

by ***Ross Gillespie***

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (James 1:3)*

I've had the privilege of serving Joshgen as an elder, for the last 8 years. As I reflect back over these years, there is a one-liner from Will Marais that has stuck with me perhaps more than any other, because of how true it is has been in my own journey -

*Everything in life is a test. EVERYTHING.*

I want to briefly share some of the tests I've experienced while serving as an elder within Joshua Generation Church over the last 8 years.

First, a little testimony. In December of 2018, I had a deeply personal moment in which God tested my heart towards leadership - those I have submitted my heart and life to as a disciple and elder of our Lord Jesus Christ. I overheard something said about the congregation I was at that point leading, and something rose up in me wanting to defend myself and the church. I felt hurt and misunderstood.

Thankfully, I identified the moment and saw it for what it was. God was testing me, again. I had faced this before! I heard the Holy Spirit say in that moment that if I tried to defend myself or justify myself or the congregation, I would be sinning. So, I took what I was feeling and thinking and headed straight to God in prayer. That is where I processed my perceived need to justify and defend myself. I didn't speak to anyone about it, not even my wife.

I mention that because in January of this year, as I sat before some of the elders of Joshgen to discuss our future as leaders of one of the congregations in Cape Town, I had a heart that had processed those comments with God. I had a heart that was soft, a heart that was positioned to believe the best, knowing that Jesus had tested me in December so that I could pass in January.

At that meeting our life was re-directed from leading the Wynberg congregation of Joshgen, to serving on the team in the Green Point congregation. With soft hearts, believing the best, we have begun a new journey on the eldership team for our King Jesus. We have embraced this change with faith and joy, believing the best.

I was able to do this because I had passed the test of not needing to justify and defend. Everything in life is a test. EVERYTHING. And the tests will come. What will the condition of our hearts, our minds and our faith be through the tests?

### **No neutral ground**

Honestly, I've never been one for tests. I had a suspicion throughout my school years (a long time ago

now) that tests were designed to get us to fail, or at least think that we had. I came across my Matric report recently which just reinforced that suspicion!

Within the Kingdom of God I have learnt (and continue to learn) that the Father places tests in front of us constantly, not to fail us, but to mature us (Hebrews 12:1b-2a).

Our Father is a test giver. He is the perfect test giver. There is no darkness in Him. There is no desire in Him to somehow trip us up. His intention in the tests is that we would become more like Him through them. That's the aim. That's the purpose.

But the Father of lies (Satan) is also a test giver. The imperfect test giver. He sets tests with the intention failing us and taking us out. There is no light in Him. His whole aim and desire is to trip us up and disqualify us.

I had to learn that in every test there is a battle. We are not living in a neutral space. We are living in the midst of spiritual conflict – between God and Satan; light and dark, life and death. The choice will be ours with regard to what we do with the tests, and who we entrust ourselves to in the process of refining.

### **The tests I've faced**

Speaking briefly of the nature of the tests that I have faced related to my journey as an elder, there have been three main areas of testing which I know we can all relate to in some way.

#### **The test of call**

Eldering had been a great joy, but also a great test. When at times I didn't see the expected fruit through 'my' serving as an elder, the door to the testing of call was opened wide. Are you really called? Why are you failing and others succeeding? Are you good enough? Is there something wrong with you...You get the picture.

The questions that I had to deal with in my mind, especially around success (or perceived lack of it), were tests that were sent to reveal areas of sin and brokenness in my heart. In wrestling through these questions with God, and with brothers speaking truth into my life, I saw that the test had come to purify my heart motivation. They forced me to face up to whether the call of eldership was somehow for me, or for him and His church.

#### **The test of identity**

On the back of the test of call, came the test of identity. Surely if you have not succeeded in your own eyes, you have failed your heavenly Father? And if you have failed Him, then you have not pleased Him? And nobody loves a failure... And so the tests of sonship and security in Christ came so that I could learn again that I am loved as a son of God not because of my perceived success or failure but

because His love is perfect. He loves me because He loves me. My heart was tested to know this and rest in this knowledge.

### **The test of faithfulness**

The tests of calling and identity resulted in me asking questions of faithfulness. If I'm not called and I'm not loved then why keep going?

That's the point that the enemy wants to get us to in the testing process. He wants us to question our identity in Christ and our part in the body to such an extent that we fail to see the point in staying the course and finishing the race.

### **Keep Going**

These past 8 years have taught me that everything in life is a test but the tests come especially fiercely in the times of difficulty and disappointment, and they will come.

It's so important that we embrace the reality of spiritual battle and recognize that our response to tests are either advancing the Kingdom of Light or the domain of darkness.

It's also so important that we realize that this battle will ultimately take place in our hearts. If we learn to guard our hearts then we are going to pass our tests and see the Kingdom of God advancing.

Let's pass our tests well and keep going for His glory.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ross is a leader in [Joshua Generation Church](#). He is married to Leigh and they have two children. Ross loves trail running and often explores the mountains around Cape Town. You can follow him on [Facebook](#).

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