

The Purpose of Testing

Job 7:17–18 “What is man . . . that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?” Isn't that an amazing revelation—that God visits us every morning and tests us every moment? When it first became real to me, I had to ask myself: *Am I prepared to receive a visit from God every morning? Do I wake up with that expectation?* Then I went on to ask myself: *Why does God test us? What is His purpose?* Collins English Dictionary gives an interesting definition of the verb **test**: *to ascertain the worth of a person . . . by subjection to certain examinations*. God does not test us because He is angry with us or wants to put us down. On the contrary, testing is a mark of God's favour. He tests us because He wants to establish our value. A jeweller will subject gold or silver to certain tests. He does this because they are valuable. He does not bother to test base metals such as iron or tin. In the world of the patriarchs there was one man of outstanding righteousness. His name was Job. God was proud of Job. He actually boasted about him to Satan: *Job 1:8 “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?”*

Characteristically, Satan's response was to attribute selfish motives to Job: “He only serves You because of what He gets from You.” In response, God permitted Satan to put Job to the test. First, He allowed Satan to destroy everything that belonged to Job: his possessions, his servants and his children. Then God even permitted Satan to touch Job's body—to afflict him with boils from head to toe. But He did not permit Satan to take Job's life.

Job recognized that God was testing him. “*When He has tested me,*” he said, “*I shall come forth as gold*” *Job 23:10*—that is, gold that had been tested by fire. This gave him the strength to endure. He cried out in agony of soul, but he never gave up. Typically, Eliphaz and Job's other two religious friends concluded that Job's sufferings were due to sins he had committed and they brought all sorts of terrible accusations against him. In the end, however, God vindicated Job and rebuked his friends. He told Eliphaz, *Job 42:7 “You have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.”*

Abraham was another righteous man who was subjected to severe tests—even to the point of being required to offer his son to God as a burnt offering. Abraham was subjected to special tests because he had a special destiny—to become the father of God's chosen people, both Jewish and Christian. God applies special tests to those for whom He has special purposes.

The New Testament clearly warns us that, as Christians, we must expect to undergo testing. Peter compares our faith to gold, the genuineness of which must be tested by fire. *1 Peter 1:7*

James tells us that we should respond to testing with joy: *James 1:2–4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [endurance]. But let patience [endurance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

Further on, James takes Job as an example of how to respond to testing: *You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and merciful.*

Testing or Chastening?

It is vitally important that we learn to distinguish between God's testing and His chastening. Many people seem to assume that once they become Christians they are exempt from God's chastening—especially if they have been believers for any length of time. This attitude, however, has no basis in Scripture. To such believers Hebrews gives a powerful warning: *Hebrews 12:5–8 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.” If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

We cannot expect to complete our God given assignment if we make room for disobedience in our lives. When we come under the dealings of God, we need to humble ourselves before Him and pray the prayer of David in Psalm 139:23–24 (NIV):

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

If we sincerely allow the Lord to search our hearts and He does not put His finger on anything that is offensive to Him, then we may conclude that we are under God's testing, not His chastening.

What God reveals will determine how we respond. Our response to chastening should be to **repent**; our response to testing should be to **endure**. But if we persist in trying to endure when we should repent, we are guilty of stubbornness and insensitivity.

What Is God Looking For?

The basic issues of sin or righteousness are defined in Satan's original temptation of Adam and Eve. His Greek title *diabolos* (English *devil*) means *slanderer*. To slander someone means to *defame their character*. This is Satan's primary activity.

First and foremost, Satan defames the character of God Himself. Hence his original question to Eve:

"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" Genesis 3:1

Satan implied that God was a despot—arbitrary, unfair and unloving. God was shutting Adam and Eve out from a "higher level" of knowledge which would open up to them if they tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Satan's goal was to undermine their trust in God's goodness when, in actual fact, God had already provided them with everything that was good, beautiful and delightful.

From mistrust of God's goodness, Adam and Eve moved to disbelief in God's word and then to the act of disobedience. There were three stages in their fall: **mistrust**, **disbelief** and **disobedience**.

Through faith in Christ, God has provided a redemption that reverses the downward process of the fall.

It replaces disbelief with faith, disobedience with obedience, and mistrust with trust. Faith leading to obedience is the first stage. But the process is not complete until faith has developed into trust.

What is the difference between faith and trust? A non-theological answer would be: faith is an **act**; trust is an **attitude**. A clear illustration of the difference between faith, as an act, and trust, as an attitude, is provided in Psalm 37:5 (NAS): *Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.* *Commit* describes a single act of faith; *trust* describes a continuing attitude that follows the initial act of committing. After that, God takes over: *He will do it.*

A simple illustration would be making a deposit in a savings bank. You hand your money to the teller and receive a receipt. That is *committing*. After that, you do not lie awake at night wondering: *Is the bank really taking care of my money? Am I receiving the interest due to me?* You just put the receipt in a safe place and sleep soundly. That is *trust*.

Many Christians take the first step, an act of faith, but do not maintain an attitude of trust. Strangely, many of us find it easier to trust an earthly bank than to trust God in heaven!

A primary purpose behind God's tests is to produce trust in us. This was true of Job. In the midst of all his trials he affirmed: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."* Job 13:15

Why is trust so important? Because it reveals our **estimate of God's character**. When Adam and Eve yielded to Satan's temptation, their actions spoke louder than any words they might have uttered. They were saying: "God is not just and loving. He is not dealing fairly with us. He is not to be trusted." Our salvation from sin is not complete until it has undone the effects of the fall and produced in us this quality of **trust**. This may require us to go through many tests. It is important that we never lose sight of God's end purpose: to produce in us an unshakable confidence in His absolute trustworthiness. Jesus Himself has provided us with the supreme example of trust. In fulfilment of His Father's plan, He was handed over to wicked, cruel and godless men. They mocked Him, spat on Him, flogged Him, stripped Him naked and nailed Him to a cross. Eventually He cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* Matthew 27:46

Yet in all this His trust in His Father's faithfulness never failed. With His last breath He yielded His spirit back to the Father. How do we respond if we cry out to God and He does not seem to answer us? Can we still trust His faithfulness? Remember, God is more concerned with our character than with our achievements. Achievements have importance only in the realm of time. Character is eternal. It determines what we will be through eternity.

God will not permit us to be tested beyond what we can bear. He will not expect of us what He required of Jesus—perhaps not even what He required of Job. Every test we go through is designed to mould our character, until we have become in Christ all that God created us to be.

Blessed is the man who endures temptation [testing]; for when he has been proved [approved], he will receive the crown of life. James 1:12