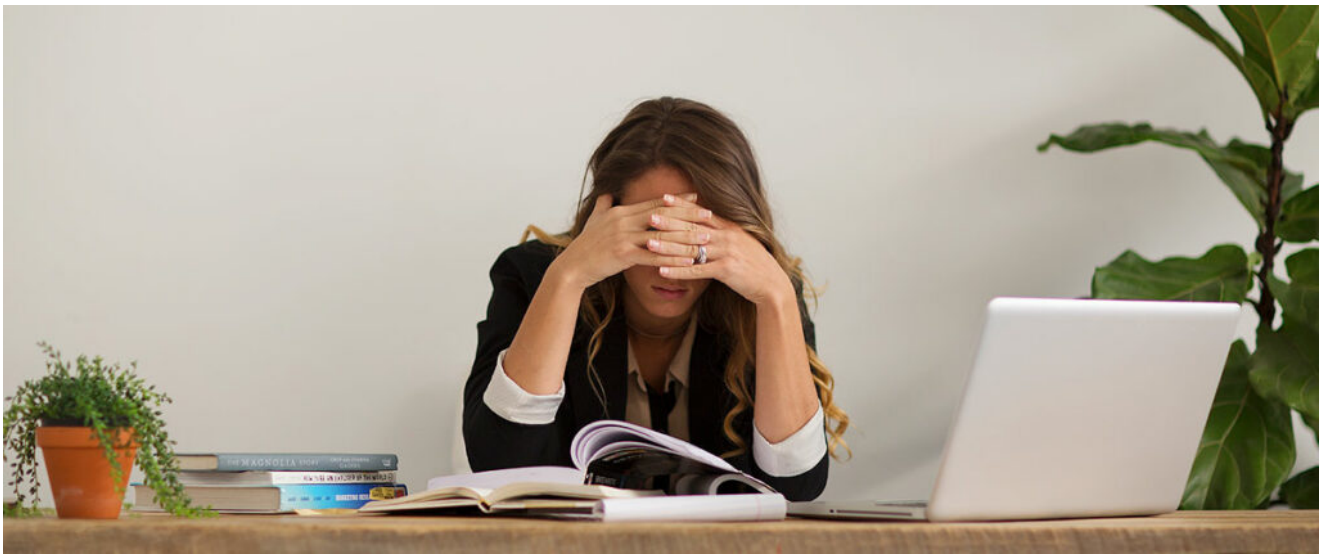
Facing the Tests

Juliet West 13 February 2018



‘Everything in life is a test. Success, failure, riches, poverty…it’s all a test.’ My dad, Will Marais, is pretty well known in our church circles for quoting this truth. Unfortunately for me, I’ve never been a fan of tests. Rewind to high school and picture me as the teen sitting in class during test week, with sounds similar to that of a hungry, caged lion escaping from my belly. Nerves. I just hated tests, no matter how much I’d prepared (or not prepared, in some cases), my reaction was always the same: sheer terror.

I can’t say I’ve outgrown my attitude toward tests. My husband knows when I’m feeling stretched or stressed or tested, by the tummy cramp medicine I’ll be seen scratching for in my handbag or medicine cupboard. I think it’s the thought that I could fail whatever test lies before me that freaks me out so much (to the point of physically feeling it). Unfortunately for me, in the Christian walk there are tests, daily. Just take a look at 1 Peter 1:7: ‘…so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.’

It would seem tests are inescapable. In light of this, I’ve needed God’s grace to help me change my attitude towards tests. (Disclaimer: I haven’t “arrived” at the point of fearlessness when it comes to testing, but God has still done a great work of grace in my life, and that’s what I want to share with you, hoping to encourage you in this area that I’ve so dreaded so much in the past.)

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> attack and **not** a test.

Last year was our (me and my husband, Pierre's) year of "testing our hearts towards leaders". How did this testing happen, you may ask? Well, through many not-so-amazing moments with leaders, which revealed many not-so-amazing cracks in my heart and attitudes towards them. The pinnacle point was when two of our local leaders came to speak into our lives about our involvement in and submission to our local church body. I did not take it well. My first reaction was (and I'm horrified to admit this) something close to rage. I was a pastor's kid, my whole life had been involved in and submitted to the local church – that's what my family had given up so much for, and from where I was sitting (right on top of 'pride mountain'), all I could see were their failings and my 'proof of good works'-filled history.

I was a ball of knots and tummy growls for days. Indignant through the testing time, stubbornly refusing to see it as a test, I drew out the test by digging my heels in and thinking of every reason why this was an attack and **not** a test. Guess how well that worked out for me? I'll be clear: **not well.** When my husband eventually got through to me with a few truth-filled 'love sandwich' moments, the Holy Spirit enabled me to face the test head on. God added a huge dose of humility and 'log out of my own eye' perspective change, I laid down my pride, and the strangest thing happened. The test ended, almost instantaneously, thereafter.

> The testing brought freedom and better health to my body.

You see, my dad has another saying that's pretty encouraging too: **'Every tough time has an expiry date'**. That includes tests.

When the test ended, and God had the opportunity to remove a lot of junk from my heart in the process, an even more incredible thing happened. I felt like I had more grace and love for these same leaders than before the testing time had begun. It was, and continues to be, a wonderful realisation for me. The testing brought freedom and better health to my body. My wise husband keeps reminding me that we can't lose when we choose to submit to our leaders (as long as what they are saying lines up with God's Word).

> Tests won't stop coming, God assures me of that truth, but the tests won't be wasted.

Not only did passing through the test bring freedom, but with it came the beginnings of a mind

shift for me towards testing in my life. Testing started to bring with it the (albeit dim at times) glimmers of a hope of something better beyond the testing. Tests won't stop coming, God assures me of that truth, but the tests won't be wasted. I hang onto the truth and hope that on the other side of the tests could be the very freedom, breakthrough or greater reality of unwavering joy for which I have been longing.