

God Tests Us Before He Can Use Us

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of being prepared and tested by God for a ministry in the body of Christ, drawing parallels from the lives of Moses, Abraham, and Jacob. It highlights the need for individuals to respond faithfully to God's training and testing, to avoid delays in fulfilling their purpose within the church. The message stresses the significance of being broken, filled with the Holy Spirit, and seeking God's blessing above worldly pursuits.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12, Genesis 15:13, Luke 6:12, Genesis 32:24

Description

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Transcript

So I thought I would continue in what Bobby began. In the scriptures, the number 40 is connected with testing. As he said, Jesus was tested for 40 days and the rain fell for 40 days and Moses was in the wilderness for 40 days, 40 years, sorry, before he was equipped to be the leader.

If you read 1 Corinthians 12, we see there that the church is compared to a body and Christ is the head. I mean that comes many times. You read in Ephesians, you read that in 1 Corinthians and one of the things you see in 1 Corinthians 12 is that God has given a function to every part of the body, like in your human body.

Is there any part of the body which has got no function? I remember the doctors used to say, we haven't discovered a function for the appendix, so they just pull it out. Well, if they haven't discovered it one day, we will discover. God never makes anything without a function.

And here it says in 1 Corinthians 12 that to each one, verse 7, and the important word there is to each one in the body of Christ, and that includes you, please put your name there, is given some manifestation of the Holy Spirit which is meant for the good of the whole body. Now you got to take that seriously. If you have accepted Christ as Lord of your life and He's become your head, then you are a part of His body.

Now you may be a useless part of the body. You're a part of the body, for example, if my hand is cut off, then it's not a part of the body, but if my right hand is paralyzed, it's a part of the body, the blood flows in it, the blood of Christ has cleansed you, but it's a useless part of the body. It does absolutely nothing.

It just hangs around with the body, goes wherever the body goes, but it needs the help of some other body, part of the body, to even lift it up. There are many members like that in the body of Christ. Imagine if you had a hand like that and a leg like that and one eye like that which is not functioning.

Can you imagine how limited your body would be? And that is the condition of many, many local churches, a local church is to be an expression of the body of Christ. Now some have very unique gifts like the eye and the hand and the ear and the heart and the kidney. These are very important functions.

There are other parts of the body which are very small functions like the veins through which the blood flows. I mean there are miles and miles of veins in our body. We may think they are unimportant, but if one of them gets cut, you die.

So nothing is unimportant and that's in that connection I read this verse, to each one there is something the Holy Spirit wants to do manifest through you of the life of Christ which is for the good of everyone. Now the question every one of you, if you're not a member of Christ's body, if you have not yet accepted Christ, then I'm not talking to you. But if you say that you have received Christ as your Savior, whether you know it or not, you're a member of his body.

You may be a useless member of the body doing nothing, just hanging around letting the rest of the body carry you around. Okay, they will carry you around because Christ's body is very compassionate and considerate. But think that you one day stand before the Lord as we will, and he tells us, you were just a useless part of my body, you did absolutely nothing.

But you say, Lord you didn't make me a prophet or a teacher. Well, why should you be the eye or the ear? Can't you be one of the veins in the body, fulfilling a function which is not noticed by anybody? Every single one has some manifestation of the Holy Spirit. So I thought in relation to, you know, there's a preparation for it.

That's what I see in this matter of testing. Moses was tested for 40 years before he was equipped to lead God's people. And the trials and testings that you face in your home, we all face testings in our home, in your married life, the testings of husband-wife relationship, the testings of bringing up stubborn, difficult children or children who are sick.

All types of testings we have, the testings that come through financial hardship in a home. That's God's preparation for a ministry in the body. And testings are tough.

And I noticed one thing, it says here, I want you to notice this, you know, Moses was 40 years old when he went into the wilderness and he spent 40 years there. When he was trained and equipped and tested, he no longer was the Prince of Egypt. He was just an ordinary shepherd looking after sheep.

Humbled greatly and then came back to be the greatest man of God that led Israel out of the wilderness. Now in Genesis chapter 15, I want you to see something. I'm talking in relation to God training us, preparing us for a ministry in the body of Christ.

That's what testing is for. Genesis 15, God said to Abraham, I want you to know this, I'm giving you this land, this land of Canaan, for your descendants and you're going to have children like the stars in the heaven, it says in verse 5. And then it says, God said to Abraham, you're not going to get this land immediately because your descendants are going to go away to another land, that was Egypt. And see in verse 13, know for certain, Genesis 15, 13, that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs.

That's Egypt, where they'll be enslaved and oppressed for 400 years. Then I will judge the nation and they serve and afterward they will come out with many possessions. Now we read here further when the actual time they were delivered in Exodus chapter 12, when that promise was fulfilled.

The 400, the period of captivity, not captivity, but slavery in Egypt was over and in Exodus 12, you read of the Passover and that was the day when the Lord took them out of Egypt. Exodus 12, 33, the Egyptians urged the people to send them out of the land. And it says here, the sons of Israel, I want you to notice this in verse 40, Exodus 12, 40.

Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was not 400 years as God said to Abraham, 430 years. How is that? Did God make a mistake? Could God not see into the future and see that it was going to be 430 years? Why did he tell Abraham 400 years? When you see something like that in Scripture, you can, if you're a lazy person, you just say, oh forget it, I don't know, let me go on to the next point. And that is where God sees you have no interest in knowing his Word.

If you see, if God sees that you have no interest in knowing his Word, he's not going to give you a ministry with his Word, never. I started studying the Scripture when I was about 20 years old and I had a very curious mind and if I found something like that, I'd say, why in the world is it like that? There must be a reason, because I know that God never makes a mistake. When he looks into the future, he's not, oh he sort of slipped up, I thought it was 400, it was actually 430.

There's no such thing with God. You need to ask yourself, why was it? And I asked myself, why is it? And in all these years of my study of the Word, I could not come up with any other reason other than this. God wanted Moses to be trained and equipped in the wilderness in 10 years.

By the time he was 50, he should have been ready to go and deliver Israel, but he was not ready. And God's plan was delayed by another 30 years till Moses was 80. If Moses had come out of the age of 50, what would have been written here? The days the Israelites were in Egypt for 400 years.

So where was the failure? The failure was God's plan was 400 years, but it became 430, because one man, and he was the only man fit to lead Israel out, he was not ready. So God's plan is delayed. Now you've got to apply this to yourself.

We saw 40 years of time of testing. God will test you to give you a ministry in the body of Christ exactly like he prepared Moses. But if God wants to train you and test you and prepare you in 10 years, and you delay it, it may take 30 years.

Or God wants to prepare you in 3 years to have a ministry in the body of Christ, and you don't respond to his training. In some cases, it may never happen. You may waste your whole life.

I'm firmly convinced the reason why there is so little effective functioning in the body of Christ, of many, many parts of the body, just like lame, paralyzed parts in Christ's body in local churches, is because in

their private life, which we don't know anything about, in their life at home, in their life in their place of work, in their attitude to money, in their attitude to how they spend their time, in the discipline with which they discipline their life in prayer and study of the Word, etc., they are downright lazy, and God's work is delayed. And what should have taken 10 years, takes 40 years. What should have taken one year, in your case, takes four years, or never happens at all.

And so the body of Christ suffers. Why did the children of Israel slog for another extra 30 years in the wilderness? Can you imagine 30 years of slavery? 600,000 men slogging along for 30 years of slavery, because one man was not ready. I believe it's like that in the body of Christ.

I mean, I've had the opportunity in the last 45 years, particularly of CFC churches, to see about a hundred churches, at least, in different parts of the world, and I see this, the same problem. There are people who should be functioning effectively in some way. I don't mean they should be prophets, because God appoints only some as apostles, some as evangelists, some as shepherds, some as teachers, and some as evangelists.

Not everybody. But there are many, many other functions in the body of Christ. Spiritual functions.

It could be even a sister encouraging some other sister over the telephone, challenging someone when they meet together. There are so many ministries through verbal communication, and we all meet each other so often. In the world, they gossip about so many things, and we have the opportunity to encourage one another and build one another up.

Some of you who may never in your life sit in a pulpit or stand in a pulpit can have a tremendous ministry of encouraging other people in personal conversation. But it may not happen if God has not succeeded in training you in that period of time by which you're supposed to complete your training to fulfill that ministry in the body. So that's the thing that comes to me in this thing of 40 years that Moses spent, which should not have been that.

The Lord chose the apostles maybe around 27, 30 years old. And one of the wonderful things I see there is, you know, Judas Iscariot. He was not a traitor in the beginning.

I hope you know that. Because if he was, if he was a crook from day one, we would have to accuse Jesus of having made a mistake in finding God's will. I mean, I would not deliberately choose a crook to train to be a disciple.

No. Remember this, that Jesus was on earth exactly like us. He did not know the future.

Do you know that? He said, even the Son of Man does not know the date of His return to the earth. He did not know the date of His return to the earth. He said, only the Father knows that.

Today He knows it. But when He was on earth, He was limited. Why does it say He came near a fig tree and then saw there was no fruit? He could have seen that a miles away if He had used a supernatural power.

He doesn't have to come near the tree to see there's no fruit. But you read there in Mark that He came near the tree and, oh, He said there's no fruit. And then He cursed the tree.

So there are many instances like that where, you know, we heard about Lazarus. Somebody had to come and tell Jesus, Lazarus is sick. I mean, He should have known that if He was God.

He'd have known that. He said, oh, I already know that. He didn't, till somebody came and told Him.

So we see that Jesus was limited in His life on earth as a man. And so He did not know the future unless the Father revealed it to Him. In some cases, the Father revealed it to Him like the Father may reveal to us.

I know when the Lord called me to His service, let's say 58 years ago, there were certain things He showed me about the future of my ministry then, which He showed me. And so when the Lord shows you something, you know, and I see it's fulfilled. So we read in Hebrew, Luke chapter 6, where Jesus chose His disciples, that the names are listed here.

He prayed all night. Verse 12. Now, whenever you read that Jesus prayed all night, you see the next verse, you know why He prayed all night.

So He prayed all night. And when the day came, He called His disciples and chose 12 of them. He had a lot of disciples.

And from them, He had to take 12. And He had prayed all night to know, Father, who are the ones I should choose? And in that list, Simon, Andrew, Peter, all mentioned there in verse 14, was, verse 16, Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. He was not a traitor from the beginning.

Don't forget to see that word became. When a person, you see a person became a leper, he was not a leper always. He became a leper.

He became a traitor. He was as wholehearted as Peter, James, and John when he started. Otherwise, Jesus would not have called him.

We can't accuse Jesus of deliberately choosing someone to go to hell because He would betray him. He became a traitor. He could have become like any of the other apostles.

In fact, I have a theory about Judas Iscariot, that if he had not failed, you know, he was, by the way, the cleverest of all the 12. I hope you know that. Why do I say that? If a man can live for three and a half years in close proximity with 11 others and they don't discover he's a crook, he must be pretty sharp to hide the fact that he's a crook.

They were in and out of all the time they were with each other. And even on the last day when Jesus said this is the person, they said, no, no, no, it can't be him. He must have, they must have, he must be going to buy some something for the feast or something like that.

They couldn't believe it. That's why I say he was the cleverest. He could deceive them outright for three and a half years.

And if he was the cleverest and he had used his brain not to deceive, but for God, I personally believe he would have written the episodes that Paul wrote. It's when he failed that Paul took that ministry. It says in Revelation 3, take heed that nobody takes your crown to one of the churches.

There is a crown meant for you which you may not get because you're too lazy. You don't allow God to prepare you for that ministry. Somebody else gets it.

There was a crown meant for Judas Iscariot, but he was tested. He failed. And so it went to Paul.

So Paul got his and Judas'. So now we got to apply that to ourselves. I believe if everyone sitting in this room who's given your heart to Christ as Lord and you're a member of Christ's body, I want to say to you in Jesus' name, if you never heard it till today, there is a ministry you have in the body of Christ.

I don't know what it is, but you asked God to show it to you. But you may not fulfill it at all like Judas Iscariot, or it may take a long, long time when it should have taken a very short time, and you can fail. It'll be a tragedy if you never fulfill it.

If after a period of backsliding at least you come back and fulfill it, that'll be great. But I hope you will take it seriously. You've got to see all the little things that happen in life as a test in your home.

God's preparing you. The frustrations, I don't know what all frustrations that Moses faced. You know, think of having, you know, Moses had to live with his father-in-law for 40 years.

Imagine a man, a man who was the Prince of Egypt having to live with his father-in-law and look after his father-in-law's sheep. I mean, even one month of that would have been humbling. God planned it only for 10 years, but it took him 40 to break that proud man.

Stephen says that Moses was mighty in words, mighty in words. That's what he was at the age of 40. But God knew that's not, I can't use a man like that who's so full of his own thoughts and out cleverness.

He had to break him to the point where he would say to the Lord at the age of 80, I can't speak. If you're a very eloquent speaker, how long does it take for God to bring you down to the dust where you say, I can't speak. That's what happened to Moses.

You are not able to speak my word, Moses. You're just full of yourself. I've seen that with a lot of preachers.

You may not be called to preach, but if you are called to preach, it's very important to learn that lesson. You can be full of your own knowledge and words and all that. God has to remove all that before he can ever make you his anointed servant.

And that's for those who are called to speak. And even in private conversation, so often we have thoughts that come to us and the Lord might say, don't say that. We have to be very sensitive to God when we seek to help others or bless others or communicate anything to others.

So what I'm trying to say is, what can take a very short time can take a very long time. In the case of the other 11 disciples, Jesus completed the job in three and a half years and they were equipped to lead his church, to start a work. Those 11 started a work that has lasted now for 2,000 years.

Imagine that. Not because they were clever. They were fishermen.

They were broken. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. The two things both we need, to be broken and to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let me conclude with Genesis chapter 32. Here was another man who needed to be prepared for his ministry, Jacob. You know, we read that about many people and Joseph, for example, at the age of 17 he was having dreams about the things of God that would happen in the future.

What an amazing 17 year old he was. What type of dreams do young 17 year olds have today? There you see what a wonderful young man Joseph was. He was having dreams about God's work and yet he could not do that work until he was trained for 13 years as a slave and as a prisoner.

Now I believe that at the age of 30, if Joseph was not ready, if he had not learned the lesson, if he had been grumbling and complaining in the prison all the time, it may have been another 10 years in the prison before he came out. I mean that's what I learned from the life of Moses. There is a period.

In Joseph's case, he was ready by the age of 30. In Moses' case, he was not ready by the age of 50. And in your case, there's a particular age by which God wants you to be ready for a particular ministry in your secular work but a ministry in the body of Christ.

Make sure that you respond to the testings along the way in faithfulness. So we read about Jacob. He had deceived Esau and he was sent off to his father-in-law's place.

Not father-in-law's but his, Rebekah's relative's home. And God was trying to break him. And in Genesis 32, we read here that Jacob was left alone.

Verse 24. And for so many years God had tried to break Jacob and he had not succeeded. And then it says, he dislocated his thigh and then he said, let me go.

And by the time Jacob was broken. Look at this man saying in verse 26, I will not let you go unless you bless me. He had been grabbing birthright, his father-in-law's sheep and property.

He had spent all his life grabbing, grabbing, grabbing things for himself. And now he had let go everything and he was grabbing hold of God and said, Lord, I don't want all those things now. I want your blessing.

And the Lord was so delighted when he saw that this man had finally emptied his hands of the pursuit of, he pursued after his birthright, he pursued after, he wanted Laban's daughter and he got two of them. But he wanted only one. And all types of things went in his life.

But finally he was broken and the Lord says, what's your name? He said, Jacob. Jacob means deceiver. He's finally telling the truth.

When Isaac asked him, what's your name? He said, I'm Esau. He was a deceiver there too. But when finally the Lord asked him, he said, I'm a deceiver.

And the Lord says, you will not be called a deceiver anymore. Your name is called Isaac because you as a prince, you have prevailed with God. And that was the turning point of his life.

And he was prepared to be the head of the nation of Israel. So what I see from there is there is a particular period that God has for us to be broken like Jacob was prepared for a ministry. And if you respond finally and say, Lord, I let go of everything else.

I want to lay hold of you. I want the purpose you have for my life to be fulfilled. I've succeeded in so many areas in my life.

Maybe you've succeeded in your profession. Maybe you've succeeded in coming to America, which you wanted to come. Maybe you've succeeded in finding the girl you wanted to marry or so many things like that.

That's great. But I want to ask you whether God has succeeded in making you what you should be in the body of Christ. Don't let that take longer than it should.

There's a period of testing and that period may be fulfilled. Amen.

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