There Is No Testimony Without A Test!

By

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I was reminded this week of an ancient wisdom that is confirmed over and over again in Scripture, which is that there is “No Testimony without a Test!” There is

No victory without a fight.
No healing without a sickness
No promise without a price
No resurrection without a crucifixion
No Crown without a Cross

There is no testimony without a test!

This has been a particularly challenging week, and it served to remind me that if life is anything it is a test! Webster defines testimony as a witness. In other words a testimony is a witness to the truth. When we go through a test we learn from personal experience what is and is not true.

Everyone here has a testimony of one kind or another. Don Snyder went through a cancer scare almost five years ago. It was a test, and now he has a testimony for how his family saw him through the ordeal. Joanne Winters, Cliff Weber, Pam Schaffner, and Mary Ann Young all just went through the same back surgery in the past four months… they endured a test and now they have a testimony for how effective that surgery is. Some of you right now are going through the test of not having a job, experiencing family grief, or you’re going through a financial trial. Life is testing you right now, and one way or another, at the end of this test, you will have a testimony. You will serve as a witness. Was
God there for you? Was He faithful to walk with you all the way through your trial? Did God answer your pleas with His presence? And did God’s Church respond to you? Did we visit, make calls, send cards, and most importantly – did we pray… did we shake the gates of heaven in your behalf? At the end of your test you will have a testimony.

Life is a test! And this is a true today as it was true for all the great saints of God.

Abraham and Sarah were directed by God to leave their home and travel to a foreign land to which God Himself would direct them. It was a test of faith. How would you respond if God directed you and your family to leave Central Pennsylvania and go to live in Botswana or Thailand? It would probably be the greatest test of your life, but at the end of it you would have a testimony about God – did He come through for you… did he prove Himself faithful to all your needs… could He move the mountains that stood in your way?

The Bible is full of saints with testimonies. Daniel had a testimony of God delivering him from the lion’s den. King David had a testimony of God delivering him from Goliath’s hands. Joseph had a testimony of how God transformed him in one day from a forgotten prisoner to the ruler of Egypt.

Indeed, the entire Bible is a testimony of God’s faithfulness – a testimony that comes in two testaments – the old testimony of the ancient Hebrews and the new testimony of the followers of Jesus. Both the Old Testament and the New are full of stories of men and women going through great trials, and in those tests learning all about God.

**TESTS ARE NORMAL!**

Now here I want to stop and emphasize a simple, but often overlooked point, which is that hard times, trials and tribulations, tests, are normal and to be expected. We tend to view tests as interruptions to the norm, (“ah, why did this have to happen now!”) when in fact they are the norm. Everyone here has been tested in one way or another, and how we respond to our tests determines our life’s
course. It’s not the easy times that chart our life; it’s when we are put to the test! Whenever you are tested it’s not some kind interruption to your normal routine. Tests are routine. Our patience is tested when we must wait in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Our courage is tested when we have the opportunity to share Jesus Christ with someone else. Our honesty is tested every time we fill out our taxes. Our faithfulness is tested every day of our marriage. Let me put it to you this way, if you are not being tested in your life… if your character is not being challenged… if your faith is not being pushed… if your love is not being stretched then you are more than likely dead. Oh, you may be sucking air and eat’n food, but you not alive, you’re just existing. To live is to be tested! It’s the dead fish that just float easily downstream with the current… only the living fish fight to swim upstream. If you are truly alive in this world you will be tested! After all, there is evil in the world and it needs to be opposed, and this will test you. There is tragedy and sorrow in the world and it needs to be ministered to, and this will test you. There is injustice and unfairness in the world and it needs to be confronted, and this will test you.

The people of Egypt are being tested right now. So are the people Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan… they are being tested. Are they up to the test of freedom? And make no mistake; we in the United States are being tested right now! Are we up to the task of preserving our freedom? Are we willing to make the sacrifices necessary to preserve our precious freedoms?

Life is perfectly calibrated by God to make us grow personally, emotionally, and spiritually, and this is what tests do, they force us to grow. Remember in school, how little studying we did during the course of a semester, but as the final exam approached our studying became increasingly more and more intense. Indeed, the intensity of this last minutes studying may be where most of our learning actually took place. We learned because we were tested. That’s the way God made us. We were made to be tested. It’s the norm!

Unfortunately, some spend most of their adult lives doing everything they can to avoid all tests. They assume that if they can make enough money and construct a shell of invulnerability around them that they will be safe from the
harsh trials of life. But it just isn’t so, ‘cause life is all about the test, and the reward you get for your test is your testimony – your own personal witness to what is and is not true.

You know where you can read some great testimonies. Go to a cemetery, and read what is written on some of the tombstones. They’re testimonies. They are the parting witness of those who have gone before us.

**Persuasive Communication!**

I want to point out something else about testimonies, which is that they are the most persuasive form of communication there is. Testimonies are what win court cases. When a witness gets upon the bench and shares an eye witness account of what happened, it is usually what carries a case. Big business knows this, which is why our television commercials are all about testimonials – ‘I used this brand of soap that my whites never looked brighter.’ Or, ‘I used this weight loss program and I lost 25 pounds in a month!’ Testimonials are the most effective form of persuasion there is. And just what kind of testimonials are the most effective of all? Well, it’s the testimonials to those who have been severely tested. Let’s face it, we don’t want advice or counsel from the person who has lived most of their life on top of sugar hill, we want to hear from the person who has had to walk through the valley of the shadow. We don’t want financial advice from the person who inherited a boat load of money and who has never had to struggle in their life. We want to hear from the person who came up the hard way, and who earned every dollar they ever made, and who knows the value of a buck. And when we are in the hospital the night before surgery, it’s not the well intentioned reassurances of those who have never been cut themselves that minister to our fears. It’s the people like Linda Olley or Joan Valor who have experienced more than their fair share of pain who can help us conquer or fears. And who do we want to talk to when our marriage is going south – is it the couple who seems to have it all together and never seem to struggle, or is it the couple who has a testimony of overcoming great odds to hold on to love?

We Christians tend to over look the power of our testimonies when in fact they are our most effective weapon in the spiritual fight. Indeed, the Bible says as
much. The Book of Revelation says that we conquer Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony.” (Rev. 12:11) Every one of us here is to engage in the spiritual fight. We are not just to avoid evil. We are called to fight and defeat evil, and according to the scripture the two weapons we have to use are the blood of Jesus which supernaturally transforms the sinner into the saint, and the word of our testimony – which transforms doubt into faith. Its not the person who knows the most scripture who going to be the most effective in spiritual warfare. Neither is it the person who attends church every Sunday, and who knows all the ins and outs of religion. No, the most powerful person in spiritual warfare is the one covered with the blood of Jesus and who has a testimony. Who is able to look someone square in the eye and say with absolute conviction, “This is what God did for me… I was broke and broken and He lifted me out of it, I was sick unto death and He healed me, I hated my spouse and had my bags packed and He rescued both me and my marriage. (LOVE LIFTED ME!

OK, so how do you use your testimony in a spiritual fight? What good are words when the bullets of anger, disrespect, resentment, despair, sickness are flying over your head? Well, one of the best examples I can think of in the Bible is the story of David and Goliath. We all know it.

The Israelites were at war with the Philistines, and the two armies were mobilized and facing each other with a valley between them. Out of the Philistine ranks strode a champion of enormous size – Goliath – who was 9’ tall and whose armor alone weighed 150 pounds. His spear was as large as a weavers beam, and his mere presence inspired terror in the ranks of the Israelites. Day after day Goliath stood in the valley between the two armies to insult the Israelites and to shout his challenge, “Why bother using your whole army? He would say. Pick your best fighter and pit him against me. If he gets the upper hand and kills me, the Philistines will all become your slaves. But if I get the upper hand and kill him, you’ll all become our slaves and serve us. I challenge the troops of Israel this day. Give me a man. Let us fight it out together.” (1 Samuel 17:8-10, The Message) This challenge went one every morning and every evening for forty days, but none of the Israelites had the courage to face Goliath. But it so happened that young David visited the Israelite camp to deliver needed food supplies for his

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brothers. David was the youngest of eight brothers, three of whom were serving in Israel’s army. Being the youngest David tended the sheep and did the menial chores. But when David heard Goliath’s challenge he bristled at the giant’s insults. He also heard the Israelite solders say, “The man who kills the giant will have it made. King Saul will give him a huge reward, offer his daughter as a bride, and honor his entire family.” Well, this was enough for David, so he volunteered to take the challenge. But when he was brought before the King, King Saul was less than impressed, and said, “You can’t go and fight this Philistine. You’re too young and inexperienced. Goliath has been killing since before you were born.”

Now, here is where the value of a testimony can be seen. You see, David and Goliath is commonly portrayed as a story of an innocent boy up against a hardened killer, but only half of this equation is true, for Goliath was indeed a career killer, but David was far from an innocent boy who knew nothing of fighting. Indeed, David says as much to the King. He tells the king his experience. He fought lions and bears to the death while protecting his father’s sheep. He says to the King, “Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I’d go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I’d grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference – I killed it. And I’ll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of God. God, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine.” So what we have here is not the unfair battle between a giant blood thirsty mercenary against a small, innocent boy. No. What we actually have is a fight to the death between two experienced killers. Goliath killed men, and David killed lions and bears. Now, do you know how big your average adult lion is? I stood next to one in at a zoo… there was a very think plexi glass window between the two of us. A lion is huge… an average adult lion is between 450 and 550 pounds! And they are an absolute killing machine. And bears are even bigger! Young David was eerily confident, not because he was naive, not because God supernaturally numbed his fears, not because he was suffering from delusions of grandeur. Not at all. The boy David was confident because he had a testimony. He had been well tested. To face down a lion or bear with but a knife, sword, or sling shot is courage way beyond the norm. He was
tested, and because he was he had a testimony that served him well when everyone else shrank in fear. He could say with confidence, “I’ll fight the giant,” not because he was young and stupid, or dangerously reckless. No, he knew what was possible because he had seen for himself what God could do through him.

How about you? What kind of giant are you facing right now? Is it sickness, or joblessness, or pennilessness, or depression? What giant stands as a test before you? Keep in mind that a test is just as much an opportunity as it is a pain. Its normal to be tested. Our tests are where the steel of our character is forged. What kind of test stands in front of you right now? And what kind of Testimony do you have with which to face it? In getting ready for this sermon this week I read a great definition for a testimony. A testimony is a weapon of triumph, born from the ashes of adversity. When you have a testimony… when you know what God can do through you then you can focus less on how big the giant is and more on how big your God is. A good testimony is a wellspring of power and confidence for those of you who have been through the valley of the shadow and back again. You know who’s in charge of the universe. You know the power and the glory of God’s name. You know that your redeemer lives, and that He lifts those who put their trust in Him.

By the way this church has a testimony! Did you know that? Yes. This Baughman Memorial UMC has a testimony? Would you like to hear it? When the forebears of this congregation decided to erect this building in 1908, they had a total 235 members. That’s less than half the number of members we have today! And do you think they were better off financially? Do you think that the rank and file members of this church were better off financially than we are today? Of course not. They probably had it worse. Even so, they set out to build this church… they believed that if they stepped out in faith that God would respond.
They believed that the future welfare of the people of New Cumberland was worth the sacrifice. They believed that the spiritual welfare of their children and their neighbor’s children was worth it. They believed and so they built. They didn’t have the money, but they had the faith. They believed, they built, and they passed the test and in doing so they left us a testimony.

All of us here have been tested, are being tested, and will be tested. Indeed, everyone here still has the greatest test of all yet to face – our own death. And God says:

It’s time to take the training wheels off…
It’s time to get rid of the pacifier,
It’s time to rid ourselves of the crutches,
It’s time to move from sight to faith,
It’s time to move from ‘I hope so’ to ‘I know so.’
It’s time to move from milk to meat.
It’s time!

When you’ve got a testimony from God you can sleep like a baby in a den of lions just like Daniel did. You can walk through the fiery furnace like Sadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. You can face down a raging mob like St. Paul did, and you can face down your own death with courage and conviction like St. Peter finally did when he was hung on a cross upside down outside the walls of Rome. Whenever you are tested, and you will be tested, your fears can be overcome and your anxieties relieved by the blood of the lamb and by the word of your testimony.
You don’t really know what’s in you… or more importantly whose in you… ‘till you’re tested. Every testimony is based upon a trial of our faith. Again, and again, and again the Bible declares to us “Don’t be afraid!” With God the Father over you, with Jesus Christ living in you, and with the power of the Holy Spirit before you, you will pass the test!

Amen.