



Stepping Stones

Ten Tests to Prepare You for Glory









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Ten Tests to Prepare You for Glory

Nevin Bass

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Dedicated with love and deepest appreciation to my wonderful family.

To Tammy, my best friend and fellow laborer. You are still the sweetest girl I know. May I always be worthy of your love.


To Jonathan, who was requested from God. Our first gift has become a wonderful, godly man. And also to your lovely wife Dottie. May God bless the two of you with a long and fruitful ministry.

To Rebekah, our love and hopes are bound up in you. Your grace and charm is the glue that holds so much together. And also to Brian, that tall, handsome husband of yours. May God grant to you the desires of your heart.

To Benjamin, the son of my right hand. You are a strong and loyal defender of truth and God's people. May the God of Heaven protect you and keep you safe as you walk with Him.

To Cheyenne, our child of the rising sun. God knew just what we needed when He gave us our sunny little sweet button. May your eyes always twinkle the way they do when you sit in my lap.

A special thanks goes to Brother Kelsey Griffin for his continued encouragement and for writing the foreword. Brother Griffin has been my instructor in Bible College, and I consider him one of the most important mentors in my life.





Foreword

NEVIN BASS HAS TACKLED a subject in this book that multitudes spend the majority of their time trying to avoid or deny. We like to learn, but we do not want the test. We are often like Naaman, who “thought” God was going to do the work some other way (2 Kings 5:11). Do not miss out on God’s ordained glory for you because you “thought” that God surely had a better way to guide you to the Promised Land. Thank God Naaman was willing to listen to good advice and change! May we do the same as we read of Israel’s experience. There is not a more obvious fact than that our God is a testing God. He does not wait until the end of the semester to administer one test, but, as Job put it (Job 7:18), He tests us every moment. Here we find just ten of those tests, and those were administered merely to get Israel started on its road to liberty. What a marvelous opportunity those people had. It would be foolish to ignore their failure and thus make the same mistake they did when we have recorded here the successful way to glory. First we recognize here the necessity to bury our past, for if we fail to bury our past, our past will bury us. Then we must resolutely face these inevitable trials and put into practice these valuable guidelines that will propel us into that incorruptible and unfading glory that awaits the victor.

It will be obvious to the reader of this book that God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called. Notice also that His work is not a sudden transformation but a slow, steady, and continual process of adjustments through situations He expects us to pick up on and turn to our benefit trials of life that will most naturally be catastrophic to the



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world. God, who did everything possible to keep Israel from failure, continues today with the same tests. Herein lies our opportunity to “become” more than conquerors.

—Kelsey Griffin





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Introduction

*T*HE ONLY THING CONSISTENT about life is change. From the moment of conception, change is a consistent quality of the journey we call life. Everything about life breathes and exudes change, from the four seasons to the march from newborn to adulthood—all of life involves change.

So what about spiritual life? Should we expect spiritual life to be totally unlike everything else we know about life? Shouldn't we expect spiritual progression to involve movement, growth, and change? In what way is one spiritually mature who has never ventured beyond the initial steps of faith?

The truth is simple: Spiritual growth does indeed involve movement, progression, and change. But change for change's sake is not the point. God's plan for spiritual growth is growth with purpose. The Lord has designed the spiritual life as a journey. Simply stated, this journey is a purposeful progression toward a destination. Let's call that destination "glory." I will define glory in this context as God's ultimate desire for your life. The Lord intends your walk of faith to be a Spirit-directed journey toward His ultimate purpose for your life. Living for the Lord is a march toward glory.

This view of life in Christ begs many questions. Isn't the true destination of the spiritual life eternity in the presence of the Lord? How does the Lord encourage change in our life that will further His purpose? What will "glory" look like for me, and how will I know when I get there? Let's take these questions in order.

Isn't the Destination of a Walk of Faith Heaven?

In the long term, yes. Beyond this earthly existence, God's goal for all His people is heaven. But between here and there is often a whole lot of living. God has a purpose for your life on earth other than His desire to convey you to heaven. God's ultimate design for your life on earth is a position of blessing and fruitfulness. It is the position of maximum benefit for His kingdom. God wants to bless you and for you to be a blessing to His work and His people. This place of maximum benefit to God, yourself, and others is God's ultimate for you. This indeed is a land flowing with milk and honey, and it is found on earth at the apex of your spiritual progression.

This position of blessing, however, will not be obtained if you are unwilling to follow God's direction along the path of change. God's ultimates for you do not come cheaply, and His glory will not be entered by accident. We must follow His purposeful direction and be willing to change and grow along the way.

How Does the Lord Encourage Change That Will Bring Me Closer to Glory?

Quite often God shaves with a hired razor (Isa. 7:20). God takes that which the enemy means for our harm and uses it to fashion us and prepare us for glory. When we understand this, we can see that how we respond to adverse circumstance is much more relevant to our progression than what kind of circumstance we encounter. Stated another way, trials come to all, but how we respond to our trials is more important than the trials themselves.

God prepares those whom He uses. He qualifies those whom He leads to glory. The process of preparation and qualification involves trials. Go ahead, take a deep breath, and say that word to yourself. *Trials!* Your trials are just proving grounds to develop the character of Christ in you. As Christ's character is fashioned in you, you are receiving the tools needed to fulfill and claim God's ultimate for your life. If you will be ready to enter into God's ultimate for you when the time comes, you must endure and pass the tests designed to prepare you. Our tests are designed to encourage personal growth (otherwise known as change) and to prepare us for glory.



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The moment you encounter a trial, you face a choice. You can surrender yourself to the will of God, humble yourself, and seek His grace. Or you can “buck yourself up” and harden yourself against the trial. The first is the response God desires, for His grace or His divine enablement flows to the humble (James 4:6). The other response of hardening yourself against the trial effectively slams the door against God’s help, and you are left to face the trial on your own.

Many do exactly that. They face their trials with a clenched jaw and stoic determination. Before long their attitude toward the trial evolves, and they begin to believe the trial was brought about by God because “He hates my stinkin’ guts!” or some such foolishness. This is the problem with a hardened heart. It rejects God’s grace and ends up blaming God for what should have been a benefit to man. The problem is not the trial; it is man’s attitude toward the trial.

“Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness...” (Heb. 3:8).

“While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (Heb. 3:15).

The topic of this book is the method whereby God prepares His people to claim the perfect place of blessing for their lives. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews dealt with the subject of trials that the New Testament Hebrew believers were facing. The writer pointed these beleaguered saints back to their forefathers’ experiences in the wilderness journey. This group of liberated slaves in the Old Testament experienced ten tests during their journey out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The Israelites’ tests in the wilderness were designed to prepare them for God’s ultimate plan for them. Instead of humbling themselves and seeking the will of God, they became hard and rebelled against what God was doing. This is one of the central truths exposed and explained in the epistle to the Hebrews. It was used to help New Testament believers accept and benefit from the trials they were currently experiencing. The trials God allows into our lives will either be stepping stones to greatness or stumbling blocks of destruction.

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As we begin our study of the ten tests in the wilderness, please understand the implications for you and me today. How do you react to the tests God designs to prepare you for His ultimate? Will you humble yourself and seek His will in the midst of your trial? Or will you harden

The trials God allows into our lives will either be stepping stones to greatness or stumbling blocks of destruction.

your heart and blame your problems on God? We aren't allowed to choose our trials, but we do choose how we react to them. How we choose to react will determine whether we grow from the trial and ultimately if we are ready when the time comes to enter the position of blessing that God has prepared for us—which brings us to the last question.

What Will “Glory” Look Like for Me, and How Will I Know When I Get There?

Perhaps I can answer that question in this way: Glory is the position of blessing the enemy tries to keep you from entering. Once you enter the land of blessing, the enemy must change tactics. Now he must try to alter your character in order to keep you from claiming all God has for you. On the wilderness side of Jordan, the enemy tried to keep Israel out. Once the Israelites entered the land, the enemy tried to keep them from claiming the blessing before them. On the wilderness side, God shaped and prepared Israel to enter in. Once in the land, God encouraged Israel to take full possession. Is the Spirit preparing you to come in or to take possession where you are? Look at the landscape around you. Is it barren and dry, or is it fruitful and blessed? Is the Lord preparing weapons for you or encouraging you to use the weapons He has provided? Is the enemy trying to *keep* you out or *drive* you out? Is the primary work of God at this phase of your life presently developing you or using you? The frank and honest answer to these questions will reveal which side of the Jordan River you are on at present.

I offer a word of advice to those on the wilderness side of God's promises. Don't be satisfied to live on the edge of God's best. Two and



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a half tribes of the twelve tribes of Israel did exactly that. They decided that living close to the Promised Land yet on the wilderness side of Jordan was good enough for them. And thus they were always on the outside of what God was doing. Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed by the opportunity for greatness and instead lived in obscurity. They began their separation from the rest of Israel with controversy (see Joshua 23), and thus the uncommitted and unconsecrated are always misjudged and misunderstood. But can you blame their brothers who lived on the hallelujah side of the river? The river that should have been a line of separation between Israel and others was now a barrier between a certain part of Israel and the majority who dwelt in the Land of Promise. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh chose to remain on the wilderness side of the Jordan. Their exile from God's perfect will in the Promised Land was self-imposed. Such is the life of the uncommitted and unconsecrated. They are content to live on the fringe and are the first to fall in an open conflict with the enemy. They are forever misunderstood by their brothers and live in a no man's land between God's promises and the Wilderness of Sin. My advice to those on the outside bank of Jordan is to take the plunge and come on over to the land of the blessed!

For those struggling with trials and who have yet to enter the land of blessing, the Word of God offers encouragement. The struggles you are encountering are God's way of bringing about internal spiritual change. God will change those He uses. Change is implied in the call to service. We can observe this principle in Christ's call of certain fishermen.

The Power of Becoming

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him (Mark 1:16–18).

When Jesus walked along the shore of Galilee at the beginning of His ministry, He passed by Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea because they were fishermen. When the

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Lord gave His invitation to these two brothers, the way He spoke is almost peculiar. Jesus did not say, “Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” He said—“I will make you to become fishers of men” (v. 17).

The entire process of discipleship is implied in the Greek word *genesthia*—“to become.” Jesus did not promise to zap Simon and Andrew so that instantly they would be super soul winners. Jesus said that as they followed Him, He would activate a process whereby they would become fishers of men. The process of becoming was part of following, and one could not follow without also becoming.

And so Peter and Andrew were faced with a decision at this point: Were they content being fishermen or did they want the Lord to make them to become something else? The question for you and me remains the same: Are you content being whatever it is you are, or would you like Jesus to make you to become whatever it is He wants you to become? I believe we must become what He wants us to become so that

we may do whatever it is He wants us to do. Becoming what God wants us to be, once it is achieved, is the position of blessing I call “glory.”

The dynamic power of God is invested in those who are becoming. The power of inertia works against those who settle into being. Becoming demands more of us than simply being; therefore, the Lord Himself has pledged His power to those who are

willing to become. The power of becoming is what discipleship is all about. Let’s break this down a bit more.

Are you content
being whatever it is you
are, or would you like
Jesus to make you to
become whatever it is
He wants you to become?



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They Forsook Their Nets—Release the Present

Come ye after me.... And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him (Mark 1:17–18).

The power of becoming is part and parcel of our relationship with Jesus. We must be willing to forsake our own plans, our own ideas, our own ambitions, and follow Jesus. What we become will be determined by whom we associate with and what we are willing to allow Him to change. I know this is very simple—almost elementary—yet it is overlooked so often.

If you want to become what Jesus wants you to become, you must be willing to forsake your nets and follow Him! Are you willing to forsake your plans and your own dreams? You will never become a fisher of men unless you are willing to quit being a fisherman. This will require you to leave your nets where they are and follow Jesus. In this sense seizing the future requires releasing the present and forsaking the past.

Those nets represent the power of inertia. An object at rest has a tendency to remain that way. Inertia must be overcome by a stronger force or things remain the same. The power of being can only be overcome by the power of becoming. If you will become what God wants you to become, you must forsake your nets. This is the essence of our journey from bondage to self and into freedom and fruitfulness in His promises.

I Will Make You to Become—Commit to Relationship

Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men (Mark 1:17).

The secret behind the power of becoming is in the One speaking the promise—“I will make you to become.” The power of becoming does not lie in the human will. The power of becoming does not originate in the heart of man. The power of becoming is none other than the transforming power of our awesome God!

Jesus did not tell the disciples that He would introduce them to a wonderful twelve-step program that would transform their lives. He



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was not talking about reforming their sinful thoughts through positive thinking. Jesus' promise had nothing to do with having a positive mental attitude. It was all about their relationship with Him. If we will keep our hand firmly in His, our trials will merely be the tools God uses to transform our lives.

Why must men try to complicate something that is as simple as following Jesus? The power to become does not come from within; it comes from the One we walk with and relate to daily. And that is a promise from the Lord Himself—"I will make you to become...." All you and I have to do is to stay plugged in with Jesus! All we must focus upon is maintaining our relationship with Him. He will do the heavy lifting involved in transformation. We do not have to transform anything; we just must remain close to Him and place our trust in Him. And that trust must remain firm even in the midst of trials, which are merely the instruments of change the Lord allows into our lives.

Fishers of Men—Accept His Design

Do you think Peter and Andrew understood what these words meant when they first heard them? Do you think they even had a clue what Jesus intended for their lives? I would have to say that it is very doubtful.

Do any of us really know what the Lord intends for us to become? It is certain that we will never discover His purpose if we are content with being and quit becoming. I am not today what I was yesterday. By the grace of God I will not be tomorrow what I am today. I am still becoming what God wants me to become.

It is a pitiful thing when men become enamored with what they imagine the Lord wants them to become. The problem with this is that men invest much energy and thought into that which may not even be what God desires. I have even known men to run from what they imagine God wants them to become. They will never learn what God wants them to become because they are busy running from what they think God desires.

If Peter and Andrew were uncertain of where the will of God would take them when they began to follow Jesus, it is pretty certain that you

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and I will likewise be uncertain. The uncertainty of the journey is one reason it is hard for many to forsake their nets.

“But, what assurance do we have that the destination will be desirable?” you may ask. This is a straightforward and fair question. The answer is found in the One you are to follow. From man’s perspective, the investment we make is not made into what we are becoming—the investment is made into a relationship with the One we are following. How do we know that what He will make us to become will be something we desire? We don’t. All we know is that we get to walk with Him throughout the process. And fellowship with Jesus makes the entire process of discipleship worth the investment.

Before Peter, Andrew, and the rest of the disciples could become involved in this process they had to forsake what they were. This was the first step. They then had to invest in their relationship with the Lord Jesus. And this is the critical step. The Lord wants us to invest in a relationship with Him while He invests His power in transforming our nature and character. This is the secret of the power to become.

And so Peter and Andrew were faced with a decision just as you and I are faced with a decision. Are we content to remain as we are, or are we willing to walk with Jesus and become whatever He wants us to become? If we walk with Jesus, we must forsake our past. We must release what we are in order to become what He desires. And then we must invest ourselves into a relationship with the Lord. This investment must remain steadfast even in the face of hardship and trials.

Just so we don’t feel that we are the ones making all the investment into this process, He reminds us that He is the One who provides the power to make us become. It is true that we must invest our future in our relationship with Him, but He invests His power in our transformation.

Receiving God’s ultimate for our lives depends on our own willingness to become what He wants us to be. Those willing to accept the

Fellowship with Jesus
makes the entire
process of discipleship
worth the investment.



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challenge of discipleship and experience God's transforming power will be the ones to inhabit the Land of Promise. We will not receive God's best if we cannot release our nets. We will not receive God's best if we are unwilling to release our present.





Preparing for the Journey

CHAPTER 1

But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it (Num. 14:21–24).

*N*UMBERS 14 TAKES US to a time when Israel has just failed its tenth and final test for spiritual growth. It has been a little over three years since Israel left Egypt on the night of the first Passover. After all this time and these ten opportunities for growth, the Israelites have proven they are incapable of following the Lord and achieving His ultimate in their lives. There remains nothing but judgment for these people. The Lord proposes to smite the nation with pestilence, disinherit them, and make of Moses a nation mightier than they (Num. 14:11–12). Moses pleads with Jehovah to spare the people, to which God consents. However gracious the Lord is in dealing with them, none from this generation will possess the Promised Land. None from this age will realize their potential blessing.

Why is this so? An explanation is given by God in Numbers 14:21–24. Because in spite of all the miracles God wrought on their behalf,

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they refused to hearken unto the Lord and instead tempted God ten times. They were guilty of misusing the tests God allowed in their lives, which were intended to develop and strengthen them. These same opportunities for growth in their unbelieving hearts became provocations (Num. 14:11) and temptations directed toward God (Num. 14:22).

One man's wilderness is another man's interlude with greatness. One man's severe trial is another man's preparation for glory. Will our trials be our servants, or will they become our masters? The answer will depend on our attitude toward our trials and our willingness to change. Many in the Church seem to have what I call a "welfare mentality," an attitude that believers are entitled to a life free from struggle and hardship. After all, they say, "We are God's people!" They seem unable to accept any sort of trial. Since trials are how God perfects us and prepares us for greater things, greatness will always elude us until we are able to transform our thinking and thus reform our living. At the heart of the welfare mentality is the false idea that the only pressing spiritual need of mankind is that of salvation. Indeed, salvation, which is reconciliation to God, is the most pressing need, but it certainly is not the only need. A life of sin lived through a depraved nature is certain to

Greatness will always elude us until we are able to transform our thinking and thus reform our living.

impose a view of God, self, and circumstances that will not be eradicated through the new birth alone. Attaining the spiritual life in Christ Jesus will not be as simple as attaining salvation.

Lest we overlook this fact, the New Testament epistles stand as witnesses of the believers' need to grow, to progress, and to become what God knows we can be. This truth is illus-

trated by the fact that there are no epistles addressed to unbelievers. Unbelievers must first find themselves in the Book of Acts, the book of new birth, before they can find their place in the epistles. And after entering the epistles, the theme is no longer conversion but rather Christian growth and development.

If everything needed to achieve God's perfect design for your life was received at salvation, there would be no need for further change. And yet the Christian experience is described as a walk by faith. A walk indicates movement, progression, growth, and change. Many times the tool God uses to goad us onward in that progression of faith is trials. These trials allowed into our lives are designed to prepare us for the position of blessing God desires us to claim.

At issue is not what happens to us but how we react to the things in life we encounter. Our reaction can become sin, which will rob us of any benefit we could derive from the test. We do well to remember that no pilgrim ever stepped out of Egypt and immediately into the Promised Land. There is a wilderness separating the two. And the wilderness is filled with tests, divinely situated to prepare you for blessing.

The entire nation of Israel faced the same trials and hardships in the wilderness journey. Most rejected God's method of preparation for His ultimate position of blessing, but not all. Joshua and Caleb encountered the same trials in the wilderness before reaching Kadesh-barnea as did the rest of the people. What turned the other people bitter and caused them to lose their potential in God became a benefit to these men of faith. By failing the wilderness tests and refusing to grow or change, the people proved themselves unsuited for God's best. On the other hand, Joshua and Caleb used these tests as stepping stones to greatness. How you react to your trials will determine whether you are suited and able to claim God's best for your life.

Tests Are to Prepare Us and Cause Growth



The exodus generation was somehow able to turn the method God would use to prepare them for His ultimate for their lives into a temptation of the Lord! Mathew Henry in his famous commentary writes that the people tempted God by challenging His power (“if He could”), His goodness (“if He would”), and His faithfulness (“would He remember”). God's purpose in these trials was to prepare them so they would have the strength needed to claim and conquer the land. But they could



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only see their tests as an opportunity to fail and perish in the wilderness.

And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt: But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 13:17–18).

The wilderness way was selected by the Lord in order that the children of Israel would have the opportunity to grow incrementally as they were exposed to a graduated series of tests. It was benevolent Providence that they were led up “harnessed” by way of the wilderness along the Red Sea. Is God’s “harness” too constraining for you? Those that God will bless He must first test. Can the Lord depend on you to follow His direction once you reach the Promised Land? Your attitude toward the harness and the tests in the wilderness will reveal your trustworthiness with regards to future blessing.

God does not want His people to fail. This is exactly what the people claimed on several occasions during their trials. Trials are not allowed into our lives to cause failure. Rather they are calculated and measured to stimulate growth and strengthen faith. It is the work of a carnal heart to turn God’s blessing into a temptation of the Lord Himself!

God wants to bless you and lead you incrementally to greater and greater responsibility. As you grow and mature in the faith, your ability to accept and claim God’s ultimate blessing for your life also increases. Your trials and struggles are intended to be a blessing and a tremendous benefit to you. Trials will be your servants if you are willing to accept them and to grow. Growth requires change. You will never be able to claim God’s best if you refuse to change. God allows trials to come our way because trials bring an opportunity to grow unlike any other life experience we encounter. Hear the Word of the Lord concerning trials:

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no (Deut. 8:1–2).

The threefold purpose of God in these tests is herein revealed:

- To humble—Grace flows to the humble. When we are humbled in our trials, more Grace is extended to us. If we humble ourselves in our trial, we can be the beneficiary of increased grace or holy enablement.
- To prove—Trials are a means to prepare us for later use. Trials are a proving ground to prepare us for greater things.
- To know what is in our hearts—This is a self-revelation. An omniscient God requires no information from man. Adverse circumstances reveal to man what is in his heart.

God's method was to prepare the Israelites first, thus ensuring victory for His people. This is God's method yet today. We have an incorrect view of our trials because of the prevalence of the welfare mentality. Our trials are intended to prepare us for the next phase of God's will for our lives. How often we, like Israel, turn God's intended blessing into a temptation of God, as we push the envelope of His tolerance and patience through constant complaining!

Altering God's Purpose



After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise (Num. 14:34).

I must introduce you to the unfortunate result of continued resistance to growth. There is an invisible line that, once crossed, disqualifies



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and renders one incapable of receiving God's ultimate in one's life. Where this line is only God knows. If man knew, the corruption of human nature would cause him to attempt to live right along the edge. The idea of crossing that line is examined in depth in the Hebrew epistle. The sternest warnings of apostasy in the New Testament are found in this epistle. The recipients of this epistle were in fact the offspring of those who perished in the wilderness.

What the exodus generation did was to cause God's purpose for them to be altered: "...and ye shall know my breach of promise" (Num. 14:34). The Israelites did this by steadfastly refusing to accept the tests God allowed that were designed to strengthen and prepare them for blessing. I understand the expression used by Jehovah in Numbers 14:34 to indicate a conditional covenant with the individuals addressed. I am not alone in this interpretation. Adam Clarke (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*) wrote:

The meaning however appears to be this: As God had promised to bring them into the good land, provided they kept his statutes, ordinances, etc., and they had now broken their engagements, he was no longer held by his covenant; and therefore, by excluding them from the promised land, he showed them at once his annulling of the covenant which they had broken, and his vengeance because they had broken it.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible says:

My breach of promise—i.e., that in consequence of your violation of the covenant between you and me, by breaking the terms of it, it shall be null and void on my part, as I shall withhold the blessings I promised in that covenant to confer on you on condition of your obedience.

The altering of God's purpose is rendered "that ye may know what it is, when I withdraw my hand" in Coverdale's Bible of 1535.

Just as it was with Israel, God's ultimate for our lives is a conditional covenant. Our rebellion and provocation may actually alter God's purpose for our lives. The blessings intended for us may fall to another

due to our own rebellion. You will not receive and come into God's glory but by your own obedience and by successfully passing through the tests set before you to prepare your heart. What a terrible thing to breach God's promise and to see God's purpose and intended blessing for you altered! We must always be prepared to allow our trials to become the agents of change in our hearts and minds. We must remain ready and willing to change.

The next thirty-seven years of history described in Numbers is a transition between the exodus generation and those under the age of majority at the time they left Egypt. The next generation would inherit God's promises. Very little is recorded about the thirty-seven years after the people refused to enter the Promised Land because little of significance happened. During these thirty-seven years, approximately 600,000 adult males and probably the same number of females died. The period of wilderness travels covers forty years, including the beginning and the final days before entering the Promised Land. Israel wandered aimlessly for thirty-seven years, never going forward to Canaan or backward to Egypt.

Numbers 33:19–36 gives the progressive list of places where the people camped during these thirty-seven years. And yet none of these places was to be a permanent habitation. Israel knew no permanent dwelling place—the people camped in nineteen places in thirty-seven years. The only thing constant in their lives was their own steadfast refusal to change.

Ten Opportunities for Growth



Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (1 Cor. 10:11).

Israel in the wilderness is a perfect demonstration of a people who refused to grow. Consider the series of tests listed below and how a successful completion of these tests would have prepared the people to enter the Promised Land.



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1. Conquering Fear—At the Red Sea (Exod. 14:11–12)
 - Instead of trusting God to deliver them from Pharaoh’s army, they accused Moses of wanting to kill them.
 - They blamed this situation on Moses for “making” them flee Egypt.
2. Beating Bitterness—At the waters of Marah (Exod. 15:23–26)
 - Again they blamed Moses.
 - The water was not as bitter as their hearts were becoming.
 - Every trial they encountered was someone else’s fault.
 - They couldn’t accept the fact that God was trying them through their circumstances.
 - There had to be some other reason because they shouldn’t have to face such trying circumstances.
3. Cultivating Thankfulness—The people murmured at Elim (Exod. 16:1–18).
4. Trusting and Obeying God—God provided bread in the wilderness (Exod. 16:19–31).
5. Enduring Dryness—The chiding at Rephidim (Exod. 17:1–7)
6. Dealing with Delays—The people tired of waiting and made a golden calf (Exod. 32).
 - We must learn to remain steadfast even during times of painful delay.
 - Achieving God’s best is not an overnight thing.
 - Are we willing to remain true to our convictions even when things don’t happen as quickly as we would like?
7. The Crisis of Unsettling Change—There was a burning unleashed at Taberah (Num. 11:1–3).
8. Burying Lust—The Graves of Lust (Num. 11:4–35)
 - The lust of the flesh begins when our soul loathes God’s provision.
 - When we no longer delight in what God has done, lust consumes us and will take us to a grave in the wilderness without achieving God’s promise.

9. Believing God's Word—Spies sent to “verify” God's promises (Deut. 1:22–23)
 - It was the people's plan to send spies to investigate the land.
 - Moses went along with the plan, and God gave consent (Num. 13:1–25).
 - But this was the people's idea due to their unwillingness to take God at His Word.
10. Obeying God's Word—Refusing to enter the Promised Land (Deut. 1:26–46; Num. 12:26–14:37)
 - This was a direct rebellion against God's commandment.
 - It was also the “last straw” with God—they had failed all ten tests and managed to tempt God with each opportunity for personal growth and development that He provided.

The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place (Deut. 1:30–31).

Every child of God must endure testing so we can grow and develop in the ways of God. God's purpose in allowing trials into our lives is to prepare us for glory—His ultimate plan for us. God's ultimate is a stretch for anyone. Salvation is just the beginning of your journey. You will not be ready or able to receive God's greatest blessing until you have mastered these ten tests.

God's ultimate is a stretch for anyone. Salvation is just the beginning of your journey.

God was willing to go before Israel, to fight for the children of Israel, to provide for their needs, and even to carry them “as a man doth bear his son,” yet they must study their lessons and grow. They failed each one of their tests because they were unwilling to grow, to learn; quite simply, they were unwilling to change. Their attitude toward their



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trials proved that they believed the only thing that needed to be changed was their circumstances.

This is the attitude that the “welfare gospel” encourages. Believers are told they should steadfastly resist whatever adverse situation they encounter. They should “claim by faith” a change in their situation that would be to their own liking. This message never encourages believers to examine *their own hearts and spirits* in a time of trial. As a consequence of this view of the Gospel, believers endure one trial after another without ever growing or being changed. Their trials never become their servants but are only viewed as an enemy.

Please remember these things about trials:

- God only allows trials in our lives to prepare us for greater things.
- God’s purpose in our trials is more often internal than external.
- Your trial is a test to get at something inside you that could not otherwise be uncovered.
- Rather than asking God to remove the trial and change your circumstance, ask God to bring about a change in you as a result of the trial.
- When God’s purpose in allowing our trial is completed, He will remove the trial, and we will move on to the next test or perhaps begin to see the blessing He is preparing us to receive.

When the truth regarding our trials is not fully grasped, a grossly simplistic view of faith is often proclaimed. Instead of presenting one’s self to the Lord for His service, people are taught to “claim” the things that their hearts desire. The welfare gospel produces a mentality of spiritual entitlement. People believe they are entitled to a carefree, prosperous existence simply because they are Christians. In his book *Turning the Curse into a Blessing*, Dr. Paul Caram writes that this type of belief system “promotes ease, comfort, convenience, a quick answer, and the fastest way out of unpleasant circumstances.” This is an extremely popular message, but it is not the message of Calvary! Jesus’ message is that we must take up our cross and follow Him. The message

of Calvary is not about entitlement but conforming our will to the will of God. Calvary is about emptying, sacrifice, suffering, and submission.

Calvary comes before the empty tomb; crucifixion before resurrection; submission before exaltation. The Creator of the universe humbled Himself to be born of a poor virgin. He was laid in a manger and eventually nailed to a tree. As a man, He submitted His human will to the will of God. And thus Christ Jesus was able to realize God's purpose through His suffering. Only through submission to the will of God will we ever discover God's purpose in our suffering. The entitlement gospel has lost sight of the basic thrust of the Christian message. A religion without the cross is a faith void of the power of redemption. And a message that espouses the power of the resurrection without the suffering of the cross is one that ignores the context of the Christian message as well as the source of its power. Suffering must always precede exaltation, and not just in the typology of the new birth but also in the practicality of the new life.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

Certainly God is not the author of calamity and suffering. This is the work of the evil one. Yet God has always *used* what the enemy means for our harm. God uses the trouble Satan brings to perfect us and to promote His work in us. Viewed from this perspective, the true message of the Book of Job is not how a righteous man endured all manner of injustice and accusation with stoic virtue but rather how the righteous Judge used Satan's calamity to uncover a self-righteous streak in an otherwise godly man.

Unfortunately, we are often so busy fighting against our trials that we fail to allow them to accomplish what God intended. Trouble is an opportunity for new grace to be extended and received into our lives. When God's purpose in allowing the trial into our lives is accomplished, we will be delivered from the trial.