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Testing: The Voice of the Stranger

523-A

Series: Testing

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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We have been dealing in the last few lessons with how God tests His children. Many have expressed concern that, in fact, He does test recent instruction and insights. The more we seem to discuss this subject, the more tests some of us seem to be having. Or, we are becoming more aware of the tests that God gives us the opportunity to be involved in.

God does this through many ways.

1- He creates needs in our lives, and then He meets those needs.

2- He tests recent insights.

3- He also allows success and then tests us in our ability to handle the blessing.

4- He allows choices between good, better and best in our lives on many occasions.

5- He gives us impossible tasks.

6- He gives us arks to build and giants to slay.

7- He gives physical affliction. Sometimes these are just inconveniences, and other times He allows us to be incapacitated to learn of Him and to learn who He is and of all the miracle-working power that is His.

Occasionally, He takes away our idols or treasures. He calls for the title of our fondest possessions. He calls for those people or those things that we have set up in our lives and said, "Okay, Lord, I will be faithful to You, but don't touch this person or don't touch this thing."

In the last ten lessons we have been dealing with eight reasons why He does these things. 1) He does it to develop the mind of Christ in us. 2) He does it to surface our weaknesses. He does it to humble us. 3) He does it to advance the kingdom in order to strategically place us where we need to be. 4) He does it to draw us to the Word and give us questions so that we will look for

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answers. 5) He does it to enlarge our vision- to help us to realize that God is all that He says He is. 6) He does it to equip us to minister to others as seen in II Corinthians 1:3,4. 7) He also does it to teach us experientially how to pray. He wants to teach us how to plead for mercy and for grace. He wants us to learn how to cry out for Him when the need arises. 8) He wants us to learn how to meditate on His Word, His works, His worth and His ways.

In the last lesson, we began the ninth reason that God tests His children. He tests us because there is indeed a very real warfare going on in the spirit world between God and the enemy, Satan. That warfare is intense and real in the pagan world. It is intense and real in the lives of Christians. Satan, like a roaring, stalking lion, is looking for lunch. He is looking to gain control of the lives of Christians. He is not seeking to gain control of much as to draw you away from the magnetism of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life and in mine. So he begins targeting any area of our lives that he can have anyone or anything but Christ gain control.

We talked of the two-horse syndrome in the last lesson in which we cannot ride two horses at the same time as they will inevitably go in different directions. We try to be in the world and be in Christ at the same time. The goal of God for us is that Jesus Christ consume our lives and be pre-eminent in every thought, every ambition, every goal and in everything we say and do.

Satan is so subtle. His goal is to draw us, through spiritual warfare, ever so slightly at first, away from the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. Oftentimes God tests us as He did with Job in order to prove to Satan the faithfulness of God.

We learned in the last lesson that every test is accompanied by spiritual warfare. We read in Ephesians 6:11,12 that we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but rather as the Phillips Translation said, “against cosmic powers, against spiritual organizations of the enemy, rulers of the darkness of this world.” There is indeed spirit warfare going on in every test involved in your life.

The goal of these lessons is not to create a spooky atmosphere because so far “greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.” We are the victors and the Victor lives ever triumphant in us. All we are doing is marching forward, watching the enemy be slain. It is a beautiful experience. But, if we allow the enemy to

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cloud our thinking and make us unaware of His presence, then we can crawl outside of Christ and not be in Him spiritually. In other words, we don't allow His power to be in control of our lives. We can make some real problems for ourselves and for the kingdom and the reputation of God in particular. So every test we face is a spiritual conflict.

Secondly, we learned in the last lesson that because the conflict is spiritual, the stakes, which are high, are spiritual victories. We dealt in detail with Job's experience. We also looked at Jesus' experience as He was tested in the wilderness. There were three underlying things that Satan was trying to do with Christ. These are the same three things that he wants to do with us.

The third principle involved in testing and spiritual warfare is that the battle is usually won or lost in the battleground of the mind. We want to study the way Satan works in the mind of the believer. Using as an illustration the steps he used to deceive Eve in Genesis 3, I believe that we will see that while Satan's tactics may vary slightly, his basic overall methodology doesn't change very much. He is not all that innovative. The battle is usually won or lost on the battlefield of the mind. I want to remind you that the first step in Satan's testing of us always begins on the battlefield of the mind when we choose to listen to the enemy. Genesis 3 begins like this:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman,
(Genesis 3:1 NIV)

The first thing Satan did was speak to Eve. The first thing Eve did was listen. You may think that sounds simple enough, and yes it does. But let's stop to realize that, for most of us if we are honest with ourselves, the Sermon on the Mount exemplified the real source of conflict for the Christian. It is not what we do that separates legalism from spirit filled Christianity. It is the thoughts and intents of the heart that separate us from the perfect will of God and play-acting in the Christian life. It is what is really going on in your mind. That is why Satan attacks the mind.

Let me try to clarify this. How many of you hear voices? How many of you talk to yourselves? How many of you reason with yourself during the day? Who are you talking to? Seriously, who are you talking to? If you are only one person, how are you talking

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to yourself? Do you ever think that you are talking to yourself? Oftentimes, we are not really talking with ourselves. We are being tested by the enemy on the battleground of the mind to distract us. What is the goal of the enemy? He is seeking whom he may destroy. How does he do that? Anything that distracts the mind from the Lordship of Jesus Christ is how he does it.

You will be driving along in the car and you begin to reason with yourself. You will begin a conversation with yourself. I believe that Eve's first big mistake was to listen to the serpent in the first place. She had no basis to listen to him. You and I will be driving along, and we think that we are talking to ourselves, but most of the time we are listening to the voice of a stranger. If you and I could ever learn to guard our minds against unnecessary conversations with someone we don't really know, we will begin to have the victory in areas of our lives that have held us captive for years. The Word is the source of victory and you cannot co-exist with this imaginary conversation while meditating on the Word of God. You begin this imaginary conversation, and if you have been memorizing the Word, you can take a passage and begin to meditate on it. You are then cleansed through the Word which He has spoken unto you.

You may ask, "How do I know where these voices come from?" You may think that you are so intelligent that there can't just be one of you, there has got to be more. What Satan did with Eve was appeal to her sense of awareness. John 10 gives us a little bit of an indicator of this situation.

To him (that is the Shepherd) the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.

And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him for they know his voice.

And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him for they know not the voice of strangers. (John 10:3-5 NASB)

In other words, for the believer to stay on target he listens for the voice of the Master. He will not follow a stranger because he does not know, perceive or understand the voice of a stranger. How do you know the voice of the Lord? The voice of the Lord speaks through the Word of the Lord. So you meditate, you memorize, and you saturate your life with the Bible. You will know when God is dealing with you because He will deal with you through

the living Word of God.

How do we know when these voices and conversations come if they are of God? One thing we do know is when they are not from Him. We know these things from the Word of God. If you are driving along thinking to yourself, you can remember these points. A lot of us have imaginary bouts with people we don't like or people who are in authority over us. We will say, "If I were in control of the situation, I would walk right in and this is what I would say." Before long you are so enmeshed in the conversation that you think it is really happening.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (I John 4:1)

This is how we can try the spirits. We can look in the Word of God and find out what we know the Spirit of God teaches us and know that some things are not of Him.

1- The Spirit of God is not a negative Spirit.

Finally my brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any praise, if there be any virtue, think on these things. (Phillipians 4:8)

For instance, suppose you are driving, walking or praying. This is the time when we get attacked the most. We will be praying and our minds will wander. We will be carrying on a make-believe conversation with somebody about some situation. The point is to think carefully that these negative thoughts are destructive. If you are thinking, "Woe is me. This problem is not going to work out!" Where does that negative thinking come from? That is the voice of the stranger. We have been commanded from the Word of God, "whatsoever things are true, honest, just and of good report, think on these things." This doesn't mean that we don't honestly evaluate things that are negative, but as your mind is in neutral, these thoughts come in that are negative that say, "God can't. God can't. God won't. God won't."

Then we say, "I think this may be right. Maybe God can't. Maybe God won't."

"Who is right?"

"Well, whoever I was talking to."

"Who were you talking to?"

“I don’t know.”

You ought to know because you have been hearing the voice of a stranger. This is the voice of one who speaks negatively against the power and the person of God. At that point in time, you need to tell Satan to get lost and be gone. Invoke the power of the Spirit of God and tell Satan, “Scram!”

2- The spirit of Satan is a questioning spirit.

How did he begin with Eve? He said, “Hath God said?” He is always asking questions. I think his favorite question for the believer is. “What if...?” You are driving along meditating on the Word of God and standing on the promises of the Word of God when all of a sudden a thought pops into your mind, “What if this happens? What if that happens?” You crumble and say, “That’s right. What if that bad thing does happen?” Then your mind goes on a marathon. You begin to imagine all of the things that might happen. You might get home and a terrible thing may happen. Someone may say something bad. You imagine the worst, and it gets worse and worse and worse before you get home. Before long it is awful in your mind. You get home and walk in the door, and your spouse asks you, “How are things going?”

You respond, “Terrible.”

“What is so terrible?” they asks.

“You haven’t been paying attention. This bad thing is about to happen,” you respond.

“How do you know?” they asks.

“Well, I just know,” you say.

You have been listening to the voice of a stranger. The stranger gives you a questioning spirit.

3- The enemy is a self-exalting spirit.

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

(Genesis 3:5 NASB)

He said, “You can be like God. You can know as much as He can.” You will be walking along or driving along thinking, praying, meditating or whatever, and these thoughts pop into your mind. A sly grin comes across your face and you envision yourself as somebody you are not. Have you ever seen someone who at some stage of his life, at least in his imagination, thinks that he

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was somebody great and through some miracle leads others to greatness? Let's be honest with ourselves. Don't all of us, when thinking in neutral, magnify the qualities that we wish we had? Many of these qualities are of absolutely no value at all in the Kingdom.

How many of you ladies, when meditating on the Word, have had your mind do mental gymnastics and the next thing you know you are in the middle of a beauty contest? Guess who wins? Maybe you are single, and in your mind you think about walking down the aisle as a blushing bride with a handsome groom standing down at the front. You don't know how he got there, but you are pleased. These thoughts may bring laughter, but let's be honest with ourselves. Don't we think of ourselves in these ways?

Suppose you have just shared Christ with someone. God has miraculously moved in his life. You give Him the praise and the glory. Your mind then shifts into neutral and a little voice speaks to you, "You know, you are great. If it hadn't been for all of the studying you have done that person wouldn't have accepted Christ. The way you fielded that third question he gave you sealed the deal. Wasn't that great!"

You think to yourself, "Oh shucks!"

You have been listening to the voice of a stranger. Who does God the Father exalt? Jesus the Son. Who does the Holy Spirit exalt? He doesn't even come to speak of Himself. He exalts the Son. You are driving along and a self-exalting spirit says to you, "Hey, you are great." You are listening to the voice of a stranger.

4- Satan is a confusing spirit.

I Corinthians 14:33 tells us that God is not the author of confusion. When your mind begins to be filled with the clutter of confusing thoughts and comments, and you get out of control—STOP. Don't become out of control. Stop those thoughts. You are listening to the voice of a stranger. Begin to pray and ask the grace of God to give you peace. Begin to meditate again on the Word of God. Don't listen to the voice of a stranger.

5- Satan is a spirit of inconsistency.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

(Hebrews 13:8 NASB)

God's plan and His purposes are perfect. However, many people say, "God led me to walk off this cliff. I'm going to do it,

and when I got just to the edge God led me to go off upside down.”

You may think this is funny and humorous, but the things you and I think that we are led to do day by day oftentimes are wrong. We go one way and then another way. We say, “God just keeps changing His mind.” No, God doesn’t keep changing His mind. Oftentimes we are not sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. We won’t stand still long enough for God to give us instruction. He is trying to hit a moving target and the devil is having a field day. Slow down. Get alone with God. Get in the Word. Wait. God is not a spirit of inconsistency.

6- God does not have a spirit of apprehension.

We see it in Philippians 3:6 which says, “Be anxious for nothing.” I have been to football games where the cheerleaders would lead the crowd in a yell, “What are we to worry about? N-O-T-H-I-N-G!” The whole idea is that we are to worry about nothing. As you go about your day and a spirit of apprehension comes over you, don’t say, “God has burdened me. I hope this awful thing doesn’t happen.” You begin to carry God’s loads for Him. You put on a backpack and stuff it full of worries. When you minister to people, you have too much on your back. You may say, “I don’t have any freedom anymore.” You have been listening to the voice of a stranger.

7- God is not the author of fear.

We see this in II Timothy 1:7. As you go about your day, a sudden fear may arise, “Oh my goodness, an awful thing might have happened to my loved one.” Or you might think, “This awful thing may have come about.” Remember that God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Send that spirit of fear back where it came from and begin to take the opposite of fear, which is faith. Stand in the fact that God is sovereign and God is. He is sovereign. He knows the beginning from the end. God is perfect love and therefore would never do anything or allow anything that is not best for you and for His glory. It may not be what we would have wanted, but it is what is best because God is God.

The same thing is true of a judgmental, divisive, hurried or impure spirit. These things do not come from God. As you are going about your day, you may be praying and an impure thought comes into your mind. The point is to reject those thoughts at the very instant they come into your mind. Satan spoke to Eve, “So

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he said unto the woman and she listened.” Because she listened the rest of us have a problem.

Don’t listen to the voice of a stranger. Have you ever been in a large crowd with a small child who can only see kneecaps and cups and the things people are holding in their hands? All of a sudden your hand loosens for a second, and they are gone. There are hundreds of people milling around as you hear a voice, “Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!” There may be thousands of people within a few yards, and you say, “Johnny!” and your child is back. Why? He heard the voice of his father.

Let’s suppose a guy next to your child heard him whimper and he said, “Son, don’t worry about it, everything is going to be alright.” Your son may kick him in the shins and run off, but his words would not comfort him because it was the voice of a stranger. The principle is that you and I have to discern the voice of a stranger.

Once he has gotten our attention by idle conversation and causing us to listen to that which is not of God, the second thing Satan does is begin to question the principles of the Word.

“Indeed,” he said, “hath God said, ‘Ye shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”
(Genesis 3:1)

We will not have time to finish this in the time we have left, but suffice it to say that Satan is appealing to our sense of reason. What was Eve’s big mistake? She reasoned with him rather than rebuked him. She began to say, “What is it that God said and how do I know? Come on Satan, let’s have a debate.” She began the first step downhill as she began to reason with the enemy. Satan is the master of inserting unanswerable questions and giving questionable answers. Usually he will overstate the principle to get you to defend the Word of God.

Satan said, “Did God say that you couldn’t eat from any of these trees?” He overstates the principle and you come back and defend with the Word of God. I have news for you. When you hear a voice questioning the Word of God, don’t answer. You are listening to the voice of a stranger. The Spirit of God will never question the Word of God.

Let’s say you pick up the phone and have received an obscene call. What is the first thing you do? Hang up. That is what Satan is, an obscene phone-caller. He dials your number periodically

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to see if he can get your attention. The first thing he will do is question the principles of the Word of God to see if you will listen. The first thing you need to do is hang up. When he begins to question the principles of the Word of God, don't argue and defend the Word of God. The Word of God needs no defense. God does not need your defense, you need His. Crawl up inside of God and stand on His Word. Claim it. Use it.

How many of you, if you were confronted by an enemy who is about to attack you, would put your shotgun up to your own face and pull the trigger to see if it would work? What we ought to do is use it. When you and I come face to face with the enemy, we need to simply use the Word of God. The principle being violated is the principle that we are not using the Word as the way of escape. Remember that the Word teaches us that there is always a way of escape.

There is no test taken you but such is as common to man and God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability to bear but will with the temptation make a way of escape. (I Corinthians 10:13)

We are studying the ways of escape. The way of escape in this case when the Word of God is being questioned is found in James 4:7.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

How do you resist the devil? When an intruder comes in, do you have him sit down? Do you put your arm around him and try to show him a new book you have just bought? Or, do you stiff-arm him, slam the door in his face and bolt it shut?

I want to ask you to do one thing in the week to come. I am not trying to get any of you to begin to hear imaginary voices, but I want us to be honest with ourselves according to the Word of God. You and I unconsciously and unfortunately deal continually and every day with the devil. We might as well be honest that there is Satanic warfare involved in every area of our lives. Satan wants control of your finances, your marriage, your relationships, your job, your ministry, your thought life, your hobbies, your vocation and every area of your life. He does this so that he can make an inroad in your life. Like a disease, over a period of time, he can chip away at it as he works away at your point of weakness until it spreads and spreads and spreads. It will create spiritual paralysis.

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You and I were designed by God to be supernaturally men and women who would go forth and, by the Spirit of God operating in us, change the world. Satan's job is to paralyze us so that we cannot walk in the spirit. His job is to blind us so that we cannot see the needs of the world. You and I must be well aware, if for no other reason than we are involved in real spiritual warfare, that there is a real enemy out there and he uses real ammunition. He knows you. He knows your weaknesses. He will almost always begin in the battlefield of the mind.

This week as the enemy begins to knock on the door of your mind and you begin to respond, remember that there are things that we know that can indicate to us that this is the voice of a stranger. You don't know the voice of the stranger, so don't listen to him.

What do you do about it? Resist him with the Word. I want to encourage you to be in the Scripture for yourself. Do this on a continual, regular basis and engrave it upon your heart as the Psalmist encourages us to do. Meditate on it and ask God to work it into the fabric of your life so that you literally breathe it so that you are saturated with His Word. If you don't, you are missing the blessing of the Christ-centered, Christ-controlled life. The frustrations of this life will continue to be frustrations. The tests of this life will continue to be met with failure because you are dealing with an enemy. You do not go out on the battlefield with a baseball bat when the enemy is fully armed. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the methods and the deceitful planned tactics of the enemy. Having done all that, stand because "greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world."

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