

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #1

I. Introduction

Tonight, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we begin a new teaching series on “The Purpose of Testing”.

Psalm 66:10-12

For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.

For the next few months I will seek to show you how our Sovereign God uses all the tests, trials and tribulations of life to bring about His great purpose-in our lives.

I realize that much of this teaching will run counter clockwise to the current Christian culture where you can't talk about testing and tribulation and sermons have to be soaked in sunshine; I call them “sermonettes”. The problem is...

A.W. Tozer

“Sermonettes make Christianettes.”

Fair weather followers of Jesus may not make it to the end when they hit tough times because no one told them tough times are normal. Many ministers won't tell you what the late Leonard Ravenhill put right up front...

Leonard Ravenhill

“The Christian life is no easy road. To say so smells either of compromise or ignorance of the Christian way, or both. The preachers of the ‘easy road’ do not know their Bible; nor do they cause Satan much trouble.”

He also said this...

“If Jesus had preached the same message ministers preach today, He would have never been crucified.”

Leonard Ravenhill

So we will run the risk of crucifixion to bring you this series on “The Purpose of Testing”, beginning with...

3 Things You Need to Know

- 1. Testing, trials, troubles, and tribulation are inevitable**
- 2. But our Sovereign God has a Divine purpose for them all**
- 3. Knowing God’s purpose for testing will resolve all our questions**

I. 3 Things You Need To Know

A. Testing is Inevitable

Acts 14:21-22

And when they (Paul and Barnabas) had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many *tribulations* enter the kingdom of God."

The Biblical Illustrator

"Tribulation is a term implying ‘crushing’ or ‘fretting’ through narrow and intricate ways. Saint Paul uses the word to signify a ‘narrowness of space to move in’, or bearing pressing burdens that must be encountered on our way to the land of rest.”

1. Let me tell you my testimony about my first encounter with these verses.
2. The first thing I noticed was how Paul and Barnabas “strengthened the souls of the disciples”:

Acts 14:21-22 NLT

...they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

- They exhorted (encouraged) them to “continue in THE FAITH-salvation is not a one-time experience-it is a JOURNEY-toward the Kingdom

- They “reminded them that the only way to enter the Kingdom of God was through testing and trial!

3. I remember thinking what a difference this was from the preaching I’d been given; no one ever told me that my trials and troubles were a normal part of the pathway to my maturity!

1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

Therefore...we sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

a. Paul is writing to an afflicted church going through great tribulation. So he sends Timothy to *establish* and *encourage* them in their faith.

b. How? 1. Do not be shaken by what you’re going through; 2. Know you were “appointed” to it.

1 Thessalonians 3:4-5

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

4. Paul’s pattern for building strong believers was to teach them that all God’s people have an appointment with trials and troubles! And don’t let the Devil tell you different!

Matthew Henry

“It must be counted upon that all who will go to heaven must expect tribulation and persecution in their way there. But is this the way to confirm the souls of the disciples, and to engage them to continue in the faith? One would think it would rather shock them, and make them weary. But no, as the matter is fairly stated and taken entire, it will help to confirm them, and fix them for Christ.”

5. The Apostle Peter said it this way:

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

a. The Apostle James said it this way:

James 1:2-4

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

b. One great Bible scholar said this...

Albert Barnes

“When we are persecuted and afflicted, we may remember that it has been the lot of Christians from the beginning. We tread a path that has been watered by the tears of the saints, and rendered sacred by the shedding of the best blood on the earth. The Savior trod that path; and it is enough that the "disciple be as his master, and the servant as his lord," Matt 10:24-25.

So the 1st thing you need to know is that testing is inevitable!

B. The 2nd Thing You Need to Know: Our Sovereign God Has a Purpose

3 Things You Need to Know

- 1. Testing, trials, troubles, and tribulation are inevitable**
- 2. But our Sovereign God has a Divine purpose for them all**

1. Almost all Christians give lip service to the “Sovereignty of God”; but in my experience, very few churchgoers really know what it means!

Sovereignty of God

God’s rule and authority over all things; that God’s choices and decisions are in no way constrained by factors outside Himself.

2. The sovereignty of God is the biblical doctrine that teaches us that God is in control of all things. ALL things.

Chip Ingram

“God’s sovereignty simply means God is in control. There is absolutely nothing that happens in the universe that is outside of God’s influence and authority.”

3. Nothing just happens! There is nothing that ever has happened or ever will happen that God has not either decreed or allowed to happen; including our trials, testings or tribulations.

R.C. Sproul

“If there is one renegade molecule running loose anywhere in the universe, God is not sovereign.”

4. There are only 2 explanations for what goes on in the universe; the randomness of the atheist and the evolutionist or the Christian doctrine of the sovereignty of God! And yet...

Charles Spurgeon

“No doctrine in the whole word of God has more excited the hatred of mankind than the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God.”

5. Why hated? Because the vanity of sinful man simply cannot accept the idea of an absolutely Sovereign Creator/God who is in control of all things.

6. But without a Sovereign God how can we believe there is a greater purpose or an explanation for all the troubles we go through in this world?

Which brings us to the 3rd thing we need to know...

3 Things You Need to Know

- 1. Testing, trials, troubles, and tribulation are inevitable**
- 2. But our Sovereign God has a Divine purpose for them all**
- 3. Knowing God’s purpose for testing resolves all our questions**

C. Knowing God's Purpose for Testing Resolves All Our Questions

1. The God of the Bible is a God of Purpose! There is a Divine plan behind all the events of history; everything is moving toward a particular destination.

2. In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul tells us what we need to know about where we're going to end up:

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

3. Most believers know Romans 28; it's like a band aid we pull out of the box when *bad* things happen.

- We know it at a funeral
- We use it when a friend is fired

4. But when something hits *US*; depression; divorce; bankruptcy; betrayal, heartbreak, or calamity...somehow we seem to **forget these 3 things:**

- Testing is inevitable
- But God is sovereign; there is a purpose for it
- That God is working all things together for our good-conforming us to the image of His Son!

The same Sovereign God who has appointed us to a good end has also appointed our problems as the means by which He will get us there.

5. This is the great explanation for the problems of life: God is allowing them; He is at work in them; for one great all-consuming purpose...to conform us to the image of Christ.

T.D. Jakes

“We need to believe there is a greater good. If we don’t we will forever play the victim or feel like Satan or some demon has taken over my life. I need to know-to believe Romans 28-I need to know that nothing just happens!”

6. God is big enough, great enough to work *all things* together for good.

All things means, well, *All Things*

- My mistakes
- My bad decisions
- My spiritual dryness
- My current circumstances

Arthur W. Pink

“But how do we know all things work together for good? The answer is, because all things are under the control of, and are being regulated by the Supreme Sovereign, and because He has naught but thoughts of love toward His own, then all things are ordered by Him that they are made to minister to our ultimate good.”

7. No matter where you are, God will get you through!

Matthew Henry

“It is true we must count upon much tribulation, but this is encouraging, that we shall get through it; we shall not be lost and perish in it. It is a Red Sea, but the Lord has opened a way through it, for the redeemed of the Lord to pass over.

Matthew Henry

We must go down to trouble, but we shall come up again. We shall not only get through it, but get through it into the kingdom of God; and the joy and glory of the end will make abundant amends for all the difficulties and hardships we may meet with in the way.

III. Conclusion

A. Making Sense of Our Suffering

When we come to the divine revelation of the purpose of testing we have arrived at a place where we can make sense of our suffering.

1. Let me review: The divine revelation is knowing 3 things:

3 Things You Need to Know

1. Testing, trials, troubles, and tribulation are inevitable

2. But our Sovereign God has a Divine purpose for them all

3. Knowing God's purpose for testing will resolve all our questions

a. Troubles, tests and trials no longer surprise me; they are signposts that I am making my way into the Kingdom

b. I know now that God is sovereign; there is a Divine purpose working all things together for my good

c. And I now know that the purpose of testing is to conform me to the image of Christ.

2. Now I know that God is more interested in my character than in my comfort!

3. I have a whole new way of looking at life.

4. Let me close by making this very personal.

B. Where Are You? Right Now?

1. What are you going through? What are you facing?

2. Whatever it is, it didn't just happen; God can work with it; He will make it work for my good.

Arthur Pink, "The Sovereignty of God"

"Nothing is so tranquilizing and so stabilizing as knowing that the Lord Himself is on the throne of the universe, working all things after the counsel of His own will."

3. So you've made mistakes; stupid decisions; we feel we've lost God's blessing...

George Warnock

“We may even feel that our circumstances are the result of some satanic influence that would rob us of the blessing. Often we may not recognize that it is a Divine influence to urge us to move forward to greater depths in God.”

4. By the time we finish this series, you'll find you've come to those greater depths because you understand the “Purpose of Testing”.

Closing Prayer

Title