

## ***Testing 1-2-3***

Welcome back to Walking with Purpose! Last week we talked about giving God our best. After all, He is supremely worthy, everything that exists is already His, and He has total claim on all of our possessions, talents and time! What a perfect backdrop for our time together today: this life – ***your life*** – is a test!

God continually tests our character, faith, obedience, love, integrity, and loyalty. He uses words like *trials*, *temptations*, *refining* and *testing* more than 200 times in the Bible. Adam and Eve took an obedience test in the Garden of Eden, Abraham’s test of sacrifice occurred on Mt. Moriah, and Peter’s test of fidelity to Jesus happened in the courtyard. How about you? What creative tests has God brought your way this week?



### **Fellowship**

1. What has happened to you recently that you now realize was a test from God?



### **Discipleship**

Our character is both developed and revealed by tests. Now, if you’re like me, even the word “test” makes you cringe. It brings to mind memories of classrooms, sweaty palms, nervous energy and unknown outcomes! But consider this: each day is a fresh opportunity to succeed. Yesterday’s failure is erased and you’ve been given a clean slate. And your Teacher is not standing by ready to berate your shortcomings; rather He is praying for your success and making plans for your future! Let’s look at Peter’s test found in Luke 22:31-34. “‘Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.’ But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.’”

Now let’s see how the story plays out in verses 54-62. “Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, ‘This man was with him.’ But he denied it. ‘Woman, I don’t

know him,' he said. A little later someone else saw him and said, 'you also are one of them.' 'Man, I am not!' Peter replied. About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.' Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly."

Now, I don't know about you, but I find *myself* weeping with Peter after his denial of Christ. There are times when we would give everything we have, just to have a chance to do it all over again! But what a gracious God we serve: He prays for us, waits for our return, and goes right on using us in the purpose He's designed us for! Not only that, but if we learn from our mistakes, we come out on the other side wiser, more humble, and holding more tightly to His hand.

Often we can't see all the weeds that are insidiously creeping into our lives; it takes the Master Gardener to apply His pruning shears. In fact, sometimes it feels like He's plowing the whole field to start again with new plants! I love what C.S. Lewis says of testing: "We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be."

I used to love "open book exams"...when our teacher allowed us to use all of our notes and textbooks. He wanted us to succeed! In the same way, God gives us the secret to passing our tests! It's an open Book – His book – telling us how to live; a hand-in-hand walk with God! Let go for even *a minute*, and we can see what happens. Take your eyes off the One who allows you to walk on water, and you begin to sink. Forgo prayer and rely on your own determination, and you will let Him down. Allow your own desires to dictate your actions and sin enters your world. But, like Daniel, *refuse* to compromise your prayer life and you will see God's marvelous deliverance! Hold onto your faith when you'd rather die, and receive the final blessings of Job. Live each day in the knowledge that God is watching, and every day is an important, purpose-filled day! Tests become fun when even the simplest actions and reactions don't go unnoticed. Did you open a door for someone today? Pray for the persecuted? Give a smile to the other driver who cut you off? Give some water to the hot children playing football outside your house? Pick up your husband's dirty socks? Apologize even though an argument wasn't your fault? Tomorrow, will you have to make the office coffee...*again*? Every second of our lives is an opportunity to grow, demonstrate love, and depend on God. Every resource He's put at your disposal can be a tool to make you more like Him. And best yet: our Teacher is praying us through!

2. Read John 15:1-8. What is God's ultimate goal for our lives? How far will He go to see it accomplished?

3. How do you think a person's level of teachability will affect the pruning process? Do you think God would describe you as teachable?

4. Read Philippians 3:4b-11. Like Paul, how has God used your past experiences to fit you more fully for future service?
5. Compare Paul's view of success (verse 10) to yours.
6. What are the greatest things God has entrusted to you? How might God use those to test your character? Your faithfulness? Your stewardship?
7. Read I Corinthians 2:9-14 and John 14:16-20. These verses tell us why the Holy Spirit is such a great teacher. If you really believed these verses, (down deep inside) how would it change your day.



## **Ministry**

8. Re-read Luke 22:31-34. Intercessory prayer on our behalf is powerful...not to mention encouraging! Share with the group what you believe will be one of your tests this coming week. Now pair up with a prayer partner until our next session. During the next week, pray daily that your partner would pass his/her test, and check in with each other mid-way through the week.



## **Worship**

9. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. List the qualities of our High Priest. How does this encourage you? Challenge your previous view of God?



## **Evangelism**

10. Your assignment last week was to bless someone with the resources that God has put at your disposal. Share the results. Close in prayer for God to bless those efforts and the requests listed in # 8.