

**Sermon File # 1250**

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**Message Title: *The Greatest Test of Your Faith***

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**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (2011).**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

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## ***The Greatest Test of Your Faith***

### **Introduction:**

Today, in my final message to you, we continue our study of the faith of Abram, whose name has now been changed to Abraham, meaning “father of many” (Genesis 17:4f, Schmutzer and Ross, 54). Abraham, the greatest faith hero to the Jews, and the father of all who believe, receives the most “coverage” in the “Faith Hall of Fame” in the Book of Hebrews. In our previous messages we considered God’s call to Abram (Genesis 12:1-9; Hebrews 11:8-10), and the difficulties he faced with the subsequent famine in the land of promise (Genesis 12:10-13:4).

Today we look at Abraham’s faith undergoing God’s greatest test. Both in the Genesis record and in Hebrews, this experience in the life of Abraham is referred to as God’s test. Perhaps the members of the writer of The Book of Hebrews’ beleaguered congregation were about to face overt Roman persecution; and the

writing preacher was exhorting them, with the example of Abraham, to be prepared to face the greatest test of their faith, to hold fast to their commitment to Christ, and thereby show the authenticity of their faith.

The historical background portion of today's text, the Genesis account of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, is one of the Bible's greatest narratives, and most moving accounts of faith. This great narrative is powerful through its artistic restraint, giving those gaps of silence, leaving us to wonder what might have been going through the mind of Abraham and his son, Isaac, as they walk up the mount toward the place of sacrifice.

Read **Genesis 22: 1-18** and **Hebrews 11: 17-19**.

Two years ago, on the centennial of the sinking of the Titanic on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1912, we heard many theories about the primary cause of this tragic sinking of this "unsinkable" luxury liner, with more than two-thirds of its 2,224 passengers perishing in the icy waters of the North Atlantic. "Had the Titanic stayed afloat longer, the tragic loss of life could have been mitigated by rescue ships getting to the disaster scene. This is the real question of the *Titanic* mystery: How could a 46,000-ton ship sink so quickly?" science writer Richard Corfield wrote in *Physics World*.

Many circumstances seem to have conspired that led to this tragedy, but one pertained to the construction of the ship. "The *Titanic* was the most modern ship of her day. She featured the latest technological innovations, yet some material used in her construction turned out to be inadequate," one report states. "Poorly cast wrought-iron rivets caused the steel plates on the hull to come apart." Metallurgists discovered that "the rivets at the front and rear fifths of the *Titanic* were made only of 'best' quality iron, not 'best-best', and had been inserted by hand. Best rivets" were cheaper but also featured a higher concentration of impurities known as 'slag.' Lab tests have shown that the heads of such rivets are particularly vulnerable to stresses and can pop off, causing the hull to "unzip."

<http://news.discovery.com/history/titanic-sinking-physics-120402.html>

The testing of Abraham's faith on Mt Moriah yielded evidence that the quality of his faith was "best-best," and not just "best." Scriptures teach us that God is also a metallurgist, testing the quality of our faith, as fire tests and purifies gold (1 Peter 1:7). God's purpose in the testing of faith, which is "far more precious than mere gold," is to bring about strength and endurance of character and everlasting benefit (1 Peter 1:7; James 1:2ff, *NLT*). I'm discovering that the testing of faith never ends. Twelve years ago I went through what was then the greatest test of my faith. But that was then, and this is now, when I am experiencing an even severer test. I cannot say that my current test, my wife's illness, will be my severest.

The Christian life is a progression and maturing of our faith relationship with Christ, and along the way in our pilgrimage we face tests. Just as metal is tested for its strength, so we are tested in our faith. It stands to reason, then, that somewhere in our life history we will undergo our greatest, most demanding test. Perhaps this is what Paul is referring to when he exhorts the church, in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, to put on the armor of God in order to be able to stand against the enemy on the "evil day." Perhaps this is a reference to that day of the greatest test of our faith, the most difficult and demanding test of our relationship with God (Ephesians 6:13).

It appears to me that Gethsemane was the hour when Jesus' human will was brought under his most severe testing. There, as he prayed agonizingly to the Father, he affirmed the cross as the will of God, and gained the peace of mind and strength of will to face his arrest and horrifying crucifixion. In the context of his Gethsemane prayer, Jesus warned Peter, James, and John to watch and pray in readiness for their hour of testing when their spirits might be willing but their flesh weak (Matthew 26:41).

As dreadful and foreboding as the fact may be, I believe it was C.H. Spurgeon (1834-92) who said that it appeared to him that the closer one gets to heaven, the more severe and frequent our faith tests become (also Wiersbe, 107f). Tests are essential to our progress in holiness, and for our preparation for heaven. You may have already undergone your greatest test. Even so, in all probability, unless the Lord is soon to call you home, you will face another test of your faith. Even the facing of death itself will be a test, the final test of our faith.

I believe, as was true for Abraham, your greatest test of faith will include...

### **A demand from God**

Abraham had been tested before, and some tests he had passed, and with others he had faltered. He had made the decisive step of faith that had brought saving grace and imputed righteousness (Genesis 15:6). But with that step he began a lifetime of growing in faith, which would be tested along the way. His growth pattern, like most of ours, was not a solid incline of growth and progress, but rather was somewhat a jagged line. Abraham's faith "chart" showed lapses of faith, such as going down to Egypt during famine (Genesis 12:10), his resorting to carnal measures that resulted in the birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-4), and his debacle with Abimelech (Genesis 20). But Abraham's faith nevertheless did make upward progress, by the grace of God. But when Abraham came to the experience our text describes, we see him under a test that was his severest. It began with a demand from God that Abraham had never encountered before.

As was the case with Abraham's faith, God will make a demand...

*That will seem untimely*

When the greatest test comes to you, it will seem so untimely. The verse before our text says that Abraham's test came after he had been a long time in the land of the Philistines (Genesis 21:34). We have no way of knowing, but perhaps Abraham had become a bit slack, or influenced by the pagan environment around him. But, whatever the case, God knew the time was right and crucial for him to be tested, though to Abraham the timing seemed an unwelcome invasion. Tests are always a terrible interruption, whether we feel spiritual or have grown uncomfortable in our relationship with God. God's tests will come as a rude interruption in our lives.

A severe test in my life and ministry was twelve years ago, when crises at the church I was serving resulted in my resignation for a pastorate of nineteen years. All my ministry goals and plans were centered in that church, where I fully intended to retire after thirty or so years of service. The events that seemed to catch Nancy and me totally by surprise were both unwelcome and untimely. Was at that point the greatest test of my life, forcing me to evaluate my calling, God's promises to me regarding that ministry, and even my relationship with God, whose sovereignty, love, wisdom, and faithfulness I have been forced to reaffirm. At the age of 57 I found myself asking, "Why now, Lord?"

I've known godly disciples of Jesus, with a passion to share the gospel, who have disciplined themselves and made extensive preparations to serve on the mission field, only to have to prematurely resign due to totally unexpected circumstances. Similarly, one prayer I have repeated to the Lord has been that he would allow me to remain in active ministry, doing the work that gives me his pleasure, well into old age. My love for the church I served in Belgium, and delight in living and serving in a multicultural setting, fed my hopes of remaining there indefinitely, as long as I was being useful in the Kingdom. But I became painfully aware of my only option to return to the US and undergo a radical "changing of gears" in our lives, which seemed a rude interruption.

When God brings a test to your life, in all likelihood you will ask, "Why now, Lord?"

This will be a demand also...

*That will seem unreasonable*

Life's greatest test also will seem to be to us very unreasonable. What God asked of Abraham was absolutely unreasonable, that he sacrifice the promised son, who represented the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise. The great Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), called this command to Abraham "the teleological suspension of the ethical" (*F&T*).

A US publication, *World Magazine*, featured an interview with talk show host Larry Zeiger, better known as Larry King. The article was headlined with his quote, "I've always searched," and reported about his respect for Christianity, but that he remains an agnostic. Having grown up in a Jewish home, he says he didn't like the things God did in the Old Testament, such as command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Said Zeiger:

"That always bothered me as a kid. I remember thinking, why would he do that to Abraham? As a test? So I said to myself, I don't know. I just don't know. That's still true to this day" (Zeiger, 22).

God tested Abraham with a demand (child sacrifice) that was a known practice in his time and surrounding culture. In our day, God would not ask us to literally sacrifice a child in the same way. Because of a fuller revelation in both the Old and the New Covenant we know now that human sacrifice is abhorrent to God and is not his way of working. Though God would not use the same type of test, he can and still does test us to the same degree of sacrifice and severity (Francisco, 188).

Throughout the Genesis account God refers to Isaac as Abraham's "one and only son," i.e., his unique, one-of-a-kind son, totally unlike Ishmael. The way the Lord referred to Isaac is the term used for Jesus as the unique, one-of-a-kind Son of the heavenly Father. Isaac was the son of the promise, the key to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Isaac's name means "laughter," and when he was born miraculously to 100-year-old Abraham and 90-year-old Sarah, they laughed in delight over the incredible fulfillment of the promise (Genesis 21:1-7).

Now, God says for Abraham to sacrifice this one-of-a-kind son. Here, as one of the ancient Fathers has said, God seemed to be against God (Chrysostom, 190). To Abraham, the promise and commandment of God seemed self-contradictory, and in our time of greatest difficulty, it will seem the light of God's truth will be turned to darkness.

Perhaps you will face the loss of a job, a marriage or your own health, which seems to counter all your hopes and dreams that you considered gifts from God. Life seems to have been rendered absurd by these sudden turns. Or maybe God is issuing a call to you that demands you forsake your previous dreams and plans and even seems an unlike fit for your talents, likes and circumstances. This story of Abraham's immediate obedience to this extreme, unthinkable command cannot help but move us to pity for Abraham. Imagine the heartbreak and turmoil in his spirit as he trudged up that mountain with his soon-to-be-sacrificed, long-hoped-for son. And, this will be a demand...

*That will seem unbearable*

We can only imagine that Abraham's heart was breaking with grief at the thought of the loss of his cherished son. The demands of God's greatest test will also seem unbearable. We will wonder if 1 Corinthians 10:13 is true for us, that God will indeed not give us more than we can bear (if temptation here can also include our hour of greatest testing).

I don't know what God will ask of you for your greatest test of faith, but it will seem to you to be untimely, unreasonable, and unbearable. It may seem a price you should not have to pay, indeed, that you cannot possibly pay, such as the severing of close ties with family, another precious relationship, the giving up of a cherished dream; even the loss of health, or threats to your personal safety and family security. It may mean the relinquishing of a job that seems the perfect match or represents the fulfillment of even your most significant spiritual gifts.

What you are asked to give up may be the very thing you thought God gave you with which to serve him, that very missionary career, that unique opportunity that seems to represent the fulfillment of the desires of your heart. Your greatest may be the relinquishing of something or someone so precious to you, that the thought of such sacrifice will make you question whether or not it is worth while to go on living. It may be the test that teaches you to depend absolutely on the Lord, and to realize that he is all you need to embrace life, and to do so with joy and purpose.

Philip Yancey tells the story of Joni Eareckson Tada. He recounts that fateful day in the summer of 1967 when Joni in her fun-loving careless way, dove off a raft into the Chesapeake Bay, breaking her neck as her head struck a rock in the too shallow water. As she awoke in the hospital, paralyzed from the neck down in her Stryker frame, she wanted to die.

"I was devastated," she recalls. "My life had been so full. I was involved in as many school activities as I could squeeze in. And suddenly I found myself alone, just a bare, immobile body between two sheets." Soon her appearance changed from being a beautiful young girl, to an 80 pound skeleton of her former self. Her friends who visited her were frightened and sickened by her appearance. She begged her friends to help her die by bringing her pills. She wanted a razor blade, but realized, as Yancey writes, another cruel fact: "She was too helpless even to die on her own" (Yancey, 128-131). This was a test that for young Joni seemed unbearable.

The great Christian thinker and writer, CS Lewis, was a long-time bachelor, until he met Joy Davidman, who became the love of his life. Shortly she was diagnosed with cancer, and the two were married when she lay in her hospital bed with only a short time to live. Lewis cried out against God for the untimeliness of Joy's death and of the seeming absence of God:

“Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him...you will be—or so it feels—welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become” (Lewis, 4f). For the middle-aged CS Lewis, his test of faith seemed unbearable.

I believe when the Lord called to Abraham and asked him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, life at that moment must have seemed unbearably cruel. And we cannot forget Sarah, and the heartbreak she would have felt over the sacrifice of the one who brought her joy and laughter.

Perhaps the greatest heroes of the faith are not the miracle workers, but rather are the people who trust God even in the dark night of the soul (Dean, 103), during times of contradictory circumstances when human reasoning would say, “Where is God?” Or, “...if God truly does exist, He would not allow such and such to happen, nor would He ask any of His children to do such an unreasonable thing.”

By faith Abraham was willing to trust God, despite the untimely, the unreasonable, and the unbearable. Imagine how his heart broke when his son interrupted the silence, asking where the sacrifice was. Our text tells us Abraham intended to obey, to sacrifice Isaac, trusting against all evidence that the Lord was able to raise him from the dead. But he didn’t know for sure God would do that.

“*God will provide* does not imply foreknowledge of the outcome, for then there would be no trial of faith” (Kline, 99).

Perhaps here his faith was as tenacious as that of Job, who cried out in his misery of soul, “Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him” (Job 13:15). Abraham had to obey, and so he grabbed his confused and frightened son, and bound him to the cruel woodpile, and raised his knife to drive it into his son’s heart. Hebrews says Abraham had a Job-like faith, saying in effect, “Though I slay my son, my only son, yet will I hope in God.” What a nightmare of the soul this was for Abraham. It was the ultimate test of his faith.

The greatest test of your faith will require these untimely, unreasonable and unbearable demands.

The greatest test of your faith will include also...

## A design from God

Satan must have delighted in the thought that Abraham would destroy Isaac, the son of promise, and thus would end the line of the patriarchs of faith and the salvation story for the people of God. No doubt, as Abraham proceeded up Mt Moriah with his son Isaac, Satan attacked his mind with thoughts such as, "What kind of God is this that you trust, who would ask you to kill your long-awaited son?"

God's design is obvious only to him. Satan's design is for our destruction, as we read in passages like 1 Peter 5:8. And, as we look behind the scenes in Job, we note that in this fallen world, God's purposes of testing are achieved by the initiative of Satan, who, in the words of Martin Luther, is God's devil. God may permit Satan to bring illness or human tragedy, but only according to God's ultimate will for our holiness and the accomplishment of his perfect purposes. So God had a design in mind when he commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

God's design is...

### *To remove idols*

The Lord desires and is worthy of the devotion of our hearts, and is jealous when we give him second place to anything or anyone else. The First Commandment is that we have no other gods before the Lord (Exodus 20:3). The Greatest Commandment is that we love the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all of our mind and with all of our strength (Mark 12:30). And, the last word in John's First Epistle is that we keep ourselves from idols that too easily usurp God's rightful place as God in our lives (1 John 5:21).

Perhaps Isaac, the long-hoped-for promised son, had slipped into first place in Abraham's heart. Jesus alone is to be the Mediator in our lives and nothing must come between him and us, not even our most beloved family members. (Bonhoeffer, 100f).

That's what Jesus meant by the necessity of loving him above all others, and being absolutely loyal to him, at the cost of alienation from members of our families (Matthew 11:34-39). Indeed, our love for Jesus is to make other loves pale in comparison, and appear even as hatred by contrast (Luke 14:26). How subtly our love for Jesus and our devotion to him can be substituted by what even appears to be noble care for our families! And the irony is, unless we love Jesus supremely, we will never be able to love and care for our families as we ought. In other words, we don't do our children or anyone a favor when we turn them into idols. Even our religious/church work can become an idol that relegates our love for Jesus to a secondary place and presents a façade to



others. Our worship becomes a mere routine and our religious work is done with hearts far from God (Matthew 15:1-9). We are really serving our own ambition or desire for self-justification while putting religious and even good things ahead of God, who demands first place and uncompromising obedience.

No wonder there are so many unhappy, unfruitful and problematic church members! There is no fear of God. And many church people are in the grip of idols they worship and serve in place of God. And perhaps God is demanding, not that you actually sacrifice your child, but he may ask you to put to death your ambition, goals, obsession and personal dreams and plans you have cherished in your heart. Someone said that in the story of Abraham and Isaac, it was not Isaac who needed to die, but rather Abraham.

During those difficult months some twelve years ago, Nancy and I did some inventory taking in our lives. In the spring of 2003, in a time of deep soul searching and crying out to God in heartfelt prayer, I prayed through our Scripture text for today. I told the Lord Jesus I was ready to take a knife to all my dreams and hopes as a pastor, believing that, if God desires me to continue in ministry he can raise a ministry up from the dead. I asked him to let nothing come between me and him again, and to not let ministry be a substitute for loving God supremely and serving him alone. Now I find myself facing that same test. And once again I am learning that...

God's design is...

*To reveal himself*

God's design for your greatest test is to make himself known to you. Job learned no theology from his miserable comforters, but as a result of his suffering he saw God more clearly (Job 42:5).

It seems that throughout the process of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, God revealed himself as Savior, Mediator and Provider in a way impossible by any other means. Repeatedly, God reminded Abraham that he was to sacrifice his "one of a kind" son Isaac, a designation used for Jesus in John 3:16 ("only begotten son"). Jesus himself, in responding to his enemies in John 8, says Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Abraham somehow by faith saw that Jesus would provide a Savior, his unique and one-of-a-kind Son, who would raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary. Perhaps in the ram caught in the thicket, which was used for a substitutionary sacrifice, Abraham saw the pre-Incarnate Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 8: 56; 1:29).

Our text in Hebrews 11 tells us that the faith of Abraham enabled him to reason with heavenly logic (the Greek word / verb in v. 19 gave rise to the English word "logic"), even though human logic failed him. Perhaps it's only when we stop

relying on human logic that we begin to live and think by faith, and begin to understand life from God's perspective.

Jerry Bridges affirms his convictions about God's wisdom, power, and love. But it is a particularly convincing argument when, at the conclusion of his book, he shares, his testimony of God's grace experienced when his wife died of cancer (193, *TG*). Some truths are learned only in the furnace of affliction. Better, beliefs become convictions through afflictions and testing times. Beliefs are what we carry, and convictions are what carry us. Abraham, when he offered Isaac as a sacrifice, and obeyed God to the full, saw God more clearly than before, and was made more mature in his faith.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) wrote from his Soviet prison cell, "It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good...I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: Bless you, prison, for having been in my life" (Yancey, 87).

During his greatest test Abraham too was learning the most about God.

God's design is also...

*To refine us*

Tested faith includes a design from God, whose design is also to refine us. James, reflecting on Abraham's tested faith, says that as a result of Abraham's obedience he was made more complete/mature in his faith (James 2:22). Peter writes that trials come to us in order to test us, to refine our faith, which is as precious as gold refined in the fire. As a result, God is glorified as our faith is proved genuine (1 Peter 1:7). In our trials Satan's design is to destroy or at least discourage us. But God is at work in our lives to refine us and to make us more fitted for his purposes.

Like the Western North Carolina (USA) wood carver who explained the secret of his craftsmanship being the simple task of "cutting away everything that don't (*sic*) look like a hound dog," so the Holy Spirit, through testing, cuts away from us everything that doesn't look like Jesus.

We are Christ-made people, who by heavenly logic are learning to trust God to cut out of our lives everything that doesn't look like Jesus. Life's greatest test may seem at the moment nonsensical, but with heavenly logic we can see the hands of the loving Creator and heavenly Father at work to make us more usable to him, more bless-able now, and more reward-able in heaven. The Lord, our sculptor, finishes what he starts, as Paul says in Philippians 1: 6. He will not give up on us until we are like Jesus.

God's design is also...

*To restore us*

Perhaps your life has not been fully useful to God, and you are not yet ready to trust him with your life, your future, and your family. God may be ready to test you, to give you the opportunity to trust him fully. The test wasn't to give God information about Abraham. It was to teach Abraham that he could fully trust God, and that now God could trust Abraham to continue to obey and honor him.

God raised Abraham that day as a renewed, triumphant, God-pleasing giant of faith. Again, it wasn't Isaac who needed to die that day. It was Abraham who needed to die on Mount Moriah. He became that day what James 2:22 describes as a friend of God, and Jesus says we too may become his friends, if we obey his commands (John 15:14). And the Great Commandment is that we love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). The only way we can love like that is to die to self so Christ might live and love through us.

Abraham discovered God's restoration as he "receives back his son. God showed him a better sacrifice which would take the place of Isaac...he will have his son in quite a new way—through the Mediator and for the Mediator's sake. Since he had shown himself ready to obey God literally, he was now allowed to possess Isaac...through Jesus Christ....Abraham comes down from the mountain with Isaac just as he went up, but the whole situation has changed. Christ has stepped between father and son. Abraham had left all and followed Christ...Outwardly the picture is unchanged, but the old is passed away, and behold all things are new. Everything had to pass through Christ" (Bonhoeffer, 99).

Joni Eareckson Tada continues with the struggle of her faith. She remains a quadriplegic and had a recent battle with breast cancer, but God is using her life in amazing ways, with her paintings, writings and leadership in the work of the Kingdom. Joni says,

"Over the years my outlook has changed. I awake every day grateful for what God has given me. Somehow—and it took me three years to believe it might be possible—God has proven to me that I, too, can have fullness of life."

She says also, "Maybe God's gift to me is dependence. I will never reach a place of self-sufficiency that crowds God out. I am aware of His grace every moment. My need for help is obvious every day when I wake up, flat on my back, waiting for someone to dress me. I can't even comb my hair or blow my nose alone."

Joni also is restored with a sense of hope, and thus has the proper perspective on life. She says, "I have hope for the future now...I realize that I will be healed.

I haven't been cheated out of being a complete person—I'm going through a forty- or fifty-year delay, and God stays with me even through that.

"I now know the meaning of being 'glorified.' It's the time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing" (Yancey, 132, 135).

God's design for us that we might glorify him. He will test you, and some day you will face your greatest test. God will be faithful to you. You can trust him fully. Somehow, in ways you right now cannot understand, your life will have more joy in God and more hope for the future and for eternity, after your greatest test. And, your life will bring more glory to God, who will be your Deliverer and Provider. I have come to believe that. If you've gone through your greatest test, you will believe that too. If you haven't, God will give you grace to face and pass your greatest test of faith. It will be demanding. But it will be designed for your good and God's glory (Romans 8:28).

### **Conclusion:**

You may have gone through a severe trial, and as of yet have not been able to see the purpose of God in it. Are you willing to affirm the love, wisdom and sovereignty of God over your life, and even your distressing circumstances? Will you ask him for grace to enable you to trust him, and surrender to him your distrust, and perhaps your bitterness?

Some of you here today may be recovering from a severe test, and are now better able to serve God.

There may be others who are in the midst of or are facing in the near future life's greatest test. Are you relying on the grace of God, and are you willing to trust and obey him, and emerge triumphant and better able to serve him and better prepared to spend an eternity in heaven? In fact, as Paul says, we are to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I am seeking God's grace to enable me to be grateful for our circumstances, trusting that he is at work for our good and his glory. One of the Scripture passages that has been encouraging to me is Psalm 50:14-15:

"Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
And perform your vows to the Most High,  
And call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (ESV).

A time of testing is sure to come, and someday you will face your greatest test of faith. James 1:2 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, *whenever* you face trials of many kinds...." Notice that he doesn't say, "*If* you face trials, but rather *whenever* you face them. And James says you can face trials with joy because

you know God is at work through them to perseverance and maturity. We don't need to dread our trials or even the greatest test of our faith. God's grace will always be sufficient. Psalm 112 describes the righteous and obedient man who "will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord" (verse 7).

All of us will some day stand before God's judgment and must pass the test of a personal relationship with God, made possible by our experience of saving grace. Have you come to know him? Are you following Jesus as your Lord?

Are you prepared to face the final test of faith—your own death?  
Will you commit to a life of obedient faith that will allow you to pass the tests of faith—both your severest and your last?

Are you walking with God, and preparing for life's greatest test? Let's dare to examine if we're "riveted" to God with the "best-best" quality of metal as we head toward possible icebergs before us. Then we're ready for the toughest voyage before us.

#### **Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. What are some examples of tests of faith in your life?
2. What has been the severest test so far?
3. What about this test seemed untimely? Unreasonable? Unbearable?
4. What do you think is Satan's desire for you as a result of these tests?
5. What would you say is God's purpose in these tests?
6. What has God provided for you to enable you to pass the tests successfully, thus pleasing him?
7. What effect did these tests have upon your faith? Upon the glory of God in and through your life?

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