

God Bombards His Change Agents With Character Tests

Are you called to be one of God's change agents? If so, get ready for His preparation.

God releases and entrusts to you in direct proportion to the character you allow Him to develop in you. God develops character through a series of tests designed to develop humility and trust. That is what God did with Joseph and many other of His change agents.

Sometimes when I tell people that God tests us, they take issue with me. "Aw, surely you don't mean that. God doesn't test people," they reply. I give them Deuteronomy 8:2, quoted at the end of this article, along with many others. *God does not test us to find out what we will do; He tests us to let us know what we will do.*

God's testing is one way we get to see how faithless or unloving or uncommitted we are to Him or another person. We get to see how we respond to those who treat us badly. We get to see if we are going to pout like little children or embrace the experience as one who needs to grow up.

David knew God tests His people: "I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness" (1 Chron. 29:17). David didn't pass several tests. He flunked the test with Bathsheba—his child died and then there was a lifelong, generational bout with sexual lust and sexual problems in his family. He flunked the test on numbering the troops—70,000 people lost their lives because he did that.

David was one of the few leaders in the Bible whose sins did not disqualify him from achieving his ultimate purpose. This was due to his repentant heart and his extravagant love of God that came from his heart.

Joseph also had some tests. He was tested to see if he would retaliate against his brothers for betraying him and throwing him into a pit. He forgave them. He was tested sexually when Potiphar's wife decided she had to have him. He fled but still got prison time for being righteous. He passed that one.

Joseph was also tested with an extended time of isolation in prison to see if he would persevere and experience God's presence in his circumstance. He passed that one too. He was a model prisoner. The Scriptures say, "And God was with Joseph" (Gen 39:23)—he was in prison when that was said. Finally, Joseph was tested to see if he would be a good steward with the position, power and influence God gave him. He passed with flying colors.

Testing is designed to prepare us for greater things. "For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance" (Ps. 66:10-12).

God brings tests into our lives to develop character and to prepare us for greater use in the kingdom. There is no other way to find out how we will do without real-world experiences to test our mettle. David understood this when he said, "Blessed be the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle" (Ps. 144:1). There's no place like the battlefield to find out how we are going to do in battle.

James tells us that testing is designed to develop patience and perseverance that matures our faith: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing ... Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of

life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:2-4, 12). Like Joseph, God takes His servants through seasons of testing, designed to mature us by developing perseverance for greater assignments.

Crisis and pain leads to greater commitment, obedience and intimacy.

One of my favorite movies is *Braveheart*. It is the story of William Wallace, a change agent for Scotland, and his rebellion against the wicked king of England that led to the ultimate emancipation of Scotland from England.

In order to defeat the English, Wallace appealed to Robert the Bruce, the king of Scotland, to mobilize the Scottish lords. During the battle of Falkirk, Wallace was attacked in an open field by a knight with covered armor, so he could not identify his opponent. Wallace knocked the man off his horse and ran to see who had attacked him—it was Robert the Bruce.

The scene of Wallace's shock and utter feelings of betrayal was captured like no other scene I have seen in a movie. You literally felt Wallace's heart break into two pieces as he discovered the very man who had committed to help him emancipate Scotland had reversed sides. Later, Bruce had a change of heart and was credited for Scotland's ultimate freedom after Wallace was captured and tortured.

Emotional pain can be the most excruciating emotion to overcome. It can devastate you like nothing else. Divorce, loss of a child in an accident or illness, death of a spouse, abandonment by a wife or loved one—these experiences test our faith in God and in human beings.

I have had more than my share of very close relationships that ended in betrayal. Many of them reconciled, but some did not until years later. Those were difficult times. There were times I literally felt my heart was bleeding from the inside out. David must have been feeling this when he wrote this

psalm: "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng" (Ps. 55:12-14).

There is something about emotional pain that drives us deep into the arms of our heavenly Father like nothing else. Emotional pain is designed to take us deeper into the soil of God. It is designed to help us identify with the cross. Ultimately, it should motivate us to greater levels of intimacy and obedience.

Psalm 119:67 says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Hebrews 5:8 describes the pain our Savior endured that was designed to create greater obedience in His life: "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

Maybe you find yourself in this place as God prepares you to be a change agent. All of God's change agents will experience betrayal at some point in their journey. God wants you to know we must follow the example of His Son, who washed the feet of Judas. Oh, how difficult this test is to pass!

We don't want to forgive those who hurt us deeply. But Jesus said that if we don't forgive others, He doesn't forgive us—not a very good option if we choose to hold onto the pain or the right to revenge or simply withhold forgiveness.

Pride keeps us from extending forgiveness to others. We want justice. Self-righteousness says, "I cannot forgive. What he or she did is unforgivable." We want someone to pay for our pain.

A sinless person would be justified in withholding forgiveness, but the one person who ever qualified for that distinction chose to forgive you and me for our sins. Jesus

chose to tear up the “You hurt me deeply—you deserve to pay” ticket. So must we.

You hold yourself and others in a prison if you do not forgive. Unforgiveness has even been proven to cause physical illness. Humility allows us to let go. Pride keeps us holding on to offenses. Psalm 25:9 says “The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way.” God wants to teach us His way.

Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth. He had his share of betrayals by those he led and those within his family. But he had a mission from God and knew he had to get past those things to accomplish his mission. So must we.

A Peculiar People

The greater the influence and spiritual insight, the greater the vulnerability we have to pride or a fall as apostle Paul was exposed to great revelation from God. It would have been easy for him to fall into pride and arrogance because of the exposure to the inner sanctums of revelation he had from God. This is why God allowed a thorn in the flesh to buffet Paul. It was designed to keep him humble.

A Place of Weakness

God calls His change agents to operate from a place of weakness, not strength. It often appears on the surface that these change agents are operating from a place of great strength. However, many struggle to balance the influence and role they have with being a steward of their influence with faith and humility.

Paul had great influence, but he also operated from a place of physical weakness. He was not a great speaker or impressive in stature. God told him it would be His grace alone that would allow Paul to do what he was called to do: “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather

boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

If you are a change agent in the making, expect God to take you through a season of character refinement designed to develop humility and trust.

"And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut. 8:2).

Os Hillman is president of Marketplace Leaders and author of *Change Agent* and *TGIF Today God Is First*, a free devotional.