

These notes follow the God's Not Dead study series, and are longer than normal.



Life Group Study Notes

"God's Not Dead: Passing The Test"

April 17, 2016

Warm Up (10-15 minutes)

Choose a question below to answer, or ask another. No right or wrong answers.

- What was the most difficult school test you ever took? Why was it so hard?
- What has been one of the biggest challenges you have had to face in life so far?
- Have you ever been given a second chance in life?

Word (10-15 minutes)

Sermons can be heard online at www.bethelworld.org

James 1:2–4 (ESV) *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

1. Your faith will be tested. God will help you in trials and temptations.

Jesus compared the quality of people's faith to seed cast on different soils. In particular, some are like seed cast on rocky soil, which sprouts quickly but eventually shrivels in the heat of the sun. In the same way, many joyfully accept His message at first, but when persecution comes, they abandon Him (Matthew 13:20–21). When we endure persecution, we know our faith rests on good soil, so it will stand the test of time.

When our faith is tested, it helps others see that it is real. Make no mistake, if you're a believer, people are watching your responses to the challenges you face. Even those who claim they have no faith are wondering if those who say they do are authentic. When they observe your faithfulness under pressure, it's a convincing witness for many.

The testing of our faith demonstrates that the kingdom of darkness and its power over mankind have been defeated by the sacrifice of Christ at the cross (Colossians 2:15). God promises that in spite of the tribulations we experience, we can overcome even as Christ overcame (John 16:33). Our ability to stand firm testifies to others that the power of God in us is greater than the power of darkness in the world.

2. Have convictions, not just opinions. It's important to possess values that don't change.

Just about everyone has an opinion on religion or spiritual issues. But there is a huge difference between having an opinion and possessing a real conviction. Opinions can change and they have little power to shape your actions; convictions are held deeply and do not change due to peer pressure or the situation you are in.

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The original disciples of Jesus preached the Gospel and confronted their culture with the conviction that Christ had been raised from the dead and was Lord and God. They said things like “We must obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29) when told to be silent. Jesus commanded His true followers to call people from all nations to turn from evil and believe His message. Many of the disciples would eventually lose their lives rather than deny their convictions about Jesus and what He commanded them to do.

Most of us will never be put to the ultimate test of losing our lives because of our faith. Yet we will all have to lose something, whether that is friends, job opportunities, or social standings.

3. Take a stand. Go public with your private beliefs.

When you possess convictions, you will eventually have the opportunity to take a stand for those beliefs. To stand for something means you have determined that the values and beliefs you possess should not change, regardless of peer pressure or consequences. It requires courage and trust to voice a belief that might be unpopular or controversial.

We also stand against the forces of darkness behind the scenes. Paul wrote, “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” (Ephesians 6:13). This means that we don’t necessarily see people as our enemies but we realize that we are battling against spiritual forces. These forces certainly influence people and wage war against us as believers. The pressure we feel to surrender our beliefs is definitely spiritual in nature and must be resisted. If we resist the devil, the Bible promises he will flee from us (James 4:7).

4. Keep calm (and carry on). Respond properly when challenged.

An ultimate test of the nature of our faith is how we respond when someone criticizes it. Biblical teaching confronts many of the perspectives and values of modern society, so it will directly clash with many things taught in school and promoted in the media. As a result, many will respond unkindly to our message and especially to us personally when we hold to a biblical view of morality. When we are ridiculed or rejected, however, we should not speak from a posture of defiance or anger. Instead, our tone should be humble and gracious. We need to correct false beliefs gently and guide people to the truth thoughtfully.

A helpful approach to hostility is to ask why a person has become angry. Often, they are simply reacting against their false perceptions of Christianity. For others, their anger comes from painful experiences with religion while growing up or unpleasant encounters with misguided Christians. We can convey remorse for their experiences but encourage them to explore the true Jesus as described in the Gospels.

Of course, some respond with hostility because they do not want Christianity to be true. They recognize that they are living in opposition to God’s standards, so they wish to deny any possibility they will eventually stand before this Creator to give an account of their lives. Speaking the truth to them plants a seed in their hearts that can bear fruit at a later time. Their resistance may simply indicate that your words touched upon some significant issue in their heart.

5. Failure isn’t final. You get lots of second chances.

We must be prepared to handle failure if it should happen. This isn’t intended to lower the expectations on us as believers, but to build a defense against the voices of guilt and condemnation. Instead, we want to focus on the voice of the Holy Spirit encouraging us not to quit. This is the reason Jesus died on the cross: to pay the price for our sins and transgressions. Though we don’t plan on sinning, we must have confidence in God and His promises concerning our opportunity to confess our sins, be forgiven, and try again.

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Just as in the story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden, we all are tempted to hide from God or from those who are His followers. Yet God is merciful and patient with us. One of the great promises in Scripture is "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

This may be hard to believe, but many times our greatest victories come after we have had major failures. This was certainly the case for Peter, who failed his big test and denied knowing the Lord. He had boldly announced that even if all the other disciples denied Jesus, he would not. His failure was so public that we are still talking about it two thousand years later. Thankfully, Peter's failure wasn't the end of the story. Jesus forgave and restored him, and within sixty days of his great collapse, Peter preached a monumental message on the day of Pentecost and three thousand people believed and were baptized. The Gospel is not only good news for unbelievers, it is good news for believers that His love never fails.

Discussion (10-15 minutes)

Choose an item below to discuss, or introduce another related point for discussion.

- Have you ever faced any kind of persecution for your faith?
- Why is it important that your faith is tested?
- The apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 gives us his perspective on the struggles he had faced. How does he describe all the troubles he had experienced?

Prayer (10-15 minutes)

Pray for any of the following, as well as any other requests you may have.

- Ask God for his perspective on any of your trials from the past or the present.
- Ask God for his strength to help you or loved ones persevere through any trial being endured.
- Ask God to help you help someone else who is going through a time of testing.