

Russell Kelfer

Testing: To Teach Us God Is!

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Series: Testing

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

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As we have been studying the subject of testing, we have been looking at the portrait of obedience. The portrait we have been using is the portrait of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham received an unusual gift, wrapped in a package from God, named Isaac. This gift had been promised to Abraham many years before. As Abraham began to lose hope that he would ever receive it, God, finally, as an act of grace, gave it to him. As this unusual gift began to develop before his eyes, God came back to Abraham with an unusual request. He said, "I want you to give back to Me the gift I gave you. I want you to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and give him back to Me." I believe that every man and every woman has a Mount Moriah in his or her life. The purpose of this study is for us to see how properly, in the Spirit, we ought to deal with the tests of life.

The passage we have been looking at indicates that God appeared to Abraham and said, "I am going to test you." Abraham responded with such joy and such a portrait of perfect obedience that we need to look at the reasons behind it and the responses to it. We can then apply them to our own lives. We are not simply to gain theological information in order to allow us to be better equipped to have a star by our name in heaven. We are to glean information about the character of God so that we can appropriate that character and be changed. The change in our lives can then be seen by those about us who, in turn, will want the Jesus we have. This is our goal. This is the reason for this study.

We have been dealing with the fact that very often circumstances come into our lives to test us. The little test pattern needs to flare up before our eyes that says, "This is a test! This is a test! This is a test!"

Many of you were tested this week. How many of you asked to be tested? Was God faithful? He was. He was faithful to test you. Was He faithful to meet the test? Yes, He was. Did you

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remember as the tests came, that there were at least three basic principles that God wanted you to remember?

- 1- Testing is by divine appointment.
- 2- Testing is usually a commendation from God, not a condemnation.
- 3- Testing is initiated and limited and therefore controlled by God.

GOD'S TESTS

There are at least seven ways God tests us. Did God use any of these methods in your life this past week?

- 1- God creates needs.
- 2- God tests recent instruction.
- 3- God allows prosperity or success.
- 4- God allows choices.
- 5- God gives impossible tasks.
- 6- God inflicts physically.
- 7- God takes away our fondest treasures in order to give us back Himself.

God does these seven things in six basic ways:

- 1- Tribulation
- 2- Temptation
- 3- Persecution
- 4- Chastening
- 5- Suffering
- 6- Divine discipline

We began the last lesson with 13 reasons why God tests us. We looked at His purposes for testing and dealt with the first five.

Reason 1- God wants to develop in us the mind of Christ. He does this so that you and I will have the thoughts and responses of Jesus in the midst of the wilderness and in the midst of the test.

Reason 2- He must surface our weaknesses. He must turn

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the heat on occasionally so that the dross rises to the top and can be scooped off. Many of us are convinced that there is much dross and little gold. Nonetheless, we know that the heat is necessary to accomplish His purposes.

Reason 3- He humbles us. We looked at a passage in Deuteronomy where God found it necessary to humble His children so that they would keep the right perspective.

Reason 4- God does test us to advance the kingdom. Because there are men and women who need Jesus Christ, God tests us. As they see our response to tests, they are drawn to Him.

Reason 5- He tests us in order to draw us to the Word. We must learn to say with the Psalmist,

It is good that I have been afflicted that I might learn Thy
Word. (Psalm 119:71 paraphrased)

This lesson will begin with the sixth reason why God tests us.

Reason 6- God tests us to enlarge our vision of God. We need to see God through His character, not just the things He does for us. We will be reading some highlights from Job chapters 38-42 to see how this pattern emerged in Job's experience and see if it applied to you when you were tested.

First of all, Job gave a proper surface response. Many times we give an improper response. We kick our dogs or we throw something off of the table. We may not on the outside, but on the inside of us we are doing these things. The tests keep coming until we respond properly. Once we respond properly, we think the battle is won and the test is over. We think God ought to give us a gold star. He might even need to give us some kind of neon light that says, "Passed! Passed! Passed!" I doubt it. This was just the beginning of Job's tests as he passed with his surface response.

God wanted Job's heart so He tested him. What was his response? First of all he said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." What had God just taken, his piggy bank? No, God had taken his children, all of his belongings, all of his riches, all of his wealth, all of his friends and all of his prestige in the community. Job had gone from being everything to nothing. Job said, "The Lord giveth

and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” We may have had a hard time saying this about some of the smallest problems in the world.

Job went a little further and was able to say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” What had God done? He had taken his health away from him, the last vestige of a man’s strength. Job was now sitting on an ash heap covered with boils. His wife was saying to him on the side, “Why don’t you just curse God and die?” Here he was, in that circumstance and he said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” We think, “Well, he passed the test. It is over. Job is a winner.”

This was only the beginning of tests God had for Job. Job then went into the valley. The first step down into the valley is the valley of personal hurt. Job began to mumble and say, “Woe is me. I really don’t have a very good situation. I’ve really got some problems. I’m disappointed.”

From here, Job slipped into the next level of the valley, which is called bitterness. He began to curse the day in which he was born.

Job went even deeper into the next stage, which is hostility towards God. He began to accuse God of unfairness. Have you ever done that? He said, “God, You gave me a bad deal. You haven’t done for me what You could have done. Lord, I understand that You are God, but in the case of me, something is just not right.” This was true, but the problem was not with God, was it? There was hostility toward God. Job said, “God, You’ve got Your hearing aide turned down. I’ve been talking for days and nobody has answered.” Have you ever said that? The test was getting deeper.

Job’s responses were digging up a deeper level of response. Job’s first response was pure and honest and good, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” Now Job had reached a level, as the heat developed, when he began to turn on God. He said, “God, You haven’t been fair.” Job began to accuse God.

Job then went to the depths. It was at this point that he heard from God. Do you know where you usually hear from God the clearest? You hear the clearest in the depths. One reason we hear God best in the depths is that we quit talking long enough to listen. For some reason we feel like we have to talk

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ourselves out. We have to holler and scream and kick our feet. We feel the need to talk and give excuses for ourselves until our throats are sore and there is nothing left to say. We then begin to listen. As we begin to listen, in the quietness of our life, God begins to speak. When God begins to speak, wonderful things begin to happen.

As God began to speak and Job listened, we learn in Job 42 that he saw God. First, he heard God. Then, he saw God as God. Scales fell from his eyes. Before, he had said, "Though He slay me, yet shall I trust Him." God said to Job, "He is My favorite." Surely he knew God. Yes, but there are stages of knowing God. Now, he really knew Him as he had never known Him before.

The sixth thing that happened is that Job repented. This is what will always happen when we see God as we have never seen Him before. We will repent.

The last thing that happened is that God restored to him, circumstantially, the things he had lost in the test as he grew in understanding. Job had known a God who could prosper, protect and heal. That is elementary, but he had known that God. He had known that God who would give him what he asked for. "Dear God, please give me a new house. Amen." Job got a new house. "Dear God, please bless my children. Amen." His children were blessed. "Dear God, please protect me on this trip." He did. "Dear God, please heal me." He did. Job knew that God, and that God was great. He believed that God and had faith in that God.

But now Job met a God who didn't do all of those things. Have you met that God? Have you met a God who could but didn't? God no longer prospered him, but He could have. God no longer protected him, though He could have. He no longer healed him, though He could have. Job came to know that kind of God in order that he might meet a God who framed the universe with a spoken word. He met a God who controlled the heavens and sent the rain. He met a God who planted a seed and controlled its growth. He met a God who designed every animal, every bird and every fish. He met a God who gave every star its name. He met a God who knew and responded to the needs of the whole world, corporately and individually. Job came to know that kind of God. Before he could, he had to know

a God who didn't.

Some of us don't want to meet God on those terms. That is what the tests of life are all about. Turn to Job 38 so that we can see what Job learned.

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

“Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?”

“Gird up now thy loins like a man, for I will demand of thee, and answer thou Me.” (Job 38:1-3)

God said, “I'm going to come to your class and sit down and be a pupil, Job. You tell me all that you know. You've been saying, 'God this' and 'God that' and 'God, You didn't do this right. You've been unfair to me. You don't have a right to do this or that to me.' I'll tell you what, Job. Let Me sit down and you teach Me. I want to ask you something. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the world? Tell Me, if you have so much understanding. Who made the world's measurements? Who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Who laid the cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and the sons of God and the angels sang for joy? Tell me about it, Job. I need some information.”

In the next two chapters, God continues to pour out a picture of His ability to create and sustain that only He has. In chapter 40 it says,

Then the LORD said to Job,

“Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.”

Then Job answered the LORD and said,

“Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You? I lay my hand on my mouth.

“Once I have spoken, and I will not answer; Even twice, and I will add nothing more.”

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm, and said,

“Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me.

“Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn

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Me that you may be justified?

“Or do you have an arm like God, And can you thunder with a voice like His?

“Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity, And clothe yourself with honor and majesty.” (Job 40:1-10 NASB)

Now turn to chapter 42. I want to encourage you to use this as a meditation this week.

Then Job answered the LORD and said,

“I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”
Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’ I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;

Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”

(Job 42:1-6 NASB)

Do you see what developed in Job’s life? He now came to know God and who God was. Ask yourself this question. How big is your God? He will test you proportionately. With each test, He should end up bigger. How big is your God? He is the size of your average problem. That is how big your God is.

If your refrigerator goes out, God is big enough to see that it is taken care of. Do you get frustrated when you try to call somebody and the phone is busy? God is big enough to handle that. Did you become angry when you were mistreated at the store? God is big enough to handle that. Did your football team lose? God is big enough to handle that. How big is your God?

Don’t laugh over these things. We get more frustrated and upset over football games or other sporting events than we do over things that really count in life don’t we? I almost broke a friend’s radio last night listening to a football game while I was watching another one on television.

Are your children cranky? God can handle that. Do you have a headache? Did you miss your favorite television show? God can handle these things in life. God can also deal with death and tragedy. He can deal with pain, disappointment

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and loss. The bigger the need, the bigger God is. Have you ever realized that?

Have you ever realized what it really means where it says,

...My grace is sufficient for thee... (II Corinthians 12:9)

The word for grace, “archao”, is used here. We can turn to John 6:7 to see the same word used. I contend that the word means “expandable to meet the need.” John 6:7 is where the same word is used.

Therefore Jesus lifting up His eyes and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?”

This He was saying to test him, for He Himself knew what He was intending to do.

Philip answered Him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient (archao) for them, for everyone to receive a little.” (John 6:5-7 NASB)

This word means it wouldn’t expand to meet the need, but when God entered the scene it did. The word sufficient means expandable to meet the need. When God says that His grace is sufficient, it literally means that God has a huge storehouse. We need to take into consideration the passage that says,

But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

We quote that verse without knowing what it means. It means that God has a storehouse bigger than you or I could fathom. You and I have little bitty needs the size of a fingernail. When we come to God, He is able to meet our little needs out of His rich storehouse of supply. The bigger our needs, the more He has to pour into us. The more He has to pour into us, the more of Him we know. The greater the need is, the greater the grace is. The greater the grace, the greater the blessing.

Most of our needs are small. We say, “Gee God, do You think You can handle it?” God says, “Let Me try.” It is like emptying the Atlantic Ocean with an eyedropper. His grace is expandable to meet our need. If we go to God with a thimble, He will fill a thimble. If we go to God with a bucket, He will fill the bucket. If we go to God with a bathtub, He will fill a bathtub. If we go to God with a lake, He will fill a lake. If we go to God with an ocean,

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He delights to fill an ocean. The key is that the bigness of our God is proportionate to the needs we have. It is proportionate to the degree to which we are available to know Him.

Consider Job's expanding concept of God. In the beginning Job knew a God who could meet his needs physically. At the ultimate end of the test He knew God, period.

Look at Paul's expanding concept of God. In the initial stages he knew a God who met him on the Damascus Road and met his needs. He knew a God who could empower him to preach the gospel. By the time his life was over he knew a God who was sufficient even though he was in jail.

Look at Abraham's expanding concept of God. At first, he knew a God who could take him to a place he did not know. Then he came to know a God who could give him a child when he could no longer have a child. Eventually, he came to know a God who was so sovereign and who ruled so perfectly that He could return that child back if He wanted to give him back.

Look at David's expanding concept of God. God used David to slay something small so that he could then see a God who was able to slay something big. David learned the expanding concept of God.

Is your concept of God any greater than it was five years ago? Two years ago? Six months ago? This is one of the reasons the tests come into our lives, to give us an expanding concept of God.

I want to give you step two in dealing with the tests of life. The first thing you need to do is to allow your thought patterns to be framed so that when the test comes, you are able to see, "This is a test! This is a test! This is a test!" Recognize it. Relate to it. Respond to it. Some of you are understanding this and are able to do it.

Once we know it is a test, the second step is for us to learn to say and mean these three words, "But God is..." You may not think this makes any sense, but I hope it will make sense when we are through. What do I mean, "But God is..."? Don't you mean, "God has..."? God has the power. He has the authority. He has the will. Don't you mean, "God was..."? He did this. He has done that. Don't you mean, "God does..."? Don't you want

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to share in a moment of testing, what God is doing? Don't you mean, "God will..."? Don't you have the promises to share?

These are all verbs of action that draw conclusions on the limits of God's character based upon experience or information. It is not what God has, was, does or will, it is that God is. When you come to fully understand that, like Job, then the whole world lights up and begins to make sense. After that, you don't worry anymore.

You may have your car smashed and crawl out of it, but you can say, "This is a test, but God is." God is able. God is in control. God is perfect. God makes no mistakes. Therefore, God is. So what? This is a test, but God is.

The phone rings. It is bad news. It is news you hoped you would never hear. This is a test. It is little help to know that this is a test unless you can reckon with the fact that God is. God is what? God is in control. God is omniscient. God is omnipresent. God is sovereign. He is who He says He is. Therefore, praise God!

There is a misunderstanding at home. Maybe you and someone close to you come to a situation where you are not communicating. The love seems to have been blocked by a misunderstanding. You say, "This is a test, but God is." God is perfect love. God is the healer of wounds. God is.

You may have an expectation of the timing of God. The time comes and what you wanted doesn't happen. You say, "This is a test, but God is." God makes time. He framed the world. He knows what is best. He is. He is the great I AM. There is no beginning and there is no ending to Him. He is, therefore, we can rest.

You may have a physical illness. You may have suffering. The agony of it goes on and on. You may say, "This is a test." If you are answering in the flesh or even with the surface response that Job had, you may say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." But if we come to the reality that God is, what difference does it make?

Eye has not seen nor has ear heard, the beginnings of
what God can do. (I Corinthians 2:9 paraphrased)

Therefore, we cannot draw conclusions about the character

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of God based upon the characteristics of man.

This week try it. “This is a test, but God is...” and let God fill in the blank. Let’s suppose the result of the test is that you feel lonely, discouraged and unloved. Suddenly, the flesh is before your eyes. This is a test. Don’t say, “But God loves me.” Say, “God IS love.” He is in Himself the essence of love. It is the nature of His character. You cannot define the love of God using the love of man as your standard and then adding brownie points because He is God. You and I don’t fully understand love. We take love from man’s perspective then we try to blow it up like a balloon and say, “Well, God’s love must be our love but a little bit bigger.” No. God IS love. You have to define love by looking at God, not by looking at man.

If we understand in the midst of our loneliness, discouragement and disappointment that God is love, therefore, He is by nature of being incapable of any act that does not manifest love. Because of that, the circumstance you are now in the midst of is an expression of God’s love. The solution to that circumstance is an even greater expression of God’s love. Therefore, all you have to remember is that, “This is a test, but God is.” He is perfect love.

What love really IS is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. The more we see God, the more we will know of His love. The cross is the greatest picture of love personified. You and I cannot fully grasp that. As we look at Calvary we will better understand love, for God is...love.

Suppose the result of the test you go through this week is that you are overcome by turmoil or disappointment. You feel that you cannot control the situation. You then say, “Well, maybe God can.” That is not the answer. This is a test. What is the response to your test? “Well, maybe God can take care of this.” No. The response to your test needs to be, “But God is...” God is by nature of being, sovereign. That is, it does not mean that He can control, it means He IS in control. He has never lost control. He has never been out of control. Before the foundations of the world, He was. Through the end of time as we know it, He will be because He is the great I AM. He is sovereign. He has never lost for one mini-second control of this universe or control of your life and the circumstances therein. God is.

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Satan cannot slip one up on God. That situation that happened this week in your life or my life was not an accident. Satan didn't slip up on God's blind side. His sovereignty didn't go out the window. God is. He IS sovereign. It is not that He CAN be sovereign. It is not that He HAS been sovereign. It is not that He WILL be sovereign. It is that He IS sovereign. By nature of His being, He has to be.

Suppose as the result of the test you are weak and unable to cope. You think, "I don't have any power. Maybe God has the power to help me." Wrong. God is. God is what? God is omnipotent. He is the derived source of power. He is the basis of the definition of power so that His power is now operating through us to cope, if we just relax and let Him. Remember what we said earlier, "I can't. He can. Let Him." Paul said it is His power, the power that raised Christ from the dead now operating in and through you. This power gives you the victory.

This is a test, but God is. God is what? God is omnipotent. It is not that God has power. Certainly He does. It isn't that God demonstrates power, of course He does. It is that God is all power. If He lives in you, and He does if you are a Christian, then all power is yours in heaven and earth. This is what the disciples were told.

As a result of the test, you may feel lost and rejected. Don't say, "Maybe God will come and help me." Say, "This is a test, but God is." God is what? God is omnipresent. He doesn't have to come to help you. He has never left you. He is incapable of leaving you. He would no longer be God if He left you. By nature of His being, He is omnipresent; therefore, He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. I can't. I wouldn't be God anymore." You look up in the midst of your loneliness. Don't say, "God come and help me." Say, "God is here." Recognize His presence. He has been there all along. He is there now. He will be there until the end of time. There will never be a time, there will never be a circumstance when God will cease to be omnipresent. If He did, He would cease to be God.

So, this is a test, but God is. Suppose in the midst of the test you are without wisdom or discernment. Don't say, "God can help me." Don't say, "God can give me wisdom." He can, but remember this, God is. God is what? God is omniscient.

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There is nothing God does not know. Ever. There is nothing God cannot know. It is impossible for there to be anything outside the scope of the knowledge of God. If there were, He would no longer be God because God is omniscient. He knows every beat of your heart. He knows every thought you have ever thought. He knows every thought you are thinking now. He knows every need you will ever have. There is nothing in the world that the memory bank of this world or the recorder of this world can erase from the mind of God. God is. He always has been. He has known everything. He always will. Therefore, you can relax. God knows.

Sometime go through the Scripture with your concordance and begin to look up the phrase, "God is." You will find that it says that:

But he Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil. (II Thessalonians 3:3)

...who is able keep you from falling... (Jude 24)

...who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able... (I Corinthians 10:13 NASB)

...God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. (I John 1:5 NASB)

God is grace, perfect grace. God is mercy. So when your faithfulness is tested, God is perfect faithfulness. When darkness surrounds you, God is perfect light. When you are over your head, God is complete grace. When you blow it, God is perfect mercy.

During this next week, I would like all of us to recognize that one reason God tests His children is to change channels on the television set of our minds. He wants to give us a different vision of Himself. The whole idea is that when God says, "This is a test," He wants us to see Himself as God. He wants us to know Him as He really is. Some of us may say, "I don't fully understand what that really means." File it away somewhere and wait, you will.

Look at Job. Look at Abraham. Look at David. Look at Paul. Look at Peter. It was through the tests of life that they came to realize, "This is a test, but God is." He shall always be totally, completely and perfectly able and in control. This is a test,

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but God is. What a God we have. When we look at it from His perspective, we can relax.

Do you want to be a relaxed Christian? Do you want to see the circumstances of your life as they come up over the hill and be able to smile and say, "Here comes a storm, but God is. He is my perfect umbrella. He is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer. He is and He ever shall be."

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

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