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Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

Why Does God Put Us to the Test?

The Bible tells us that God never tempts us. James 1:13 says,

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

But, it doesn’t take much Bible reading to discover many other passages in which God puts people to the test. Here is Genesis 21:1–2, for example,

Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham. . . He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”

First of all, we must ask if this is even a fair distinction. Are tests and temptations all that different? They both feature situations in which people are faced with a decision and left to choose.

I believe there is a clear distinction, which is best seen in the motivation of the key players. When Satan tempts, he puts before us an object of lust that has the potential to destroy us spiritually, and then lies and deceives in an effort to trick us into choosing incorrectly. He is “seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:7). He is “a murderer” and “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

The best place to see the nature of Satan’s tricks is Genesis 3, as he tempted Eve. Now, God did not baby-proof the Garden of Eden. He left the tree there that could potentially harm His children. But God warned them about it, God gave them clear instructions about it, God told them what would happen if they disobeyed His instruction, and God gave them plenty of other good options to enjoy.

Satan, on the other hand, lied about it, suggested that God was limiting their fun, and suggested that no harm would come. He said, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:5). And sure enough, Adam and Eve did die—they got kicked out of God’s presence as a result.

This is not God’s way when it comes to testing. Like a loving parent, God attempts to accomplish three things when it comes to a test.

1.) To teach His children the value of obedience.

In Exodus 16:4–5,

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

God gave them clear instructions: gather one day’s worth of bread Monday through Thursday, and gather two day’s worth of bread on Friday. He did not explain why. He waited to see what they would do.

Sure enough, some disobeyed. Likely they feared the hunger of the wilderness, and wanted to store up some bread for the next day in case God didn't provide. But God wanted them to learn to trust Him for their daily bread. And so those that hoarded bread found that it grew nasty and foul, and Moses scolded them. Some disobeyed the second instruction as well. They failed to gather two days' worth on Friday. When Saturday dawned, they discovered that God didn't provide bread, and they had to go hungry on Saturday. Only then did God explain that He intended for Saturday to be a Sabbath, a day of rest.

Let's admit it: some of us only learn the hard way. Which of us obeyed our parents' instruction not to rock back on the chair until we fell over and hit our head on the floor? Or at least saw someone else hit his head on the floor. Through this episode, the children of Israel learned a valuable lesson about the benefits of obedience, and the consequences of disobedience.

2.) To teach His children the importance of trusting Him.

Another test is recorded in Deuteronomy 8:2,

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

God purposefully made His children experience the wilderness wandering to teach them that He was reliable. They always had something to eat, something to drink, and something to wear. God always fought their battles. God knew that the blessings of the Promised Land could not be enjoyed unless they learned to trust God first. He did this "that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end" (8:16).

James says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces

endurance” (James 1:2–3). Stand firm in both Satan’s tempting and God’s testing, and God will lift you up in the last day.

3.) To strengthen the faith of His children.

Another test is recorded in Judges 2:21,

I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not.

This generation didn’t have to fight for their land. Joshua had won the territory, and they could simply have enjoyed it. But God purposefully left some smattering groups of the inhabitants, to see whether or not His people would rise to the challenge, to “teach them war” (3:1).

No one knows his own strength until it is tested. A sports team does not know how good it is until it is put up against a challenging opponent. And no Christian becomes confident in his spiritual power until he flexes his spiritual muscles. “In this you greatly have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6–7).

Conclusion

When David realized this truth, he even invited God’s scrutiny. He prayed to God in Psalm 26:1–3, “Examine me, Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart, for your lovingkindness is before my eyes.”

That idol in your path ahead—is it a temptation, or a test? Maybe both. Listen to God’s instructions, and let the outcome serve God’s purposes, not Satan’s!

—John Guzzetta

Quote of the Week:

“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith!” (2 Cor. 13:5)