

REflections: From Tests to Testimonies—December 2016

One of my favorite Bible characters is Joseph (Genesis 37-50). Briefly, Jacob (*Joseph's father*) grows up, tricks his twin brother Esau into giving away his blessing, and then flees town to live with his uncle, Laban. He marries, has children, and lives with Laban for 20 years before God calls him back to Canaan.

When Jacob returns to the land of Abraham and Isaac, his name is changed to **Israel** (35:9–12). Israel has 12 sons, and young **Joseph** is his favorite because he is the son of Israel's true love, Rachel. Joseph's brothers are jealous of him. They sell him into slavery and he becomes a prisoner in Egypt. His God-given ability to interpret dreams becomes valuable to the Pharaoh, so Joseph is released from prison and eventually becomes second in command of Egypt.

During the time Joseph is in charge, he warns Pharaoh that a terrible famine is coming, so they stockpile food for years. Joseph correctly predicts that the famine reaches Canaan and his brothers (*who sold him into slavery*) come to Egypt to buy food. The brothers reconcile, and Joseph provides for all of Israel's children to move to Egypt until the famine is over.

Joseph suffered many hurts and hardships from the time he was 17 years old. His brothers sold him into slavery; he was wrongly accused by Potiphar's wife and forgotten in prison by someone he helped until he was needed to interpret a dream. Over the course of those almost 14 years of tests and trials, some of us would have given up, become bitter, angry, disappointed and unforgiving. During the reconciliation with his brothers, one of Joseph's most memorable quotes is, "*You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.*"

Isn't that often the case in our lives? The 'love of our life' leaves, we are passed over for that 'dream' job, the doctor's diagnosis is heart-breaking, we are hurt by the actions of our siblings or others, and we can't imagine why God is punishing us. However,

when we survive, persevere or overcome that pain, hurt or disappointment, we come to understand that God meant it for our good. We see that the test didn't take us out; that we are wiser, stronger, closer to God, or that He has something better for us. And, we *have a testimony* because we passed the test!

Many of us relish the opportunity to share our testimony with others, but we sometimes have amnesia about how we murmured, whined, cried and complained when we were going through the process. Joseph didn't do that. He didn't become bitter, resentful, feel sorry for himself or seek revenge on his brothers—even though most of us would understand if he had. God didn't leave or forsake Joseph, and He does not leave or forsake us when we are in the midst of our tests and trials.

Tests are a part of this life and sometimes the Lord Himself wants to use them to grow our level of faith in Him. He also uses the heat and intensity of trials to burn good and godly qualities into our souls and personalities as part of our sanctification process.

We have at least two clear options when life throws tests our way: We can toss in the towel, run off the playing field of life as a result of fear and intimidation, and bail out on what God is doing with this trial in our life. Another choice is that we can take those tests head on in the same manner that Joseph did. We can be prayerful, faithful and obedient, and let God handle the situation. And, He will if we just pray, trust and obey!

There comes a time in our life when God will test us as we have never been tested before. No one comes out of this life untouched and unscathed from some kind of trial or test. When this happens, PERSEVERE. Remember, if you do not pass the test, you will have to re-take it!

Sometimes we fail the test because we refuse to believe that God—in His infinite and compassionate wisdom—allows certain things to happen to us or those we love. Our rationale is, if God loves me, why would He allow this pain, suffering or trial?

Tests can be hard pills to swallow. Sometimes we simply refuse to accept that they are for our own good or benefit. The truth is, though, that tests help strengthen our personal level of faith; they draw us into a closer relationship with Christ, and they make us stronger. 1 Peter 5:10 reads, “*After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*” (NASB) When we go through the trials of life—and survive them—we realize the strength we have and the peace that Christ can give. Moreover, we are able to help others navigate through similar hurts, pains and disappointments, as we share our testimony with them.

We must also learn to be honest with ourselves and with God. When we have a personal relationship with Christ, it’s okay to admit our hurt and disappointment to Him; after all, He already knows our heart, so He is not shocked by our revelation. We are works in progress and if we never go through anything, if life is always happy, how can we expect to grow or become closer to Him?

If we are to be authentic, some of us have to admit that, were it not for a test or trial, we might never have given our life to Christ. If, in our sin, there were no calamities, and life was good all the time, why bother to commit to Christ? For some, it was in that darkest hour, that moment when you didn’t know what to do or who to turn to, that you cried out to God.

Understand this:

- It’s okay to be flawed as long as we are in the Master’s hand. He will rebuild/repair us; not recreate us, but *repair us*. We are molded in the Potter’s hands, so we must remember that clay does not become hardened until it goes through fire (storms/trials).
- God always has somebody to speak to the needs of His people. Sometimes the words we need to hear—words of comfort and encouragement—come from

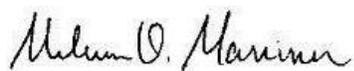
people who have been through and survived what you are going through – *their testimony*.

- Sometimes we cope with things that God wants us to erase. Perhaps it is time to forgive, cut your losses and move on.
- Sometimes God changes our venue to show us something different. God will send us places that we think are beneath us, to speak to us.

Through perseverance, endurance and our brokenness, the Potter will make and mold us into a finer, better and more valuable person to serve in His Kingdom. As an analogy, I like to use the Japanese art of repairing pottery through a process called *Kintsukuroi* (“golden mend”) where broken pottery is restored using lacquer resin laced with gold or silver. *Some* people believe the pottery to be even more beautiful after it has been broken and repaired. Through *kintsukuroi*, the vessel is worth more after the repair than before. In addition, the cracks are reminders of an event that happened in the life of the object, rather than the *cause* of its destruction.

Like broken pottery, the Master lovingly puts us back together. He rebuilds and repairs us as we endure trials, tests and disappointments. Once we have been broken and put back together again, we not only gain a testimony and become more valuable to God and His Kingdom, we have successfully gone from *tests to testimonies*. Go the distance. Pass the test so that you can get to the testimony!

Peace and power,



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