

---

## The Ever-Increasing Demands of Faith

**By David Wilkerson**

August 25, 2008 What is it about faith that keeps demanding of us greater testings? Why do our afflictions grow more intense, more severe, the closer we get to Christ? Just when we come through one trial that proves us faithful, our heart declaring, "Lord, I will trust you for everything," here comes another test, increased in its intensity.

This experience is shared by Christians all over the world. I see it in all my travels, from continent to continent, and our ministry regularly receives letters from readers who testify of a growing intensity in their trials.

A godly pastor friend told me recently, "I have never loved Jesus more than I do today. And yet I have never been so severely tested. My present trial has left me stunned, speechless. I've never felt so helpless, so lacking in wisdom. And I see no human way out of my difficulties. I simply don't have any more answers. I find myself longing for heaven, for rest from all of this conflict."

The fact is, every saint who grows ever closer to God's heart will find his burdens and trials becoming ever more intense. I call this experience *the ever-increasing demands of faith*. And it is a pattern we see throughout Scripture.

1. Consider the ever-increasing demands on Abraham's faith. When we first read of Abraham, God asks him to pack up his family and travel to an unnamed destination. This must have been an incredible test for Abraham, as well as for his loved ones. Yet by faith, Abraham obeyed. It was by faith he lived among strangers in strange lands yet was unharmed and blessed. And by faith Abraham was delivered from every crisis, through supernatural dreams and visions given by the Lord.

At one point, God told Abraham to behold the starry sky, saying: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them...so shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:5). In other words: "Abraham, that's how many children, grandchildren and family you're going to have. They will number as many as the stars."

What an incredible promise. This word to Abraham was beyond the comprehension of any human being to grasp. What was Abraham's response to this promise? "He believed in the Lord" (15:6).

What was the result of this faith from Abraham? What did his deep, abiding trust mean in God's eyes? We find the answer in a single verse: "He believed in the Lord; *and he counted it to him for righteousness*" (Genesis 15:6, my italics). Time after time Abraham put his faith in God, and he was considered righteous in the Lord's eyes.

By the time Abraham turned 100 years old, he had endured a lifetime of incredible tests of faith. Through it all, Scripture says, he had trusted God. And now the Lord said of this faithful, obedient man: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (18:19).

Do you see what God himself said of this man? He declared, "I trust Abraham. He has a proven faith." This caused the Lord to say, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (18:17). When God said this, he was about to perform an important work. He was declaring, in essence, "How can I hide something this important from such a faithful man?" So the Lord shared with Abraham a secret no other human knew: Sodom was about to be destroyed.

---

In his old age, Abraham was given the son promised to him by God. Isaac's name means "laughter," and for a season this boy's name seemed to describe Abraham's life. Every indication is that Abraham enjoyed his later years free from trials. God seemed to have given him a furlough from testing. The picture is of a very old man, well respected and enjoying a time of peace in his life.

Yet, once again we read, "It came to pass after these things, God did tempt [test] Abraham" (Genesis 22:1). After all the many years of struggles — all the afflictions, the testings, the ever-increasing demands on his faith — godly Abraham, so trusted and loved by the Lord, faced the most incredible demand yet on his faith.

God told the patriarch, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (22:2).

As I read this, my human reasoning cries out: "Lord, this man has already been tested to the limit. He doesn't have to prove his faith. You already know his heart! You declared yourself his proven trust in you. He's at such a wonderful place in life right now. A lifetime dream has come to pass for him, your promise fulfilled in his later years. Why does he have to endure another test now?"

"This man will soon be in glory with you. Who is going to benefit from this trial? Who among Abraham's generation will ever even hear of this test, taking place as it does on an isolated mountain? You know Abraham is going to trust you through it. He has already proven that, many times over. So, what is this trial about? Is it a matter of chastening? What is there to chasten Abraham over? He's an old man. He has a record of prayer and trust with you in all things."

You know the story. God spared Isaac, substituting a ram for the sacrifice. And the Lord told Abraham: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.... Because thou hast done this thing...I will bless thee... Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:12, 16–18).

God told Abraham, in effect, "I know now that you will never hold anything back from me, even your precious son. I know I am everything to you, Abraham. And because you have proven this, I am going to bless you."

Hear what the Spirit is saying in this passage: "Others may never learn about your ever-increasing tests of faith. You may suffer in isolation, alone, with no one to benefit from your testimony of faith and endurance. In fact, you may be judged for your suffering, as others think, 'Why is he going through all this? There seems to be no point to it. I wonder where he has failed in his life. What sin he has committed to bring this kind of suffering on himself?'"

Yet, you can know the God who led you into your trial of faith knows what your trial means. Your tears have all been bottled by him, every pain felt in his heart. And the Lord assures you: "This will end in blessing. It will impact those in your family."

Abraham was already in glory when these promises were fulfilled by the Lord. But his family, the nation of Israel, and eventually all of humankind would benefit from his proven faith. Likewise, you may not be there to witness when God blesses your children and spiritual children. But the Lord makes clear to every servant who endures with faith in him: "This will all end in blessing."

---

2. Consider the ever-increasing demands on David's faith. David was known as a man who fully trusted God. He declared the theme of his own life when he wrote, "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him" (Psalm 28:7).

These weren't just words for David. Scripture records event after event in David's life when he showed great faith in impossible situations. By faith, David killed a lion and a bear with his bare hands. Placing his trust in God, David killed the Philistine giant Goliath. By faith he escaped from Saul's attempts to kill him. And by faith he won great victories over all his enemies. Later, by faith and repentance, David was restored to the throne after his son Absalom attempted to kill him. Simply put, David lived and breathed faith in the living God.

Through all of these things, David boasted of the Lord: "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" (31:19). It is no wonder Scripture calls David a man after God's heart.

Yet we also know from Scripture that this blessed man was sorely tempted. David was overcome by adultery. He spent days, weeks, months in anguished pain over other trials. There were episodes in David's life when he was so tormented and afflicted he pleaded for death. Indeed, David suffered severe bouts of depression. He became so overwhelmed that no counselor could console him. He speaks of crying himself to sleep many nights, of intense loneliness, of how low his spirit sank.

Yet through those years of intensified tests and afflictions, David never lost faith. Few people in Scripture were tested, tried and proven as David was. And he came out of it all with an ever-increasing faith.

We have seen how many tests and trials were endured by both Abraham and David, each a great man of faith. My question is this:

Is there a point in our walk with God when we become so trusting, so proven faithful through years of testing, that we can expect a respite from spiritual warfare? Is there ever a vacation from troubles, a time when we can relax free of trials? Does a lifetime of meeting faith's demands earn us a furlough from the battle? Is it possible to have nothing left to prove, to reach a point in faith where a test is no longer necessary?

The answer, according to Scripture, is no. In fact, the opposite is true: the trials of the faithful increasingly become more severe and troublesome. The Bible bears this out again and again, from the Old Testament to the New.

Once again I turn to David's example. In 1 Chronicles 21, we find David as an elderly saint. At this point Scripture says he is utterly loved by God, admired by angels, a proven man of great faith. As I consider this picture, my human reasoning speaks to me:

"Oh, Lord, David has been in the fires of affliction long enough. Time after time, he fought till he dropped. His life is an established testimony to your faithfulness. Please, God, give this man a furlough. Let him enjoy time with his grandchildren. You already know his heart. Why can't you let him retire in peace? Let there be no more warfare for such a faithful man."

Was this God's plan for his beloved servant? Not at all. Instead, we read, "Satan stood up against

---

Israel, and provoked David to number Israel” (1 Chronicles 21:1).

David, in an act of pride, conducted a census, to learn how populous Israel had become. For a man who had lived his entire life by faith in the Lord, this was purely an act of flesh. And God was displeased over it. David then faced a horrible trial, perhaps the worse affliction of his life.

A plague swept through Israel, causing the deaths of 70,000 men. When David realized this was happening because of his sin, he clothed himself in sackcloth and fell on his face in anguished repentance. He prayed without ceasing, casting himself solely on God’s mercy, and the Lord stopped the plague.

Again, I have to wonder: Why did God allow Satan to have such access to this proven, praying man? Why test the faith of an elderly saint who was already close to death? I picture the elderly David barely able to kneel in repentance. Why was such an incredible demand put on his faith? What could God possibly have been after in David?

I’m convinced this same question enters the minds of many godly saints about their own faithful lives: “Lord, you know my heart. I have trusted you through years of excruciating trials and testings. You and I both know I will trust you no matter what I face in life. So, what are you after? What is this awful trial about?”

I have two responses to this question, both drawn from what I see in Scripture.

1. The first reason for such continual testings is well known to most Christians. That is, the life of faith continually demonstrates humankind’s need for the Lord in all things. Simply put, we never reach a point of *not needing God*. The idea of a “furlough from trials” presumes a “furlough from need.” And there will never be a time when our needs are met by our circumstances. The Lord is our source, our all in all.

The Bible shows us instance after instance when Israel’s needs were met and the people stopped relying on God. They became preoccupied with being provided for, when God had already promised to supply all their needs. As Jesus tells us, our purpose is not to seek having our needs met, but to feed on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (see Matthew 4:4).

2. I am convinced an additional reason behind our ever-increasing afflictions — our trials that demand ever greater faith — go far beyond anything having to do with this world. From what I read in Scripture, God’s elect are being prepared for ministries in glory. And our trials today are meant to bring victories having to do with the Lord’s purposes in eternity.

This is most clearly demonstrated in the life of the apostle Paul. In him we find our New Testament example of the ever-increasing demands of faith.

3. Consider the ever-increasing demands made on Paul’s faith. We all have read about the perils that Paul faced. In 2 Corinthians 11:24–28 he lists all the afflictions he endured, both “without” and “within”:

“Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea, and I have been constantly on the move.

---

“I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and often have gone without food. I have been cold and naked.

“Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (my paraphrase).

Paul stated that none of the outward afflictions moved him, and his life proved it. Indeed, every time he was about to enter another city, the Holy Spirit reminded him about the chains and afflictions awaiting him. Paul says, in short, “My mere presence stirs things up wherever I go. I face intense physical suffering in every city. A messenger of Satan has been appointed to harass me.” Yet he could endure it all, he said, because “neither count I my life dear unto myself” (Acts 20:24).

Paul’s deepest, most intense trials had to do with the problems and burdens of others. He was moved to tears over those in the church who endured great affliction. He said, in so many words, “The beatings and shipwrecks can’t affect me, because I don’t count my life as worth anything. Rather, it is the things within — the mental battles, the emotional pain over my cherished ones — that cause me the most anguish.”

I identify with Paul in Acts 20. Here we find the apostle in Ephesus, saying goodbye to the saints in that city. At this point, Paul was nearing the last few laps of his race. He had fought a good fight and kept the faith, and now he was on his way to Jerusalem. So he said goodbye to the Ephesian believers, telling them, “(You) shall see my face no more.”

Paul then prophesied over these believers a deeply painful message, with tears and anguish: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30).

What an excruciating truth for Paul to have to face near the end of his days. How heartbroken this godly man must have been. I can’t imagine how difficult that meeting was for such a loving shepherd, who had given his all for those believers.

Watching Paul sail off, my flesh wants to say, “Lord, he has fought enough battles! Let him go to Jerusalem and have a restful time with no burdens. Let him bask in the love and fellowship of the saints there. Let his final days be full of peace and quiet, free of pain or affliction.”

Yet, within a week of arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was dragged out of the temple, putting the whole city in an uproar. Once again, the apostle was bound in chains. After all the trials and suffering he had endured, here came more ever-increasing demands on Paul’s faith. It meant yet another imprisonment, another court appearance, another trial.

Because Paul appealed to the Emperor, he was now headed for Rome. But before that could even happen, Paul faced more suffering. The ship he was sailing on was wrecked by a mighty storm, with everyone aboard having to swim to shore. Once on land, Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, causing the crewmen to turn on him, thinking he was cursed. It was as if Satan were saying, “You’re dead now, apostle.” But Paul shook off the snake, with no effect from the deadly venom.

---

The group set sail again and Paul eventually got to Rome. Finally, we think, “Here is a break, a furlough, for Paul.” Instead, he spent the next two years there under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier in a tiny, cheap, rented house. It was in these humble circumstances Paul died a martyr.

Ever-increasing afflictions, demanding ever more steadfast faith, become a stumbling block to many believers. Paul was accused by fellow Christians of being chastened by God. They said his sufferings were the result of a lack of faith, or because of some secret sin he was hiding. Moreover, the messenger of Satan appointed to harass Paul never let up, buffeting the apostle to his dying hour.

As we see Paul spending his last days in that tiny prison house — reaching the Jews who visited him, one by one, with the good news of Jesus — we find it impossible to explain why this beloved servant had to endure such extreme testing after years of suffering. Humanly, we can’t comprehend it.

Personally, I think we simply can’t explain why many righteous people face insurmountable sufferings. We’ll never be able to state all the reasons why difficulties increase for those who love God deeply. We may think, “It’s all meant to teach patience.” Or, “It teaches God’s people to trust him more.” Yet, often when we say these things, they are nothing more than clichés. Certainly they are empty of meaning to those who are enduring critical crises.

I want to offer a special word to all who have come through floods and fiery furnaces of afflictions, and who are facing ever-increasing trials. I believe it is possible your time of testing may have nothing to do with chastening. Rather, it is this:

Something eternal — something having to do with your life in the new world to come — is at the center of your trial. The battle you’re enduring now is not about this world, not about the flesh, not about the devil. Rather, the warfare you’re facing is preparation for your eternal service in glory. *You are being prepared for service on the other side.*

Think about it: The very day you committed your life to trust God, no matter the cost, he knew your present trial would come. He knew then — and you know now — that you would love him through everything that comes at you. By grace you are determined to be an overcomer.

I’m convinced that right now everything you’re facing points to the New Jerusalem. The apostle John writes about that time to come: “There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3). “There shall be no night there...and they shall reign for ever and ever” (22:5). “(He) hath made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (5:10).

All of this speaks of activity. It suggests God is preparing us now for what he wants to entrust to us in the new world. Simply put, he has plans for us beyond our comprehension. Paul speaks of this when he says we will serve God continually, with all joy: “He has raised us up together, and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: *that in the ages to come* he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6–7, my italics).

Think of it: we’ll hear testimonies of the Lord’s merciful kindness for ages to come. And there will be great, powerful singing. Imagine the praise meeting that will take place when all the angels sing about sinners now saved. If those celestial beings rejoice over one sinner, as Jesus says, what will it sound like when millions of the redeemed from throughout the ages come marching in?

---

In a recent time of great testing, I asked the Lord: "If there are lessons I need to know from this present trial, please teach me."

The Spirit spoke clearly to my heart: "Your present affliction has nothing to do with chastening. It has nothing to do with this world at all. Your intense, long-lasting trial has to do with eternity. I am preparing you for your service and ministry in my kingdom."

Dear saint, I believe we are being weaned from everything that is of this world. The pain we are experiencing right now are awful birth pangs. God has allowed us to be so weakened of human strength that we may stop all striving and let him take us the rest of the way.

There is an old gospel song: "By and by / When the morning comes / When all the saints of God are gathered home / We will tell the story how we've overcome / And we'll understand it better / By and by."

I have testified of God's goodness throughout my lifetime. And in the new world to come, I'm also going to tell my story all over heaven, of how real, near and merciful Jesus was to me in my worst times. Glory to God!