

The Gift of Obscurity

Psalms 91:1 He that dwelleth in the **secret place** of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Jesus' trilogy of spiritual disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount ...

Matthew 6:3-4 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be **in secret**: and thy Father which seeth **in secret** himself shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is **in secret**; and thy Father which seeth **in secret** shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:17-18 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is **in secret**: and thy Father, which seeth **in secret**, shall reward thee openly.

We know nothing about Jesus' life between the age of 2 and 30, except for this one incident recorded by Luke ...

Luke 2:40-52 And the child **grew**, and **waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom**: and **the grace of God was upon him**. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. **And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers**. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? **wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?** And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, **and was subject unto them**: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus **increased in wisdom and stature**, and **in favour with God and man**.

There is a pattern in the Word of God that we are meant to notice!

Obscurity is a gift from God – it is where He does His best work!

Job 23:8-10 Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: **when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold**.

In the ancient world there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into moulds and allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honour who put only genuine full weighted money into circulation. Such men were called "dokimos" or "approved." That is what New Testament writers meant when they used this word, which is translated in the King James Version as "approved" or "tried" ...

2 Corinthians 10:17-18 But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is **approved**, but whom the Lord commendeth.

2 Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself **approved** unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is **tried**, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

The opposite of "dokimos" was "adokimos" which meant "not standing the test, not approved, unfit for use, unproved." It is rendered in the King James Version as "rejected, castaway, reprobate."

1 Corinthians 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a **castaway**.

Titus 1:14-15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work **reprobate**.

Hebrews 6:7-8 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is **rejected**, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

If you truly desire to serve the Lord in whatever capacity He assigns you, it will be reassuring to understand some of the tests of God that lie before you. It will be encouraging to know that He uses these tests to build and grow you, not to tear you down. You can take great comfort also in the spiritual fellowship of the many great servants of God in the Bible, and those around you. For you as a Christian, they are “older brothers,” leaders by example, and the truest “mentors” that you could ever hope to find.

WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE TESTED? Doesn't God know if you're ready to minister? Of course He does, but you need to know it too. The very act of testing is itself part of your preparation, and can drive you into a deeper relationship with God like nothing else can. The Bible clearly teaches that God tests and tries every ministry which He uses in His Kingdom. By that, we mean ...

God examines the true inner attitudes and motives of those whom He calls, to show whether they are pure or not; this is not simply to expose weaknesses, but to cause them to turn to the Lord for help and healing. Through our trials, God removes impurities.

God puts those He calls into difficult situations which will refine them spiritually (the Latin word for test, “testu” means “to be put inside of an earthen pot with a lid on top”). This creates faithfulness, sorts out those who are not truly called by Him, and equips His servants with the spiritual understanding they need to help His church in the future.

This testing is why the Bible says “For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

Every Christian should have a desire to be used by God in some way, but many do not understand the process of preparation for their ministry. Most people also do not understand that PROVING IS A LIFETIME PROCESS, and that tests will occur throughout our lives.

There are many different tests God uses to uniquely prepare His servants for their various ministries. Many of them are seen at the time as dark and deep valley experiences, but when later regarded in retrospect they are seen as some of the most precious times in one's spiritual life.

THE TIME TEST. By all outward appearances, God does not seem to be fulfilling the word He gave you in the past. This tries your patience, forcing you to trust God to fulfill His promise in His own time and way. **(David)**

THE WORD TEST. You experience circumstances that seem to nullify the Word of God. Many feel that they should never experience darkness or confusion, but God purposely allows contrary situations to accomplish purposes we cannot see. **(Joseph)**

THE CHARACTER TEST. You are surrounded by ungodliness that attempts to pull you in its direction. This shows us the areas of weakness in our own personality, and we realize we must call on more of God's grace. **(Samuel)**

THE MOTIVATION TEST. God arranges situations to reveal to you what influences your decisions, values, choices and priorities. We may not always know why we are really doing something, so God discloses our inner desires. **(Balaam)**

THE SERVANT TEST. You are asked to do menial tasks that seem below you. This reveals whether your motivation is to be in the public eye, or if you truly desire to help. Those who pass this test learn that God brings forth some of the most precious fruit in the shade! **(Elisha)**

THE WILDERNESS TEST. You find yourself in a dry and desolate place where no fruit is growing in your life, and you wonder if God really wants to use you. This shows you whether your spiritual life is sustained by the Lord or merely by all your activities, cultivates your prayer life, and strips you of worldly wisdom. **(Moses)**

THE FRUSTRATION TEST. You feel that your spiritual goals cannot be achieved due to people or circumstances. There is no logical reason, yet your efforts are being foiled. This causes us to re-examine and re-align our spiritual priorities. **(Paul)**

THE DISCOURAGEMENT TEST. Circumstances or people dishearten and deter you from an undertaking which you believed was God's will, and you lose your confidence and hope. This causes us to go to God in prayer. **(Elijah)**

THE SELF-WILL TEST. God asks you to do something that counters your own plans or desires, or ask you to do something for which there is no logical reason. We must realize that God has to break the self-will and personal ambition of every person He uses, so He can completely trust them. **(Abraham)**

THE PROMOTION TEST. You find yourself not moving forward in the church, and are tempted to become angry and bitter at the lack of advancement or preference given to you. The more developed you are, the harder this test is to endure! God's timing is not man's timing, and true promotion comes only from Him. (**Abimelech**)

The Parable of Promotion

Judges 9 contains a parable that can easily be called "the parable of promotion," because it uses the word promotion three times (v. 9,11,13). This parable is found in the midst of a political upheaval that includes a terrible blood bath. The men of Shechem accepted as their king for a short time Abimelech, the son of Jerubbal (Gideon) by his Shechemite concubine (Judges 8:31). By recruiting help from his mother's kin, the Shechemites, Abimelech won the family fight among Gideon's seventy sons for rulership over the tribe of Manasseh. With the support of the Shechemites, Abimelech went to his father's house at Ophrah and murdered his seventy half brothers upon a single stone. Only Jotham, the youngest, escaped his hand. Jotham, from the safety of Mount Gerizim, screamed out this incisive parable of promotion ...

Judges 9:7-15 And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

This parable of promotion demonstrates through nature the spiritual principle that every leader must know his own place of ministry, and STAY IN IT! All but one tree knew the place that God had given to them in nature, and were content to stay there. The olive tree (v. 9), the fig tree (v. 11), and the grape vine (v. 13) showed their acceptance of their place in nature when they REFUSED PROMOTION beyond God's will. The bramble bush, however, expressed its desire to go beyond the realm God had given to it. It wanted to be promoted over all the other trees. EVERY CHRISTIAN MUST ACCEPT THE PLACE OF MINISTRY WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN HIM. Stay in your boundaries!

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are **called**: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Matthew 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be **called**, but few **chosen**.

Revelation 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are **called**, and **chosen**, and **faithful**.