

A few weeks ago while sitting in a reception room I picked up a magazine and began reading. One story that caught my interest was about of a very fast all-electric sports car which is being tested in California. The same magazine reported that researchers were testing new drugs and therapies that might cure cancer. A few pages further on I was drawn to an article that a large software company has released a new "beta" version of its popular product. I had heard this word, "beta" a lot over the years but now felt I needed to look it up in the dictionary. I found that the meaning of the word, "beta" is, *it is still being tested although it is released on a limited scale.*

What do all these enterprises have in common? Before each product is released to the general public, it has to be repeatedly tested for effectiveness and functionality. Did it do what it was projected to do? Before manufacturers spend a fortune on promotion, they need to know if their product will work outside the lab or the factory. So, they test it under stressed conditions. Once it passes the test, then it is released.

God has an idea, a product, in mind for us. He wants to reveal a new species of human man and woman, a new creation. At the center of this new person is a Christ-like heart. This new person comes with a heavenly mind and spirit. Even though this new human looks like the old version outwardly, yet spiritually its inner mechanism is entirely different. Yet, the process of releasing the new person to greater authority, require levels of testing. The more tests we pass, the greater God releases us to the general public.

Using this metaphor, I suggest that most Christians are in the "beta" stage. They are released to a limited group for testing. God wants to see how well what He has created in us works outside the "lab," (the church). These small test groups may consist of co-workers, a neighbourhood, one's family, etc. But during this time of "limited release," you will go through various tests before being released into the larger, general population.

When God tests us, He does not descend into our thought-life with a loud public announcement or warning, *"This is a test, only a test."* The test examines us when we are under stress and in real life conditions. It appears in our lives without forewarning that a test is coming. I believe that God isn't testing how well we can outwardly look "Christian," He is examining the quality of what we actually are. Even more than possessing right answers, He desires us to possess right attitudes and responses. He wants to know if we can function under adverse conditions, spiritual warfare and stress. We need to remember that it wasn't always this way and was not meant to be this way. Once our First Parents left the climate of Eden, the stresses and challenges started and continue to this day.

To underscore this truth about God we need to understand that He will test the quality of His work in us. Remember God's conversation with Satan? God asked, *have you considered my servant Job?* The Lord described Job as being unique in all the earth, *a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.* (Job 1:8). The

implication of the question, *have you considered ... Job*, is that God had worked some deep things in his servant and now it was time for this inner transformation to be tested.

We need to remember that Satan had *considered Job*. He had a dossier on him filled with information. When Satan sought to attack Job, the devil couldn't get near him. God had placed *a hedge about Job and his house, and all that he had on every side*. Satan had probably been examining Job for many years. But he couldn't touch him because of the impenetrable protection Job enjoyed. For all the devil tried to do to get to Job, God had *blessed the work of Job's hands, and his possessions increased in the land*. (v. 10).

Knowing that Satan had considered Job, we need to consider this Biblical story and the revelation it provides concerning our tests and their outcome.

-If we walk with God with integrity and intercession, we can trust that the normal status of our lives will be completely protected and hedged *on every side*.

-If we do come under severe spiritual attack, it is because God is testing the quality of His work in us. He knows the capacity to overcome is within us, otherwise He would not have allowed the enemy access to us.

-While tests within the world are usually accomplished in labs or controlled environments, God's tests come in the real world. Thus we might not realize that we are going through a "test," for the test will be a real life experience.

-The test often comes just before we are released into a *double portion*, which is what happened to Job.

-We probably will not know what the test is all about until much later. Job's test was not whether he would *rejoice always*, or maintain his good works; nor was he made vulnerable because of fear or unbelief. The great test in Job's life was whether or not he would curse God. For all he went through, Job passed the test.

God took Job, a righteous man of great influence in his community and brought him through a terrible test. One might say that the costs of his test outweighed his reward even though He did receive a double portion. Job's wealth and influence increased greatly, but that was not the end of this story. God has since used the life of Job as an example for millions and billions of people. Before the test, Job's range of influence touched his culture; afterward, his integrity has inspired nations through the epochs of time. The Lord tested Joseph, Moses and David. He tested Israel in the wilderness. Jesus Himself endured many tests, not the least of which was His time in the desert.

These Biblical teachings are given to help us understand, if we want to advance spiritually, God will lead us through fiery ordeals which test us yet bring us out to a greater place. Some of us are in "beta", being tested in limited small groups; others have gone through significant battles recently, but God is about to bring them into a double portion. A dear friend of June and mine, one of my former teachers had been battling cancer for nearly two years. Once one cancer cleared up in one part of his body, another cancer seemed to pop up within a few weeks of his being given the "all clear." Before he died he sent all his students in the Interim Ministry Network a letter sharing his faith reflections. In the end he said he had had to ask himself if his glass was half empty or half full. Having passed through *the Valley of the Shadow of Death* at least six times, he admitted that there

had been days he did not know if he could take one more treatment or if it had been all worth it and if so, to what end. One day a friend went to visit him, and they talked about his life's work – he was an Episcopal Priest. Through the conversation and prayer that followed, he felt the revelation affirmed instantly, though he did not recover, he was alive and still praising his Lord. Since that day he did not doubt for a moment that his glass was any less than very full, even that it was *a cup that runneth over*. In a letter before he died, he asked that when we remember him in prayer, before the end of our prayer to sing or hum, *hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah*.

For all who are followers of Jesus Christ and whose goal is conformity to Him, God gives us one answer to every test we experience: become like Jesus in the test. When the devil realizes what he is using to destroy you is actually being used by God to perfect you, Satan will withdraw his attack.

The Psalmist has written in Ps. 66:11-12, *If you have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our backs. You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water, yet You brought us out into a place of abundance.*

The test is the door to abundance. Amen.