

HAS 2020 TESTED YOUR FAITH?

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“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1.6-7)

Nobody needs to be told today we are living in tough times - 'an hour of trial.' These times test, unsettle, and pressure us. They are times of trouble, tribulation and stress. God is allowing the genuineness of our faith to be tested by times of trial, because faith can only grow when it is tested. **EVERY** believer, without exception, experiences the testing of his faith. The test of faith is when your experience and circumstances run contrary to what you believed or had been expecting.

Our senses (physical and emotional) relate to what we see and feel, but the eyes of faith, on the other hand, look to the GREATER REALITIES of the unseen eternal world. Faith, looks to the word of God and *always* puts **IT** above the evidence of the senses and feelings. However it does not **deny** the evidence of the senses, but it puts the word of God above it. The test is won when we keep on trusting, believing and resting on the facts of the unseen realm, even when feelings and experiences roar the opposite. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things **not seen**.”* (Hebrews 11.1) Our faith is built entirely on the Word of God and especially on His promises and faithfulness.

In times of trial and tribulation God's blessing is not withdrawn - although it may feel like it is. We experience the temporary withdrawal of blessing so that we learn to rely more completely on Him than ever. Our **senses** may experience anxiety, depression, confusion, joylessness, bodily weakness and pain, but faith leaps beyond the realm of the senses to the reality of God's life, and begins to draw on His life made ours by Jesus.

In easy times this is not hard to do. However, in times when there is little consolation or comfort, when our emotions seem to rise and fall like the tide, when our bodies experience weakness and pain, it is not so easy. This is the trial of our faith. Jesus said: *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* (John 16.33) Tribulation is the **temporary withdrawal of the experience** of blessing so that we may become more established in our reliance on God's care and life. At these times we learn to look beyond ourselves to the life of Christ (who lives in us) to be our peace, our joy, our health and our everything.

In the end, trials can benefit us greatly, because they increase our dependence on God and brings us closer to Him. In fact, **all** spiritual growth is growth in dependence. Dependence leads not only to greater faith, but to greater love, intimacy and appreciation of God, our Loving Heavenly Father.

Trials come to prove, test and strengthen our faith. They also become the opportunity for us to assert and manifest our victory over the devil. In times of tribulation and testing, the enemy of our souls (mind, will and emotions) exercises all his resources to try to move us from faith in our promise-keeping God. The deceiver uses lies, which he sows in our minds to try to make us doubt God's faithfulness. He seeks to inject fear, disturb our peace, sow doubt about the truth of the word of God and accuses us incessantly. However, we overcome by continuing to trust in, focus on and to confess the faithfulness and goodness of God and the reality of what He has done. The believer keeps on living by faith and relying on the word of God.

When the devil injects fear, we say, *"I will not fear because I am in the care of my Heavenly Father."* When He accuses, we show him the blood of Jesus who has taken all our blame and fully reconciled us to God. When we experience weakness in our bodies and he tries to make us believe that sickness, and deterioration are the only ruling forces in our bodies, we lean on the life of the resurrected Jesus that dwells within us. *"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your **mortal bodies** through His Spirit who dwells in you."* (Romans 8.11) We do not deny our weaknesses but we turn them to our advantage, because we use them as an occasion and invitation for a greater experience of God's mercy, power and life.

"I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12.9-10)

We see that the life of **faith** is a life of **overcoming**. We believe the unseen realm is more real and we live from that realm. We believe the life of Christ in us is greater than our weakness. We continue to relate to His life, draw from His life and to celebrate His life. Whether it takes a month a year or longer we **hold fast** to our belief in the faithfulness of God. We exercise the faith of Abraham who *"did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform."* (Romans 4.20-21)

When we come through the test of our faith we are not only closer to God, more reliant on the life of **the resurrected Jesus** within us and more victorious over the devil but we are also more compassionate towards others. Because we have gone through things we are better equipped to comfort them *"with the comfort with which we have been comforted with,"* and to strengthen them with the faith we have received. We can say from personal experience, *"this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for a greater weight of glory"* - not just in heaven in the future, but right now in our present situations.