

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG38 The Testing Of Our Faith

As believers, we must realize that God uses testings in our life in order to humble us, teach us, discipline us, and prepare us for His purposes. In the first Epistle of Peter, he is addressing both Jewish believers in Yeshua and Gentile Christians, who are scattered throughout several Asia minor provinces, which were under the Roman Empire. Christian persecutions were beginning to grow in the Empire, especially under the rule of Nero. In his Epistle, Peter is instructing Christians how to walk through the fiery trials that come when faith in God is in conflict with the government, the society, and the cultures in which we, as Christians, live.

Peter tells us not to think that it is a strange or unusual thing when fiery ordeals, or testings, come upon our lives. He knew the necessity of God refining His people before they receive the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit to become His witnesses. Peter had gone through that same process. We must come to the place of Christ-likeness, knowing that we can do nothing of or by ourselves, but all things are accomplished by God through the Holy Spirit in us. Christ said, "I can do nothing by My own initiative"; so Peter was giving instructions. I think sometimes this is difficult for us to hear, but it is a teaching that is very necessary in our lives and in the church today.

In 1 Peter chapter 4, starting at verses 12-14, he says, "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; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." And this we see as the ending of the testing and trial, that the Spirit of God, His glory, rests upon His people who have been tried, tested and refined by what they have gone through in the process that God requires.

In 2 Timothy 3:12, it says, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." So we understand that this idea of persecution in our generation is not really being taught that commonly in the church. It's not something that we would consider a popular message. We would rather hear things about how we make all kinds of money, and prosperity gospel, and how we don't go through things; but instead, God pulls us out of all trouble before things become to a level of tribulation surrounding us. But the reality is, none of that lines up with what we read in the Scriptures themselves. And so I encourage you. I encourage you to go back, especially through this first Epistle of Peter, and read the whole text. I will be reading specific passages out of it, but I encourage you, please, read the whole thing; because again, he is addressing Christians who are in the midst of, and ready to go into, greater sufferings and persecutions. And so he is telling us how to think.

Now, as we recognize this is what Peter is doing, I want to confirm to us: Peter was prepared for this ministry. This was something that he went through in his own life. And I want to remind us why Peter is uniquely qualified and commissioned by Mashiach to teach us about testings and the fruit that it brings in our own lives. This is one of the things that I actually love about the Word of God. It never tries to put

a spin on the truth about our humanity. It's always so in your face about the problems that people faced, and the difficulties, and how people stumbled and failed. And we see this with Peter. He was used in the Scriptures to teach us that it doesn't matter what you do, failing in your flesh; God is able to bring you through testings and trials that perfect your spirit and perfect your flesh, and allow Him to pour His Spirit upon you and create you into His witness to the nations.

So in Luke 22, I want to begin telling the story of what Peter went through, and actually all the disciples, especially in the days between Passover and Pentecost. We realize that those fifty days were a time of great trial. That was their trial. That was their time of testing. And so we see in verses 19-24, it says, "And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to the man by whom He is betrayed!' And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest."

Now, here we have such an amazing picture of the flesh. Here Christ Himself has just instituted Communion, and He has given His body and His blood as a forgiveness of sin. He has created with the disciples a new covenant, and where do they go with this? They somehow end up in a dispute over which one of them is the greatest, all in the name of trying to figure out who is going to betray the Lord. This, again, is what I'm talking about. The Scriptures are so wonderful in that they don't hide our humanity. They don't hide our flesh and sweep it under the carpet. They bring it out into the light to be dealt with, and that's what God is doing here.

And so we go on with the story, realizing that they are so much on a different page than where Christ is at, at this moment, awaiting His betrayal. In Luke 22:28-31, He goes on to say, "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a Kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." And again, I love this perspective of the Scriptures, how He's giving them this tremendous word from God, this tremendous prophesy over their lives of what's going to happen to them. He's going to let them sit with Him at the table in His Kingdom. And He turns right around in verses 31-32 and says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you."

So we go right from this glorious purpose of God into the natural process that's going to be necessary in order for Peter to walk in this time, or in these prophecies over his life. And that's the way it is in our walk with God. God speaks wonderful things. He has provided all things for us pertaining to life and godliness. He gives us all of the promises, great and precious promises, by which we are able to obtain His divine nature. And yet, at the same time, He has to turn and make real to us what we must necessarily go through in the testings of God in order to prepare us, to discipline us, to perfect us so that we can walk in these things. Because when these words are spoken to us, we aren't ready. We aren't prepared; and that's the way the disciples are at the table. They are the ones that have walked with Him, and He's prepared wonderful fulfillments for them to be part of His Kingdom. And yet at the same time, He's warning Peter, you're about to go through now the trials that will prepare you to walk in it.

He begins in verse 28 by saying, "You are those who have stood with Me in My trials." In other words, God is giving Me a great Kingdom. God has disciplined Me and prepared Me and perfected Me, but He

did it through trials. And you've walked with Me these three and a half years. You've been with Me, you've witnessed My trials; you have watched Me go through what I have gone through. Now I'm telling you, Peter, and all of the disciples, that you will go through your trials and your preparation; because as He talks to Simon Peter here, He says, "Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat." Well, that word "you" in the Greek is in plural. So where He begins addressing Simon about the sifting he is going to go through, He is actually speaking to all the disciples at that point. And He says, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail you. And you, Simon, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." So He gives Simon this very particular, peculiar anointing and ministry, saying, "When you find the grace of God, and when you go through the testing and the trial and what you will go through, then I want you to use that experience in order to train and teach and impart to others." And that is literally what we find Peter doing in the Epistle of First Peter.

He begins addressing Peter, and He says, "satan is demanding to sift all of the disciples like wheat; but Peter, I want you, when you come through this, to be the one who ministers encouragement and helps them through their testing." And I believe that's an anointing that rested on Peter then and rests on Peter now, as we read through his Epistle. He is teaching us, you and I, in this day and age in which we live, what we must do and understand in order to go through and succeed in finding the grace of God through the testings and trials that we are going to experience in these days that we are in.

And so we know that Peter denies this and says, "No, I will never deny You." And the Lord comes back and says, "No, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And we see the fulfillment of that in Luke 22, starting at verses 59-60. It says, "about an hour had passed," – and this is while Christ is being tried – "another man began to insist," to Peter, "saying, 'Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a Galilean too.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about.' Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed." Verses 61-62, this is the one that gets me: "The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, 'Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly." And this was the first phase of what Peter goes through in these testings.

Again, we are talking about, "Why is Peter the one who is teaching us and preparing us for what we go through in the trials?" Because he was uniquely prepared; and he was commissioned by Yeshua Himself, that after he found the grace of God and came through the trial and the testing, he would be one to turn and help us all through, and help the other disciples through during those days. And so we see that he went out, he wept bitterly. And so Peter is going through now the first phase of this over the fact that he denies the Lord, and the arrogance that he had in refusing to believe the Lord and humble himself before the Lord, when the Lord said, "No, you're going to deny Me." And he said, along with all the disciples that spoke up too, "No, we will never deny You. We will go with You to prison and to death."

So this arrogance that was in their spirit, this pride that was in them over who they were in their discipleship and their ability to walk with Him as disciples, was absolutely shattered and ground to powder; and he goes out and he weeps bitterly. And so we see that this is what happens during the time of the crucifixion. And as far as we know, the apostle John was the only apostle that was at the foot of the cross. The others, as Christ said, were scattered. We don't know where they were. Peter's out weeping bitterly. Whether he went back to the upper room or whether he went out somewhere in the wilderness, whatever he did, he went out and had to seek God and begin to enter into this godly sorrow that would work a repentance in his life.

Now we see another phase of what Peter went through in the trials and testing after the resurrection of Christ. We know that the disciples, a few of the disciples were on the way to Emmaus, and Christ appears to them on the way to Emmaus. And as He breaks bread, their eyes are opened, they realize it's the Christ. They get tremendously excited and they run all the way back to Jerusalem to share what they have seen. So in Luke 24:32-34, it says, "They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?'" Verse 33, "And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, 'The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.'"

Now, this is extremely interesting. How did these guys know that the Lord appeared to Simon? This is something that you really don't hear taught very much; but the truth is, the first thing that happened after the resurrection, of His appearances, is that Christ appeared to Simon Peter; and these ones who were on the road to Emmaus knew this. Obviously the Lord had spoken this to them. So before appearing to them, at some point, He had appeared to Simon. Man, I wish I could have been in that meeting. What was the Lord doing? I'm sure that He came to Simon Peter, who was weeping bitterly, and shattered and destroyed and humbled over what he had been through. And somehow the Lord ministered His grace to him, the love of God to him, the love of the Father, the forgiveness. My gosh, imagine trying to forgive yourself. I mean, think of the things we do wrong and how hard sometimes it is to forgive ourselves and get back into a place of moving in God. But imagine Peter and what he did and how difficult it would have been, if not impossible.

We know for Judas, it was impossible. He went out and hung himself. When he saw the revelation of what he had done in betraying the Lord, he was not able to reach in to a repentance. He was not able to accept forgiveness and grace in his life, and so he went out and hung himself, killed himself. And Simon Peter had to find a place and a way of forgiving himself; and it took the Lord coming and appearing to him and having some discussion with him in order for that to happen.

We find this confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15, starting at verses 3-5. Paul is speaking here, saying, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." So Paul also knew this. When the Lord met Paul, the Lord showed Paul how He had first appeared to Peter. And so it was very real to Paul that the first thing the Lord did after His resurrection in appearances was to appear to Peter and to talk with him, and to minister somehow the grace of God to him and bring him to a place of receiving that grace, and also to a place of forgiving himself for what he had done.

Paul goes on in verses 6-8 to say, "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also." These were the appearances of the Lord after the resurrection; but first He had to appear to Peter, because He had to minister to Peter and enable Peter in this ministry of pulling others out. They were getting ready to get together in the upper room. They were going to go into Galilee. They were going to be together with the Lord for forty days. And Peter was to begin this process of helping all of the disciples, not just the twelve apostles, but all of the ones who had been with Him in that upper room during the Last Supper, to be able to walk through these testings without being crushed and destroyed by the experience.

So these were lessons that were amazing, and Peter's lessons don't end with just the denial surrounding the cross; it goes far beyond that. We see that Peter also had to command the love of one another to

the disciples. He had to bring them into the right relationships with each other. In John 21:12-18, "Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.'" He had gone to Galilee and met with them. They were fishing all night, as you remember, not catching anything. Then He tells him to throw the nets on the other side, and they come up with this great catch. And so Christ invites them to breakfast; He makes breakfast for them. They come in and sit, and no one questioned who He was. And "Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after He was raised from the dead. So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.' He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" He said to him, 'Shepherd My sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Now it's interesting; in some ways it could look like Christ is pouring salt in his wound. He's in this time of devastation, and I know He is ministering the grace of God to him. But here He is, and you notice how it's almost a repeat of when He told Simon that he was going to deny Him, and Simon comes back on a couple of occasions and says, "No, I'll never deny You. I'll go to prison. I'll go to death with You!" And here He is, saying, "Do you love Me?" And Peter says, "Oh, you know I love You." And He goes, "Okay, well then, tend My lambs." But He keeps asking him; and finally the third time Peter has kind of this more humble demeanor about himself, and he says, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You." And Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

"Truly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." And I think here, the Lord's speaking to him about Himself and the Holy Spirit. Somebody else, finally, Peter, is going to lead you. You're going to be broken enough in your heart and your spirit that you will finally hold out your hand and let someone else guide you and lead you. This is what was to happen through the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost for Peter.

And we see that it is only through these temptations, these trials, these testings, these fiery ordeals that Peter and the disciples are going through, that they are brought to a place in their own self and their own flesh. You know, the carnal mind, the mind of man, the heart, the arrogance that we hold within our flesh nature – it is so strong, it is so inbred into us that it takes a lot for God to crush it and bring it to an end. He has to grind us to powder. It's like He says, we either fall on the rock and are broken, or the rock falls on us and grinds us to powder. And so Peter is going through this experience, recognizing not just does he deny the Lord, but his lack of love for his brothers and sisters, his lack of right relating to them; because what was the first thing they did during Communion? They were arguing about who was the greatest! Well, that's not an expression of loving your brother as yourself, or considering each other as greater than yourself.

So He is breaking down in Peter and in the disciples that arrogance where they didn't love; and what was the commandment of Christ? This is My commandment, that you're to love one another. You're to love one another, you're to consider one another as greater than yourself. These were the commandments; but there had to be this preparation, through these testings and trials, where they were able to walk in these things. It was these times of preparation, these fiery ordeals, that prepared the disciples for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

In verses 20-22, "So Peter seeing him said to Jesus, 'Lord, and what about this man?'" Because the Lord had just addressed John. He said, "If this guy is to stay until I return, what is that to you?" So Peter is getting another lesson. Peter says, "What about this guy, Lord?" Well, he is still over here in competition with what the Lord is going to do with his brother, with what the ministry of somebody else is all about. And, "Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!'"

"Peter, you follow Me. Don't worry about what I'm doing with somebody else. I want you to walk with Me in the calling that I have for you, and you're to shepherd the sheep; you're to love one another; you're to become one in your spirits with those that I have you walking with. All of these are the qualities that you must have if I'm going to be able to anoint you with the Holy Spirit and use you after My ascension."

In 1 Peter 1:3, we begin to immerse ourselves in the wisdom and the understanding of all that Peter learned through these very personal firsthand experiences. And remember the admonition of the Lord to Peter, commissioning him to help his brothers and sisters, once Peter had found the grace of God in his life to fulfill his calling. It says in verses 3-7, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so 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."

So here, Peter is speaking to us. I know he was speaking to that generation. I know he was speaking to the other disciples; but he is speaking to us in our generation through this Epistle. And he is saying all of these wonderful things are available to you. All of this wonderful ministry, this inheritance, this imperishable, undefiled salvation that will not fade away. But yet, you may find yourselves, for a little while, upset and distressed by various trials; because the proving of your faith, as was the proving of my faith, is more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though it's tested by fire.

Peter is telling us the wondrous things that God has for us. Remember how Christ began with the disciples. He said, "I'm going to give you a Kingdom. I'm going to let you into the Kingdom and sit at My table as the Father has prepared this Kingdom." First, He gave them the wonder of the prophecy of what they would receive from Him. Then He went in to say, "But be careful, because now Satan is trying to sift you like wheat." And Peter turns and does the same thing for us. He tells us about this living hope through the resurrection of Christ, obtaining this inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled, all these fabulous things that will never fade away. But, we're going to get them as we're distressed by various trials, because God will prove our faith. God needs to prove our faith. He needs to work out of us the same things of humanity that He worked out of those disciples. We are no better than they. And God does not try to write the Bible in such a way that the apostles look like these fabulous, perfect men of God. Even of Christ, it says, "He was made perfect through the things which He suffered, and He learned obedience." And so we see in the disciples, God shows us their errors and their problems, because we have the same thing; and it's not a cause to make us feel like failures. It's instead supposed to bolster our faith so that we know that if He was able to work the miracle of His grace in them, He likewise will and can work the miracle of His grace in us, even if by trial.

In 1 Peter 4:1-2, it says, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." There's a change that comes within our nature that we're able to serve God. 1 Peter 4:7-13, "The end of all things is near." And boy, that is very, very apparent for us, and it's very real to us. "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." Remember how He taught him that he had to love the sheep; he had to shepherd the sheep; he had to love God's people. And now Peter turns and he says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies." Remember what Christ came to: "I can do nothing of Myself." I can do nothing of Myself, that's where the disciples were on the day of Pentecost. That is where He is bringing us to in our gifts. We are to serve; we are to speak; but we are to do so by the strength and the anointing only that God supplies, "so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

"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." This is not a strange thing. We are going to go through, in our generation, the fiery ordeals that God has prepared for us, but we shouldn't think it some strange thing. And I think at times we do, because again, I don't know that we've been thoroughly taught this from the beginning of our Christian experience, that these ordeals are awaiting us and they are there as part of God's perfecting us. He said, "What son does He receive that He does not scourge? that He does not discipline? He disciplines every son whom He receives." He will discipline us; and that should make us feel accepted and like we are being imparted His divine nature, because that is the truth of its purpose in these trials. "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

Now, verses 14-19, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." This is what the disciples received at the end of their testing and ordeal. This is what Christ received at the end of His temptation; it was the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon them, that they were enabled to walk out the purposes of God in their life. Verse 15, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evil doer, or troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." And that's what the testing brings us to. It brings us to the place, honestly, where we can absolutely trust God; where we are not afraid to follow Him wherever He leads; where we're not afraid to put our lives in His hands, wholly and solely, because we know that it is by His strength, by His grace, by His enabling, that all things happen.

We go to 1 Peter 5, verses 6-9, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being

accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." And never was that truer than in the day and age we live in.

Sometimes for the Western church, these sufferings and trials and persecutions seem like something that are unusual, or we don't understand; but believe me, much of Christianity in this day and age – the Iranian church, the church in China, in many other parts of the world – suffer great persecutions and loss of life as believers. And it has only been for a time, possibly by the grace of God, that the Western church has been saved from these persecutions for so many years. But I see on the horizon that those days may be ending and may be changing; and we need to prepare our hearts to go through what we must go through.

Verses 10-11 says, "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. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen." God is preparing you. He is perfecting you as He perfected Christ in those days in the wilderness. As He perfected those disciples between Passover and Pentecost. He has perfected every generation. Look at Abraham and what he went through in the testing of his faith that perfected him and made him the father of faith to us all. But it wasn't by anything less than deep, painful trials and testings that he endured and became the father of our faith.

So I bless this message to us all, this podcast I hope is alive to you. And I want to give a few points just as reminders of what we have heard so far during this time.

Number one, Christ was prepared all the days of His life by the Father. And yet, He experienced the fiery ordeal of temptation in the wilderness; and after He did, He emerged in the power of the Holy Spirit as Messiah.

Also, the apostles walked with Christ and were prepared by Him throughout His whole ministry, for three and a half years of that ministry. Yet following the crucifixion, they experienced fifty days of fiery trials, and then were endued with power from on high by the Holy Spirit.

Remember, Peter is admonishing us in this Epistle that as the end of all things grows near, we should not be surprised at the fiery ordeals we will face. Don't be shocked if these things come upon us as believers.

Lastly, I would say, as we are witnessing in the cultures around us growing signs of rejection and persecution of Judaeo-Christian values, we must remember that the testing of our faith is more precious than gold; and through it He will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. And let us believe that at the end of our trials, we too will be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill our callings and destiny in God. The Lord be with you in these days. Amen.