

## The Test of Willingness

Tests of God #1: The Test of Willingness

Exodus 3:11-15 and 4:10-15

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials of many kinds, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

From the moment we arrive in this world until the moment we depart for glory, life seems like a continuous series of tests woven by our Lord with a fine gold, purple, and scarlet thread. God tested our patience as children when we were watching cartoons on a Saturday morning only to be interrupted by these words: "This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is a test. Oh yes, this is a test and only a test. Beep....." He tests our ingenuity as adults when the air conditioning and power go out in the middle of a hot Florida summer, and we only have a battery powered fan and slowly melting ice cubs from the freezer at our disposal. He tests our attitudes in our twilight years because we know that were aren't as good as we once were. But we still want to demonstrate that we can be as good once as we ever were.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is replete with examples of all different kinds of tests that we will encounter in this life, from the cradle to the grave. There's the test of obedience: "Abraham. Take your son, your only son and go to the land of Moriah to make a sacrifice" (Gen 22). There's the test of faith: "But when Peter saw the wind and the waves, he became afraid and began to sink" (Mt 14). There's the test of courage: "But Peter and John replied, 'which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-20). There are many more. And we will see all of them over the next couple of months. But I want to start today with one of the tests from God talked about the least. And that's unfortunate because it just so happens to be the one we are in the process of taking right now. It's the Test of Willingness.

The word "willingness" is a noun that denotes our consent and readiness to do something. When we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to reside in our hearts, we demonstrated a "willingness" to receive him. When we ask God for wisdom, we demonstrate a willingness to see things as God sees them. When we trust and obey, we demonstrate a willingness to agree with God that there's no way to be happy in Jesus. Consequently, the Test of Willingness is the one where God taps you on the shoulder to do something in spite of your reticence to do it, or your abilities to accomplish it, or your doubts to thwart it, or your bottom line to finance it. The question in the Test of Willingness is not: "Can You? Or "Could you?" It is "Will you?"

You are going to see from the story of Moses and the Burning Bush today that when God gives you the Test of Willingness, he will target four areas of your life: (1) **Qualification:** "But who am I that I should go to Pharaoh to tell him 'let my people go?'" (2) **Education:** "Moses, you tell them the Great I Am sent you!" (3) **Evaluation:** "Are you sure you got the right person, Lord? I have a stuttering problem." (4) And **Inclination:** "Send someone else." And we will see those areas at work in the Test of Willingness God gave to Moses in chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus. But before we do, pray with me.

### 1. Qualification (Ex 3:11-12)

- *11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."*
- **God Doesn't Call the Qualified:** (1) There are two fundamentals at work in every Test of Willingness: (a) God's ways are not our ways; (b) God doesn't call the qualified. He qualifies the called. (2) God raised Moses in a palace. He called him to the desert to lead the people of God out of Egypt. (3) Consequently, Moses' response was "Whom am I?"
- **Moses' Question:** (1) Was an Honest Question: It's a play on concepts in the whole narrative of chs 3-4. God is the great I am. That's who he is. Moses, however, asks "who am I?" It's the opposite reality. It's the other end of the spectrum. It's Moses acknowledging that he is not "I am." (2) Was an Insecure Question: Moses had fled Egypt because he murdered an Egyptian for being cruel to an Israelite. He fled to Midian, married Zipporah, a non-Jew, and named his son Gershom which means "I am a foreigner in a foreign land." He wasn't seeking the Lord. He was building a life out of fellowship with God and his people. So, when God appeared to him, his natural response was "Who am I?"
- **God's Response:** (1) Was an Honest Response: (1) He doesn't give Moses a pep talk. He doesn't give him a lecture in the power of positive thinking. He simply says: "I will be with you." That's always the first answer God gives in a test of willingness. It's an answer that says, essentially: "you are right, Moses. But I will be with you." (2) Was a Provident Response: The same mountain – Sinai – where Moses was out of fellowship with the Lord is the same one he's going to receive the Law.
- **App:** If you don't ask "Who Am I," there's no test. But if you do, there is a test going on. The Lord is telling you in it: "Your right. You can't. But I can. And I am with you."

## 2. Education (Ex 3:13-15)

- <sup>13</sup> Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.
- **On the Job Education:** (1) I once knew an old carpenter who told me that he was graduated at the top of his class at On-the-Job University in the School of Bended Knee. (2) That still sticks with me because it implies the best education came only come through experience, professionally and spiritually. (3) The same with Moses. God gave him an education he needed to accomplish the task he called him to perform.
- **Moses' Question:** (1) Indicates a Lack of Knowledge: He knows the Bible stories. He's familiar with the plights of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He knows the traditions. That much is signified by the phrase "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." But the one thing he doesn't know is the name of the Lord. (2) Indicates a Lack of Experience: That phrase "God of your fathers" is impersonal. If it was personal, Moses would have said "our Fathers." He's disconnected and thinks he's no longer part. After all, he was raised by an Egyptian Pharaoh, and he was on the run.
- **God's Answer:** (1) Indicates Supreme Knowledge: I am who I am. Jesus said: I am the living water. I am the bread of bread of life. I am the gate. I am the door. I am the light of the world. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. And I who speak to you am He. (2) Indicates Intimate Knowledge: The Lord says, "tell them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you." He uses it in a completely different way than Moses. Moses is part of the Israelites even though he doesn't realize it. That's an education Moses needed to put his best foot forward in what God wanted him to do.
- **App:** In a Test of Willingness, God will not give you everything you need to know to be successful in what He's assigned for you. But he will give you what you need to know for that task at that moment. You have to put your best foot forward in obedience to gain the experience.

## 3. Evaluation (Ex 4:10-12)

- <sup>10</sup> Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." <sup>11</sup> The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" <sup>12</sup> Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."
- **Geico Commercials:** (1) Are the greatest commercials on TV. (2) The greatest one ever is the triangle solo (probably because it reminds me of my son). (3) But lately, I've seen a new one that features a new spokesman: Bobby. The problem is Bobby can't speak at all because he's a puppet who speaks only through a ventriloquist: the Geico. (4) Moses was no puppet. But in his evaluation and estimation, he wasn't qualified to be God's spokesman because he couldn't speak very well.
- **Moses Comment:** (a) A Personal Evaluation: Was based on how things seemed to him: (a) wasn't eloquent (neither was Peter); (b) was slow of speech and tongue. (b) A Pompous Evaluation: Moses tries to educate the Lord of Creation about God created him.
- **God's Response:** (a) A Rebuke: Was based on how he created Moses. It follows a similar pattern to Job when God finally speaks after having enough of Job trying to educate God: Who gave... Is it not I the Lord. (b) A Redirection: is three-fold; denoting the idea of completeness (a) Go and (b) I will help and (c) I will teach you.
- **App:** The reason will often have trouble passing the Test of Willingness is because in the midst of that test, we like to try to educate God on why something isn't possible in our estimation. But passing the test comes through willingness in light of the One who has called, in spite of your reservations. Nothing is impossible for him. He just wants to see if you will do as he commands.

## 4. Inclination (Ex 4:13-15)

- <sup>13</sup> But Moses said, "Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else." <sup>14</sup> Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. <sup>15</sup> You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.
- **The Story of Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody:** (1) There once lived four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have. (2) Translation: like Moses, all four lived according to the motto: "send somebody else."
- **Moses' Request:** (1) Was Based on Disinclination: (a) God has given him a command, promises, and reassurance, yet he doesn't want to do it. Why? (2) Was Based on Fear: When fear overtakes us because the task seems too great, commands of God get ignored and promises and reassurances do too.
- **God's Response:** (1) Anger: (a) This is the first time in the Bible God's anger burns against someone. And it comes when Moses says, "send someone else." (2) I'm Smarter Than You: I knew you would say that Moses, so Aaron is already on the way. (2) I'm With You in Your Weakness: Is also threefold (a) You shall speak to him and (b) I will help you both and (c) I will teach you what to do.
- **App:** The question in the Test of Willingness is not "Can you?" or "Could you?" It's "Will you?" Like Isaiah, may we say, "Here am I, Lord, send me." Amen.