

The Lord Tests the Heart

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles this afternoon to Proverbs 17. If you could peek into the mind of God this afternoon and see yourself as He sees you.

! Would you want the view? Would you want to see what He sees when He looks at you? And if you saw what He sees, what would you do with that information?

Well, every day, every moment, God is constantly showing us more and more of who we are, and what we're like, and what is good, and what is bad in our lives.

We simply need to be aware of the process going on of God revealing that information to us. And so we want to consider it today from the book of Proverbs 17. And notice verse 3 with me.

The crucible for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart. God is always testing us.

[1:09] Always putting us in the crucible and the furnace with the purpose ultimately of purifying us. And so we want to consider this afternoon testing metals.

There's silver and gold here being tested. Testing hearts, which is what the Lord does. And then we want to think about the test results. What do we find when these tests take place?

What do we learn of ourselves? What does God reveal to us? And so we begin with testing metals. The crucible for silver, and the furnace for gold. Gold and silver are tested by melting them, which involves heating them to very high temperatures.

And so you need a crucible, something that's going to heat that silver, a furnace, something that will increase the temperature to the point where those precious metals melt. And there's two purposes for doing that.

One is to test it, to see if it's genuine, to see if it's pure, to see how much of the impurity is mixed in with it. And so you melt it down, and you can see the gold or silver and the dross, another word for impurities that are mixed in.

[2:13] Is it what it claims to be? You bought some 24 karat gold, and that's supposed to be 99.99% pure. 24 karat is. Not mixed with other metals, not mixed with anything else.

Now my wedding ring is 14 karat, and that's intentionally mixed with some other things to make it a little bit stronger, because pure gold is more malleable, it's more bendable, more flexible.

But if you get some 24 karat gold, if you melt that stuff down, all that should be there is gold, except for .01% of a little something else mixed in. And so you can heat it and melt it and see if there's impurities there.

Sort of like what some of us do when you go shopping in the grocery store, in the produce aisle.

You're going to test that produce before you buy it and take it home. It says it's a good apple, and it's charging you a good price for it, but before you do it, you're going to squeeze, and you're going to knock on watermelons, and you're going to sniff and see if it smells like fresh fruit, and you're going to look at it and see if it's brown, that lettuce, or whatever it is.

You're going to put it to the test. Now you don't go and you melt down the produce, but there's other ways of testing it to see if it's genuine, to see if it's worth the price they're asking for. And you put it to the test to see if it's genuine, to see if it's good.

[3:30] That's one of the reasons for testing gold. The other reason for melting down gold or silver is to purify them. When they're in that molten liquid state, it allows for the separation of the dross from the silver or gold, from the precious metal, so that you get a purer product.

Proverbs 25 and verse 4 says, Remove the dross from the silver, and out comes the material for the silversmith. He doesn't want the impure stuff. He wants the pure stuff after you've separated it. And this is more like what you ladies do at home when your husband failed to test the produce in the grocery store. He just grabbed a bag of apples and you brought them home, and then you come

home, or you get home, and they're there, and you put them to the test, and you say that they didn't pass your test.

And so, instead, you can't take them back now. And so what you do, you get out your knife, and you cut away the bag. You cut out the bad part of that banana or that apple. You throw out the rotten strawberry.

You peel away the brown lettuce. And you purify it. You get rid of the bad. And that's what you do when you melt down the gold or silver. You separate the dross. So that's the picture in the first half of the proverb.

[4 : 36] There's intense heat to melt down a precious metal, to test it, and to purify it. To see if it's genuine, and to get rid of the impurities in it.

So that's testing metals. But what about testing hearts? Crucibles for silver, furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart.

First of all, it's the Lord that does it. Now, God isn't being compared to a crucible or a furnace. He's not the thing that produces the heat, the furnace. He's more like the silversmith, or the goldsmith, that melts the gold down to shape it into what He wants it to be.

Or to see its value. Or to purify it. But why does God test our hearts? We see why a jeweler might want to melt down the gold or the silver. For those reasons. But why does God test our hearts?

Well, He does it, brothers and sisters, for our sake. Listen to what Wardlaw, a commentator, says. The Lord does not need to try, and try is His word for test.

[5 : 39] The Lord does not need to try in order to make any discovery for Himself. He knoweth what is in man, but He tries, or He tests, in order to bring to light what may lie concealed from men, and especially from the individual Himself.

He does this in order to the person's conviction and benefit. God already knows what's in your heart. He knows what's there. He sees it. Psalm 11 and verse 4.

The Lord is in His holy temple. The Lord is on His heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men. His eyes examine them. His eyes test them. God knows what's in your heart. When the test comes, it's not so that He'll figure out what's in your heart.

He already knows. It's to reveal it to you. To me, what's in our own heart. In this way, we see what He sees. That's how we see God's perspective on us.

The impurities that remain. The dross as they bubble up to the top. The test shows us who we are and who we're not.

[6 : 43] It enables us to become more like we ought to be as that dross is removed. It might wake us up to see all sorts of purposes this could have in our lives. You've professed to be a Christian.

You claim to be a Christian. But as God tests you, you see more and more that there's no gold there at all. All there is dross. There's impure metals. There's worthless metals. You see, you're not a believer at all.

And God may use those tests to open your eyes to see that you're not what you thought you were and to send you running to Christ. It might wake us up for that purpose.

It might show that though we're believers, there's still a lot of work to be done. Still a lot of impurity to get rid of. To get out of my life. It might do it for that reason. It might do it as He did with Job.

Demonstrating to Satan that we really are servants of God. It might demonstrate to others around us the nature of our profession of faith. You learn a lot about a person when you watch them go through a trial, don't you?

[7 : 38] Hopefully you learn about yourself when you go through a trial. We tend to be pretty good at looking at other people and seeing their trial and learning something about them. About their profession of faith. God is revealing these things to us.

And ultimately, God wants a pure people for Himself. Zechariah 13.9 This third, I will bring into the fire. I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.

They will call on My name and I will answer them. I will say, They are My people. And they will say, The Lord is our God. God wants a holy, unmixed with the world people.

Useful to the Master. Prepared for every good work. And so He tests our hearts. Well, what does the Lord use to test our hearts? What is the crucible or the furnace that He uses to reveal to us what's in our own hearts?

Well, the first thing I think that comes to mind are trials. Difficulties. A furnace is hot. And if we think about walking into a furnace, that would be painful, wouldn't it?

[8:39] We would suffer. We would burn. It would hurt. And so when we think of a furnace, we think of something painful like a trial. And God uses trials to test us.

To reveal to us what's in our hearts. Isaiah 48. And verse 10. See, I have refined you. Though not as silver, I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. It could be physical, financial, emotional, family problems.

All sorts of afflictions that God could use to test us. And isn't this what He did with Job? Job was a righteous man. So it appeared to everyone around him.

Satan didn't think that he was. And so God put him in the furnace of intense personal loss. Of material wealth. Of his family. Of his own health.

And in the process, we find out what Job was made of, don't we? We find that there's a lot of good gold there. But we find that even with Job, there was still some impurity, still some dross that needed to be removed.

[9:43] And so God put him through that furnace. Revealed those things to him. But God uses things besides trials to test us. To reveal things to us.

He uses the praises of men. Did you know that the last time somebody said to you, great job, that you were being put to the test? Proverbs 27 and verse 21 begins the same way as our verse.

The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives. How do you respond when somebody says, great job, great game, nice work?

Does it puff you up? Does it make you proud? God's revealing something to you. Showing you. There's still pride in your heart that needs to be put to death. Or does it show that God has been working.

You're growing in grace and humility and you deflect that praise to God who's worthy. Be careful how you receive praise. Be careful how you give praise. When you praise somebody, you're putting them in the furnace.

[10:45] They're being tested. God tested Herod this way, didn't He? In the book of Acts, King Herod, Acts 12, 21, on the appointed day, Herod, wearing his royal robe, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people.

They shouted, this is the voice of a God and not of a man. They praised Him. He was in the crucible. And Herod, he soaked up the praise.

Puffed Him up. But he doesn't pass the test. This furnace consumes Him. Immediately. Because Herod did not give praise to God.

He failed the test, you see. He was praised and he didn't praise the Lord in return. Because he did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died. He was tested and found wanting. Revealed something about who Herod was. He was a proud man, a wicked man. Thought he was worthy of being called God. You contrast that with the apostles and when people worship them and say, oh, it's like a God, they tear their clothes and say, no, we're men like you.

[11:55] And they're past the test. Reveals to us what's in their heart. Other things could be a trial or a test for us. Success. We work hard and we prosper financially or with advancement at work.

And how do we handle it? Does it make us proud or arrogant or condescending towards others? God's revealing something to us about ourselves? Or does it make us more inclined to show mercy to others who don't have it as good as we do?

You think of Joseph who climbs all the way to number two in the land of Egypt. He enjoys great success and that's a test for him. It's a trial. What is God revealing to Joseph about himself when he puts him in power?

And what do we see about Joseph? It doesn't turn him into a cruel, unloving tyrant. No. That test from God reveals something to us. It shows us that Joseph was a true servant of the Lord who loved his family and showed mercy to them.

But then you think years later of King Saul. He arises to power. King over all of Israel. He enjoys military victories. He's successful. And how does he handle it?

[12:58] Does Saul handle it well? Does he learn? What do we see in the life of Saul? Well, he doesn't handle it well. We see that he's power hungry.

That when David comes along, he wants to kill him because he doesn't want to give up his throne. He's not concerned for the good of Israel. Just for his own self. We see how selfish he is. How proud he is. How power hungry he is.

We learn something about Saul's heart and he doesn't do well with the praises of men or lack thereof when the people sing of Saul killing his thousands, but David is tens of thousands. Saul doesn't rejoice that Israel is winning victories and rejoice with David. He's jealous. He's jealous of David. He's angry. And that test from God reveals something in his heart. That he's not a man after God's own heart. He's angry, jealous, desperate for power. It shows Saul for who he is. Parents, maybe you've found that your children are a crucible or a furnace from the Lord to test you.

[14:03] They test us every day early on with crying for no apparent reason. Not sleeping for no apparent reason. And later on with incessant questions and rebellious hearts and disobedience and the apparent inability to follow very basic directions.

And we're being tested. And what does it reveal about us when we're put in that furnace and crucible? What bubbles to the surface? Is it anger? Temper? Lack of patience?

Strict justice with no mercy? Or is there love? Patience? Prayer? Gentleness? Increased dependence on God? How has God been working? What is He revealing about you?

Every providential event in your life. And that is every event in your life. Because they're all providential. Sometimes we say that was really providential. Of course it was.

Everything is. It all happens by God's promise. Every event in your life is a crucible of some sort that will reveal something to you about yourself if you're paying attention and ready to learn the lesson that God is revealing to you.

[15:13] From the sleepless night to the unexpected phone call to the unexpected windfall, all of these tests from God, to the economic meltdown, to job loss, to a pay raise, to tragic unexpected death, sickness, health, a flat tire, a heartbreaking loss for the player and the parent, all of these and more reveal something to us about our hearts.

And our response to them will show us much about the way God sees us. Reveals our hearts toward the God who sends these things to us. So God through testing is constantly revealing to us who we are, what we're like.

Are we paying attention? Are we learning the lesson? Are we seeing what He sees? What He does with this with the righteous and the wicked. We can see what's in a man's heart by His response to these various situations.

And this isn't just for believers. He'll test unbelievers too and show them just how far short they fall and show them that there's only dross there, only impurity. Might show that to a man to send them to Christ or to the church to keep that person from membership and being a destructive influence in the church.

We're going to show the need of the Savior who can alone forgive our impurity and give us the grace to rightly respond when we're tested. He can reveal the remaining impurities in our heart so that we know what needs to be worked on, what needs to be cleansed out of our lives.

[16:44] He does it with the righteous and the wicked alike. And so, we've talked about testing metals and testing hearts, but now we want to talk about the test results.

What do you do when you're tested? What comes of it? What does God reveal? And how do you respond to it? If you find that there's only dross there, if there's only impurity, that's what God wants you to see.

That there's no gold there at all. Well, God even talks about Israel this way at one point. He says, I put them in the furnace and all there was was tin and scrap metal. No gold or silver at all.

Maybe that's what you find. You go through the test and you say, you know what? There's no gold here at all. Well, if that's the case, the result for you should be that you would fly to Christ, that you would run to Him.

You need the work that only Christ can do. You need to be changed to gold. We praise God that He has something far better than the Midas touch where everything you touch turns to gold. He has a saving touch and He can take worthless metal and turn you into gold by the work of Christ at the cross.

[17:54] Forgiving our sins. Purchasing our peace and our redemption. You run to Christ. You find forgiveness today if that's what you see. You look at all the time. You can look back just through the past week and think about different ways you've been tested.

Maybe we haven't thought of it in that way before, but yes, that was a test I went through. How did I respond? What do I say? If I only see sin there and wickedness, we need to go to Christ to be

saved.

But maybe God's revealed other things. He's shown you some sin, but He's shown you there's some good in your life as well. He's shown you how you're growing in grace and where you still need work. Our response to that test should be one of gratitude.

Charles Bridges says, Is not any furnace that purges away our dross of earthliness that brings us to know ourselves or God and His dealings with us a mighty blessing.

Aren't all these things a mighty blessing? Yes, they are. And so then, shouldn't we be thankful for them? We don't tend to think that way. We get in the furnace and we're in the fire and we think, man, I've got to get out of the furnace.

[18:55] I don't like the furnace. And that's okay. We don't have to like the trial, but we are to count it joy when we encounter trials of various kinds. Are we not? And shouldn't we thank God for what He reveals to us?

We don't despise the very things that God is using for our good. Instead, we praise Him and thank Him even if it's painful. You've got a heart patient who's recovering from a successful surgery and he's in pain.

It hurts. So I'm told. But it hurts. Imagine having your chest cracked open. That's going to hurt and it's going to hurt for a good long time.

But is that patient that's had that successful heart surgery, the surgeon walks in, is he going to hate that surgeon? Is he going to be angry at that surgeon? Hey, you made my chest hurt. I just saved your life, man.

What are you talking about? It's good. You be thankful to the surgeon even though it caused you pain. And so we ought to thank God. Thank Him for the trial. Thank Him for whatever test it was that revealed something more to us.

[19:58] And if God is testing us all the time, shouldn't we always be examining ourselves? Always looking at our hearts to see what God is revealing to us.

We pray with the psalmist in Psalm 139. This is a scary prayer. We're going to sing it in a few moments. But this is a scary prayer. Lord, search me, O God.

And know my heart. Test me. And know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Lord, search me. You show me those things that aren't good, that shouldn't be there, and then lead me away from them. Lead me in the way everlasting. And so you know that every day, everything you encounter is a test from God.

You're going to use it to reveal something about yourself. You're going to see whether there's gold there or there's impurity there. So what a great way to start the day. Search me today, O Lord. And it's a scary thing to pray because He's going to show you.

[21:02] He's going to answer your prayer. And you're going to see things that you didn't want to see. But then you see Him. You thank God. Thank You that You showed me. Give me grace to deal with it now. Now, pray that He would open your eyes to see what He sees when He looks at you.

Let's talk about, for a moment, some of the things that will be revealed as we're tested. Some of the results that will come back from the test. What is God showing you about your life? I can only be suggestive here.

And so if I leave something out that's been revealed in your life, don't let yourself off the hook. You know it's been revealed there. You deal with it accordingly. Let's talk about some of those things that God might show us as He tests us.

I think He's going to show us our pride real quickly. If we start looking around some of the things that happen to us every day, some of the compliments you receive, good game, the good grade, an outstanding performance, a fine sermon.

Remember, it's a test. Look back on the times you've been praised recently. And think about what your response was. How it made you feel.

[22:10] It puffed you up. If the response is one of pride, we've got to pray that God would make us humble. Make us to give Him the glory. Maybe what He revealed there is working humility in you.

Maybe yours was a genuine response of, it's not me, it's the Lord. It wasn't false humility. Praise God if that's what you see. But I think a lot of times one of the things we'll see is pride.

Sometimes when we're tested, we'll see the need for the approval of men bubbling up to the surface. Maybe the praises of men or the success that you've enjoyed has revealed the dross of

craving the approval of men.

If God's shown you your desperate attachment to popularity, then repent of being a man-pleaser and seek to please God alone. You know, it's so easy to do that for me with preaching.

I want to preach a good sermon so that people think I'm a good preacher. I don't want them to think I'm a bad preacher. Is that the reason I'm preaching? If it is, I'm missing it.

[23:13] It's to be for the glory of God, that God can use that to attest something somebody says after a message. A challenge to reveal that. Say, I've been preaching for the wrong reason.

Doing it for praise, for the approval of men, not for the glory of God and the good of the church. You might see that approval of men maybe God reveals to you in the furnace a lack of discipline.

Maybe the slowdown at work or the loss of a job altogether or a drop-off in your performance has revealed to you your laziness or your lack of discipline in using your time well.

Something comes along and you find that you're just wasting time. And God uses something to open your eyes. You realize there's a lack of discipline. Maybe an all-you-can-eat buffet shows your lack of self-control with respect to food.

Maybe the fellowship lunch was a test. Did you pass? But something like that can show us something that we hadn't seen before.

[24:21] That we have a lack of self-control. Maybe a free weekend of HBO from the cable or satellite company reveals a lack of discipline with your eyes.

God shows you your need. You go back to the cross. Maybe a provoking word from another person reveals your uncontrolled tongue. You fly off the handle.

Don't let that pass without learning the lesson, without seeing what God is showing you. Maybe you go through the furnace and the test results come back selfish. That's what's written at the top of the page.

It's not an A or a B or a C or a D. It's selfish. Self-centered. Children reveal this quickly in us, don't they? We think we're scolding them, disciplining them for their own good, teaching them obedience because that's what they need to learn, but actually we're upset because they're embarrassing us, cutting into our personal time.

Some other selfish motive. All sorts of things can reveal selfishness. Maybe God's revealing a sinful anger, a quick temper. You're cut off in traffic and quick.

[25:25] It's a test. How do you respond? What immediately bubbles to the surface? Maybe the Lord's been working with you and you control the temper. Thank you, Lord.

He reveals some patience. And then you get to the game that you were driving to and the ref makes the wrong call from a purely objective standpoint. It was the wrong call.

And you realize that maybe the level of self-control you thought you would attain when somebody caught you off in traffic wasn't quite what it was. Or you were a little too proud of that self-control. And the Lord's revealing two things. Your pride and your selfishness. Your quick temper all at once. What impurities are bubbling to the surface.

There's progress there. Thank God. But there's still work to be done. Don't quit. Maybe your lack of patience is what comes out. The baby is crying.

[26:25] The older ones are fighting. They've all been disobedient all afternoon. The pot on the stove is boiling over. The smoke alarm is going off because the food in the oven is burning while the timer for the oven is going off adding to the noise.

The baby's diaper didn't hold everything which is why he's crying. And your husband just walked in and said Honey, how long till dinner?

And what bubbles to the surface? Maybe it's patience and gentleness and self-control and we see that gold shining. And if we see something slightly uglier and it's back to the throne of grace for forgiveness strength to change maybe the lack of faith is what God brings to the surface and the furnace.

The economic crisis has shown you that your trust is in money or your own ability and your hard work but it's not in God. An illness can do the same. We think our success is due to our hard work our strength but sickness brings us to our knees and reminds us that we're helpless without our King.

A violent windstorm can show us our fear and lack of faith like it did with the disciples on the boat. Testing can reveal all sorts of things.

[27:55] There's just a few thoughts. Maybe it's some other sin for you some other idol on the throne whatever it is when the dross when the impurity is revealed purge it. Go back to the cross for forgiveness.

It's that wickedness that caused our Savior to die and so it should make us hate it all the more and to have a desire to be rid of it to put off that old way of life and to walk in newness in the power of Christ who's dwelling in us by His Spirit.

You can't do this on your own. You go home and say I've seen all sorts of impurities so I'm going to work harder to get rid of them. Well good you need to work hard but don't do it in your strength. God help me.

By the power of your Spirit dwelling in me give me strength and our own strength will never succeed in purifying away the wickedness. So we do it in dependence on Christ and brothers and sisters who better to help us?

Who better to help us than the Lord Jesus Christ? You might remember that He was put through the furnace. Every day He walked on this earth.

[28:59] Put through the furnace. And you know that when He came out He wasn't like 24 karat gold because that's just 99.99% pure. He was 100% pure.

Never were any impurities found in Him. When He was tempted He didn't sin. 1 Peter 2.23 When they hurled their insults at Him He did not retaliate.

When people hurl insults at you the fences come up the gloves come out and you go on the attack but Jesus didn't retaliate. When He suffered He made no threats.

Instead He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. We could learn something about that, couldn't we when we're wronged? Entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly.

When Jesus was provoked He didn't respond in kind. When confronted with the reality of bearing our sin and suffering the wrath of God He sweetly submitted to God's will.

[30:01] He sought the favor of God and not men and when He was tested by God God found no flaw in Him. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. That's God's evaluation of Jesus and that ought to be our desire to have God say that of us.

My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. But that's not going to happen in our own strength. And so when I go through the furnace I want Jesus at my side.

There was a fourth man with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. That's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There's a fourth man with them in the fiery furnace. It was the pre-incarnate Christ. And without Him they would have been consumed.

And without Him, dear people, you try to navigate the furnaces of trial on your own, you'll just as surely be consumed. You try to deal with the results of what you find on your own.

You'll fail. Only if you go through that furnace with Christ at your side will we be purified from the dross that remains. So, 2 Corinthians 7.1, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

[31:16] We're going through our daily lives and God is revealing to us things that are contaminating us. And so, friends, let us purify ourselves from all of those things. Perfecting holiness. Doing it in the power of Christ.

It's painful. It's hard work. Getting rid of things that we love. Things that are second nature to us or that were our first nature. Getting rid of those things.

It hurts, but it's worth it. When you find branches on a tree that aren't healthy, they're not producing fruit, you cut off those branches. And it makes the rest of the tree stronger.

The water, the sap, flows to the healthy branches instead of being wasted on those fruitless ones. And it will be that way in your life as God enables you to cut off sinful, foolish habits.

You'll find that you have more effort, energy, time to put into those things that are pleasing to Him. To that which is noble and pure and honorable and upright and worthwhile. So don't waste your trial.

[32:15] Don't waste the things that God is showing you every day. John Piper several years ago was diagnosed with prostate cancer and on the eve of his surgery he wrote an article called Don't Waste Your Cancer.

He's known for his book Don't Waste Your Life which is don't waste your cancer. Don't waste the trial that God puts you through. I encourage you to look it up. You can find it easily online and read

it. And there's an excellent Christian counselor, David Pallison, diagnosed with the same thing and he went back and he added his thoughts to it. His thoughts are just as good as Piper's and very helpful about not wasting the trial that comes. Take what God shows you and act upon it. Again, Ward Law says, Oh, how sad to suffer and not to profit. Pray that the gracious end or goal of your Heavenly Father may be answered in you that you may not bear the heat of the furnace without acquiring the purity which the heat is meant to impart. Don't waste it. Don't go through the pain of the trial and not come through and have learned something from it and be purified by it. Because you're going to have to go through a similar trial again to have that purged away.

[33 : 26] Don't waste your trial. Men like Herod and Saul, they wasted their trials. They didn't learn. They died because of it. Don't waste the trial and miss the benefit that's waiting.

The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold but the Lord tests the heart. Has He tested your heart lately? Well, yes, He has. He's doing it every day. Have you been paying attention? What have you learned about yourself? The view from Heaven's perspective looking down upon ourselves is often not a pretty one. And so we need to take action. Nothing easy about plucking out eyes and cutting off hands. But far better to be rid of it than to let it remain like gangrene eating away and destroying you. And so as God reveals your sin, take swift, violent action against it by His grace, by His power. And so may God enable us to see the things in our lives as a test. And give us grace to act on the results that we find so that we might be able to say with Job, Job knows a little something about being tested.

[34 : 30] And may we be able to say with him, but he knows the way that I take. When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.