

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, May 13, 2017

Perhaps you too dread hearing these words: *“Everyone close your books. We’re going to have a pop quiz.”* I certainly did and was often ill-prepared to be tested on the subject being taught. My method of choice for studying was to cram all the material into my brain during the final days, late evening, and sometimes early morning before an exam. Our instructors do have a good purpose in administering those pop quizzes. They hope we will properly study before each class and be prepared to learn in the classroom environment. Forming good study habits can go a long way in learning, but it goes against the grain of our natural tendencies. Even outside the classroom we all still face many pop quizzes in life. Let’s focus on some of life’s little pop quizzes.

Much like those classroom quizzes we are often confronted with frequent tests that have consequences for whatever action we take. You may feel those tests are random and perhaps coincidental, but I suggest there’s an Instructor Who oversees those little pop quizzes. Throughout scripture we’re shown that God often tests His people for their well-being. In Psalm 26:1-3, King David talks to the Lord on this concept. He thoughtfully shares, *“Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have led a blameless life; I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.”* (NIV) That’s quite a conversation with our Heavenly Father which I suspect most would not feel worthy in presenting to the Lord of hosts. King David was apparently aware that God had every right to test him whenever He wished. David declares in Psalm 139:23-24, *“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.”* (NIV) David longed to be tested in order to be more in the Father’s will.

In Jeremiah 23:11 we see God’s hand at work in His people as He instructs the prophet, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* (NIV) These words were sent to the priests and prophets in Babylon during their seventy year exile. You can certainly say this was more than a pop quiz, but it demonstrates how God orchestrates over the lives of His people. As Christians, we can see Him at work daily, if we simply watch closely. It may be in our own lives or the lives of personal acquaintances. Paul instructs Timothy in Timothy 3 regarding the qualifications of overseers and deacons. In verse 10 he tells Timothy, *“They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”* (NIV) Testing is important to our Lord and must be taken seriously.

So, as followers of Christ, when we are tested we need to take it with sober conviction. Our adversary the Devil will do everything he can to tempt us and cause us to fall. Satan wants us to stumble so we will be ineffective as ambassadors for Christ. The temptations may come in our business life. It may come in our personal relationships. It may even come in our church life. We also need to be careful not to do anything that might cause a fellow believer to stumble. Life is filled with pop quizzes and we’d be wise to remain in God’s Word, to remain in fellowship with those of like faith and to become accountable for our actions in all matters. I’ve found that accountability is a key to staying on course and I’ve found much encouragement through the counsel and care of close Christian friends.

So, I suggest that you look at it this way. All those pop quizzes we face will help us in doing well in the final exam which comes at the end of our earthly existence. When we meet Christ face-to-face we’ll then find out how well we did on those little pop quizzes and get our final grade. Our salvation may be secure based upon Christ’s work on the cross, but frankly I’m looking forward to getting much better than just a passing grade. Consider joining me on that Heavenly Honor Roll!

Passages to Ponder: Proverbs 8:33-36; Isaiah 50:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; 1 Timothy 6:3-6; Galatians 6:1-6; 1 Peter 5:8-9

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Proverbs 8:33-36 New International Version (NIV)

³³Listen to my instruction and be wise;
do not disregard it.
³⁴Blessed are those who listen to me,
watching daily at my doors,
waiting at my doorway.
³⁵For those who find me find life
and receive favor from the LORD.
³⁶But those who fail to find me harm themselves;
all who hate me love death.”

Isaiah 50:4 New International Version (NIV)

⁴The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary.
He wakens me morning by morning,
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8 New International Version (NIV)

⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

1 Timothy 6:3-6 New International Version (NIV)

³If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.
⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Galatians 6:1-6 New International Version (NIV)

⁶Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵for each one should carry their own load. ⁶Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

1 Peter 5:8-9 New International Version (NIV)

⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.