

Grade-A faith

By Bradley T. Trask

Remember that sinking feeling you had in school when your teacher suddenly asked your class to take out your pencils and clear your desks to take a test? You thought you knew the material, but the sudden need to apply it caught you off guard.

In some ways, faith operates that way in our lives. We study the Word. We exercise our faith daily in prayer and worship. We feel like we know what faith is and how it should work. But then the unexpected catches us at a low moment. We're caught off guard. Our faith begins to falter.

Receiving an A in "Faith 101" is imperative to the follower of Christ. The apostle James states, "Consider it pure joy,

my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ... Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:2-4,12, NIV).

"Trials" is a translation of the Greek word *peirasmos*, which can also be translated "testings." While we may reach an age where academic classrooms and tests cease, our spiritual classroom experience never ends. Throughout our lives our Heavenly Father at times says, "Take out your pencils and clear

your desks." But He always does so with the view of developing perseverance in our walk of faith. He already sees the crown of life He has in store for us.

Let's evaluate the importance of becoming a lifelong learner in our faith in preparation for those times of testing. I'd like to suggest to you four criteria for life's testing times that will give you a solid understanding of where your faith is today and where God can take it.

The inevitability of tests

The apostle James writes, "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials." Not if, but whenever you face trials. Jesus did not escape trials while on this earth; neither will we.

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King David said, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19, NKJV).

In life, as in the classroom, there are three types of people. There are those taking a test, those who have just finished taking a test, and those who are preparing for a test. The Bible says, "Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7, NIV). God did not save us to exempt us from tests; rather, He sent His Son to help us with the tests.

Be cautious concerning doctrine that promotes, "Once you become a Christian it's all about the honey and not the bees." The

fact of the matter is, the stronger a Christian becomes, the more severe the tests will become.

Paul the apostle said, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Notice those words "everyone" and "will be."

Biblical examples abound regarding this topic. Job was a blameless man who feared God and shunned evil. However, in a single day Job lost his family, finances, fortune, fitness, and friends. Joseph, a man of unquestioned integrity within Potiphar's home, was thrown into prison for a crime he didn't commit. Daniel was totally committed to God in the face of

adversity, and he found himself in a den of lions.

None of us should think it strange to experience difficulty while serving the Lord. Peter said, "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). Jesus himself said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Tests are a certainty of life.

The diversity of tests

James says, "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds." This reminds us that life is touched by a variety of tests. Tests can be physical,

financial, psychological, spiritual or emotional, with subtle combinations as well. They can also vary in their difficulty. There are the mild irritations that complicate an hour or a day. There are monumental tragedies that alter the very landscape of life.

Tests come in as wide a variety as the people who encounter them. And in God's economy, that translates into a wonderful resource for the believer. Within the body of Christ, there are always going to be brothers and sisters who have faced circumstances similar to our own. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "We can comfort those in any

trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4).

The purposefulness of tests

We may never comprehend many specifics about the tests of life. However, if as followers of Christ we comprehend "that the testing of your faith develops perseverance," we will succeed.

When looking at the word for "test" in this passage of Scripture, picture a young bird testing its wings. The point of this image is to reinforce the concept that something (wings) is ready to perform the function for

which it was created. The word "test" refers also to the refining of gold. As gold is subjected to extreme temperatures the purification process burns off the impurities. It is important for us to understand that life's tests are for our refinement.

When met with faith, tests equip us to carry out God's purposes. The opposite is also true. If we fail to apply our faith during testing times, we're left with our own miserable strength. Solomon said, "If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!" (Proverbs 24:10).

One may not know the when of tests; they can happen any time. One may not know the why of

Are they worth it?

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tests; they can seemingly have no rhyme or reason. One may not know the where of tests; they can happen any place. Elisabeth Elliot said, “Every experience of trial puts us to this test: Do we trust God or don’t we?”

The dependability of tests

Tests are built into the design of most classrooms because they have been proven dependable in creating

comprise this fourth category of rejoicing and dependability.

God is always revealed. God permits trouble to come into our lives so we will draw close to Him. Our human tendency is to stray from God when life is in a nontesting mode. Tests have a unique propensity to draw us back to God.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “God whispers to us in our pleasures but He shouts to us in our pain. Suffering is God’s megaphone to

fire.” The Bible declares, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze ... for I am with you” (Isaiah 43:2,5).

We are always refined. Your faith may have impurities; therefore, God allows tests to remove the dross. A crippled woman came to her pastor,

and watches as the impurities float to the top, so God watches to see our sinful tendencies separate from the molten silver of our lives.

We are always rewarded. The apostle James stresses that there is a special crown waiting for the person who “has stood the test” (1:12). “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Yes, this life is difficult. Yes, our faith is tested. But no matter how difficult or prolonged the test, our reward will be eternal. Paul assures us, “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory

that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Martin Luther struggled through some severe tests. One day, his wife, Katie, came into his study wearing all black, her face covered by a veil.

“Who died?” Martin asked.

She solemnly responded, “God died.”

Martin retorted, “Silly woman, God hasn’t died.”

“Oh,” she replied, “I thought by the way you were acting that God had died.”

The impact was immediate and reminded Luther that regardless of the tests he was facing, God was in control.

Is your faith being tested?

Remind yourself that God is in control — and that you never have a testimony without a test. Then, get out your pencil and clear your desk. The next test is guaranteed. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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solid learning experiences among students. God’s design allows for tests in our spiritual experience as well. When we recognize God at work through our tests, we learn to rejoice in them. We learn to celebrate that God is placing within our lives the potential to receive an A in the area of faith.

At the core of each test God is really asking us two questions: “Will you trust Me?” and “How much do you trust Me?” Our joy in the midst of our tests comes when we recognize God’s tests are dependable; they are designed to strengthen our lives, preparing us for the most effective service in the Kingdom. Three elements

rouse a deaf world.” Lewis made this statement after caring for his wife, who died of cancer.

The three Hebrews who were thrown into a Babylonian fiery furnace experienced this same revelation (Daniel 3). While only three men were thrown into the furnace, a fourth showed up, the Son of God. In the midst of an inferno meant to destroy, divine revelation occurred — in the person of Jesus Christ. Often God permits the furnaces of life so that He may reveal himself to us in unique ways.

Charles Spurgeon stated, “The refiner is never far from the furnace when his gold is in the

weeping and shaken in her faith. She asked, “Why has God made me like this?” He prudently replied, “God has not made you — He is making you!”

Remember, God may not ignite the fire of affliction, but He does control the thermostat. The Psalmist said, “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees” (119:71). There are certain lessons in life that are only learned during times of testing.

When pleading with the Lord to turn down the heat, evaluate if you are responding correctly to the refining process. Just as a silversmith looks into a crucible

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness and repent of your sins.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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