

Lima United Methodist Sermon  
October 27, 2024  
Second Sunday of Stewardship Awareness  
By Rev. Jonette Gay

"Go ahead, Test God"

Some of you are teachers and you give test to determine how much a child is learning and the lessons can adjust to the child's needs. If you are like me it has been many years since we took a test. I still remember though. Hoping to be prepared, but not always knowing enough. If we were tested by God, we just may not be able to pass.

In the Lord's prayer we pray each week, lead us not into temptation. We are praying to God not to test us. We like to be prepared before we take a test. There is no way to be prepared enough for what life may throw at us. We know we would fail. But why do we have to ask God not to do that? Maybe it is a stance. We are admitting we are not up for the challenge. We are admitting our reliance on God and not our wits or our knowledge or our data. Or our reliance on artificial intelligence.

I think of the time Jesus was tempted in the desert.

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "*

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "*

Jesus passed the test. Jumping off a roof to test God to save us, not a good idea. Most of us know that. We would not try to do something just to test to see if God will intervene and save us, catch us as we are jumping off the roof. There is another thing about that particular temptation that strikes me as very significant. Satan quoted scripture. He said words that are in the Bible Psalm 91:11-12. The timing was off. It is important that we remember quoting the Bible at the wrong time may not be the words of God, but the words of Satan. Hal Hopson wrote beautiful words in the song "The Gift of Love" *Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire, but have not love my words are vain, as sounding brass and hopeless gain. Though I may give all I possess and striving so my love profess, but not be given by love within, the profit soon grows strangely thin.* The words could be a memorization of a Bible verse, but without love they are words strangely thin.

We know from the book of Deuteronomy we are not to test God, like they did at Massah. Deuteronomy 6:16. What happened at Massah which means 'Testing place'? Because they were thirsty, dying of thirst in the desert and they asked if God was with them or not.

Do not test God. It is clear. Do not test God, saying, do this or we will not believe. They are dying of thirst, I understand their desperate feeling. Yet, after all God did for them through the

plagues and delivering them from slavery, it is as though they are saying, yes but what have you done for me lately? You brought us here only to let us die in the wilderness? God, are you there or not? Do not test God.

Except, there are exceptions, exception that proves the rule. The expression doesn't really mean unless there is an exception the rule is invalid. The expression: "The exception proves the rule" is really about testing the rule, the text, the spirit.

Do not test God, **except** when God asks us to test him.

We may want to quote Jesus or Moses: Thou shalt not put the Lord to the test." Such a declaration happened in the book of Isaiah. The prophet says to king Ahaz:

*<sup>11</sup> "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." <sup>12</sup> But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." <sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:11-14*

So, Ahaz hides behind piety to say, oh, no I would never ask for a sign, because we are not allowed to test God. The prophet Isaiah comes down hard on this false piety: too little to weary people, now you weary God? You do not ask because you do not want God to give you guidance, or provision or direction, it may be contrary to your desires so you quote a scripture and claim faithfulness when the prophet is weary of such false sanctity.

Stop saying, oh, I will not ask for a sign, or test God's blessings, because the Bible says .... This is a caution to use the Bible when the Bible is saying to do just what you read not to do. Confusing? It doesn't have to be.

*<sup>8</sup> Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! <sup>10</sup> Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the locust<sup>m</sup> for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.*

Here in the book of Malachi God is telling us to test him. Go ahead and try it. Tithe and see if you are not blessed by this. See if blessings are not showered upon you. See if you do not

receive in return. **if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.**

I am not promoting a prosperity gospel. That is a theology that says you will gain monetarily if you just ask God.

No, Jesus said interesting things about blessings that are counter cultural. Such as blessed are the poor, the hungry, those mourning ..... not our idea of blessings.

Not prosperity gospel which says, name it/ claim it. Blab it grab it.

No, test God with tithing because our good God knows what is good for us. See if you do not feel a blessing after tithing. Some say, is it tithing the gross or the net? Simply tithe, many do not notice before or after taxes. Perhaps some of you do. You have to know your context. A pastor once asked a child in a wealthy church during a children sermon.

What is a prophet?

A child piped up with her answer. "That is the money you have after taxes"

Prophet and profit- homonyms, homophones but not at all the same word.

So, is it a tithe of gross income or net income? You decide. A tithe may seem like a great deal of money. Some churches emphasize it more than we do. In the United Methodist Church there was a time we said, "give 'til it hurts", until we found Methodist have a very low tolerance of pain. Give because it feels good to give. Go ahead and test God, try a tithe for a year and see if you do not feel God's blessings.

A pastor wrote about an experience he had when applying for a loan. He was required to list his expenses. He listed his church pledge. The bank loan officer said, "Sir, a church pledge is not a debt." And the pastor replied, "In my case if you are evaluating my credit worthiness, you need to know that I do consider it a debt. If push comes to shove, I will pay the church before I pay you." Guess what, he not only got the loan, that bank officer joined his congregation.

In the Bible verse we read today, it goes so far as to say do not rob God. We have changed our wording in the bulletin this week to be; **"The giving of God's tithe and our offerings."** The tithe belongs to God, the extra offerings are what we decide to give above the tithe.

Try it in 2025, go ahead, God says, Test God. See if you are not blessed. If you find next year, it was not true that you are blessed by God when tithing, then you can say you tried. I do not preach every day about tithing. But I will tell you one thing, in 30 plus years of ministry I have never had a person who is tithing complain about a sermon on tithing. You may complain, but if you do, you will be found out.

If we say, I will not test God because the Bible says do not test God. Then we do not know that God in the Bible also says, "Go ahead and test me".

When I take an inventory of God's blessings, I am reminded of being forgiven this year. In return, I want to forgive others. I see God was with me in difficult times. How can I pay attention to someone who is struggling and offer the ministry of presence to them? When we realize how generous our God is, we want to pay it forward and give to others to participate in the spirit of giving.

Go ahead, test God.

Go ahead, test God. Tithe and see the blessings flow in 2025.

This is not my norm. Not what I say every day. I am just convinced that God loves us and knows us. We give to participate with our generous God.

Try it, God ahead, test God.