

THE TRIAL AND THE CROWN

James 1:2-4, 12

Book of Ruth

Wouldn't it be nice if you could cram for life's tests? Don't you wish God would give you a heads up about what's coming so you could be ready for the test? It might go something like this:

"Hey! You're about to go into a big financial test. You might not want to get that new credit card. Focus on paying down the debt on that old one. That new automobile you've been fantasizing about needs to wait a while. I would suggest that you focus on saving as much as possible, and it might serve you well to memorize Philippians 4:19!

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Unfortunately, tests of faith don't come that way, do they? No, they don't. James tells us they ARE coming (not "if" but "when"), and, when they hit, they'll be a surprise (you "fall" into them). The great consolation is that, when you persevere, you will be blessed. (James 1:12) Is that true? The Book of Ruth is an interesting laboratory to examine this promise.

3 CHOICES YOU CAN MAKE WHEN YOUR FAITH IS TESTED

Choice #1: Am I loyal, or am I a leaver?

Loyalty these days seems to be a lost virtue. Follow/Unfollow – Friend/Unfriend OMG this is such a cliquish time! Loyalty is so hard to give and so easy to expect. Loyalty looks beyond what you can do for me to say, "What can I do for you?" Ruth's response is truly the essence of loyalty – your people shall be my people, your mall my mall, your yard sale my yard sale, your recipe my recipe. Whew! Glad that's over with! Not so fast my friend. The test goes on.

Choice #2: Am I consistent, or am I a controller?

Difficult people are a real test, aren't they? I'm going to give you a suggestion based upon 42 years of pastoral experience - not that I expect you to agree with me - but here it is anyway. When you are dealing with people that are difficult or hurting or challenging, quit trying to change them. In other words, have a funeral for your expectations of this person. If you'll give up on them ever being what *you* want them to be, it'll set you free. I'm not saying that you should give up hope that God will change them. I'm just asking you to give up the idea that you can change them.

Choice #3: Am I a gleaner, or am I a griper?

To "glean" means to extract or remove. I don't know about you, but quite often in my tests, I don't want to extract or remove - I want to wallow! I can be exceptionally passionate and very dramatic. The truth is – God promotes the gleaners, and He resists the gripers. Gleaners know that it's not enough for you to simply take the test. You must pass the test! God doesn't grade life on the curve, and you don't get promoted just because you get older. It's the test that brings the blessing.