

# Tests

## Their Source and Their Purpose

*The crucible for silver  
and the furnace for gold,  
but the LORD tests the heart.*

Proverbs 17:3

### EVERYBODY LOVES TESTS. RIGHT?

If our goal is to know the Bible better and, from that knowledge of Scripture, to know God better, then we know that the more we know God and his amazing characteristics, the more our faith and love for him grows. There are some traits of God, however, that may not seem at first to be all that endearing. This is one of them. The proverb stated above points out what many examples in the Bible illustrate: God is the Tester.

So, we may not love tests while we are going through them, but we don't want to be so hateful of them that we actually are saying that we don't like this trait of God. God is the Tester. Let's learn to appreciate that.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,  
because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.  
Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete,  
not lacking anything.*

James 1:2 – 4

That may be a familiar passage to you, but whether it is or not, read it again a couple of times slowly, letting it really sink in. What stands out to you about that passage?

You may need to start with the simple but important admission that, if you're like most people, you don't yet have that joyful attitude about trials or that clear understanding of the valuable purpose of tests. But ask God right now to help you grow in that. (In verses 5 through 8 of this same Scripture, God reminds us of how generous he is in answering prayers of faith. Don't ever let your honest admission of need keep you from believing that God will help you grow.)

### THE SOURCES OF TESTS

The statement from James referred to above mentions "trials of many kinds" and what these variety of tests can produce in our lives.

Peter also talked about "all kinds of trials." Like James, Peter also went on to talk about the good results of having this variety of tests in our lives.

We want to be able to do what James said and actually consider these tests as pure joy. To do that, we will first look at what he and Peter might have meant by the variety of tests.

*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

1 Peter 1:6 – 7

I certainly can't claim to have perfect insight into what God referred to about tests and their varieties, but here are some ideas about the sources of tests that have made sense to me. See what you think about them, and come up with your own conclusions.

#### 1. Some tests are directly from God.

We see that clearly from **Proverbs 17:3** that is quoted at the top of this study.

- An example of that is found in **Genesis 22**, where Abraham went through that terribly difficult test about offering Isaac. Read verse 1 of that chapter. It clearly says that God was the one that was testing Abraham.
- In the tests that Job went through (**Job 1 – 2**), we see that God did not directly cause them, but he allowed them.
- Look at the example in **John 6:5 – 6**. "When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do." Jesus already knew how

he was going to feed that multitude, but he tested Phillip to let him express what he would say during that test of opportunity by asking him how he would feed them.

- See also **Exodus 15:25** and **16:4** where God himself told Moses that he was testing them and **Judges 2:22** where God said that he would use the idols that the people were so devoted to as a test to see whether or not they would follow Him.

One difficulty about tests directly from God is that we don't always know that they are coming from him. Job certainly didn't. But the more we study the Scriptures, the more we know that God is interested in testing the heart. We will focus later on what those tests produce that come from God.

## **2. Some tests are temptations directly from Satan.**

One huge difference between Satan's tests and God's tests is that Satan is hoping that we will fail, whereas God is wanting us to learn and grow from the test. Even if we do fail at first (like Phillip did in his answer to Jesus), God allows us to learn from that mistake. We can imagine that the next time Phillip faced a test of opportunity, he would have responded with more faith.

Satan, of course, has no such interest in seeing us getting stronger through the tests in our lives. However, **I Corinthians 10:13** faithfully states that God will not allow Satan to tempt us more than we can bear and that God will always provide a way out for every temptation.

## **3. Some tests come from other people in our lives.**

Co-workers, class mates, friends, family, neighbors, and sometimes even church members may test us in many ways. They may openly abuse us or simply get on our nerves. Their habitual sins may cause us grief of many kinds. It's important to recognize three things about this kind of tests:

- (1) They are **NOT** directly from God. He doesn't cause people to do what they do just to test us.
- (2) These tests aren't directly from Satan either. He tempts people to do what they do, but he can't cause them to do it.
- (3) These situations are not your fault. The person chooses to do what he/she does.

## **4. Some tests are from your own bad choices.**

These are the ones that we may hate the most. In Christ, we are forgiven of our sins from the past, but many of them have consequences in the present and future. These consequences are not caused by God; they are not caused by Satan; and they are not caused by others. We are the cause. They test us to see what we will do now.

## **5. Some tests come from hardships and disasters.**

God did not cause the tornado or the disease. Satan did not even have direct cause in it. It's not your fault nor the result of someone else in your life. It is just what happens naturally and randomly, and usually without an identifiable reason. While they do not necessarily happen just as a test for us personally, they do provide a test to see how we will react.

## **6. Some tests come from ordinary life changes.**

We and the people we love grow older, and life changes. Tests that come from that are not from God, Satan, others, or self. They are the natural result of ordinary changes in everyone's life. But they certainly are tests.

## **7. Some tests are tests of opportunity.**

Like Philip when Jesus tested him about the opportunity to serve people by feeding them, we often see needs and wonder what we can do to meet those needs.

There may be other varieties of tests, but **Hebrews 12:4 – 11** gives us some great insight into all of them, and is certainly an important Scripture to deeply study when you are thinking about the purpose of tests.

Read that section of Scripture carefully right now and have it open as you read the next part of this study.

First of all, verse 7 says to "endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children." That does **not** say that every difficult situation in your life is a test from God, as noted in the sources of tests listed above. But what has always helped me is to apply the instruction of this verse by considering: "God, you may not have caused this hardship, but you can use it in a way to train me." (By the way, too many times "discipline," as referred to in this Scripture, is viewed as punishment, rather than training. There sometimes is punishment for wrong doing, but discipline from the Father is love-centered training.)

Another insight this section of Scripture gives us about tests is found in verse 11:

*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.  
Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace  
for those who have been trained by it.*

Don't you love the way God stated this? He knows that no trial or test (no matter what kind) seems pleasant at the time. Amen to that! So, don't expect that you will always immediately respond to difficult tests with the joy that James talks about. Do expect, though, that you can eventually remember and believe the fact that later on it will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace. That's what we want to look at next.

## THE PURPOSE OF TESTS

Wouldn't it be great if we knew ahead of time what questions would be on the tests we face? As we have seen there are many kinds of tests, but it turns out that there are two frequently asked questions, no matter what type of test. These show up every single time we are tested. Knowing that helps you be eager to have these questions asked and look forward to the way you will answer them.

### 1. How do you view God?

*"Power belongs to you, God, and with you, Lord, is unfailing love."* **Psalm 62:11 – 12.** Do you see God as loving and powerful? Is this your go-to-first thought when tested?

When you go through a test of opportunity, or any other type of test, do you focus on the powerful and loving God at work in your life?

### 2. What's in your character?

Tests can be a part of the character-building process described in **Romans 5:1 – 5.** You can find out a lot about your character when you go through various types of tests in life. For instance:

- Are you prone to anger, discouragement, or panic when tested?
- Are you spoiled or entitled?
- Do you spend more time figuring out what you need to do than you do going to God about it?
- Do you need a wake-up call?
- Do you need to get stronger in some area?

This is actually what is so valuable about tests in this life. They show you how you view God and what is in your character. It's good to know how we answer those two questions. We all really want to know now how we view God and what is in our character. There will be a final exam on the Day of Judgment, and we don't want to wait until then to find out where we stand on these two questions. That actually wouldn't be fair. God is a tough Tester, but he is a fair Tester. He wants us to know now where we stand, so we can make any necessary changes to improve. Look honestly about the way you answer these two questions during a given test, but realize that they are **not** your final answer. You have the opportunity, with God's help, to grow and improve your answers with real and lasting transformations.

Things to remember about God, when He is the Tester:

- **The Tester (God), like a teacher, already knows the answers. He's not asking you for information. He wants you to see what's in your heart.**
- **The Tester (God), like a teacher, may be silent during the test. When it may seem like he's not answering your request to help you deal with the test, it may be that He has already provided what you need to pass the test, and he wants you to see that.**

## CONCLUSION

You may have heard public service announcements that start with "*This is a Test.*" They usually go on to describe what to do if you were facing an actual disaster. It might help if you thought of that when you are facing a challenge. Tell yourself, "*This is a test.*" Then remind yourself of what we've seen that tests can do for us (and why we can be thankful for them):

**THIS IS A TEST**

- **We can find out what we really think about God.**
- **We can discover what our character is really like.**

So, it turns out that God the Tester is always helping us to actually examine ourselves in every test. In the end, it becomes a self-examination. We can learn a lot from the results of those tests and allow God's Spirit to help us make some valuable progress in our lives. We may not enjoy every kind of life tests at the moment while they are happening, but we can be very thankful for what they produce.

*Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thought.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

**Psalm 139:23 – 24**

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