

Tested by the Father (1 Peter 4:12–5:11)

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Introduction

1. Last week we looked at family discipline.
 - a. The trials endured by the Hebrew Christians were taking their toll. Their resolve to persevere faithfully in running the race set before them was lagging. Citing Proverbs 3:1, Paul applied the truth in Hebrews 12:7.
 - b. The finish line of the race is described in Hebrews 12:14. The goal is *peace* (a right relationship with others as defined and governed by Scripture) and *holiness* (a right relationship with God as defined and governed by Scripture).
 - c. Discipline is God's means to get us to the finish line, but it is not a pleasant experience. Nevertheless, it results in "*the peaceful fruit of righteousness*" (Hebrews 12:11).
2. In this message, we want to delve deeper into the Father's child-training process (1 Peter 4:12, 13).
 - a. The Greek term Peter uses translated "*test*" means that adversity, affliction, and trouble are sent by God and serve to test or to prove one's character, faith, and holiness.
 - b. There is no one that we are more prone to misunderstand than ourselves. Jeremiah accurately describes us and the Lord's remedy (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).
 - c. Because of the deceitfulness of self and pride, we are not at all persuaded of the depth of our evil hearts; neither are we interested to examine the evil that still clings to us. But God has a plan, and He is set on our transformation in holiness.
3. John Calvin wrote: "All whom the Lord has chosen and received into the society of His saints ought to prepare themselves for a life that is hard, difficult, laborious, and full of countless grief." Why would this be so? There is a simple truth that our sinful hearts are desperate to avoid at all cost.

I. The Principle (Deuteronomy 8:2)

1. We do not know the strength of sin nor the evil corruption of our own hearts unless and until the Lord allows us to see it. This is where trials come into play.

We thought that we had everything under control. The old man was crucified, and, we thought, dead. Our new and better nature governed us. Our lusts were under control. Our tempers improved, and our souls were calm. Our mountain stood strong: "we shall never be moved." But pride, the fruit of the deceiver, lied to us and blinded our eyes. We were profoundly ignorant of our own hearts. Then the trial came . . .
2. Trials do not create the evil in us; they simply reveal it.

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, the desert trials provoked the iniquity that was already in them. The rebellion, unbelief, complaining, self-will, self-pleasing, and idolatry burst out of them in torrents when the hardships of the desert hit them. Egypt with all its luxurious plenty returned to haunt their memories and exposed their dissatisfaction. God was proving them, and so with us.
3. John warned us: "*Do not love the world or the things in the world*" (1 John 2:15–17).

Why? The desires of our flesh, our eyes, and the pride of life we thought were under control. Our great need is to be instructed by the Scriptures concerning God's work through trials.

II. Biblical Examples

1. Abraham stands preeminent for his faith and courage. Paul states a puzzling truth about Abraham (Romans 4:20, 21).

In the trial of famine, Abraham went to Egypt. Seeing a sudden unexpected danger, his faith gave way to fear, and he lied. And later in Gerar, his faith again gave way to fear, and he lied. God graciously to build true faith in him—the faith that justified him as documented by Paul in Romans.

2. “*You have heard of the patience of Job*” (James 5:11). Job stood resolute in the first assaults of Satan when his possessions were taken through nature and theft and his family was ripped from him in a horrible tragedy. He did not sin (Job 1:21; 2:10).

Oh, but his patience gave way: the inner circle of self was reached when the duration of his loathsome disease drove him to the ash heap and his “friends” rose up against him with accusations of sin. Job responded, “*The righteous holds to his way, and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger. [But] my days are past; my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart*” (Job 17:9, 11; 19:8–10).

These are a few drops in the bitter cup of adversity that God gave him to drink. This example is given us to “*know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*” (James 1:3, 4). Grace prevented Job from utter despair and he repented (Job 40:1; 42:2, 3).

3. David, the man after God’s own heart, is esteemed for his courage and fearlessness in battle. Did he not stand and defeat the giant Goliath while seasoned soldiers cowered in fear? Is he not the one made legend in the women’s songs (1 Samuel 18:7). Yet, he fled from Saul, feigning himself a madman before King Achish at Gath, his courage gone, his true self revealed that we may be taught to “*be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*” (Ephesians 6:10).
4. We could give many additional examples, such as Elijah, who boldly confronted Israel’s worship of Baal, praying down fire from heaven, slaying the wicked prophets of the demon religion, and stopping the rain for three years. Yet he fled the threats of Queen Jezebel and pled to die in the wilderness of Sinai as he complained that he stood alone and in danger. God responded (1 Kings 19:15, 18). What is the lesson here?

Conclusion:

1. The hearts of the saints must be proved to demonstrate their true character. The source of our disease must be reached, and its real nature exposed to the light in order that God’s grace may do its work, perfecting the heart in true holiness to love and serve the King of Righteousness.
2. When the wondrous manifold love of the Savior was brought to us through the gospel, our hearts were won, and shame that we would distrust such grace filled us. We were convinced we should never think ill of God again (Job 13:15). We believed that affection would only make us cleave more to him. However, when He begins to smite us with His rod of correction, our former thoughts return. We suspect His love and faithfulness. Our hold on His grace loosens and might, it seems, wholly give way.
3. Grace reveals our glorious privilege in His Word (Hebrews 12:22–24). The Father’s love is your portion. The kingdom of the Son is your inheritance. No chastening at God’s hands, no matter how severe, is designed for nothing less than your good (Hebrews 12:10).