



Part 2: Lesson 12

## Cultivating the Good Soil: The Testing of Your Faith

Fertile Soil: Starting Your New Life with Jesus

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Everyone prefers sunny days. The sun provides us with light and heat, and it helps everything to grow. There are some parts of the earth where the sun shines every day, and it rarely rains. These places are called deserts. Life is difficult there. Most plants, animals, and humans cannot survive in that type of climate. Rain is necessary for things to grow and survive. But sometimes storms come and deliver too much rain. Disasters like floods and hurricanes can destroy both property and life. Haiti has been battered by many storms over the years.

The Bible tells us that *God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matthew 5:45).*

**This is an important, universal truth—you will encounter storms in your life. You will experience many types of trials and temptations. Your faith will be tested.** We experience this testing in many ways and to various degrees of severity. Some of our suffering is physical, such as sickness, injury, or hunger. Some of our troubles are relational, such as dealing with difficult people or being treated unfairly and cruelly by someone. Other ordeals are emotional or spiritual. These adversities are often deeply personal and private.

Some hardships are the result of an unforeseen accident while others are the consequences of poor decisions. There may be times when fear, sadness, grief, loneliness, and pain will tempt you to disobey God or to abandon your faith.

God's word warns us, "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*" (1 Peter 4:12).

When the Bible uses the word "testing," it is referring to many kinds of trials and temptations that we will encounter. **Christianity is not an escape from pain, adversity, and misfortune. Even though difficulties occur, you are never alone. You can know God as your source of strength, comfort, and purpose. You can be confident that God will help you to face your struggles, to stand strong, and to provide a way of deliverance.**

## YOUR GROWTH GOAL



**In this lesson, you will learn that:**

- 1) God is with you when you are tested**
- 2) God will help you overcome when you are tested**
- 3) God has a greater purpose when you are tested.**



**Before you go any further, stop and ask God to help you understand His Word, to help you experience His presence, and to become the person He wants you to be.**

## STORIES OF JESUS' TEMPTATION AND SUFFERING



Would it surprise you to know that God understands your trials and temptations? He understands them because He experienced them deeply. He was tempted by the devil, and He suffered torture and murder. Read the following stories about Jesus' testing.

### Jesus' Temptation

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.*

*The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"*

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."*

*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

*The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:*

*"He will command his angels concerning you*

*to guard you carefully;*

*they will lift you up in their hands,*

*so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*

*Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time (Luke 4:1-13).*

### Jesus Mocked and Beaten

*Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him (Matthew 27:27-31).*

### Jesus Crucified

*As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said*

to them, *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. . . .*

*Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

*The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”*

*The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”*

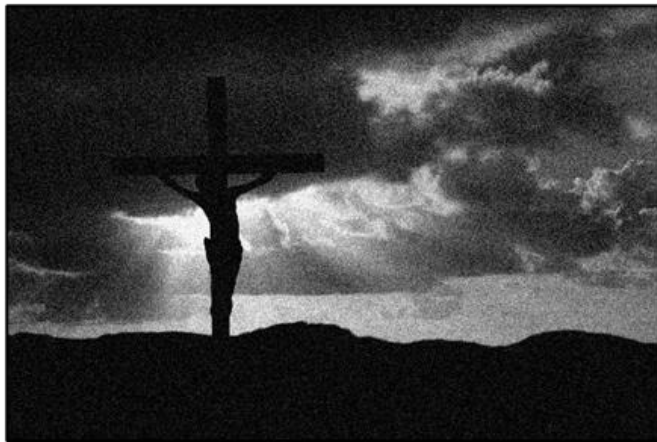
*There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews.*

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”*

*But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”*

*Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*

*Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:26-28, 32-43).*



## Jesus' Death

*It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

*The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away (Luke 23:44-48).*

## Questions to Consider:



Privately, take some time to think about the following questions. Write your personal responses to each question in the spaces provided. If you are studying in a group, talk about your responses with the other people.

*How did the devil tempt Jesus?*

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

*How did Jesus resist the devil's temptations?*

*Looking closer at the stories of Jesus' death, how did He suffer physically? How did He suffer emotionally and spiritually?*

*Why do you think Jesus went through these temptations and sufferings?*

As Christians, we face and fight our trials and temptations differently from the world. We understand suffering differently than Vodou and respond in completely opposite ways. **You can be confident that you are not alone—God is with you, and He will help you.** God's word assures us:

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:5).*

*God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

*So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).*

Ultimately, **we will be victorious . . . we will not be defeated!** Jesus' resurrection conquered death and won the battle. *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).*

## DIGGING DEEPER: OVERCOMING TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS



In this section, you will learn about the power to overcome your testing. You will also learn about the purpose of your testing. Carefully study the Scriptures and consider how they apply to your life.

### I. GOD IS COMPASSIONATE

Considering Jesus' temptations and suffering, the Bible says, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

*Is God able to understand your trials and temptations? Why?*

*How does that make you feel about going to Jesus with your sufferings and temptations?*

*How should we approach God with our weaknesses?*

*If we approach God with confidence, what does He promise?*

Jesus is compassionate and will show you mercy because He suffered everything that you will experience and more, yet without sin. He endured and overcame the limits of suffering.

### 2. GOD HELPS YOU WHEN TEMPTED

Jesus taught us to pray, "*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*" (Matthew 6:13).

*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).*

*What is the warning?*

*What is a common truth about your temptations?*

*What does God promise:*

- 1)
- 2)

### 3. GOD HELPS YOU AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL

Not all of your struggles are against human forces. You will encounter attacks by spiritual forces fighting against God. God's word warns and promises us:

*“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” (1 Peter 5:8-9).*

*“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:7, 8).*

God provides us with weapons to resist the devil.

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).*

Read about these weapons of divine power from Ephesians 6:10-18.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In*



*addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

***To resist evil, what are six pieces of equipment needed and their function?***

- 1) belt - truth
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)

***How are you instructed to pray?***

#### 4. GOD HAS A PURPOSE

When our faith is tested, we often ask **why?** And **where** is God?



Many religions attempt to explain suffering. Most connect the cause of suffering to wrongdoing. In the Biblical story of Job, he encountered a severe testing of his faith. Three friends came to him and accused him of doing something wrong because they believed God only punishes bad people. But this is not true. God does not always work that way. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Not all failures are the direct result of our own shortcomings. Many are the result of circumstances outside our control.

In Haiti, many turn to Vodou to discover the source of their suffering, to obtain relief, and to change their fortunes, especially for healing or release from a tormenting evil spirit. Some believe suffering is the result of offending a loa or failing to offer an appropriate sacrifice. Others fear hidden spirits and curses laid in their path to be the source of their misfortune.

Your suffering and illnesses are **not** caused by a failure to perform some ceremony that has offended the loas or because you angered the spirits by accidentally stepping on magic powder or touching an ouanga. An amulet or garde will not protect you.



**God takes our trials and temptations and uses them for a greater purpose.** God's word tells us that your trials are to make you stronger and purer. Your testing is not to defeat you. To understand how God uses your trials for something greater read James 1:2-4.

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

***When you face trials, what should you do?***

***What does the testing of your faith produce?***

Perseverance is continued effort to do something despite the difficulties, obstacles, failures, opposition, or delays. ***What is result of perseverance?***

The following verses explain how God works in your suffering:

*We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5).*

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them (Romans 8:28 NLT).*

***Can you think of a time when God turned your suffering into something good? Did you learn any lessons from your testing?***

## FINDING COURAGE AND STRENGTH IN GOD'S PROMISES



God's word is a tremendous source of strength and comfort when your faith is tested. It has many powerful promises. Romans 8 contains several reassuring promises. Read the verses below and underline words and phrases that give you courage and hope.

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. . . . we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:*

*“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:18, 23-39).*

***What words and promises were most helpful to you? Write them in the space below.***

Verse 18 says, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” ***How does this give you courage and comfort?***

***Have you ever struggled to find the words to pray? How does the Spirit help you to pray?***

Verse 31 asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” ***How do we know that God is for us and not against us?***

Verse 35 asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” ***Is there anything in this life that can separate you from God’s love?***



**With your mentor and other followers, pray together asking God to guide you, strengthen and protect you, and provide for your daily needs.**

**Every day this week, read 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”**

