

# Enduring the Test

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God's ways, especially during trials and bitter experiences, as they lead to spiritual growth and the ability to bless others.*

**Duration:** 18:41

**Scripture:** Exodus 15:25-27, Numbers 20:2-13, Deuteronomy 8:2-3, Deuteronomy 8:16, Psalm 66:10-12, Isaiah 55:8-9

**Topics:** "Testings"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the journey of the Israelites as they were led by God out of Egypt towards the land of Canaan. The speaker emphasizes the importance of trusting God even in difficult times and praises Him regardless of the circumstances. The sermon also highlights the misconception that following certain formulas or principles will guarantee specific outcomes, emphasizing that God's ways are not always predictable or understandable to humans. The speaker shares personal experiences and encourages listeners to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and to rely on God's presence rather than material things.

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## Transcript

You know, there's a verse that a lot of us quote, but we don't understand how significant it is. For God says, my ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts. What does that tell us? We all get our own concept of how God should work.

And we go to church for a while, we know a few verses, and then we hear some formulaic preachers who say if you do this, then that will happen. And if you do that, then this will happen. But it's not true.

Oh, there are some ironclad principles like, everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved, that's true, that's true. Not true for some people, not true for many people, true for all people. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And in a general way, what a person sows, they will also reap. And there's a way that seems right to a person, but the end is destruction. But then a lot of stuff happens in life.

And if you don't understand how God works, you can really get confused. You can even, I've seen people get bitter with God. I feel strange even saying those words, but I've witnessed people getting bitter with God.

Let's learn this lesson. When God raised up Moses to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, they had the great Passover night celebration. That was instituted then.

And then that very night, they left Egypt. God brought them out with power. They were led then, a lesson for them.

They were led, they were following this GPS system that God had put in their lives. At night, it was a pillar of fire, and by day, it was a pillar of cloud. The contrast made the difference.

They were led by God at that point into a hemmed-in situation with the Red Sea, and then nowhere can left or right. And then suddenly, they look back and who do they see coming? The Egyptian chariots. So they said, like, what's up with this? We came out, God delivered us, and now they said to Moses, this makes no sense.

God delivered us, so we'll die. God delivered us so that the Egyptians can kill us. You would think they would have said, now God couldn't have done that to get us destroyed, but we all get fearful, don't we? What happened was they had the great miracle that's talked about through the entire rest of the Old Testament.

Over and over again, the prophets, the Psalms go back to that day when God made a way where there was no way. He opened the Red Sea. The people were able to pass through by some super ginormous miracle that God performed, but when the chariots of Egypt started to come through, they were destroyed.

The enemy was destroyed, and God delivered his people. And now, as they just get out, they sing a song, Moses' song, and Moses is teaching them, and they're all singing, and then there's a short song by Miriam, and she gives a song, give thanks unto the Lord, and God is great, and whatever that song was about, and the tambourines, and everyone's having a great time. And now they have their system of being led because God brought them out, but now God, whoever God brings out, he's supposed to bring to.

He doesn't bring you out. He brings you out so you can get in. Get into what? Well, for them, it was the land of Canaan, which he was gonna lead them toward.

So now they're out, and they're following the cloud, so they know wherever they go, God is leading them. And wouldn't you know that they're just, just out, and they get hit with this huge lesson which they do not understand, and which all of us have battled with. So let's read about it.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went into the desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. Now wait a minute.

Why would he lead them to a place where there's no water? You need water to live, am I correct? No, they're in a hard place. Now when they came to Marah, they could not drink its water. Now they got water, but it was bitter.

They couldn't drink it. That's why the place is called Marah, because Marah means bitterness, or bitter. So the people grumbled against Moses, as if Moses was leading them.

Moses wasn't leading them. Moses was pointing to the cloud and the pillar of fire and say, when it moves, we move. When it stops, we stop.

I'm not in charge of this. God's in charge of it, right? So now they're mad at him, and Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. And he threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

And there the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test, or as one version has, he tried them. Then skipping a verse to verse 27, then they came to Elam, where there were 12 springs and 70 palm trees, and they camped there near the water. So now being led by God, let's do real talk.

When they were led by God, he led them to a place that was hard. There was no water at all. Then he leads them after that to a place, and they go, yo, there's water.

But when they go to drink it, it's too bitter to drink. And who led them to those places? Who led them to that bitter water? God, not the devil, God. You gotta understand that.

And then God takes the bitter water and makes it sweet and refreshing by using just a piece of wood, which tells us that God can take the most bitter circumstances that we're in in life, and if we'll trust him, he can make the bitter sweet. Come on, can he make the bitter sweet? The bitter can become sweet. Some people say that that wood is a type or a symbol of the cross, which was made of what? Wood.

So it's a symbol or a type of the cross that when you apply the cross of Jesus and you think of his love, he can take the most bitter thing and make it sweet for you. God leads us sometimes because he's prepping us, preparing us, trying to build faith in our lives, and the only place that faith is developed is in hard places. In hard places is where you develop faith.

You don't develop faith when the sun is shining and you're eating from a palm tree and you're eating dates and figs and whatever else they're eating over there. No, it's in a hard place that you learn to trust God, and it's in the bitter place that you can learn, he can take a bitter thing and make it sweet. How would they know that unless they had lived through it? You and I have to remember in our lives, sometimes you can be following God and loving God, and not everything is elam.

Elam, does he bring us to elam at times? Yeah, elam, nice water, trees for shade, nice spot, dates, figs, whatever they're eating. There are elam days in our life. How many have been led by God since you're a Christian into some sweet time, sweet moments of blessing? Just lift your hand.

Come on, all of us know what that is. But how many of us also have been led by God, God permitted it, when they went into that desert and couldn't find water, if they would've said, who brought us here? Moses, if they would've been polite enough to ask, Moses would've said, would you please look up there? I didn't lead you here, we're following the cloud, and the cloud led us here. This is what people don't believe.

God leads us sometimes and permits hard situations. Why? He's testing us, he's trying us. He's trying to put iron in our soul.

He's trying to give us a testimony. How are you gonna have a, look, stop, stop. How are you gonna have a testimony to help anybody unless you go through something? Everybody wants to be a blessing to someone, but folks are living through hard situations.

And unless you and I go through those hard situations, my wife and I were counseling a couple, and we were talking about life. Carol was saying that a certain time after we were pastoring for a while, she just

wanted to run, she just wanted to quit. It just got hard.

You know, what she was called to do, no musical training, every week you have to come up with a song, you gotta teach the choir. She had no office, no assistance, no help, nothing. Nothing, there was no one to help.

She played for every wedding, played for every funeral, played for everything, and she can't read or write music. She's just doing this on the fly. And it got to her trying to raise children, and it just got to her.

She wanted to run, it was a hard place. And we've all been through hard places, haven't we? But don't blame everything on the devil. God sometimes leads you in a hard place because here's the point.

He wants you to learn in the hard place to say, God, I do not like this, I don't see any water, but I will trust in you, and I will praise you when there's no water, when there's water. A lot of folks can only praise God at Elam. They only can praise God when it's looking good.

Then they act like children, act like babies when things don't go the way they like it. As if God has only got your pleasure in mind. No, he's trying to teach us, break us, melt us, make us fit to bless someone else.

I've been through some really hard times, but God's brought me through, and now I see, I can say to people, I have this element of faith in me. No, don't give up, don't quit. Well, how do you know what I'm going through? I went through worse, and God brought me through, he's gonna bring you through.

Come on, let's say amen to that. You teenagers, now that you're Christian, you gotta learn to get strong in the Lord so you can help other young people who are empty. They're going nowhere, and they're going through pain.

So God permits us to go through that so that we can learn that he is more than enough. He's more than sufficient. His grace is beyond what we could imagine.

One last thought. God not only permits hard situations, he permits bitter situations. Hasn't he had permitted and led some of us into Mara, where we thought it would be nice, and we went to drink it, it was bitter, it was hard.

But he permits those so that he can throw that piece of wood in the situation, and we can see the bitter become sweet. You know what the sweetest aroma I ever smelt was? Better than any perfume, cologne, France, wherever it costs, was a man who came in the building, and I wasn't ready for him, and I wanted to go home. And it was an Easter Sunday, and he smelled and reeked from urine, feces, sweat, and the street.

And he came up to talk to me. I didn't even want to talk to him. I was tired.

I had pulled my tie down, and I just wanted to go home. And when he got close to me, he smelled the foulest smell I ever smelt in my life. That was the nastiest odor I ever smelled in my life.

And I tried to just take out some money. Listen to me, young people. I took out some money out of my wallet, and I thought, let me give him some money.

I'm tired, that's what he wants. He wants to bum some money off of me. This was in the other building, 20-some years ago, and he stuck his finger in my face and put the money down.

He said, I don't know if you want your money. I want this Jesus that you were talking about tonight. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

Because I'm gonna die out there. He had slept in a truck the night before, an empty truck, and he'd be out in the street a couple of years living homeless. He won't go in a shelter.

He said they were too dangerous back then. It had been Atlantic Avenue Shelter, Atlantic and Bedford. You know that big armory there? When he said that, I went through an experience that God permitted me to go through to show how shallow and cheap I had become as a minister.

You know, you can be really cheap as a minister just about preaching and carrying on and not being in tune with the Lord. I was not in tune with the Lord. I was tired, I wanted to go home.

I wanted to hear about this guy's problem. It smelled so bad, and I lifted my hands up to God, and I said, oh God, I forgot about him. He didn't need a God.

I needed God as much as him. I lifted my hands up to God. He'll tell you the truth.

He'll tell you today. I lifted my hands. I said, God, please have mercy on me and forgive me because I am a disaster, and you send someone that needs Jesus, and I'm trying to give them \$5 to get rid of them.

Listen, listen. I started to cry. I was sitting as God as my witness, sitting on the edge of the platform over there, and I just started to weep and just ask God, forgive me, please help me, make me more like you.

I'm a mess, please, and he felt what was going on in me, and he fell against me, and I put my arms around him, and he put his arms around me, and we started rocking back and forth, and suddenly the Lord just spoke to me and said, you smell what he smells like? If you don't love that smell, I can't use you. I can't use you because that's how the world smells to me. The whole world smells that way to me, but I love the world, and you're gonna have to love that smell because if you don't, I can't use you.

I'm putting you on the side. I'm gonna put you on the shelf. You're gonna grow to love that smell, and as God as my witness, as I'm hugging him and saying, yes, Lord, yes, he changed that smell into the most beautiful aroma I had ever smelled, and I was like, my heart started beating like, what is this going on? He made it like a perfume to me.

He can take the bitter thing and make it sweet. Come on, can he do that? He can take a negative situation. Everything that God permits you to go through is so that he can use you to be a blessing to someone else.

If you make it about you, you've missed Christianity. It's not about you. It's about what God can do through you once he saves you, and all these experiences that are bitter.

How do you think Leah felt when somebody sent a bomb hidden as a present three years ago or whenever it was, just disguised as a Purim present, and almost blew that tall, handsome guy that's with her, her son, almost blew him to kingdom come with nails and all shrapnel in it. They were wanting to kill the parents, and he, unfortunately, was the one who opened it, and we have a picture that we used to show of his whole chest opened up and blood everywhere. What do you think, that was easy? And they're over witnessing for Jesus in Israel, ministering to Muslims, ministering to Israelis.

They're trying to do God's will, but that's the way it happens sometimes. You go to Marah, sometimes you're in Elam, sometimes there's no water at all, but you gotta learn to say, God, though you slay me, I'm

gonna trust you, I'm gonna praise you. One last time, let's put our hands together.

Come on, I'm gonna trust you, I'm gonna praise you. Gloria, Gloria, Gloria, remember that. Remember that, no matter how you feel, no matter what you go through, God's with you.

If you have God, that's better than water. As long as you have God, and do you think God is gonna kill you after saving you? No, he's testing us to see if we'll believe in the hard place, if we'll believe when there's nothing to believe in, when you don't see anything, and when things are bitter. Oh, praise God, I thank God for Elam.

I've been to Elam a few times, but I've been in Marah a lot too. How many have ever had like 10 days, 11 nights in Marah? Come on, how many lived through some bitter situations? Of course we have, but has God brought you through? Come on, has God brought you through? Has God brought us through, taught us? Praise God. Father, help us to be mature.

Help us to grow up and learn that our ways are not your ways. We're selfish little beings, but you are a great awesome God. You got plans on your mind, thoughts, and ways that are not even close to the way we operate.

Help us not to be selfish and fleshly, but help us to be spiritual and full of faith so that we can see the bigger picture that you have for all of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name.

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