

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

Tested AND True

LESSONS ON FAITH FROM GOD'S CLASSROOM

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

TESTED AND TRUE

LESSONS ON FAITH FROM GOD'S CLASSROOM

Jesus was so human when He lived on this earth, even His own brothers did not believe He was God. They grew up with Him and watched as He grew up. Maybe they noticed Jesus was a bit unusual (since He never sinned), but they didn't believe He was the Savior of the world—or *their* Savior. (Let this encourage you—Jesus understands our frustration when our family members are the hardest people to reach with the gospel.)

When James, Jesus' brother, wrote his epistle, he used Jesus' full name—the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was His human name—the name James knew Him by in His humanity. But, more importantly, James came to know Him as Christ. His Savior. The Messiah who came and died for the sins of the world.

When we study this epistle from James, we discover a different outlook on life from ours today. In fact, James seems to have little in common with contemporary Christianity as we know it today. James was austere, rugged, serious, and solemn.

He was also very practical. **He believed Christianity had to be put in shoe leather. If you couldn't walk it out, then it wasn't true Christianity.**

James described what faith—a faith that works—looks like. Practically speaking, he wrote about the skills and techniques we need to faithfully live the Christian life.

That's the first fact to note: This letter was written *to* Christians *about* the Christian life. James invites believers into the classroom of “God’s University.” As in any good school, you need to pass entrance exams, and they’re not easy. In fact, these entrance exams are difficult because the lessons run contrary to our natural way of thinking. If you don’t know Jesus as your Savior, you’ll never pass these exams. You must be a child of God to pass the tests.

“God’s University” has only one field of study. It’s very clear, but easy to miss. The one major field of study in “God’s University” is *faith in God*. Paul taught on this same theme decades later, but he and James looked at it from different viewpoints.

Paul talked about the root of salvation, which is faith.

James discussed the fruit and works of faith.

Many Bible teachers mistakenly think James wrote Christians to contradict and correct Paul. The apostle Paul had taught them they were saved by faith apart from works. But James couldn’t have written to correct Paul—since this epistle was the first one written in the New Testament. If corrections were needed, Paul would have done it. Taken together, we see James and Paul’s messages complement each other.

Their message is: We are saved by faith, we grow by faith, we live by faith, and we die by faith. We enter a life of faith the moment we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

OUR FIRST LECTURE

FAITH IS TESTED BY TRIALS

Are you ready for James' first classroom lecture on faith in God's University? It's a big one: Faith is tested by trials.

Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience.

–James 1:2, 3 (AMPLIFIED)

Study that verse like you'll need it for a test, because you *will* need it when you are tested. Is James saying a Christian is supposed to feel joy when you're going through trials, troubles, and tensions of life? No. That's an unrealistic expectation of the Christian life. Some may *say* they're bowing to God's will and accepting their trials with joy because they think that's what they *should* do. But God doesn't want you to put up a front. He never asks us to say anything that is not really from the heart.

My friend, you are not reconciled to the will of God until you can rejoice—not *for* the trials, but *in* them. There is nothing joyful in the trials and tragedies of life; joy is *the result* of the trial. Trials come to us in order to bring joy into our lives.

“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful,” writes the author of Hebrews (12:11). Isn’t that true! The word “chastening” actually refers to “child training,” the discipline of a child. No disciple seems joyous when you are going through it. It’s a form of insanity to say you enjoy your troubles.

Trouble is not given to us for trouble’s sake. God always has a reason for testing us. And here it is. Hebrews 12:11 continues, “Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” When does the test yield its fruit? *Afterward*. After the trial, the discipline yields peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is a sound reason for and some good purpose served by them.

When the external pressures of testing weigh on us and we are placed in the fires of adversity or tragedy or suffering or disappointment or heartbreak, the internal attitude of faith should be that God permitted it for a purpose, and He has a high and lofty goal in view. For “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

Let me add, this doesn’t mean we will always *understand* what purpose God has in it. Often, we will not understand. This is the test of *faith*, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

What are some of the purposes of testing our faith? God has put down certain guidelines that give us an idea of why He permits trouble to come.

WE ARE *saved* BY FAITH,
WE *grow* BY FAITH,
WE *live* BY FAITH,
AND WE *die* BY FAITH.

— DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHY GOD ALLOWS TROUBLE # 1

TESTING PROVES THE GENUINENESS OF OUR FAITH

The testing of faith is proof positive of its genuineness. When your faith is tested, then you'll find out whether it's genuine or not. James said, "*knowing* that the testing of your faith...." God tests our faith that we might *know* it is genuine.

When ore is tested to prove it is gold or silver, the assayer puts a fire under it, pours acid on it, and then determines whether or not it is genuine.

Likewise, God puts faith to the test to prove it is genuine. As someone said, "The acid of grief tests the coin of belief."

When our Lord began His ministry, He met a group of folks who expressed a faith that proved to be false:

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs [miracles] which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. —John 2:23-25

Did He suspect them? He surely did. He knew their belief was not genuine because He “knew all men.” When a time of testing came for them, their faith was proven false—it was not a genuine faith. Our Lord said to them later:

“But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. –John 6:64-66

The ones who walked away couldn’t stand the test, so they left Him. Then our Lord turned to His own disciples and asked them, “Do you also want to go away?” Simon Peter, answering for them, replied, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). *Their* faith was genuine.

David’s faith was also tested. That little shepherd boy went through a great deal of testing. In fact, I know of no other man who was ever tested quite like David. I imagine when he was an old man sitting in the palace, he thought back over his life and remembered when he was a little shepherd boy out yonder on the hills of Bethlehem. When he looked at his life, he saw how God had led him, and that’s when he wrote Psalm 23. Only a man who had been tested could write “the Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). An inexperienced man who knew nothing about life could not have written that statement. But David could, because his life and his faith had been tested in the fires of adversity.

The Apostle Paul was also really tested. In fact, he was told from the beginning, when he was first called to follow the Lord, that he was going to be tested:

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” –Acts 9:15, 16

Paul suffered for the Lord. His faith was tested, and when he wrote his letter to the Galatians he said:

From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. –Galatians 6:17

He was no young theological professor raising questions about the inspiration of Scripture and the reality of the Christian faith. He was a man who *knew*.

My friend, if your faith is genuine, God will test you to prove it. The church today is filled with shallow and superficial saints. Why? Their faith has never been tested. I read a book by a brilliant theological professor. He was a clever fellow, but you couldn't help reading insecurity between the lines. I suspect it's because his faith had never been tested. He put his faith through all kinds of mental gymnastics and made it perform like a trained elephant. The only trouble with that is that faith is not a trained elephant, nor is it lived out on a mental trapeze. It must walk the streets of life in order to be real, my beloved. Faith must be tested; if it's not, then it is impossible to know for sure whether or not it is genuine.

We hear a lot from so-called intellectuals who question the Word of God. They raise all kinds of questions. Why? Their faith has never been tested. When your faith has been tested, you don't argue about it. Once a man has taken his ore to the assayer—it's been taken through the fire, the acid has been poured on it, and it's been beaten—do you think he'd waste even five minutes arguing with anybody about whether or not his ore is genuine? He *knows* it's genuine, because the test has been made.

My beloved, faith needs to be brought out of the ideal atmosphere and taken down to the streets where we live and move and have our being. God wants our faith to be tested in our lives. That is one of the reasons why He gives us an entrance exam of suffering or tragedy.

MY FRIEND,
IF YOUR FAITH
IS GENUINE,
GOD WILL TEST YOU
TO PROVE IT.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHY GOD ALLOWS TROUBLE #2

TESTING PRODUCES PATIENCE

Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing.

–James 1:3, 4 (AMPLIFIED)

Endurance. Steadfastness. Patience. Can you just will these to happen in your life? No, it's not going to happen. Nor will the Holy Spirit place endurance on a silver platter and offer it to you as a gift. Patience comes through suffering and testing.

James says testing is so we might be “perfectly and fully developed.” You will never be a perfect—that is, a complete and fully mature—Christian without patience.

Some Christians never really grow up. Some are silver-haired babies. God tests us so we might grow up. David said, “Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me” (Psalm 131:2).

Trouble and testing quieted David. When a baby is being weaned they are fretful, wanting to get back to the bottle. But then comes the day when the baby is weaned and satisfied with solid food.

Many spiritual babes today still want the bottle. When God takes the bottle away from them and begins to give them the good solid food of testing, they become fretful. What's God doing? He's attempting to bring us to the place where David was when he was able to say, "I have quieted my spirit like a weaned child. I don't fret and cry all the time for the bottle." God tested David, and that testing enabled him to grow up.

What about you? Are you still on the bottle? Is God today trying to wean you? And are you fretting over the difficulties and tensions of life? God is trying to produce patience in you. Paul confirmed this when he wrote to the Romans:

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [patience]; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. —Romans 5:3-5

What a wonderful domino reaction! A great many people ask for patience, and when God sends them trouble they say, "Lord, I didn't ask for trouble. I asked for patience." But that's precisely what He's doing; He's making you patient by sending you trouble. The reaction goes like this:

**God sends us trouble —→ we learn patience →
patience produces hope → hope produces love →
love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit**

I have seen the Holy Spirit work this out in the lives of many people. I knew one man who was loud, noisy, and critical. Then trouble came, and he passed through deep waters. It almost crushed him. He was different afterwards; he was then one of the strongest and most stable believers I'd known. What happened? God tested his faith, and it was genuine.

WHY GOD ALLOWS TROUBLE #3

TESTING PRESENTS A PROGRAM
FOR THE FUTURE

Blessed (happy, to be envied) is the man who is patient under trial and stands up under temptation, for when he has stood the test and been approved, he will receive [the victor's] crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.


—James 1:12 (AMPLIFIED)

God enables us to grow and develop patience in our Christian lives right now through testing, but He also has something in mind for the future—the “crown of life.”

Testing of any kind, but especially if it is a severe calamity or tragedy, often produces pessimism and hopelessness. I do not blame anyone whose loved one is suffering from a debilitating disease for asking, “Why, Lord?” But the child of God can have confidence God is allowing it for a very definite reason. He has a purpose in it all.

However, the man of the world will sink beneath the waves of adversity. Life, even at its best, makes him pessimistic. How many are cynical? How many are filled with bitterness, although they have everything they need? We are seeing an epidemic of suicides among teenagers, and thousands of others are dropping out of society today. Why? It is because they have no goal in life. A sensible news commentator once made the observation that back during the Depression, people had a will to live and there were very few suicides. But today, when everything has been given to us, people want to die.

When faith is tested and surrounded by darkness, when the waves are rolling high and all seems lost, the child of God knows this is not the end. It may be gloom now, but it will be glory later on. As the psalmist said, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). That is what testing will do for the child of God!



WHEN *faith is tested*
AND SURROUNDED BY DARKNESS,
WHEN THE WAVES ARE ROLLING HIGH
AND ALL SEEMS *lost*,
THE *child of God* KNOWS
THIS IS NOT THE END.
IT MAY BE GLOOM NOW,
BUT IT WILL BE *glory* LATER ON.



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

PASSING THE ENTRANCE EXAMS

If you stand the test of life, you have a crown of life waiting for you. This is different than the gift of God through faith in Christ. You don't work for that crown of salvation, and a believer can never lose it. But God has also promised He will give a crown of life as a reward to those who will stand the test and, through the experience, learn to love Him:

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

–Revelation 2:10

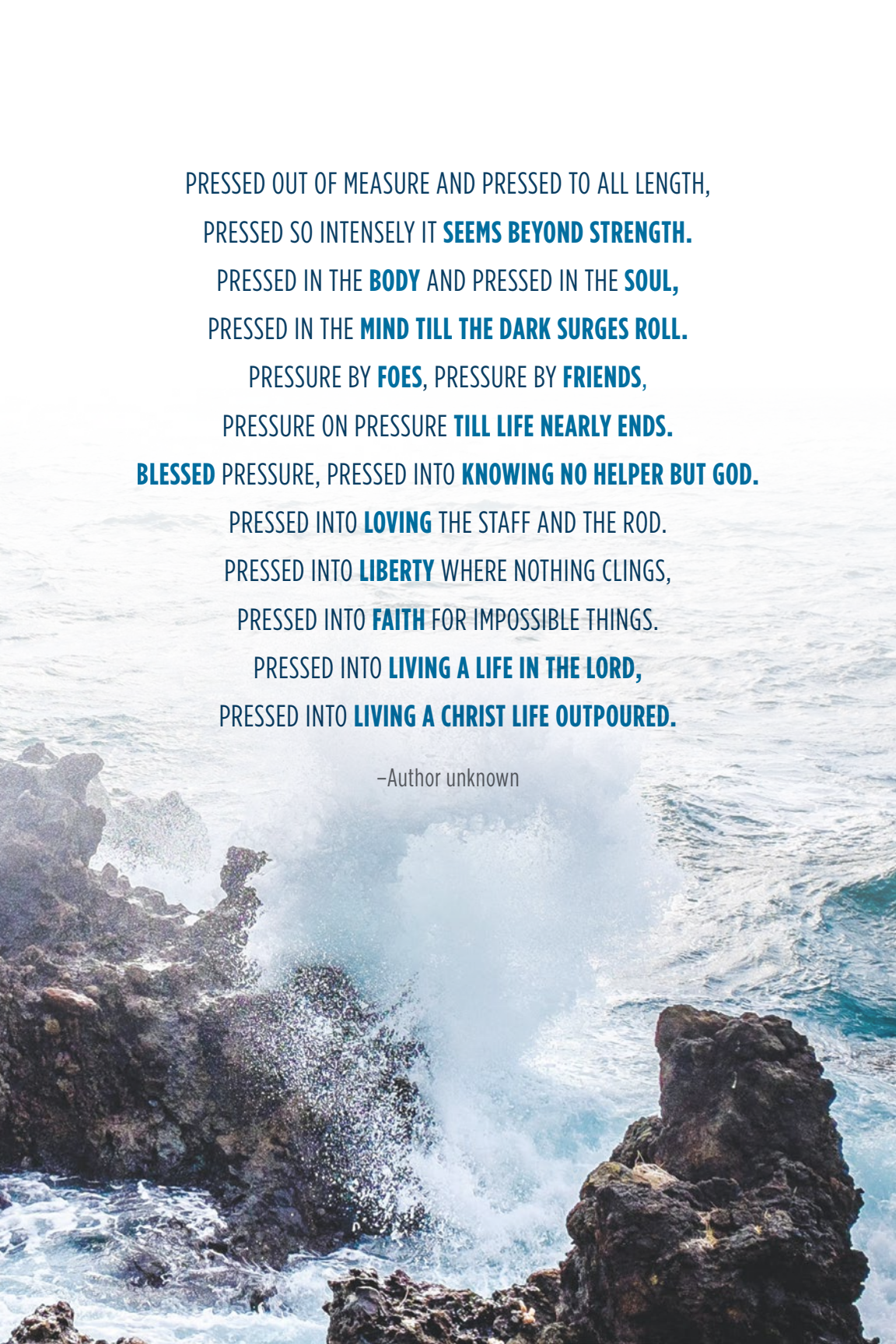
A believer cannot lose his salvation, but there is a danger of losing the crown of reward:

Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. –Revelation 3:11

My beloved, God tests us for a definite purpose. It's not meaningless or senseless. Testing will either drive you to the Lord or it will drive you away from Him. So many Christians become bitter. My friend, if you let the very thing your heavenly Father is using to develop your character and bring you into a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ make you bitter, it won't be a pleasant experience to someday look at Jesus, face to face. We will have trials, but a crown of life waits for those who persevere.

You cannot escape suffering. Trials and troubles are going to come to you, whether you are saved or unsaved. Job said, "Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Man has nothing but trouble in this life. My beloved, you cannot cope with the troubles and problems of this life. They will get you every time.

Only Jesus can deliver you. He says, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Jesus Christ today is the answer for your troubles, for your sorrows, for your trials. You cannot bear your burdens alone, so He'll bear them for you. He'll give you a deliverance and a freedom if you come to Him. Then, when He tests you, He will prove you are genuine. He has said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you..." (John 15:16), so you can be sure He will see to it that you stand the test.




PRESSED OUT OF MEASURE AND PRESSED TO ALL LENGTH,
PRESSED SO INTENSELY IT **SEEMS BEYOND STRENGTH.**
PRESSED IN THE **BODY** AND PRESSED IN THE **SOUL,**
PRESSED IN THE **MIND TILL THE DARK SURGES ROLL.**
PRESSURE BY **FOES,** PRESSURE BY **FRIENDS,**
PRESSURE ON PRESSURE **TILL LIFE NEARLY ENDS.**
BLESSED PRESSURE, PRESSED INTO **KNOWING NO HELPER BUT GOD.**
PRESSED INTO **LOVING** THE STAFF AND THE ROD.
PRESSED INTO **LIBERTY** WHERE NOTHING CLINGS,
PRESSED INTO **FAITH** FOR IMPOSSIBLE THINGS.
PRESSED INTO **LIVING A LIFE IN THE LORD,**
PRESSED INTO **LIVING A CHRIST LIFE OUTPOURED.**

—Author unknown

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from TTB.org. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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