

STUDY NUMBER FOUR - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Are You Discouraged by the Problems?

Key Verses 3:3, 4: "so that no one might be deceived in these afflictions; for you yourselves are knowing that we are destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were to be afflicted; even as also it came to pass, and you are knowing."

TEXT:

v. 1 Wherefore no longer being able to bear it, we considered it good to be left behind in Athens alone;

v. 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and fellow worker of God (God's helper) in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith;

v. 3 so that no one might be deceived in these afflictions; for you yourselves are knowing that we are destined for this.

v. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were to be afflicted; even as also it came to pass, and you are knowing.

v. 5 Because of this I also, when I could not bear it any longer, sent [him] that I might come to know your faith, lest perchance the one who is tempting tempted you, and our work should be in vain.

INTRODUCTION:

(Simple Faith by Charles R. Swindoll)

Jorge Rodriguez was the meanest, orneriest bandit on the Texas, Mexico border. The guy would often slip across the line, raid the banks of South Texas, and steal 'em blind. Before they could catch him, he would race back into Mexico and hide out. No matter how hard the law tried, they could never catch him.

Finally the Texans got fed up with this nonsense and decided to put the toughest Texas Ranger they had on the case. Sure enough, that got the job done. After only a few days of searching, the Ranger found the bandit in a dingy, dusty saloon south of the border. He bolted into the bar, pulled both guns, and yelled, "Okay, stick 'em up, Jorge; you're under arrest! I know you've got the money."

Suddenly a little guy over in the corner butted in. "Wait, wait . . . just a minute, senor," he said. "Jorge does not speak English. He's my amigo, so I'll translate for you."

The Ranger explained, "Look, we know he's the bandit we've been looking for. We know he's taken thousands and thousands of dollars--about a million bucks, actually. We want it back now. Either he pays up or I'll fill him full of holes. You tell him that!"

"Okay, okay! I'll tell him . . . I'll tell him." So the little fellow turned to Jorge and repeated in Spanish everything the Ranger had said. The Texas Ranger, not knowing a word of the language, waited for the bandit's reply.

Jorge listened, frowned, then responded in Spanish, "Okay, they got me. Tell him to go down to the well just south of town, count four stones down from the top of the well, then pull out the one loose stone. All the money I have stolen I've hidden behind the stone."

Then the clever little translator turned to the Texas Ranger and translated with a shrug, "Jorge says, 'Go ahead, you big mouth; go ahead and shoot 'cause I'm not telling you where the money is.'"

pp. 12-13

(As Far As You Can Go Without a Passport by Tom Bodett)

Did you ever notice that nobody you see on television looks like anyone you know? They're all experiments in genetic engineering that couldn't find jobs doing anything else. They look and act exactly the same. If the women aren't cast as complete dingbats, then they've got them acting like Clint Eastwood in drag. Macho women detectives spend an hour yelling at everything in sight, then they'll portray a moment of tenderness or gender identification by sharing a lipstick in the ladies' room.

All the men look like the ace through king in the Chippendale card deck. To show character and a sense of humor, they put a baseball cap on them. Innocent boyish grins under the brim of a New York Yankees hat, and the hearts of America go pitter-patter.

They're all private detectives, too. I've never even met a private detective. Can there really be that many? And do they all really look like that? I never see these kinds of people in airports or shopping centers. They don't work on my car, sell me groceries, give me parking tickets, or plow my road. Those folks look a lot like me. Sometimes our faces are dirty, our socks don't match, and our clothes get ripped. They don't rip provocatively at the shoulder or chest to show off anyone's manliness either. They rip right in the seat of the pants just before you walk into the coffee shop for lunch. I want to see more human beings being human.

Aren't you getting a little tired of eating hamburger casserole, trying to feel sorry for the poor young television heiress who's not getting her share of the oil revenues? Or how are we supposed to feel when our favorite private eye loses his wine cellar privileges, or wrecks the Ferrari when our cars sit in the driveway on bald tires? Not everyone in America's biggest problems are illegitimate children, terminal heart disease, and psychopathic killers, nor do they care to hear much about it. Most of us are dealing with high rents, boring jobs, and bunions. But what fun would it be to see that on the tube?

I can picture the network ads for a new drama set in Fargo, North Dakota. "Tune in Tuesday and share the excitement as Caroline gets a raise to minimum wage and Freddy surprises her with a matching set of vinyl dinette chairs." That series wouldn't last a week, would it? For good reason too, I suppose.

Maybe it's not so bad that we immerse ourselves in the fantasy worlds of the very rich and perpetually good looking. As long as we don't all start thinking that the way they act is admirable behavior. I think the Freddys in Fargo who surprise their wives with tubular furniture are worth any ten of the vicious oil tycoons we so enjoy watching. I'd rather share a cup of coffee with my snow plow driver than almost anyone I've seen on TV since Ed Norton and Ralph Cramden.

That truck driver is kinda ugly, but by God, he sure is good people.
pp. 120-22

(The Inward Journey by Gene Edwards)

The Lord knows something we don't: The Fall has left all of us in dire straits. Most of us are either extremely sinful or extremely religious. Or both! And further, I suspect that neither one of those states pleases God more than the other. Neither impresses Him. What He does in us impresses Him!

He knows something else: We usually learn about Him only during periods of adversity. Few, if any, of us really seek after a deep, intimate relationship with the Lord except (1) just before, (2) during, and (3) right after those periods of calamity, disaster, catastrophe, suffering and pain! That's true of the very sinful, the very religious, and . . . well . . . the rest of us!

p. 64

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 (Phillips)

This priceless treasure we hold, so to speak, in a common earthenware jar, shows that the splendid power of it belongs to God and not to us; we are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair; we are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone; we may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out.

On every side pressed hard and sorely troubled,
perplexed, hemmed in, but no, not in despair.

On every side but overhead still open.

Thus heart can rise above on wings of prayer.

On every side unrest, tumultuous heaving,
a fevered rush, a seething, surging throng.

On every side disturbance, dislocation,
but deep within a sweet thanksgiving song.

On every side a heated, frantic clamour,
a push, a greed, a selfish work and will.

On every side unheavenly words and warings,
but deep within a place where all is still.

On every side 'tis true the foe is pressing
and driving hard his quickly shortening day.

But God doth reign, He over all is sovereign
and rest on every side our hearts can stay.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

In our study of the Thessalonian epistle we are making a SPIRITUAL CHECKUP, and to do this we are raising a number of questions in order to find SYMPTOMS.

We have asked ourselves the questions:

1. Have We Made the Right Start?
2. Are We a Phony?
3. Has Satan Hindered Us?

Now we come to one of the most effective tools of the devil, and we raise the question:

4. ARE YOU DISCOURAGED BY THE PROBLEMS?

If there is any one thing that the devil would use more than any other it would be the tool of DISCOURAGEMENT. If he can get us discouraged, he knows that defeat is impending.

As we study this passage together, let us recognize the fact that this might be one of our difficulties. Maybe we are just discouraged by the overwhelming problems that confront us at this time.

Ryrie observes:

The chapter division is unfortunate here. The "wherefore" links this to the preceding section. Because of having to leave his converts and because he himself had been hindered from returning to the city, Paul sent Timothy back to see how the young church was faring. He did this in spite of the fact that it meant that he would have to be left alone in Athens. Evidently, Silas was still ministering in Berea and had not yet rejoined the party. All three met again in Corinth where the letter was written.

Walvoord points out:

In the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians the great theme of salvation was unfolded. There is nothing in all the world that thrills the heart like a real experience of trust in the Lord Jesus which the Thessalonians had experienced. Chapter 2 presented the challenge of Christian service. Paul speaks of his own service and the rules of ministry as well as the service and faithfulness of the Thessalonian church as it will be recognized at the judgment seat of Christ in glory.

Chapter 3 before us now has the theme of sanctification, which continues into chapter 4 through verse 12.

Ogilvie asks the question:

Are you ever tempted to check out from life's battles and tensions? We all have times when we wonder if it's worth the strain. Often we check out from discipleship when the cost of caring becomes exorbitantly high. Or we check out on difficult people or demanding situations. We are still with them but have checked out mentally, emotionally or spiritually. The temptation to give up while we are still in the battle is constantly before us.

p. 56

v. 1 Wherefore no longer being able to bear it, we considered it good to be left behind in Athens alone;

"WHEREFORE" takes us back to 3 THINGS:

1. in light of our desire to see you
2. in light of the fact that we were hindered on 2 previous attempts
3. we did the next best thing, we sent Timothy

The "WHEREFORE" then takes us back into the 2nd chapter:

Since they were made orphans by the separation from the Thessalonian saints, they had made a couple of unsuccessful efforts to get together with them, and Satan had hindered them.

Paul, because of his strong feelings for them, and the lack of information as to how they were faring, felt that it would be good to be left in Athens alone to have Timothy go and bring a report as to how things were going in Thessalonica.

"In view of the fact that we have a great desire to see you, and also in view of the fact that Satan has hindered our 2 previous attempts to come to you, we did the next best thing, and that was to send Timothy to get a report."

I think it would be good for us to get the MOVEMENT OF THE MEN involved here so that the passage will take on a little more meaning:

1. Paul left Silas and Timothy at Berea and goes on south to Athens alone. This is recorded in Acts 17:15, 16.
2. Silas and Timothy join Paul in Athens - 1 Thessalonians 3:1
3. Timothy is sent from Athens to Thessalonica - 1 Thessalonians 3:2
4. Silas goes to Macedonia after Timothy leaves - Acts 18:5. He either goes to Philippi or back to Berea.
5. Paul goes to Corinth from Athens - Acts 18:1
6. Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul at Corinth - Acts 18:5
7. Paul now writes to Thessalonica in the names of Paul, Silas and Timothy.

"WHEREFORE NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO BEAR IT."

This phrase helps us understand that Paul's love and compassion runs deep. There are 2 THINGS that stand out:

- 1.the INTENSITY of his feelings
- 2.the DEEP LOVE he has for the Thessalonians even though he has only been with them for a brief time

"WE CONSIDERED IT GOOD TO BE LEFT BEHIND IN ATHENS ALONE."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Paul and Silas send Timothy back to encourage the saints.

Hendricksen says:

The sense of verse 1 is: in view of the fact that our immediate attempt to return to you was frustrated by Satan, and that, nevertheless, we could not stand or endure the separation any longer, we decided, (thought it good) to deprive ourselves of the valued presence of one of our number, even though that meant that we would be left alone in the very worldly and idolatrous city of Athens.

p. 82

Horne says:

Paul's concern for the Thessalonians had become unbearable. Some definite action must be taken.

Ellicott describes his feelings by saying:

No longer able to control my longing to see or at least hear about you.

Barnhouse observes:

Now, with this background, we move into chapter 3, where Paul expresses his intense concern for the Thessalonians. Were they weathering the storm of persecution? Were they standing true to the faith delivered to them by Paul? He says that when he simply couldn't stand it any longer, he sent Timothy to them to see how things were going. We can, perhaps, liken the apostle Paul's feelings to a mother whose son is taken into the army. In the rush of basic training, he has no time to call or write home. She does not know how he's getting along--if he is sick or even if he's alive--and she's frantic. All sorts of dire possibilities suggest themselves to her. It was the same with Paul. Finally, it was too much for him. He was willing to remain at Athens alone while Timothy returned to Thessalonica to get a firsthand view of what was happening.

Lange, in his commentary, says:

What diligence in watering is shown by Paul! In the case of young plants this is especially necessary. But the tender and encouraging treatment has no other aim, than to lead them on to a Christian self-dependance. Thus Paul not merely passed through among them as a proclaimer of the word, but he was their father, and continued to be their pastor. A true apostle is intimately knit to the souls of his children, and can never forsake them. Such a spirit of love and truth forms the true apostolic succession.
p. 54

Paul was going to be in PAIN either way:

the PAIN of not knowing what was going on in Thessalonica,

and if he remained in Athens alone, the PAIN of being separated from young Timothy.

Ryrie describes it as follows:

As much as Paul loved the Thessalonians he hated to see Timothy leave him, for he used a word that literally means "abandoned." It is emphasized by the word "alone," showing the sense of desolation which overcame Paul in Athens as he faced the philosophers of that city. Yes, even ministers of the gospel feel depressed and alone at times. However, it was important that Timothy go.

This verse just does nothing more than describe love in action--love that is no longer content to be separated without knowledge of the one that is loved.

v. 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and fellow worker of God (God's helper) in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith;

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Timothy was a hard-working servant. It is suggestive of his zeal and his humility. He is a brother and a servant in spreading the gospel.

Timothy is described in 2 WAYS:

1. "OUR BROTHER"--which is the result of him being born again by the Spirit into God's family,
2. "AND FELLOW WORKER OF GOD"--which speaks of his unselfish acts of service.

Philippians 2:19-23

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me;

His mission has a 2-FOLD PURPOSE:

1. "TO STRENGTHEN" the Thessalonians concerning their faith,
2. "AND ENCOURAGE" the Thessalonians concerning their faith

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

To "strengthen" would be to establish them firm and solid in the faith, and to "encourage" them would be to provide what they needed to fight the good fight of faith.

Much of the ministry was grounding new converts in the faith.

Paul and Timothy were very close in the things of Christ. Timothy, being much younger, looked to the apostle like a son would look to his father.

TIMOTHY was a real soldier of the cross who was willing to face:

HARDSHIP,

DIFFICULTY,

DISCOURAGEMENT,

and LONELINESS,

simply because he was concerned about doing what God would have him do.

He was a man who was willing:

to go anywhere

at any cost

to do anything for the glory of God.

There are 2 REASONS given in this 2nd verse then as to why Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians:

1.to establish them in their faith, or
"TO STRENGTHEN" them

2.to "ENCOURAGE" them in their faith

Paul recognized the fact that they were young converts and needed to have a great deal of help in being STRENGTHENED or ESTABLISHED in their faith. This is one of the reasons for sending Timothy.

The 2nd thing is to "ENCOURAGE" them. He was fully aware of the fact that they were going through difficult trials and suffering, and that in this particular situation they needed to be encouraged lest they become overwhelmed by the problems they were facing.

Horne says:

It is not enough to have experienced the new birth. One must go on from there to be firmly rooted, strengthened in the faith. The pastor's and missionaries' task does not cease when the unbeliever is brought to an initial saving experience with the Savior, it only commences. Evangelism must be followed by a vital teaching of the great doctrines of the Bible.

Hendricksen summarizes it by saying:

Timothy then must tell these recent converts to the Christian faith, "You're doing fine. Continue to do so, but do so more and more."

The motto of the newspaper man JOSEPH PULITZER owed much to Jesus:

Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Lenski says:

The Thessalonians were to be made firm and solid by being encouraged in regard to their faith.

J. Vernon McGee says:

"To establish you concerning your faith." This same wonderful word was used back in the book of Exodus when Moses went up to the mountain to hold up his hands in prayer to assure Israel's victory: "But Moses' hands were heavy. And they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon. And Aaron and Hur staid up his hands, the one on the one side and the other on the other side. And his hands were steady until the going down of the sun" (Exod. 17:12). "Staid up" is the same word as "establish." Paul sent Timothy over to them to "stay them up," to "hold them up," to "establish them." People still need the same thing today. They need to be established in the faith.

Acts 14:22

strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

v. 3 so that no one might be deceived in these afflictions; for you yourselves are knowing that we are destined for this.

The GOAL FOR TIMOTHY'S MISSION is now seen in verse 3:

"SO THAT NO ONE MIGHT BE DECEIVED IN THESE AFFLICTIONS."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out:

It is Paul's hope that the Christians would not lose their spiritual balance and stability as a result of the trials they were experiencing.

The word "DECEIVED" is the word "unsettled." It is used of a dog wagging its tail and points to a picture of the Thessalonians going back and forth because of their persecutions. The word can also mean "fawn upon" or "flatter." It only occurs here. It would be better to translate it "to move," or "disturb," or "to agitate":

"SO THAT NO ONE MIGHT BE [SHAKEN OR DISTURBED]."

"So that no one might 'pull on your chain' or 'rattle your cage' by the circumstances you are going through."

"SO THAT NO ONE MIGHT BE DECEIVED IN THESE AFFLICTIONS"

You will note that it is "IN" and not BY.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

1 Peter 1:6, 7

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Satan is the master at deceit, and Paul is so afraid that the Christians in Thessalonica will be deceived in the midst of their afflictions.

S. Lewis Johnson points out:

David vanquished Satan on the battlefield but he was vanquished by Satan on the housetop.

Alan Redpath, in The Making of a Man of God, speaking of David, says:

In a few moments this great man had blackened his character, imperiled his kingdom, dishonored the name of his God and caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. What a tragedy it was that a man who had walked with God as psalmist, a warrior, a king, a great spiritual leader had trampled all that in the dust in just a few moments.

Paul's main concern is that the Thessalonians will not get the idea that living the Christian life is just a bed of roses, but that we are to expect afflictions and problems along the way.

Lenski says:

God placed us in a position where we are bound to encounter affliction.

"SO THAT NO ONE MIGHT BE DECEIVED IN THESE AFFLICTIONS."

We raise the question:

How is it possible to be deceived in the midst of affliction?

Well, there are 4 POSSIBLE MISREADINGS that can take place in the midst of our affliction:

1. we assume that direction has been missed or is being changed as a result of affliction
2. doubting God's control and goodness in the midst of affliction
3. assuming God's displeasure toward us in the midst of affliction
4. discipline from the heavy hand of God upon us

Hendricksen says:

We can fully understand how it was that you were led astray by these enthusiastic foreigners who came from Philippi. You were led to believe that they had your interest at heart, but their sudden departure and failure to return clearly proves that they are not concerned about you at all. Moreover, the things that have happened to you since their coming shows that the gods are not pleased with you. Why exchange that which is tried and tested for something novel? Rejoin our ranks, the ranks of those who have always admired and respected you and we'll promise you that we will never mention the subject again.

"SO THAT NO ONE MIGHT BE DECEIVED IN THESE AFFLICTIONS; FOR YOU YOURSELVES ARE KNOWING THAT WE ARE DESTINED FOR THIS."

TRIALS ARE THE CHRISTIAN'S APPOINTMENT AND DESTINY.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Paul adds his own stabilizing reminder that trials are not necessarily a sign of God's disfavor but a part of every Christian's legacy.

2 Timothy 3:12

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Romans 8:38, 39

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The reason that these Thessalonians knew that this was part and parcel of every Christian's experience was because of the teaching that Paul had given them when he was with them.

In chapter 1:4 Paul tells them that he is confident of their election unto salvation, and here in chapter 3:3 he is telling them that they already know that they are destined for suffering.

Horne says:

Tribulation is the divinely appointed lot of God's children. It is inevitable. Through it God teaches us those many lessons necessary to our spiritual growth.

Ryrie says:

He further reminded them through Timothy that they should remember that affliction is the normal lot of the Christian and should not be regarded as something unusual or strange. We are appointed to such.

J. Vernon McGee says:

Then Paul makes the amazing statement that we are appointed thereunto. We know that we are going to go through storms. They will be temporary storms, but we cannot escape them. We are going to have trouble down here. The word of God makes that very clear. Paul wants the Thessalonians to stand for the Lord in the midst of afflictions.

Storms often come to believers to make them stand rather than to blow them away.

Let us return to 2 Corinthians 4:15-17 in the Phillips translation:

We wish you could see how all this is working out for your benefit, and how the more grace God gives the more thanksgiving will redound to His glory. This is the reason why we never collapse. The outward man does indeed suffer wear and tear, but everyday the inward man receives fresh strength. These little troubles which are really so transitory are winning for us a permanent, glorious and solid reward out of all proportion to our pain.

Matthew 7:24-27

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.

It is obvious from this illustration that it is going to rain, and as Tony Evans says so well:

It's too late to be pouring concrete in the rain.

(Why Christians Sin: Avoiding the Dangers of an Uncommitted Life by J. Kirk Johnston)

This pastor was expressing a theological perspective that is increasingly popular among Christians today. In his book, God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will, Richard Rice summarized this view by saying that "God maintains ultimate sovereignty over history. But he does not exercise absolute control."

Many evangelical Christians don't feel comfortable with the idea expressed by Rabbi Kushner that "God would like people to get what they deserve in life, but He cannot always arrange it." Even some non-Christians don't like this concept.

Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust, said when he heard this: "If that's who God is, why doesn't He resign and let someone more competent take His place?"
p. 84

God's sovereignty (or lack of it) has wide-ranging implications, as R. C. Sproul said:

If there is one maverick molecule in the universe running around free of God's sovereignty, then there is no guarantee that any promise God has ever made will come to pass. That one molecule may be the very thing that disrupts God's eternal plan.
p. 86

(Charismatic Chaos by John F. MacArthur, Jr.)

Word Faith teaching has no concept of God's sovereignty. Scripture says, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). God is "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). Yet in the volumes of Word Faith material I have read, I have not found one reference to the sovereignty of God. The reason is clear: Word Faith teachers do not believe God is sovereign. Jesus, according to Word Faith theology, has no authority on earth, having delegated it all to the church.
p. 269

Hagin seems callous even about the death of his own sister from lingering cancer:

My sister got down to 79 pounds. The Lord kept telling me that she was going to die. I kept asking the Lord why I couldn't change the outcome. He told me she had had five years in which she could have studied the Word and built up her faith (she was saved), but she hadn't done it. He told me she was going to die, and she did. This is a sad example, but it's so true.

Word Faith theology makes the healer a hero when miraculous cures are claimed, but always blames the seeker for a lack of faith when a healing does not happen. Hagin describes an incident when he was attempting to heal an arthritic woman. Her disease had crippled her so badly that she was unable to walk. Hagin became frustrated at her unwillingness to let go of her wheel chair.

I pointed my finger at her and said, "Sister, you don't have an ounce of faith, do you?"
 (She was saved and baptized with the Holy Spirit, but I meant she didn't have faith for her healing.)
 Without thinking she blurted out, "No, Brother Hagin, I don't! I don't believe I'll ever be healed. I'll go to my grave from this chair." She said it, and she did it.
 We weren't to blame.

pp. 283-84

(Healing and Holiness by C. Samuel Storms)

I suppose this is what disturbs me the most about modern healing ministries. They publicize the occasional "miracle" and praise the faith of the one healed, but conveniently ignore the multitudes who continue to suffer. The testimony I want to hear is of the person who suffers from a debilitating, perhaps terminal, illness and is not healed, yet whose faith in God remains unshaken. It is the remarkable life Joni Eareckson Tada lives from a wheelchair that bolsters me in my faith more than any dozen miracles of healing. It is what countless other Christian men and women are enabled by divine grace to do, in spite of ongoing illness, disability, or frailty, that encourages and inspires my Christian walk with the Lord.

pp. 12-13

Paul also learned that the Christian life is not designed as an opportunity for us to experience and display our own power and prestige. It is designed to magnify the power of God, which may well demand that we endure severe weakness. To come right to the point, God doesn't exist for us; we exist for him.

Finally, Paul also learned that his purity is more important than pleasure. Of greater value to God than Paul's happiness was Paul's holiness. If, in the divine wisdom, it was necessary to give him pain in order to protect him from pride, Paul was willing to yield to the divine purpose. If, as God saw things, the best way to make Paul humble was to make him hurt, so be it. That was the spirit of the apostle. May it be ours as well.
p. 109

Let us never forget that the most grievous disease is not bodily affliction, but the loss of spiritual intimacy with God. Suffering drives us to our knees, thrusts us before the throne of grace, and welds us to the heart of our heavenly Father.
p. 130

(I Want to Grow Hair, I Want to Grow Up, I Want to Go to Boise by Erma Bombeck)

They were children who had been sentenced to a period of uncertainty and pain usually inflicted on the elderly who had lived rich, long lives. They were little people whom destiny had tapped on the shoulder and announced, "We interrupt this life to bring you a message of horror."
p. xiii

(Within the Shadow by Shelley Chapin)

We try to make this world our home and fit all the pieces neatly in place, but such ease is rarely the guarantee that comes in the package of following Christ. Instead, life is difficult.

Sometimes we must accept pain and suffering and grow in their wake. Sometimes we must yield to God's plan even when it seems to be counterproductive to our own. Sometimes we must step out in faith even when there seems to be no light to guide the way.
p. 15

Lange, in his commentary, says:

The best ground of comfort to save us from fainting in tribulation is to consider well and firmly believe that God in His goodness and wisdom has appointed to everyone what, in his station and according to the measure of the powers granted to him, he is to suffer. Comfort and tribulation are by turns heavenly companions. God be praised for both.

We must have tribulation for we contend with the whole world and a mighty prince. Seeing then that afflictions are appointed to us and we appointed to them; seeing there is a decree of God concerning them, a decree as to the matter of them, as to the manner of them, as to the measure of them, as to the time of them, when they will commence, how far they shall advance, how long they shall continue, seeing everything in affliction is under an appointment, how meek and humble, how patient and submissive, ought the Christian's spirit to be under them, and with what steadiness of expectation may and ought he to look up to heaven for a sanctified use and improvement of them.

1 Chronicles 28:20

David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.

v. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were to be afflicted; even as also it came to pass, and you are knowing.

In verse 3 he says they are destined for this affliction and have been taught that,

now in verse 4 he gives the reason that they should not be surprised or deceived by it: because they kept on telling them when they were there that they were going to be afflicted. And it certainly "CAME TO PASS" and they "ARE KNOWING" this.

Now Paul tells them why they should know, because when they were with them they were telling them that they were going to be afflicted as they stepped out to follow Christ.

1 Peter 2:20, 21

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

Romans 8:17, 18

and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Paul says here, "You remember when I was with you, I was telling you that we were going to suffer affliction. And now it has come to pass, and I do not have to tell you. You already know about it."

This verse and verse 3 are the KEY VERSES for this study. In making a SPIRITUAL CHECKUP we are raising the question:

ARE YOU DISCOURAGED BY THE PROBLEMS?

Has your fellowship with the Lord been broken because of things that have happened in your life these past days? Are you now blaming God for them, not looking on them as things which God is permitting in your life to teach you some truth and to prepare you for a greater ministry?

Someone has said:

Claim Him, don't blame Him.

It is a truth of life that trials and suffering come to the man and the woman that God wants to greatly use.

Ryrie says:

Sufferings are by divine appointment, and the remembrance of this, along with steadfastness, is what is needed in the time of stress.

Hendricksen says:

How these words resemble those of the Master himself spoken on the eve of His most bitter suffering. Afflictions that have been predicted and that take place in accordance with this prediction serve to strengthen faith.

J. Vernon McGee says:

If you are a believer you are not going to escape trouble. To accept Christ does not mean to take out an insurance policy against suffering. The fact of the matter is that you will have trouble after you become a child of God even if you have not had any trouble before. He has never promised that we would miss the storm but we will go through all the storms of life. What He does say very definitely and dogmatically is that He will go with us through the storms and that we will reach the harbor. Any boat which He is in will not go to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee but will reach the other side. You and I are in the process of going to the other side.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary observes:

Everything was going according to plan. Paul used this to calm them down.

Paul had prophesied that they were going to have afflictions when he was there with them and now in verse 4 he is just saying, "I told you so."

You are normal; you are flying according to the flight plan. Nothing has gone haywire.

"If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

Acts 9:15, 16

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."

It is related of Charles Simeon that at the commencement of his career as an evangelical clergyman at Cambridge he encountered such virulent abuse and opposition that his spirit seemed on the point of being crushed. Turning to the word of God for direction and encouragement, his eye lighted on the following passage: "As they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear his cross." The similarity of this name to his own arrested him, and he was moved to new courage with the thought of the oneness with the sufferings of Christ. So is it with us all if we are reproached for the name of Jesus, happy are we; and we should rejoice inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed we may also be glad with exceeding joy.

The FOUR Ts are always involved in the difficulties in our lives:

- 1.They come to teach us to TRUST Him.
- 2.They come to teach us to TURN to Him.
- 3.They come to test us in our progress TOWARD Christlikeness.
- 4.They come to teach us that He can TRIUMPH over every circumstance and get the glory from it.

The poet put it this way:

I thank God for the bitter things,
They've been a friend to grace.
They've driven me from the paths of ease
To storm the secret place.

I thank Him for the friends who failed
To fill my heart's deep need.
They've driven me to the Savior's feet
Upon His love to feed.

I'm grateful, too, through all life's way
No one could satisfy;
And so I found in God alone
My rich, my full supply.

(The Inward Journey by Gene Edwards)

His experience is destined to be the experience of the church.

Did He suffer?
Then it follows
As the night follows day
You shall suffer.
Did He die?
Then you also die.
Did He rise?
Then you also rise.

Yes, it is true that all these experiences that Christ has had are present and accomplished facts. Yes, I have been crucified. Yes, I have died in Christ. I have already risen in Christ. But I shall also enter into and partake of some small portion of His suffering while I live upon this clod. I shall, experientially, touch His sufferings. Paul did. Peter did. So will you. So do I. And while she is still confined to this earthen ball, still locked in time and confined to visible realms, the experience of the bride will follow hard upon that experience which was His own.
pp. 146-47

(Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon
by Henry Davenport Northrop, D.D.)

An old Scotch woman found that when her minister lost his sight he could not read his dry old manuscripts, and was therefore forced to preach extemporaneously. Perhaps she was a little cruel when she said, "Praise be to God. It would have been well if he had lost his sight twenty years ago." To her mind the sermons were so much better when they came forth from his heart than when he read them from the sapless manuscript, that to her the good man's loss of sight was a gain. If, in any way, you are able to tell out a sweeter experience, and so afford greater comfort to others through your body being like a broken lantern, be thankful for it. Happy are we if our losses are the gains of others. So long as our soul shines out with holier radiance we will glory in infirmities.
pp. 306-7

(Each Day a New Beginning. Hazelden Foundation)

. . . we do not always like what is good for us in this world.

--Eleanor Roosevelt

9/25

We tend to think of the rational as a higher order, but it is the emotional that marks our lives. One often learns more from ten days of agony than from ten years of contentment.

--Merle Shain

5/7

Bad moments, like good ones, tend to be grouped together.

--Edna O'Brien

5/11

Difficulties, opposition, criticism--these things are meant to be overcome, and there is a special joy in facing them and in coming out on top. It is only when there is nothing but praise that life loses its charm, and I begin to wonder what I should do about it.

--Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

5/15

(The Upside of Down: Finding Hope When It Hurts
by Joseph M. Stowell)

So pervasive a reality is trouble that even Dr. Seuss warns children of the inevitable downside of life. He writes,

You'll be on your way up!
You'll be seeing great sights!
You'll join the high flyers who soar
to great heights.

You won't lag behind, because you'll
have the speed.
You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon
take the lead.

Where ever you fly, you'll be the best of the best.
Where ever you go, you will top all the rest.

Except when you don't
Because, sometimes, you won't.

I'm sorry to say so
 But, sadly, it's true
 That bang-ups
 And hang-ups
Can happen to you.

You can get all hung-up
 In a prickly perch.
 And your gang will fly on.
 You'll be left in a lurch.

You'll come down from the lurch
 With an unpleasant bump.
 And the chances are, then,
 That you'll be in a slump.

And when you're in a slump,
 You're not in for much fun.
 Unslumping yourself is not easily done.

1. From Oh, the Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss. Copyright © 1990 by Theodor S. Geisel and Audrey S. Geisel. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc. pp. 18-19

Being preoccupied in the "Why" syndrome may even create a downward cycle of despair that is tough to recover from. You know you are on the wrong track when all you can think of is:

Why me?
 Why me again?
 Why now?
 Why did this have to happen?
 Why did God not stop it?
 Is there something wrong with me?
 Is there something wrong with Him?
 Is there something I've missed about life?
 Why are others seemingly free from trouble?
 Why don't people understand?
 Why don't people care?
 Why don't they get their act together?
 Why do I keep blowing it?
 Why do I keep living?

Processing problems in the "why zone" too often leaves us cynical, hardened, angry, and confused. The only right answer to "Why?" is "I don't know why--and if I don't know why, I need to suspend judgment until I do."
 p. 21

(Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life
by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

Then it happened: something striking me, a strange dark sound going through my body, a sharp pain in my back, stumbling, falling on the pavement, attempts to cry out. I found myself thinking: "Did the driver who hit me notice, or is he driving on as if nothing happened?" But another thought emerged, much deeper and stronger: "Everything has changed. None of my plans matter any more. It is awful, painful . . . but maybe very good." Sue's words were there: "It's too much, far too much." Then there was nothing. Just me . . . lying helpless on the side of the road. That feeling of powerlessness, of being completely out of control, did not frighten me. I felt as if some strong hand had stopped me and forced me into some kind of necessary surrender.
pp. 23-24

(Silent Pain: Finding God's Comfort for Your Hidden Heartaches by Kathy Olsen)

In this quiet refuge of the soul, I felt secure enough to listen to the Christ within-- who gently corrected me or trained my heart in new directions. All of us have been wounded and are guilty of wounding others, but the kindness of God's compassion for my wounds led me to the deep repentance of wanting with all my heart to please Him who loves me so tenderly.
p. 169

The truth is that it takes courage, faith, and patience to face our pain with integrity. Courage to face the pain and our powerlessness to control the process. Faith and patience to believe that God will see us through if we take responsibility to fight our sinful tendency to demand that our needs be met our way.
p. 51

(Splashes of Joy in the Cesspools of Life
by Barbara Johnson)

As one psychiatrist said to his patient: "The whole world isn't against you; there are millions of people who don't care one way or another."
p. 86

I often tell parents to remember to say:

I DIDN'T CAUSE IT,
I CANNOT CONTROL IT,
NOR CAN I CURE IT.

But God can! We have two choices when we are faced with suffering and tragedy: We can withdraw and become bitter, growing old before our time and dying inwardly, or we can reach out to God and grow inwardly. We have God's promise that it will happen and "there hath not failed one word of all His good promise . . ." (1 Kings 8:56, KJV).
p. 63

You are His gem--
Tested, shining and sparkling.
You have survived the winds of adversity . . .
You are a WINNER!
You are an OVERCOMER!
YOU HAVE CREDENTIALS!
Source unknown
p. 45

(Healing and Holiness by C. Samuel Storms)

There are numerous other insights to be gained from Job's experience, but one in particular stands out above all the rest. The clearest explanation of it is provided by Joni Eareckson Tada as she struggled to come to terms with her own suffering. It is lengthy, but right on target. Read it prayerfully.

Strange as it may seem, it appears God often not only allows, but actually insures that His children undergo and endure long periods of real difficulty. Not only that, but He seems to be hurting His own cause by letting this take place within plain view of unbelievers who scoff at Christianity. Not one embarrassing detail escapes the eyes of these scorners as they jeer, "Look at how this so-called loving God treats His devoted followers!"

But wait. As we continue observing, we notice something unusual. These Christians, on whom God has sent trial after trial, refuse to complain. Rather than shake rebellious fists at heaven, and rather than curse the One who allows them such misery, they respond with praise to their Creator.

At first the world mocks. "It's only a phase," they assure themselves. "Just wait." But as the trials continue and Christians refuse to "curse God and die," the watching world is forced to swallow its own words and eventually drop its jaw in amazed disbelief.

Thus, God has shown one of the most effective ways in which suffering can bring glory to Himself--it demonstrates His ability to maintain the loyalty of His people even when they face difficult trials. If being a Christian brought us nothing but ease and comfort, the world wouldn't learn anything very impressive about our God. "Big deal," men would say. "Anybody can get a following by waiting on people hand and foot." [Isn't this precisely what Satan said to God about Job?] But when a Christian shows faith and love for his Maker in spite of the fact that, on the surface, it looks as if he's been forgotten, it does say something impressive. It shows the scoffers that our God is worth serving even when the going gets tough. It lets a skeptical world know that what the Christian has is real.

pp. 53-54

(Cages of Pain by Gordon Aeschliman)

Jesus beckons us to leave that world and follow him. And as Bonhoeffer wrote before being hung with piano wire by Nazi guards for resisting Hitler's crusade, "When Jesus bids a man come, he bids him come and die."

p. 54

LEARNING THROUGH SUFFERING

C. H. Spurgeon understood the need for suffering, for he wrote, "Stars may be seen from the bottom of a deep well that cannot be discerned from the top of a mountain: so are many things learned in adversity which the prosperous man dreams not of. We need affliction as the trees need winter, that we may collect sap and nourishment for future blossoms and fruit. Sorrow is as necessary for the soul as medicine is to the body. 'The path of sorrow, and that path alone,/ Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.'"

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

GOD LEADS US ALONG

In shady, green pastures, so rich and so sweet,
 God leads His dear children along;
 Where the water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet,
 God leads His dear children along.

REFRAIN: Some through the waters, some through the flood,
 Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
 Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
 In the night season and all the day long.

Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
 God leads His dear children along;
 Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
 God leads His dear children along.

Though sorrow befall us and Satan oppose,
 God leads His dear children along;
 Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes,
 God leads His dear children along.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

When we understand these 2 KEY VERSES it changes our whole concept of problems, suffering and unexpected circumstances in our lives. We see a sovereign God using difficulty in our lives to accomplish His divine purpose.

We begin to recognize the fact that it goes with the territory.

We are going to get hurt.

Matthew 5:11, 12

Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

When you love, you lay yourself wide open to hurt and to suffering.

A SERVANT SUFFERS FROM SELFISHNESS.

CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER COMES FROM THE CRUCIBLE.

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

2 Peter 1:5-8

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

v. 5 Because of this I also, when I could not bear it any longer, sent [him] that I might come to know your faith, lest perchance the one who is tempting tempted you, and our work should be in vain.

Here in verse 5 we are resuming what was said back in verse 1:

"Wherefore no longer being able to bear it, we considered it good to be left behind in Athens alone;"

"BECAUSE OF THIS I ALSO, WHEN I COULD NOT BEAR IT ANY LONGER, SENT [HIM, that is, Timothy] THAT I MIGHT COME TO KNOW YOUR FAITH."

According to The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

It was the condition of their faith that was a real concern to the apostle Paul. Were they still trusting, or had they thrown in the towel?

Romans 4:20, 21

yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform.

Paul's concern is that they might not be trusting God in all the circumstances of life. Therefore, when the difficulties came and the afflictions mounted, they would perhaps turn away.

The reason Paul was concerned about their faith was:

"LEST PERCHANCE THE ONE WHO IS TEMPTING TEMPTED YOU, AND OUR WORK SHOULD BE IN VAIN."

This certainly is one of the hazards of evangelism in that the tempter can pluck away the seed that has been sown and thus cause the ministry to be of no avail, to be fruitless, or to be empty.

In chapter 2:18 we notice that it was SATAN who was hindering the men as they were endeavoring to go to Thessalonica.

He is the one who is also doing the DECEIVING in verse 3,

and here he is seen as the one who is TEMPTING.

He is tempting them as Christians in the midst of adversity and persecution to get them to go back on their faith.

This is the same problem that the writer of the book of Hebrews confronts with these Jewish Christians who are suffering who want to go back to Judaism:

Hebrews 6:1

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity . . .

The Bible Knowledge Commentary observes:

Paul saw Satan as using the persecution the Thessalonians were undergoing in order to lure them away from what they knew to be God's will, namely perseverance in the midst of trials.

Paul was concerned that Satan might snatch away the seed before it had a chance to take root.

Paul's concern was that his LABOR might have been "IN VAIN," not that their faith had been in vain.

We see Satan's activity:

1. in Genesis 3 tempting Adam and Eve,
2. in Matthew 4 tempting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ryrie says:

In other words, he is sure that Satan has been tempting but he does not think that the Thessalonians had been yielding. If they had, then his hard work would have indeed been in vain. But such he doubts to be the case.

Lenski says:

"The tempter" agrees with the mention of Satan in 2:18, the greatest enemy of the gospel who is back of all opposition to its success; but the idea in temptation accords also with the [deceiving] used in v. 3, the deception by which the Thessalonians were not to allow themselves to be fooled.
p. 288

Hendricksen says:

Here in close connection with verse 3 the prince of evil is called the tempter. His meanness consists especially in this: that he first tempts a man into sin and then accuses him of it. Moreover, he will even continue accusing the man after the latter sin has been forgiven. He is accordingly the devil, or slanderer. He is Satan, the wicked adversary. He is, moreover, the god of this world, the prince of the powers of the air and of the world rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies, seducing spirits and demons. Indeed, for Paul the devil was real, an actually existing very powerful and very terrible opponent. Those who deny the real and personal existence of Satan should be honest enough to admit that they do not believe in the Bible.

J. Vernon McGee says:

The tempter is none other than Satan. In chapter 2 Paul said, "Satan hindered us." In other words, Paul is saying to the Thessalonians, "Satan is giving me a bad time and I fear he may be giving you a bad time also."

(The Solid Rock Construction Company by Haddon W. Robinson)

Some wag has said, "Don't resist temptation. It may go away and not come back."
p. 45

A young woman in a shopping mall sported a T-shirt that proclaimed: "Lead me not into temptation--I can find it myself." She wanted people to chuckle as she passed, but her one-liner raised a question. What are we praying for when we ask, "Lead us not into temptation"?

Why should we have to ask God not to lead us into temptation? To ask Him to keep us out of temptation would be more understandable. Professor D. A. Carson suggests that Jesus is using a figure of speech to express something positive by stating the opposite concept. For example, if I say, "This is no small matter," I mean it is a big matter. When we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," we are really praying, "Keep me away from temptation." We are crying out, "Don't let Satan ambush us. Don't let the foe of our souls catch us in his trap." We are recognizing that God has the power to lead us past all the lures to sin that threaten us. Therefore, we ask, "If the opportunity to sin presents itself, grant that I will not have the desire. If the desire springs up within me, grant that I will not have the opportunity."
pp. 44-45

(Why Christians Sin: Avoiding the Dangers of an Uncommitted Life by J. Kirk Johnston)

Some Christians may not be mature enough to withstand temptation in certain places, and as Joe Aldrich said, "If you're made of dynamite, don't stoke blast furnaces." Some Christians have weaknesses for certain sins and may always have these, so they should know their limits.
p. 143

(A Pretty Good Person: What It Takes to Live with Courage, Gratitude and Integrity by Lewis B. Smedes)

I have tried to say in this chapter that integrity is about holding our lives together so that we are the same person inside and out, backward and forward. We create integrity as we own whatever story we are called on to write by the living of our lives. If we begin by owning our own stories in truth, we are ready to own reality and resist the corruption of our consciousness. And when we are able to own reality for what it is, we are ready to speak our minds with honesty and love.

Integrity is not an optional part of ourselves. A good car can lack air-conditioning and still be a splendid automobile. But if we lack integrity, we lose our hold on the other components that go into the making of a pretty good person. Losing integrity is more like having our lungs cave in; everything else goes out with them.

No living person has yet arrived whole at the place called integrity. If anyone tells you that he is a person of integrity, get a second opinion. We do well just to keep moving in the right direction. We have to check on our own intentions regularly, and see whether we are still moving on the journey or whether, at some shadowed station, we left the train and went off to nowhere. For, without integrity, anywhere is nowhere.

pp. 85-86

When we see in this verse that "THE ONE WHO IS TEMPTING TEMPTED YOU," we ask ourselves the question:

How did he do it?

He uses:

- 1.the world and its allurements,
- 2.the flesh within us that wants our own way,
- 3.and oftentimes he himself attacks us on the spiritual plane to get us entangled with botched-up priorities of not spending any time with the Lord. He attacks the relationship.

When he does that, the FOUR Ds become a reality:

1. DISCOURAGEMENT
2. DEPRESSION
3. DISOBEDIENCE
4. DEFEAT

There is no question here that the tempter has been at work and he is tempting them. The question is:

Was he successful?

2 Timothy 1:15

You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

2 Timothy 4:10

for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica . . .

We have learned 3 THINGS about Satan's strategies:

1. He HINDERS
2. He DECEIVES
3. and he TEMPTS

1.He HINDERS in our pursuit of the will of God. He also hinders us from ever making a decision about receiving Christ by constantly hassling us with the thought that there is no hurry.

2.He is DECEIVING us even as he did Eve in the garden with the pleasures of sin which are only for a season.

3.He is TEMPTING us with the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them.

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

An old legend tells of an angel who was sent by God to inform Satan that all the methods he uses to defeat God's children would be taken from him. The devil pleaded to be allowed to keep just one. "Let me retain depression," he begged. The angel, thinking this is a modest request, agreed. "Good!" he exclaimed, as he laughed to himself. "In that one gift, I have secured all."

In his book Depression, What It Is and What to Do About It, Roger Barrett describes this condition as "a miserable, wretched experience that leaves you exhausted, uninvolved, and in deep, hopeless despair. There seems to be absolutely nowhere to turn and not one single thing you can do to escape these horrible feelings. You feel doomed, trapped, and at the end of your rope. . . . It's awful!"

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

HE TAKES OUR PLACE

A valuable painting had been purchased by F. W. Boreham called "The Chess Player." It portrayed Satan playing the game with a young opponent, and the man's soul was at stake.

The game had progressed to the point where it was the novice's turn, and there seemed to be no move he could make that would not mean defeat for him. Awful despair was on his face as he realized his soul was lost, and Satan was grinning as he anticipated victory. A champion player who had come to view the canvas studied the picture for a time and then called for a chessboard. Placing the pieces in exactly the same position as in the painting, he said, "I'll take the young man's place." He then made a move that showed how the devil's captive could have won and been set free.

(From InfoSearch 2:21)

THEY AREN'T HUNGRY!

Everything was all set for the first bass fishing expedition of the year. We had some exotic new lures that we just knew would be irresistible to those big 6-pounders lurking beneath the surface of our favorite fishing lake. We would tempt them with Sassy Shads, with brightly colored new Hula Poppers, with buzz baits, with a "killer" red flatfish with a black stripe, and with a white double spinner with long bright streamers. And, if all else failed, we had some fresh Canadian crawlers. We were out at dawn, hitting all the best spots with our assortment of delectable temptations. But nothing happened. We worked the shore. We cast along the weeds. We tried every lure in the tackle box--even the crawlers. Finally we gave up. As we motored back to the cabin, we concluded, "The fish just aren't hungry."

Come to think of it, I see some parallel in our ongoing battle against temptation. Satan has a whole "tackle box" of alluring devices he uses to tempt us. Some of them are gaudy and exotic, easy to spot--yet oh, so tempting! Others are designed to whet our appetites in quiet and subtle ways, appearing innocent until the hook is set. Whatever the temptation, we can best resist if we do not let our thoughts dwell on evil but on things that are true, noble, just, pure, and lovely (Phil. 4:8). With mental discipline and the help of the Holy Spirit, we can keep our hearts full of goodness. Then, in frustration, Satan will have to say, "They just aren't hungry!"

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

SAFE IN THE ROCK

Some translations of the Bible render the term "rock badgers" in Proverbs 30:26 to read "coney." Have you ever wondered what a coney was? The coney is a weak, timid, furry little rabbitlike animal. It has no way to defend itself from its fierce enemies--the weasel, the hawk, the fox, and the eagle. Therefore, this vulnerable creature lives among the rocks, and it never ventures far from home. When a coney spots an enemy, it doesn't stand its ground and try to fight. It wouldn't last a minute. Rather, it scurries away and hides down among the rocks where it cannot be reached. Knowing its own weakness, the coney finds its protection "in the crags."

Every Christian can learn a valuable lesson from this little creature. Sometimes when Satan attacks us, we try to defend ourselves against his onslaught without immediately fleeing to God for help. We make firm resolves and try to defeat him in our own strength. But Satan is far more powerful than we are. He is also a slick and crafty deceiver. How much better to flee for safety to the Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ! We just can't fight the devil by ourselves.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

John Calvin says:

By this term he teaches us that temptations are always to be dreaded, because it is the proper office of Satan to tempt. As, however, he never ceases to place ambushes on all sides and to lay snares for us all around, so we must be on our watch, eagerly taking heed.

Galatians 4:11

I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.

The word translated "IN VAIN" is the word for "fruitless." Paul means a nut without a kernel, actually worth nothing.

When tempted sore to turn aside,
As at some bypass I have stood,
this thought has helped me to decide
Not what I would but what I should.

In daily life comes many a test
To those who purpose to be good.
To such this motto I suggest:
Not what I would but what I should.

Life's little span by God is planned.
I would not change it if I could.
My course is guided by His hand.
Not what I would, but what I should.

Not my will, Father, thine be done,
Said One who was supremely good.
Here's strength for those who evil shun:
Not what I would but what I should.

If in my heart ought lurketh still
To keep from me Thy highest good;
cleanse every thought, control my will
Til what I should is what I would.

(I Want to Grow Hair, I Want to Grow Up, I Want to Go to Boise by Erma Bombeck)

An adult friend asked Christina what she would like for her eighth birthday. The small child, diagnosed with neuroblastoma, rubbed her hand over her bald head, then rested her face in her hands and said, "I don't know. I have two sticker books and a Cabbage Patch doll. I have everything."

Christina, age 12
Alpena, Michigan

p. 7

DAY BY DAY

Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best--
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Every day the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counselor and Power.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure,"
This the pledge to me He made.

Help me then in every tribulation
So to trust Your promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within Your holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.

(From InfoSearch 2.21)

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Satan might have hindered but it was the Father's plan to send Timothy to Thessalonica.

LESSON #2: Paul was willing to forego the pleasure of Timothy's presence so that the Thessalonians might be strengthened and encouraged.

LESSON #3: Do you have that same deep love that the apostle Paul displays here for the Thessalonians?

LESSON #4: Timothy was willing to go anywhere at any cost to do anything for the glory of God.

LESSON #5: Has Satan been successful in deceiving you in the midst of your afflictions?

LESSON #6: Don't ever lose your confidence in the purpose and plan of our sovereign God when you are going through difficulties.

LESSON #7: Trials are the Christian's appointment and destiny.

LESSON #8: Christlike character comes from the crucible.

LESSON #9: Temptation and deception are primary in Satan's battle plan.

LESSON #10: Satan uses discouragement, depression, disobedience and defeat to accomplish his purposes.

(The Upside of Down: Finding Hope When It Hurts
by Joseph M. Stowell)

So it is with us in the midst of suffering.

There are principles that cannot and must not be compromised. They govern the engagement. Those who trust those rules of conflict will find great security and refuge, even in life's darkest hours. The reality of God's permission for all that enters our lives, guaranteed by that which is consistent with His nature and undergirded by His unfailing presence are certain rules of engagement. Grasping these nonnegotiable principles is essential to our successful response to trouble. They lead us to find refuge and strength in God. Is it any wonder that God's Word commands us to be "strong in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:10, italics added)?

p. 62

(Comeback by Dave Dravecky with Tim Stafford)

Love, not baseball, is what I thought about during those few days of anxiety after the biopsy. Sometimes in the mornings, after Janice had gotten up with the kids, I would lie in the basement, where we were sleeping, and think how much I loved her. I thought how much I loved Tiffany and Jonathan.

One thought did not enter my mind. I never thought, Why me? I didn't feel sorry for myself. I wasn't wondering why God had treated me so unfairly. I wasn't feeling as though God was mean and vindictive.

I know that those thoughts do come to people who are facing cancer, because many people have asked me about them. Some have been convinced that I must be thinking that way. For many people it seems a battle with cancer is also a battle with bitterness.

I don't claim any credit for myself, but I didn't think that way. Janice didn't either. It just wasn't in our mindset. God had put us through some experiences and taught us some lessons that prepared us to face the worst.

pp. 65-66

FARTHER ALONG

Tempted and tried we're oft made to wonder
 Why it should be thus all the day long,
 While there are others living about us,
 Never molested tho' in the wrong.

When death has come and taken our loved ones,
 It leaves our home so lonely and drear;
 Then do we wonder why others prosper,
 Living so wicked year after year.

Faithful till death said our loving Master,
 A few more days to labor and wait;
 Toils of the road will then seem as nothing,
 As we sweep thru the beautiful gate.

When we see Jesus coming in glory,
 When He comes from His home in the sky;
 Then we shall meet Him in that bright mansion,
 We'll understand it all by and by.

Farther along we'll know all about it,
 Farther along we'll understand why;
 Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine,
 We'll understand it all by and by.

(From The New Church Hymnal, by Rev. W. B. Stevens,
 1987. #138)

1 Corinthians 15:58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

(Molder of Dreams by Guy Rice Doud)

. . . next student's paper.

My family has been plagued with problems relating to drinking. My brothers usually drank a lot when they were in high school. Their grades were not very good, and they all dropped out. One day while I was at work, I had some visitors. They told me that I had to leave work right away because of a family emergency. I didn't ask no questions, I just changed my clothes and left. On the way to the car one of them spoke up and told

me that something had happened to my brother.

"Is he all right?" I asked.

He just shook his head and said. "No, your brother has been killed in a car accident."

I continued to read this student's paper:

If the fact that my brother's death isn't enough on my mom, I might mention that my dad drinks very heavily. After my brother's funeral my dad decided to get a divorce. My mother started to drink. I'm watching her decay before my eyes. I told her that she's got to stop, and that if she continues, she's going to kill herself.

I looked up at my students. They sat quietly, listening. Whose story was this? I couldn't tell by looking at them. I continued:

Two weeks after my brother's funeral, we got the autopsy back from the examiner. We found out that my brother was drunk at the time of his accident. It was a head-on collision, and the steering wheel pushed through his chest and tore the big artery from his heart by the roots.

I finished this line, but I couldn't swallow the tears anymore. My class sat silently out of respect. They understood, too.

I read the last paragraph:

It's too bad that something like this has to happen to make people realize what they're doing to themselves and others. Maybe if people would take a hold of something solid--like faith in Jesus Christ--maybe then and only then will the troubles of our time be solved.

I stared at my class. A few of them were also crying.

I reread the last line, "Maybe if people would take a hold of something solid--like faith in Jesus Christ--maybe then and only then will the troubles of our time be solved."

"Those are his words, not mine," I said.

Those first weeks of teaching, I discovered I would learn as much from my students as they would from me. The words of one of my college education professors came back to me: "Every adult needs a child to teach; that's the way adults learn."

pp. 118-19

STUDY #4 - 1 THESSALONIANS

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

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