

Pass the Test

Develop Character Through Trial

How safe is your car, really? Sure, the manufacturer has told you about the airbags, crumple zones, and rigorous safety inspections, but will your car actually keep you alive in an accident? The auto industry constantly crashes brand new vehicles in frightening ways to make sure they pass the test. They even simulate real people at the wheel with their crash test dummies. But we face tests every day, too — high-speed collisions with temptation and trials that threaten to crush us. Will our character prove sturdy or crumple on impact?

We're modeling our integrity after Jesus' integrity as we continue our [Cross Training](#) journey. Integrity comes when we receive the whole truth, live with purity, develop our character, and speak courageously. So how can we reinforce our character for life's collisions?

What You Need to Know

When the Bible talks about character, it's talking about the fortitude to pass the test. The Greek word *dokimē* — translated as character, test, or proof — means to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination (Louw-Nida). Like a soldier tests the strength of his sword in battle, we show our moral makeup every time we face adversity. And like so many commendable qualities of Christ, character doesn't develop overnight. It grows as we continually — and successfully — navigate life's challenges. As Paul said, "*suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*" (Rom. 5:3-4).

God judges our character, not by our outward appearance but by the condition of our hearts. As God told Samuel, "*Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*" (1 Sam. 16:7).

What You Need to Do

Keep your eye on your moral development. Today's many tasks and tests present opportunities for practicing virtue. Attend to your patterns and relationships, mindful of their effect on your character (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33).

"Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8).

As strange as it sounds, we can find joy in our problems when we see that in Christ, our obstacles improve us rather than tearing us down (Rom. 5:3-5; 8:28-37). Try to see God's creative hand, chiseling away imperfections and sculpting you into his image (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18-4:12; Heb. 12:7-11). It takes perspective and power to see anything good in heartbreak, pain, and frustration, so pray for wisdom from God, trusting that he can help you rejoice in your trials (James 1:2-6).

Give special attention to the parts of your life no one sees. Trying to *look* good can get in the way of *doing* good. Christ shared an incredible insight into character development when he taught his disciples to do good in secret (Matt. 6:1-9). Think of your character like an iceberg. Most of an iceberg lies submerged underwater and remains unseen. When all of our praiseworthy qualities are seen and praised, it's hard to know whether it's for real. But when we do even *more* admirable deeds in secret than we do in public, we bolster our character and leave no doubt about our motives.

Through the Week

- **Read** — Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 5:1-5; Phil. 2:12-16; James 1:12-27; 2 Peter 1:3-11
- **Reflect** — Ask yourself, *"What have my choices, attitudes, and trials revealed about me this year?"*
- **Request** — Pray, *"Father, refine me in the furnace of my trials"* (cf. Isa. 48:10).
- **Respond** — Look back at the past year and give thanks for a difficulty you faced, recognizing the growth God can bring from it.
- **Reach Out** — Ask someone, *"How has suffering strengthened your character?"*