

Tested by the Lord

Rich Nathan

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John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 6

You know, you can't live in 21st century America without regularly being tested. If you want to work for the government, there are Civil Service exams. Physicians have to take medical boards and tests in their areas of specialty every decade or so. If you want to drive a car, you must take a driver's test. You can't go through High School without taking SAT's and ACT's and 9th Grade Proficiency Tests and 12th Grade Proficiency Tests. Testing has become the Holy Grail of national educational policy right now. Kids are tested throughout elementary school by state exams along with all of the other quizzes, papers and exams.

And then, of course, you have Graduate Record Exams and LSATs and MCATs and licensing exams for various trades. You can't do anything in the US anymore without taking some sort of a test.

One of the toughest series of tests that anyone in America takes is to be part of the Navy Seals. Seal training and testing is reported to be the toughest military testing and training in the world. The testing and training lasts 25 weeks. The first phase begins with a bang and ends with a boom. It consists of 2 and 3 mile timed runs; 1-2 mile ocean swims; and then obstacles courses every day. The minimum times required to pass become increasingly stricter and the intensity of the physical training becomes harder.

Navy Seals are required to run in the soft sand in boots with fatigues on. They learn how to tie knots under water. And they need to learn how to swim with their feet tied at the ankles and their hands tied behind their backs. Essentially, an instructor ties a guy's hands behind his back at the wrists and ties his feet at the ankles and then he throws that man into a swimming pool in the deep end.

Another fun-filled event during the first phase is an event called "surf torture." Basically, the entire class wades into the surf up to their waists and then sits down with their arms linked. The ocean temperatures could be around 58° and the class sits in the surf as waves crash repeatedly over their heads. The plan calls for submersion to the brink of hypothermia. Then you are taken out of the water to do calisthenics and then back into the surf.

But none of this compares to the sixth week of training and testing, which is called "Hell Week." This is the make or break test. Prospective Seals are given five days and nights of non-stop training. They have a total cumulative sleep time in those five days of 2 hours. They run everywhere with these inflatable boats on

their heads. They are constantly wet and cold from the surf. Hell Week is the defining moment for Navy Seals. By the end of the week, the average Seals' class has been whittled down from about 100 at the start to 25 by the end of this week.

Oh yes, one of the other tests that they engage in as a Navy Seal is to have one of the trainees put on full diving gear and swim to the deep end of a combat training tank. Then several instructors go down there with the trainee, attack him under water, rip off his diving gear, and tie his hoses in knots. The goal of the test is to not panic and bolt for the surface so that you might breathe, but rather the goal is to remain calm, untangle the knots, put your diving gear back on and continue to breath under water. If you bolt for the surface, you've failed the test and you're out of the program.

One of the things that people do not understand about having a relationship with the Lord is that the Lord regularly puts his people to the test. Now, it is important to distinguish between testing and tempting. God does not tempt us. The book of James says, "No one should ever say God is tempting me." Satan tempts us in order that we might fail. Temptation is designed to weaken your faith and to turn you away from loyalty to the Lord.

Testing, on the other hand, is designed to strengthen your faith and to deepen your loyalty to the Lord. See, the purpose of God's test is to bring out of you what is best. The testing is designed to remove from you various impediments, to free you up from certain habits and to bring to the surface qualities that now in your life may be under developed or undeveloped. God tests us not to discover what is in us. He knows what is in us. God tests us to put into us things that are not currently in us. Navy Seals test people to put into them courage, stamina, leadership, and toughness beyond anything that the men had at the beginning of the testing. God wants to put into you and me qualities that we don't currently possess such as faith, obedience, hope, love, and perseverance.

None of us will grow on our own simply out of our natural desires. So God prods us along by tests. The test of a broken dating relationship with someone you still love. The test of confrontation by a friend or an employer or a roommate regarding some attitude or behavior of ours. The test may be a major disappointment in your career, or betrayal by a loved one. It may be a financial test. Your car broke down and you simply don't have the money to fix it. The test may be failing to get into the grad school you wanted to attend. Or your friend has a baby and you are infertile. Tests are designed by God to bring out of you and me qualities of maturity, of faith, of love, of hope, of obedience, perseverance that are not present, or are not fully developed in our lives yet. I've called this series The Jesus I Never Knew. The passage we're going to look at today, as we continue our series in the book of John, I've called this talk, "Tested by the Lord," John 6. Let's pray.

We read in John 6, "Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up to the mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near."

Let me just stop here for a moment. From chapter 5 to chapter 10 the apostle John arranges his materials according to Jewish holidays. So chapter 5 is centered around the Sabbath. Chapter 6 is around the Passover. Chapters 7 and 8 are centered around the Feast of Tabernacles. And chapter 10 is Hanukkah. Now, what John is attempting to communicate is that everything that the Jewish holidays in the Old Testament pointed to has been fulfilled in Jesus. These Old Testament holidays are like shadows on the wall, the substance that's casting the shadow is Christ.

There was an old nursery rhyme that expresses the idea of the relationship between the Old and New Testament that goes this way:

"The New is in the Old concealed
The Old is by the New revealed.
The New is in the Old contained.
The Old is by the New explained."

I saw an architectural picture of this when I was in Rome a month ago. In the Sistine Chapel, that famous chapel at the Vatican in Rome that Michelangelo painted the ceiling of. In the Sistine Chapel, on one side of the room there are about 8-10 large paintings of events from the life of Moses. And directly across from these paintings on the other side of the room there are corresponding paintings drawn from the life of Jesus Christ. Moses was a type, a model, a shadow on the wall, if you will, cast by Jesus Christ.

So, for example, on one side of the room there is Moses nearly killed at birth by an evil king named Pharaoh. But his life was rescued and preserved by the actions of his mother and father. On the other side of the room you see Jesus nearly killed at birth by an evil king named Herod, but his life was preserved by the actions of his mother and father.

Back and forth across the room.

John 6 is like the Sistine Chapel in which an activity of Jesus is echoing, reflecting something from the earlier activity of Moses in the Old Testament. For example, what were the two great miracles of Moses in the Old Testament? One was the feeding a multitude of people in the desert with manna from heaven, and the other was walking through the Red Sea. What do we find in John 6 in verses 1-15? Jesus feeds a multitude of people in the wilderness. And in verses 16-24

Jesus recapitulates the activity of Moses not by splitting the water, but by actually walking on top of the water.

What was the purpose of the wilderness wanderings? The Lord said in Deuteronomy 8, "He took the people through the wilderness to test them." And what is going on in John 6? Jesus is presenting people with a series of tests. Jesus is the test giver.

So we read in John 6:5, "When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him." You can circle that word "test" in your bibles. "For he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him; 'Eight months wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite.' Another one of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. But how far will they go among so many?'"

Here is the test of supply. Philip and Andrew are engaged in a little bit of mental arithmetic. Philip is calculating the financial cost of feeding so many people. Andrew is calculating the amount of food that it will take. Let's see, we have five barley loaves and two fish. And we have 5000 men. Many of them are married and a bunch of little kids. There are about 20,000 people here. Let's see. 20,000 into five loaves of bread? Hmmmm, I don't think we have enough.

One of the tests that the Lord will regularly test you with is the test of inadequate supply. You will be put in a situation in which you will do the math and discover that your resources are simply inadequate to succeed in what you are trying to succeed in. The math just doesn't add up. You feel like God is telling you to participate in a short-term mission, which will cost you \$1500 to go. You don't have \$15.00!

Have you ever come up short? Someone asks you to teach at a home fellowship group or to speak at a workshop, but you feel so inadequate. You look at yourself, your resources, and you say, "I am insufficient."

Let me offer you a word of encouragement when you feel inadequate. You are inadequate. And so am I.

I talked with a woman last week and she said, "I heard what you said about what Christ has done for me, but I feel so unworthy. I know I shouldn't feel that way, but I just feel so unworthy of salvation."

I said, "May I say something affectionate to you? You are unworthy. Let me disabuse you entirely of the notion of achieving some worthiness before God. You are unworthy. This is the good news. The good news is Christ supplies what you cannot."

The gospel tells us that we look into our accounts and we see insufficient funds. Every time we try to write a check to God, we bounce the check. We don't have enough righteousness in our account, enough worthiness in our account, enough love or goodness in our account to satisfy the debt that we owe the bank of heaven. The good news is that Christ supplies the righteousness, the love, the goodness, the worthiness – he puts all of this into our accounts as a gift, as an act of grace. And by faith we can draw on these things as we approach God.

You feel inadequate? Good! The issue is not your adequacy. It's Christ's adequacy. It's not our sufficiency, or competence, or goodness, it's the test, when you've run out of supply, is this. Is Christ plus nothing enough?

Some of you have a child or a spouse or a sibling, a friend, a roommate that you are trying to motivate toward God. You push and prod and talk and discuss and argue. You shed tears, but nothing seems to work in terms of putting into that other person the motivation to turn to Christ. You strategize, you do mental arithmetic and you realize that you can't supply motivation in another person's life. You can't do it.

That's a good place to be. Here's what Christ says in verse 10, "Have the people sit down. There was plenty of grass in that place and the men sat down, about 5000 of them (I don't think the women or children were left standing, but the focus in that culture was upon the men). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed them to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of barley loaves left over by those who had eaten."

How was the hunger of the people satisfied? Not by chopping up the two fish into 20,000 parts. This crowd's hunger was satisfied by a miracle from Jesus in which he multiplied the loaves and fish. He supplied what people could not.

Let me ask you a question. Is there an area in your life where you have to confess that you have run out of resource? That your supply is inadequate and yet God wants you to do something anyway? Inadequate supply is a test, friend. You've run out of love in your marriage? Your heart has grown cold? You can't work up the feelings any longer toward your mate? Can Jesus Christ multiply the love in your marriage? He can. Can he supply you both with fresh feeling? He can do that. Christ can take our little bit of faithfulness, our little obedience, our little bit of prayer and multiply it so that the entire supply is met. Look what he's done with our church.

Then we encounter the test of the storm. Verse 16-21 "When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across

the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.' Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

The test in the storm, friends, is who is God. The waves are crashing and it's dark. When things in your life are topsy turvey and you are really not in control, what you are being tested about at that point is who do you believe God to be? Look at Jesus' words in verse 20, "But he said to them, 'It is I; don't be afraid.'" The original Greek here is very important. The words are Ego Eimi. When the Old Testament was translated to Greek, before the time of Christ, the translators of the Old Testament used these two Greek words Ego Eimi when translating God's self revelation to Moses at the Burning Bush. I am who I am. Ego Eimi.

What John wants us to understand is that Jesus is using the divine name regarding himself. He is identifying himself with God. The issue that arises when you are going through a storm is what is God like for me? Who do I believe God to be? Does he care? He knew that I wanted that job and yet he allowed the door to slam in my face. He knew that I wanted my loved one to be healed, and yet he did nothing.

Who are you, God? You've become a mystery to me.

Jesus says, "Do you want to know what God is like? God is like me. I am God with a human face." Whenever you think about God, think about Jesus. Does God care? Well, did Jesus care? Is God good? Well, was Jesus good? Is God kind? Is God loving? Does God hear my prayers? Well, is Jesus kind, loving and does he hear people's prayers?

There is an old saying that when you are going through a storm you must not forget in the dark what you learned in the light. It is entirely one thing to sit around in a Bible study with a cup of coffee and a piece of pie on your knee and talk about how faithful God is or the fact that God is in control and he hears prayer. But when the storm hits unexpectedly, when you discover that your child is taking drugs, or that you have cervical cancer, or that you've been laid off from your job. It's quite another thing to remember the things you said at that small group Bible study or that you read in your devotions about God's goodness or God's control.

Are you going through a storm right now? Have dark clouds settled over you?

It is the storm, the darkness that is the test of what you believe. Who do you believe God to be now? What do you believe he is really like?

And then we have the test of success, verse 25, “When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, ‘Rabbi, when did you get here?’ Jesus answered them, ‘I tell you the truth, you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for the food that spoils, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’

Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the work God requires?’

Jesus answered, ‘the work of God is this: believe in the One he has sent.’

So they asked him, ‘what miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’

‘Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’

‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on gives us this bread.’

Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

Here is the test of success. The people had eaten. They had experienced the miracle worked by Jesus and they were materially satisfied. But their material success did not lead them to pursue spiritual success. They didn’t reflect long enough about the source of this food, how it came to be that the loaves were multiplied, and what this miracle pointed to regarding the identity of Jesus, the supplier of the food.

Do you know anyone who is materially successful, but that success has not translated into spiritual success?

The fact is, friends, that success is a test. Some of you are saying, “Test me with success, O Lord. This is the test I want. Test me with wealth and good health and great influence.”

See, success in this world generally leads to the neglect of God. You continually have to be reminded that it is God who gave the success, not the human being through whom the success came. That’s why Jesus has to say in verse 32, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.”

The successful struggle with attributing all the blessings in their lives to God. The successful continually have to remind themselves that it is the favor of God that gave them their intellectual abilities, their family background, their opportunities, their connections. This is as much true in ministry and church as it is in the business world. It is not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven. It is not the pastors who caused Vineyard Columbus to grow. It is my Father in heaven. It is not the preaching that brings about the conversion of so many. It is my Father in heaven. It is not because people here are unusually welcoming or unusually kind, that ministries of compassion happen. The welcome, the kindness is supplied from my Father in heaven.

Success is a test. It is a test of whether we really can see the source of success. Whether we can fight through all of the confused values of this culture so that we give worth to the things that really matter. And we hold with a light grip those things that don't matter.

Friends, it is a rare person in my experience that handles success in a thoroughly godly way. Let me share with you one statistic before moving on. We did a survey last year of our entire congregation. One of the questions we asked people on an anonymous survey was how much they made. Under 20,000; 20-40,000, 40-60,000, 60-80,000, 80-120,000; 120-175,000; or over \$175,000. We also asked people what percentage of their income they gave to the church. 0; 1-5%; 6-9%; 10%+ Do you know what we discovered? Those in our congregation that make over \$175,000 most nearly mirror the giving patterns of the poorest members of our congregation, those who make under \$20,000. Two groups in our church that gave the least by way of percentage were our poorest members, many of whom are unemployed and don't draw an income, or our students who have irregular giving patterns, and also our wealthiest members. Now some of you who are well off tithe to the church and give more than a tithe. But as a group, the most successful folks here, as a group give the least by way of percentage of their income.

Success is a test. Can I find God and continue to radically and passionately follow him under the layers of all my stuff?

There is also the test of security. In the midst of my testing, will I make it? Will I be brought safely all the way home to live eternally with God forever? In the storms, with all the material temptations, despite all of my inadequacies, will I make it all the way home? Here's what Jesus says in verse 37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up to the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day."

Dropping down to verse 43, “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.”

With so many obstacles in the way, with so many tests and difficulties, will we simply flunk out of the program like the Navy Seals who could not stay under water, but bolted for the surface to fill their lungs with air?

Jesus speaks to us here of three impossibilities. Verse 44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” It is impossible for a woman or a man or a child to come to Christ apart from the drawing of that woman or man or child by God, the Father. The reason why people don’t come to Christ is not because they don’t have the opportunity to come. It is not because they have not heard. It is not because there aren’t people praying for me, or they don’t have a will or emotions, or intellect. People do not come to Christ because they spiritually refuse to do so. People don’t come to Christ because it is their nature to reject Christ.

And Jesus says it is impossible for a human being to come to Christ apart from the Father’s drawing them.

Here is the second impossibility, verse 37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me.” The second impossibility is that it is impossible for someone whom the Father draws not to come to Christ, just as it is impossible for a person to come to Christ apart from the Father drawing him or her, so it is impossible for a person not to come to Christ, if the Father does draw him or her.

If a person is to be saved, they must come to Christ. You must willingly actively embrace Jesus Christ by faith. But this active, willing embrace is a gift from God. God doesn’t merely give you the opportunity to embrace God. God gives you the desire to embrace. Apart from the Father you have no desire for Jesus. You have no appetite for Christ. You have no thirst for him.

Here is the second impossibility. It is impossible for a person not to come to Christ, if they are drawn by the Father.

And the third impossibility follows upon the second half of verse 37. Look at this, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” It is impossible to come to Christ unless the Father draws us. It is impossible to not come to Christ if the Father draws us. And it is impossible to lose Christ when the Father draws us.

Again, verse 37, “whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” That means to literally drive out what is already in. One commentator says that John 6:37 argues not only that the ones given to Jesus inevitably come to him, but that Jesus will keep them individually once they are there. Jesus Christ is saying, “I

will not refuse to embrace and accept anyone the Father gives me.” God the Father makes a gift of certain sinners to his blessed Son. How do you know you will? Why will you continue, despite the test and your stumbling? Because the Son will never refuse a gift that is given him by his Father.

Finally, the fifth test, what I call the step of steeper climbs, verse 48, “I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Verse 60, On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

There is, briefly, a lot of debate on the meaning of eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood. Some people think that he is primarily talking about taking communion. That this is a teaching about the communion meal. About the bread of communion representing his body and the wine representing his blood.

I think if communion is being referenced, it is referenced only in a very secondary and tangential way. I believe Jesus is giving us a tangible, visible picture of what it means to believe in him. A person is not saved by taking communion. Jesus says in verse 53, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.” He is giving us a very vivid picture of belief. To believe is not just to check a set of boxes regarding some abstract notions you have in your head:

True or False – Jesus Christ is the Son of God. True.

True or False – Jesus died for your sins. True.

True or False – Jesus rose from the dead. True.

To believe is to actively come to Jesus and to embrace him by faith, to feed upon him by faith, to take his Spirit into your soul by faith. Jesus is not talking about some sort of cannibalism.

But the Jews who heard this could not receive it. We read in verse 60, On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept

it?" And in verse 66, "From that time on, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

You know, the climb in this chapter gets steeper and steeper regarding the teaching of Christ. We often think that life will get easier and easier as we walk with Christ. It is certainly easier to not live with sin. It is certainly easier to not blow yourself up by your own stupidity and rebellion. But it is the common experience of followers of Christ to have the tests get harder and harder over time.

Certainly, the test of old age presents us with unique challenges. You think you've climbed the mountain in your youth and you discover that it's only the foothills. The mountain lies towering ahead of you. The mountain of declining health and losses of loved ones, loss of companionship, and diminished capacities and diminished influence.

The test of the steeper climb: will you persevere?

I want to close by reading an email that I received from a member of our congregation just this past Friday. This couple told me their story on Thursday and I said, "Will you write this down and allow me to share this with our congregation because we are talking about tests this week." This couple was severely tested. Listen:

After knowing each other for five years, we were married in 1987. Our plans were clear from the day we got engaged - we were available to God for full time Christian service, and we were looking for opportunities in missionary work in a Muslim country.

(This is a faithful couple who simply wanted to do God's will in a difficult situation.)

We had planned to wait for five years before starting a family, but our "surprise" baby came after just a year of marriage. Life was exciting - we were in love, we were about to become parents, and we were looking forward to serving as missionaries.

Daniel was born on January 20, 1988. He was beautiful and we took countless pictures the first hour after he was born! But our joy was cut short when his doctor told us that Daniel did not seem to be getting enough oxygen, possibly the result of a heart or lung problem. After a night of testing, we were told the tests indicated the problem was with his heart and he was immediately transferred to a larger hospital. For the next ten days we were on a roller coaster.

Daniel had good days, followed by bad days. His oxygen levels improved, then dropped. Then he had a lung hemorrhage. Nurses used to seeing tiny

premature babies had assured us that Daniel was a big strong baby and would be fine, but then came the blow.

Further testing showed that Daniel's veins were not connected properly. Instead of running from his lungs to his heart, Daniel's veins went from his lungs to his liver. Daniel had to be transferred to a third hospital where he could undergo open-heart surgery. Though only offering a 50% survival rate, this surgery was Daniel's only chance.

It was at this third hospital that I "heard" a thought in my mind that was loud and overwhelming. The thought was, "Just curse God and this will all be over." Was I overwhelmed and exhausted? Perhaps, but I never felt that was the origin of this thought. I felt this was a direct spiritual attack and I immediately said, "I will not curse the Lord my God, I will praise Him" and I began worshipping the Lord in song and prayer. I prayed the Lord would protect Daniel's little life and heal him and I poured out my love and worship to the Lord.

On Super Bowl Sunday, 1988, Daniel was wheeled out of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and into the Operating Room. He was on a tiny tray like bed, hooked up to monitors and IV's. The image of the medical team wheeling him through the double doors is embedded in my mind. When those doors closed behind them, I somehow knew that would be the last time I would see him. Though the doctors were able to sew Daniel's veins into the proper location, his little heart stopped beating during the surgery, never to start again. After 11 short days, our Daniel was gone.

As grieving parents, we held each other and cried. We hadn't asked for this child, but after coming to accept him as God's gift, we had longed for him. We felt like little children who got up on Christmas morning to open a beautiful gift, only to find that it was smashed and broken beyond repair.

We honestly asked God for meaning. Why did he allow this to happen? What bigger purpose did he want to accomplish? We asked God to bring glory to himself through Daniel's life and death, and to use it to somehow draw others to himself.

We talked a lot, probably one of the best things grieving parents can do. I told a few people about the night in the hospital and the thought I had to curse God. Two people, my prayer partner and my dad, understood then why they had been awakened during the night multiple times to pray for us - they had been awakened to pray, not for Daniel, but for my faith. When they were awakened to pray, they didn't know the extent of the spiritual testing I were going through, but sensed the need to pray for my faith.

The climb gets steeper. From this time many of the disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

"You do not want to leave me too," Jesus asked the Twelve?

Simon Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

You know, when you have experienced Jesus Christ, not just as an abstraction, but you really experienced a relationship with him, you've tasted and seen in your own life that the Lord is good, you've felt the love of Jesus Christ, you've experienced his forgiveness, you can't walk away and try to be a nice person again. When Jesus Christ makes a place in your life for himself, you can try finding satisfaction elsewhere, but you never will be able to. Some people draw near, they believe in some fashion, but they've never tasted and experienced the Lord for themselves. So they turn away.

This couple turned to Christ in their hour of testing. Let me finish their story and this message.

With time, we began to heal. That summer we were accepted as missionaries and began taking Bible and missions classes. Just over a year later, we had a healthy baby girl with a perfect little heart. She confirmed what the doctors had told us - Daniel's condition was so rare we didn't need to worry about ever seeing it again. In fact, it was so rare, they said, the chances of it happening were as low as getting struck by lightening.

But lightening does sometimes strike in the same place twice. When our third baby, Michael, was born, his face was dark purple and he seemed weak and floppy. They took him into the nursery for testing and when we were allowed to enter the room an hour later, we saw his oxygen monitor - one just like Daniel's with the same low reading. Asking if he had the same condition, the doctor tried to assure us with the phrase that "lightening doesn't strike in the same place twice."

From there it seemed we were on a slow motion movie, playing a repeat of our first experience. Michael was taken by ambulance to a larger hospital, the diagnosis was confirmed, the medical procedures explained, and the surgery papers signed.

Not again, Lord! Until now, all we knew at the end of this journey was grief.

How steep, Lord, will the climb be? Why so much pain for some people? But this time, the answer was different.

But God had a different ending to Michael's story. When Michael was two days old, the doctors sewed his pulmonary veins onto his tiny heart, and God chose to

keep Michael's heart beating. On his 11th day, Daniel went home to be with God, but on Michael's 11th day, he came home with us.

Let's pray.

Tested by the Lord

Rich Nathan

April 26-27, 2003

John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 6

- I. The Purpose of Tests

- II. The Nature of Tests
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 - b. The Test of Storms: Who is Jesus Christ? (Jn. 6:16-24)
 - c. The Test of Success: What Really Matters? (Jn. 6:25-26)
 - d. The Test of Security: Will I Make It? (Jn. 6:37-44)
 - e. The Test of Steeper Climbs: Will I Persevere? (Jn. 6:47-71)