

LEVELS OF TESTING

TESTS OF OBEDIENCE, FAITH, FAITHFULNESS, AND LOVE

In the Bible we find tests of character (1 Tim. 3:10), humility (Prov. 27:21), truthfulness (Gen. 42:15–16), wisdom (1 Kings 10:1; 2 Chron. 9:1; Mark 10:2; 12:15), diligence (2 Cor. 8:22), supernatural power (Matt. 16:1), orthodoxy (John 8:6; Rev. 2:2), obedience (Deut. 8:2), faith (1 Peter 1:7), faithfulness (Rev. 2:10), and love (Deut. 13:1–4). Tests of faith may be tests of security (Exod. 14:1–31), provision (15:22–26), or contentment (Num. 11:1–34). I believe there is a logical sequence of testing that leads to approval (James 1:12) and becoming an overcomer (John 16:33; Rev. 2:17, 26; 3:12, 21). Let's take a look at four levels of testing, and by way of application, ask yourself, "What level am I?"

LEVEL 1: TEST OF OBEDIENCE

This is a test of your obedience to God. Testing is a part of life: "The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked" (Psa. 11:4–5a). "Thou who dost test the righteous, Who seest the mind and the heart" (Jer. 20:12a). "The LORD tests hearts" (Prov. 17:3b). "I test the mind" (Jer. 17:10b). "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10b). God gave tests of obedience to the children of Israel (manna, Exod. 16:4; Deut. 8:16). He left idolatrous nations in Canaan "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" (Judg. 2:22; cf. 3:1–4). The purpose of testing is to see what's in your heart: of Hezekiah "God left him *alone only* to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). David prayed "Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart" (Psa. 26:2). God, of course, already knows what's in your heart and whether you'll pass or fail a test. The important thing is for you to know. Testing is for your benefit, not God's. Will you obey Me?

LEVEL 2: TEST OF FAITH

This is a test of your faith in God: will you trust Him with every detail, every aspect of your life? Will you trust Him with your job, finances, house, family, life, and future—right up to the last possible moment? Let's take a look at a few examples from the Bible. Moses trusted God and left the treasures of Egypt (Heb. 11:24–26). Israel failed ten successive tests of faith and never progressed to the next level (Num. 14:22). They were tests of safety (at the Red Sea, Exod. 14:1–31; giants in the land, Num. 13:1–14:38), provision (bitter waters of Marah, Exod. 15:22–26; no food in the wilderness of Sin, 16:1–35; no water at Rephidim, 17:1–7; Num. 20:24; Psa. 95:8–11; 106:32), and contentment (quail at Kibroth-hattaavah, Num. 11:1–34). David trusted God with his life in challenging Goliath (1 Sam. 7:37). Jesus' first test in the wilderness was a test of provision: after fasting for forty days he refused to use his supernatural power to provide bread for himself. The issue at stake: will he have faith and trust God for the necessities of life and for physical comfort right up to the last minute (Matt. 4:1–4; Luke 4:1–3)? He did. Few ever get this far. Few ever pass a test of faith. Few ever reach this first level because, when they count the cost as instructed by Jesus (Luke 14:28–32), they decide it's too high. As in the case of the children of Israel, God keeps administering this test until you pass... or until He gives up on you. A member of our church recently reached this level. Out of work for a year, unemployment benefits coming to an end, and no job prospect in sight, at the last minute he said, "I'm willing to give up my car and house to be the youth director at Glendale Baptist Church. I believe God is calling me to that ministry!" Four days later he had a job! Count the cost: Am I willing to have faith and wait for a last-minute save... or pay the price? Courage and complete trust is what it takes to pass a test of faith. Risk, and then reward: "that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). *Principle:* Christians who fail tests of faith can't move on to the next level and be faithful because they've already proven they won't pay the price. You have to pay to play! Will you trust Me? Now, as we move on, it's important to note that tests of faith produce the endurance necessary to reach the next level, to pass a test of faithfulness: "knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:3).

LEVEL 3: TEST OF FAITHFULNESS

This is a test of your faithfulness to God: will you be faithful to Him in suffering and in blessing? Will you be faithful and not deny Him (Rev. 2:13; not bow to Caesar), not fall away in times of persecution (Matt. 13:21; 26:31–33; Mark 4:17; Luke 8:13; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12), not be ashamed to take a stand (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 1:8), not throw away your reward (Heb. 10:35), and not let another take your crown (Rev. 3:11)? Will you be firm in your beliefs (1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Peter 5:9) and bold in your witness (Eph. 6:19; 1 Thess. 2:2)? Will you be faithful in service (don't get discouraged and quit, Luke 18:1; Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:13; Heb. 12:3; Rev. 2:3), doctrinal orthodoxy (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:2; 1 Tim. 4:1), persecution (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 1:4), and the worries, riches, and pleasures of life (Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14)? Consider Job's two tests of faithfulness: will he curse God in the midst of terrible undeserved suffering (chapters 1 and 2)? Will Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fall down and worship the golden image or choose the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:1–30, esp. "who put their trust in Him" in verse 28)? Will Daniel continue praying as always or will he compromise and pray behind closed doors (Dan. 6:3–15)? Jesus' second test (following the order in Luke): will he seek to promote himself to ruler of the kingdoms of the world or be faithful to God (Matt. 4:8–10; Luke 4:5–8)? "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12). "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). Steadfastness, endurance, or perseverance (all good translations of *hypomone* in Greek) will help you reach this level of faithfulness (Rom. 2:7; James 1:3–4, 12). The member of our church mentioned earlier also passed this test of faithfulness a few days later. Instead of desiring a lot of overtime, he told me, "I want my treasure in the next life, not here! I want to do youth ministry!" He counted the cost of faithfulness and was willing to pay the price to be faithful. Think about this definition: *Faithfulness is being willing to fulfill or accomplish God's plan for your life—at any cost.* At the beginning of his ministry "Jesus said to them [his disciples], 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work'" (John 4:34). At the end of his ministry he said "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do" (17:4). And faithfulness cost him his life: "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I am thirsty'" (19:28). *Personal application:* will you accept God's will and plan for your life *at any cost*? Will you be faithful to Me?

LEVEL 4: TEST OF LOVE

This is a test of your love for God: do you really love Him with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? It's the last and hardest test: a test to see if you're able to keep the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). Temptations to apostasy or idolatry create tests of love: "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:3). In a test of love you're asked or commanded to do something you really don't want to do. Abraham was so tested: did he love his son Isaac more than God? His obedience (Gen. 22:12) and love for God were both tested (implied by the context of Gen. 22:1–19). For Jesus, going to the cross was a test of obedience and love for his Father. In a test of love you have to once again count the cost in order to move up to this level: am I willing to pay the price to love God with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength? The price can be very costly! Ask Jesus. He literally sweat blood over this test (Luke 22:44)! And you. Will you love Me... *more than all*?