correctly,” and then respond correctly and move on. But I believe that God wants us to know why He tests us so that we can begin to respond and co-operate with Him in accomplishing the goal of the test.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S TESTS

What are the reasons for the test? Whenever you ask yourself why God does something, remember that there are certain passages to remember. Isaiah 55 is one:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8,9)

Remember that we can begin to figure out the ways of God, but the ways of God are past finding out as we learn in Romans 8:33-36. We can never fully comprehend the beauty of His purposes because we are now seeing through a glass darkly, as we read in 1 Corinthians 13. But He has given us a love letter, His Word. In that love letter, we know that there are at least some reasons why God tests His children. Let’s study those reasons and begin to try to comprehend the depth of the ways He revealed His purposes to us. Isaiah 2:2,3 tell us that God has done things that He might teach us His ways. He wants us to learn a portion of His ways.

There are at least 13 reasons why God tests you. The next time a test flashes on the screen of your life, I would encourage you to remind yourself that God is testing you and also ask

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yourself, “Why?” Have you ever asked yourself that question?

1- God tests us to develop the mind of Christ. This is a very broad phrase. There is no one who uses that phrase who fully comprehends the depth of it. We do need to come to a partial understanding of what it means to develop the mind of Christ. It means to think God’s thoughts in every situation and to have God’s responses in every situation. The Scripture tells us to:

put on the new man which after God is created in
righteousness and true holiness (because now ye have
the mind of Christ.) (Ephesians 4:24)

God does this, among other ways, by testing us. James 1 in the New English Bible says this:

My brothers, whenever you have to face trials or tests
of many kinds, count yourself supremely happy in the
knowledge that such testing of your faith brings fortitude
and if you give fortitude full play, you will go on to
complete a balanced character that will fall short of
nothing. (James 1:2,3 NEB)

You will have the mind of Christ. Now God does this through testing. Hebrews 5:8 tells us that:

though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience through
the things which He suffered. (Hebrews 5:8)

He learned through the tests that the Father gave Him.

As you read Matthew 4, have you ever wondered why the Father gave us a full-color blow-up of Jesus during His testing? We have a full-color picture in the Scripture of Jesus face to face with the enemy while being tested. We can spend the rest of our lives studying that passage in depth, but we know that He was lead by the Spirit into that situation. We also know that He was filled with the Spirit as He went into that situation where Satan conceived alternatives to the best God had to offer. Jesus always countered with the Word of God.

We know, then, that the mind of Christ in the midst of testing involves certain things. You read how Jesus responded to the tests of life. More complicated and more involved than

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this is that when you are tested, the first thing you need to do is test your response. You need to think of having the mind of Christ. You may say, "I don't know the mind of Christ." Yes you do. Check your response. Does it reflect the following: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness and meekness?

Now go back to the tests that you faced this past week. Before you worry about the circumstances surrounding that test, which is what we always major on, how did you respond when that circumstance came? Did you get a flat tire? Did a child knock off your favorite vase and break it? Did your refrigerator go out and spoil everything? What was your first response? Was it joy? Joy is an inner excitement and expectation over the results. Did you have peace? Peace is calmness uninterrupted by circumstances. Were you patient? Patience is the freedom to wait without agitation. Did you have love toward the person involved as God's instrument who He used to test you?

The question is not what God is saying through the circumstance, that is a small part of it. The question is, "What is God showing you through your response?" We need to begin to learn that the major goal of God through testing is to create in us the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ has the response of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, patience and self-control. Self-control? We want to leave that one off of the list. If the paperboy throws your paper through your window, love him. God is in control.

I bought a car and was struggling with pride concerning it. I went to get in the car and realized there was some acid that had been sprayed on the car. It was a minor thing, but I kept recognizing the marred paint. I realized that God was nudging me to ask myself how important the looks of this car were to me.

If you have asked God to put things in perspective, He will put it in the right perspective for you. You need to recognize what your response is. The point is that God wants to develop within us the mind of Christ. What if I had known the person who had done that to my car? Could I have loved him? Not on

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your life. Not in my flesh anyway.

2- God tests His children in order to surface our weaknesses. He wants to develop the mind of Christ in us, and He does so by surfacing our weaknesses. When we find a weakness, the thing we do is to dwell on it until it is healed. My wife and I decided that we were reaching the age of being extremely aged. We were discussing our many aches and pains. If my wife has a sore spot on her neck, I don't try to avoid it. The first thing she wants me to do is to press on that spot until the circulation comes back and the pain is relieved and it begins to heal.

Don't go around your sore spot or weakness. Find it and stay there until it is healed. This is not the way we like to approach life. We find a weak spot and we say, "That is a good place to run from." We will run from it and build a little bush around it so that nobody can see it. I Peter 1 in the New English Bible says:

This is cause for great joy, even though now you smart for a little while, if need be, under trials of many kinds.

Even gold passes through the assayer's fire, and more precious than perishable gold is faith which has stood the test. These trials or tests come so that your faith may prove itself worthy of praise, glory and honor when Jesus is revealed. (I Peter 1:6,7 NEB)

What this literally means is, here is your life in a big, clear bowl that won't break. God, with His perfect thermostat, turns up the heat at various times to test you. But in addition to the test, He wants the impurities to surface through the fire. As they surface, He wants to come along, through the Holy Spirit, and scoop off the impurities so that the life can be more pure. These impurities are your blind spots. These are the unaffected characteristics of the old nature.

As I deal with discipleship and other spiritual disciplines, I asked myself this question this week that all of us ask, "How many Christians really want to see and deal with their blind spots?" I doubt that more than 10% of us really want to know about those weaknesses. I would venture to say that 100%

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of us have limits to how much we want to know about those weaknesses. It is just not in us apart from Christ.

I want to encourage you that God tests you to surface your weakness. Don't say, "Oh my goodness! Look how I responded." Then go on. Stop and say, "What weakness surfaced?" Then get some help in dealing with it. Don't concentrate on the circumstances of the test, but on your response to that test. This will expose a character need.

Think back on a test you had this week. Look at your character response or your attitude. Were you impetuous? Impatient? Irresponsible? Fearful? Hostile? Disrespectful? Insensitive? Selfish? God is not concerned that you didn't break anyone's bones. God is concerned if you broke His heart. Write down the weakness that surfaced and see a pattern that has developed in your life. Get help for those blind spots.

3- God tests His children to humble them. The Scripture tells us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt us in due time. Because we don't do that, He has to humble us. Our reference verse is Deuteronomy 8:3 in the New American Standard. It tells us that He humbled the children of Israel in order to test them. When He had humbled them, He wanted to teach them a lesson. He taught them that man does not live by bread alone. The goal was to humble them. I Corinthians 4 reveals Paul's gripe session in the flesh. I want to read this from the Phillips Translation:

I sometimes think that God means us, the messengers, to appear last in the procession of mankind, like the men who are to die in the arena.

For indeed we are made a public spectacle before the angels of Heaven and the eyes of men. We are looked upon as fools, for Christ's sake, but you are wise in the Christian faith.

We are considered weak, but you have become strong: you have found honour, we little but contempt. Up to this very hour we are hungry and thirsty, ill-clad, knocked about and practically homeless.

We still have to work for our living by manual labour.

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Men curse us, but we return a blessing: they make our lives miserable but we take it patiently. They ruin our reputations but we go on trying to win them for God. We are the world's rubbish, the scum of the earth, yes, up to this very day. (I Corinthians 4:9-13 JB Phillips)

One of God's goals for His children is to humble us to create the need that we learned about in the last lesson. Sickness is one way God humbles us. We dealt with that in the last lesson. He wants to make us insignificant by revealing us as inadequate so that He can become significant and totally adequate. Sometimes He has to humble us and bring circumstances into our lives that just seem to embarrass us.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you had an area in your life that you just knew you were on top of? Is there an area that you knew nobody could touch you? Were you in a situation where all of your friends or family were watching, and you completely blew it? As you crawl out from under the carpet you think to yourself, "This was a test? Why? Why would God do such a thing to me? God must have made a mistake. He must have had a lesson for those other people." No. God knows that He has to bring us back down to size.

What is humility? Humility is a healthy realization of a man's worth apart from God. John 15 has the answer. It says:

I am the vine, you are the branches, He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same shall bring forth much fruit that without Me, you can do nothing.

(John 15:5)

So the third reason God tests us is to humble us. The next time the test comes into your life and that test pattern flashes on and you begin to feel insignificant, ask the Lord, "Do I need to be humbled so that You can use me?"

4- God tests His children to advance the kingdom. Are you willing to be tested, humiliated or inconvenienced for the sake of the kingdom?

Your boss calls you to make a trip out of town. You get in the car and start your trip. The car breaks down. This is a test. You call into the garage and the manager tells you that

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it will take a long time to fix it. You mumble and groan. While you are standing there by your car, you get into a conversation with the mechanic. He begins to share all of his problems with you. His wife is having problems. His children are having problems. He is discouraged. You begin to share with him the love and the person of Jesus Christ. You share the power and the plan of God. His eyes open, and he begins to respond. He says, "This is what I've always been looking for." You share the gospel with him. He opens his heart and invites Jesus Christ to come into his life. All of a sudden, Bethlehem and the manger become new again. Christ is born again. Was your delay worth it? This was a test. What was the purpose of the test? To advance the kingdom. God had a heart for the mechanic.

You go to catch an airplane for an important trip. You must be there by 10 o'clock to be on time. You get to the airport and you have missed your plane. You grumble and mumble. This was a test. You put your suitcase on the floor and complain to the man behind the counter. You kick a few chairs. You sit down, grin and open your Bible. You finally get on a plane, grumbling and complaining the whole time. The person next to you sees you open your Bible. He says, "Do you read that?" "Yes, as a matter of fact, I do," you reply. "I have a few questions. Can you answer them for me?" the seatmate asks. Forty-five minutes later as you approach your destination, your seatmate bows his head and asks Jesus Christ to come into his heart.

You were tested. Why? To advance the kingdom. Was it worth it for you to be late and miss your meeting? Was it worth it to go through all the trouble you went through? You bet.

Paul says in Philippians 1 in the Phillips Translation:

Now concerning myself I want you to know my brothers that what has happened to me has in effect turned out to be advantage of the gospel and has furthered the kingdom.
(Philippians 1:12 JB Phillips)

What has happened? Paul is being tested. Maybe his air-conditioner broke on his car. It is a little more complicated

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than that. He had been thrown in prison for a crime he didn't commit.

First of all, my imprisonment is a personal witness for Christ before the palace guards.

(Philippians 1:13 JB Phillips)

Can you imagine his perspective? Here he is, locked in prison. He is separated from his friends with no future whatsoever, and he was thinking of the guards who he had been able to witness to. He was considering how great it was that the kingdom of Christ was being advanced.

Not to mention the others that come and go. Then, it means that most of our brothers, somehow taking fresh heart in the Lord from the fact that I am a prisoner, have far more courage in boldly proclaiming the Word of God.

(Philippians 1:14 JB Phillips)

Advancing the kingdom. This is a test. What is your response? What is God's reason? It may be to advance the kingdom.

5- God tests His children, often through more crucial tests, to draw us to the Word. Sometimes God has to feed us salt to make us thirsty. Psalm 119:71 says:

I was glad that I was afflicted that I might seek the word.

(Psalm 119:71 paraphrased)

Have you ever had that experience? Have you ever made a list of the amount of time you have spent searching the Word for hidden treasures when you have problems versus when you don't? When you are really under pressure and when you're not? Have you ever made that comparison?

We go to the Scripture for comfort. We go to the Scripture when we are in distress. We go to the Scripture for information when we need it. We go to the Scripture for answers when we have questions. God tests us to get us back into His book. That is where Abraham got his strength. On his way to Mount Moriah, I think he had his verse pack in his robe. He would ask the men on the trip with him, "Would you review me on these verses? I need to remember them about now." I think he

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was reviewing: “I will multiply your seed as the sands on the seashore.” I think he was going back to remember. He knew the Word. That is why he was where he was. He knew the Word. That is why he was willing to make that trip. Don’t you know that it was beneficial for him to bring the Word back to himself in remembrance as all of the trials and pressures developed?

Make a list of the tests you had this past week. Go back to the Word to find the right responses and then start rejoicing. Make a list of the things that happened in your life this week and try to find what the Scripture says about your response to that situation.

In closing, I have an experiment for us. Are you willing to ask God to test you this week? As you are being tested, are you willing to test your responses and try to discern God’s reasons for testing you? Are you willing to measure your rejoicing in the midst of it? This is what Christianity is all about. It is not just learning facts and information about God. It is learning what the Scripture says about the total mind of God in the believer so that we can begin to appropriate His life on such a full basis that every day and with every breath He lives through you and you are excited about it. It does not matter what the circumstances are as much as your response to the circumstances that matters. Are you willing, in order to accomplish His purpose more quickly, to ask for the test? Are you willing, as they come, to weather and gauge your responses and search through His reasons and begin to rejoice?

He may be teaching us visibly more of how His mind works. He may be putting a close-up lens on a weak spot in our lives that He wants to heal. He may be trying to bring us down to size in order to bring Him up to His rightful place in our lives. He is the leader of the kingdom and He wants to lead. He wants us to be the tools to lead. He may realize that our spiritual throats are parched and that we are not drinking the water of the Word. Whatever His reason, we know this much, it is good, it is acceptable and it is perfect.

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This is a test! For whatever the reason or reasons, the Scripture says: Count it all joy, my brethren, count it all joy.

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(03.27.13)