

A Practical Study of 1 Thessalonians

Delighting The Heart of God “Learning to Bring Pleasure to God”

Question Number Four – Are You Discouraged by the Problems? – 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Now we’ve asked ourselves three questions so far in our spiritual check-up but we’re just probing.

Question #1:

Did you make the right start?

Question #2:

Are you a phony?

Question #3:

Has Satan hindered you?

Now, we raise the question:

Are you discouraged by the problems?

If this is true, probably one of the devil’s greatest tools is the tool of discouragement. If he can get us discouraged and get us

losing our confidence in God and His ability to handle the circumstances in our lives, then he knows that defeat is impending.

So as we look at these verses in this passage together, let's ask ourselves the question down deep in our hearts:

Am I discouraged by the problems?

Verse 1.

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

That little word “Wherefore” starts this third chapter and chapter divisions are man-made.

“Wherefore” takes us back to our last lesson. It tells us **THREE THINGS**:

1. in light of wanting to see you so badly,
2. secondly, in light of the fact that we were hindered by Satan on two previous attempts, and
3. in light of the fact that we wanted to see you so bad, we did the next best thing—we sent Timothy to you.

“[So] Wherefore no longer being able to bear it...”

Would you notice something there? That is intensity of feeling if I've ever seen it.

Do you remember when you first fell in love with your sweetheart? There were times that you could no longer bear it. So you have to call on the phone and you call and you talk and you talk and you talk. Or you make arrangements to go see the loved one. There is that intense feeling inside.

Now let me tell you something, here Paul has known these people for three weeks and he's got those intense feelings for them. He has such an intense desire to know about them, to have the suffering explained, that he has to do something with these intense feelings.

Is something wrong with us or is something wrong with Paul? For how many people do you have those kinds of intense feelings?

Spiritual health tells me that we ought to have those kind of real concerns for each other but we're destitute. We're selfish. We're cold. We're lukewarm. We would rather have a pity-party than to experience the pain that somebody else is going through. And that pity-party would be for our own selfish needs.

He has a deep love, intense feelings. He's no longer "able to bear it."

Verse 2.

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;

Now I've already mentioned Timothy to you. He's Paul's young understudy. Paul is a father-image to him. And he's a young man always available to go anywhere at any cost to do anything to glorify God. Incredible testimony and witness.

Notice:

1. he's "our brother." That means that they've got a relationship in Christ.

Secondly:

2. he's a "fellow worker"—he's a man who is sacrificially giving himself in service out of love for Christ.

And then his mission is TWO-FOLD:

1. it's "to strengthen" the Thessalonians concerning their faith, and
2. to "encourage" them in the midst of their adversity and their suffering.

You see, much of ministry is simply involved in these very

areas. The areas of:

STRENGTHENING and
ENCOURAGING.

Now Timothy is a real soldier.

He'll face HARDSHIP.

He'll face DIFFICULTY.

He'll go into the eye of the storm because he's got to do that.
Thessalonica is a hot-spot and it's very dangerous.

And as a real soldier of the Gospel of Christ, he'll go there and
he'll minister to them in an effective way to:

1. "strengthen" or to establish their faith.

And then secondly:

2. to "encourage" them.

Verse 3.

Now, these next two verses are the **KEY VERSES** to this study—3 and 4.

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

I would say that that one statement right there wipes out almost all of these books on suffering that are trying to explain that God's not fair when good people suffer.

You have it right here in the statement. I mean this verse is critical to understanding what's going on in your life right now.

He sends Timothy to “strengthen and to encourage” and he says “so that no one would be deceived.”

And “be deceived” in what? In these difficulties—in these sufferings—“in these afflictions.”

And then he says:

“you yourselves are knowing that we are destined for this.”

Now let's just take those words and break them apart. Since these are the two key verses for our study, it's important for us to understand the words.

First of all, the little word “deceived” is the word for being “unsettled.”

It's the word that describes the wagging of a dog's tail. It's going back and forth and back and forth. And that's the way it is with a lot of us when we suffer. If it's going good we're up. If we're suffering, we're down. And we just kind of go on a rollercoaster kind of an experience—back and forth.

“so that no one might be [DISTURBED or SHAKEN or] deceived in these afflictions;”

In other words, so that no one might:

pull on your chain,

rattle your cage,

cause you to be deceived

in the midst of your circumstances.

Now, I want to point up one little word in that first phrase that's very important:

“so that no one might be deceived BY these afflictions.”

Is that what it says?

“so that no one might be deceived IN these afflictions.”

They're already in it. They're having a hot time in Thessalonica. As we're going to see when we get over to

chapter 4, several of them have already died through persecution.

So he says “I don’t want you to be deceived in these things that are going on in your life.”

Philippians 1:29

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

How can a person be deceived in the midst of his suffering. And I came up with **FOUR POSSIBLE MISREADINGS** in suffering while you’re in the crucible that can be used by the evil one to accomplish his purpose of deception, because he is the great deceiver.

And one of the tools that he loves to use is the tool of injustice on the part of God. He did that to Eve in the garden and nailed her. And he will do it over and over again, if at all possible. And when we’re in the midst of difficulty, the first person that gets blamed is guess who? God Himself—and Satan can stir up all kinds of affliction and God gets the blame for it. And so he knows that.

And out of deception can come **FOUR POSSIBLE MISREADINGS**.

Misreading #1:

1. we assume that because we're suffering that we have missed some direction with regard to the will of God or that a change has taken place or is going to take place in the will of God.

We assume that direction has been missed or is being changed as a result of affliction. Now you've met people like that all the time as Christians. They kind of go with the flow.

If they're pastoring a church in an area and things are getting stirred up in the area and it's getting a little hot in the leadership and they're getting shot at. They immediately send a resume to somebody else in hopes that they can change their circumstances and get a better church. Or get into a new location where people are going to really like them.

So much of the determination of the will of God has to do with the comfort zone we're experiencing in present circumstances.

And you know, I heard a statement one day. I still think the longer I live, it's truer than ever. That is:

"Lord, change my circumstances."

And the Lord says:

"No, but I'll change you to suit your circumstances."

You see, that's the real truth. And you can make a misreading every time just because you're circumstances are stirred up.

But it's time to change! And I hear people coming into my office all the time saying "Boy, God expects me to be happy and my marriage is a mess so I'm going to look for somebody else and shuck this one I've got!" As though I can go ahead and do that because God expects me to be happy in this little temporary life that I'm here. That's a fallacy!

You can be happy and know great joy independent of your circumstances in the joy of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you and it has nothing to do with your circumstances. And right in the midst of that crucible, you can make a misreading and Satan knows that. And so he just turns the heat up so he can get you all fouled up—that's misreading number one.

Misreading #2 is even more painful:

2. doubting that God's control and goodness is there in the midst of the affliction.

Doubting that's God's control and goodness is there in the midst of the affliction. Do you believe that God is sovereign? I believe having a real good dose of God's sovereignty will help you in any suffering. Because God is not sitting up there biting His fingernails and saying "Oh that car's on the wrong side of the road! I hope it doesn't hit somebody!" or "I'm sure he's going to die prematurely!"

You know, God's got that all in control. We need to come to the rest and the peace in that—that He is sovereign. And that what's going on in your life right now is known to Him and

He's directing those things for your best interest if you'll just trust Him.

Now maybe you can't understand, maybe you never will understand it.

My dear doctor friend that I office with lost his little three-year-old to drowning a number of years ago. And Dr. Knarr still says "I understand that I don't understand." We really don't!

Why would God choose to snatch a little three-year-old home? We don't know. But that doesn't allow us the privilege and the prerogative of doubting God's goodness, God's grace, God's sovereign control in all that took place. He has some reasons and we're only going to understand some of those when we get over on the other side. But don't you ever lose your confidence in God. Because at that point, you could begin to get deceived and you begin to be tossed to-and-fro.

Third one:

3. assuming God's displeasure toward us in the midst of the suffering.

Now Satan loves to play on that tune. Assuming that "Boy, man I have really gotten God ticked this time. What I'm going through you can't believe. And so God must REALLY be mad at me."

And because of that we kind of say “Well God if you’re mad at me and that’s the way you treat your friends, I sure would hate to be Your enemy.” And we just decide to do our own thing. And we leave. We take a misreading and assume that in suffering, God’s is mad. Don’t do that! That’s a misreading of suffering in your life.

Number four—we assume that in suffering:

4. discipline is from the heavy hand of God upon us.

Now that might be possible but it also might not be possible. It might be discipline because of something He’s trying to cut out of your life.

And He is taking you on a whaling expedition to apply the board of education to the seat of knowledge in the woodshed. That is possible. That is Hebrews chapter 12.

But, on the other hand, don’t assume that immediately—that you are being disciplined for something in your life.

Now would you notice one more phrase in that verse that is very important before we take leave of it?

“so that no one might be deceived in these afflictions; for you yourselves are knowing that [WHAT?] we are DESTINED for this.”

That means that God IS sovereign. He predetermined your life

before the foundation of the world. He predetermined the choice you were going to make with regard to His Son. And guess what?

He predetermined the curriculum necessary to make you more like Christ and we have been DESTINED as believers for suffering and it has nothing to do with these four things we've talked about too many times.

One writer just put it like this. He said:

Trials are the Christian's appointment and destiny.
(source unknown)

Now you see, if you could accept that much, we have gained a whole lot of ground in understanding that when our boat gets rocked and we're in the storm and it looks like everything is going against us that we can still be stable because God's in control and things are happening. But it's just part of the program.

You know that had to be a great comfort to the Thessalonians for Paul to just say "Hey you know, you guys don't worry about it. You're on schedule. Everything's fine. Sure a few people are dying and going to heaven but, hey look, that's all part of it. It's okay. Everything's fine. It's just exactly the way I told you it was going to be. So don't think that you're weird in Thessalonica just because you're really having a hard time. Everything's good."

2 Timothy 3:12

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

Yes. That's part of it. Now if you can accept that and realize that tribulation is the divinely appointed lot of every child of God and that suffering is inevitable, and that through it God teaches these things, then we ought to be able to respond in a Christ-honoring way.

You know what I think? I think that because we don't understand this and we don't respond with victory in the midst of suffering, we lose our greatest opportunity for witness.

I think when you're in the crucible; God has given you a unique opportunity for ministry. It's opening up a ministry for you and for what God wants to do through you that you're rejecting and fighting and wishing you could get out of it.

And God means to use that to bless and to bring others to Christ. And He will use it!

You see, storms oftentimes come to believers to make them stand rather than to blow them away. And I think we need to see that. That in that, God gets the glory!

Listen to Second Corinthians 4:15:

2 Corinthians 4:15-17 (Phillips)

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 renown 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.

These little transitory sufferings—you want to look over at Second Corinthians chapter 11 and see 39 of those little transitory things involving beaten with rods and going without food and being in the water in the sea 24 hours and being through 3 shipwrecks and a few other things—these little transitory things.

You see, it's going to be terribly embarrassing for twentieth century Christians to hang around with some of those folks from the first century.

I can just hear the conversation right now as I listen on it:

“Well, what troubles did you go through while you were down there on earth?”

“We couldn't get a babysitter to go to the concern! Oh, what did you go through?”

“I was beheaded.”

“Oh goodness!”

You see, I mean, man! I tell you! They’re going to blow your socks off, you know! It’s just like we don’t have anything to talk about. We’re so comfortable and little things that hit us through storms in life and just make us consume every prayer meeting we can get into, and everything. Those things didn’t mean anything to them. Man they were just plowing a straight furrow and they stayed in there and persevered and kept going no matter what. Even if it was going to cost them their lives! It meant that much. They kept going.

You know Matthew chapter 7, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the story about the wise man that builds his house on a rock and the foolish man who builds his house on the sand, and then it starts to rain. You know, you need to take these principles out of this study and start building on some rock.

And listen, it’s a gimmie that it’s going to rain.

And I love Tony Evans. He says:

When it starts to rain, it’s too late to pour concrete.
(source unknown)

You know, you need to be pouring concrete right now! Because it is going to rain and you can count on it. You are **DESTINED**

for the rain! And for the floods and for the heartache in your life. And out of all of it, God's got it under control and it's going to be wonderful what's going to come out of it.

Verse 4.

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.

“For indeed when we were with you,”—look at that. That's in the PRESENT TENSE—“we kept telling you in advance that we were to be afflicted; even as also it came to pass, and you are knowing.”

It's just like Paul, if you want to put that in layman's terminology, he said: “Look I told you when I was there and now I'm telling you so. See I told you so. It's happening just like the program. You are right on schedule. It came to pass. It happened exactly in the way I said it was going to happen.”

Now when it happens, somebody said:

“You want to CLAIM Him and not BLAME Him.”

And that's an awful good thing to do. And also someone else said:

“You want to be BETTER rather than BITTER.”

Everything is going according to God's plan. Paul is using this to calm them down. "You're normal. Everything is just fine."

Now, let me give you FOUR Ts that can help you in the crucible. Why are you going through difficulty in your life right now? Maybe these four Ts will help you put a handle on some of that if you're facing some real difficult times in your life.

1. The first T is the T—TRUST. They come to teach us to TRUST Him.

Can you trust Him in the midst of the storm?

2. Secondly, they come to teach us to TURN to Him.

How long does it take after the initial shock hits for you to turn to the Lord for strength, for grace, and to make it through that thing?

You see that determines the level of your maturity. To whom do you turn when it gets difficult and how long does it take for you to turn to the Lord?

3. And third, they come to test our progress TOWARD Christlikeness.

They come to test our progress TOWARD Christlikeness. It's like the Lord is saying "I hope you've learned this lesson and we can pass this test now and get onto something else." He's

in the progress of bringing us to Christlikeness. And that might be just a part of that.

And then number 4:

4. They come to teach us that He can TRIUMPH in every circumstance.

He can triumph in every circumstance.

Impossible from a human perspective, but from a divine perspective:

2 Corinthians 2:14

Thanks be to God who is always leading us in triumph.

He's never lost one yet and He's teaching us this.

You know, there are tons of pieces of poetry that are written about the suffering saints.

Martha Snell Nicholson, Annie Johnson Flint—there are scores of writers. But I don't think there's any more concise or better piece than these words:

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.
(source unknown)

Dr. Joseph Stowell has written a little book called *The Upside of Down: Finding Hope When It Hurts*. And he gives this little deal from Dr. Seuss to kind of help us understand how we think sometimes.

(*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.

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

You know, well said. And maybe you're there. And it isn't easily undone.

What are you saying? You know whenever you start using the word "Why" you ain't going to get out of it very quick. Because "Why" immediately says "God I don't deserve this" and you're resisting it. You always change your WHYs to WHATs and then you're going to be on your way to learning what it is.

When a sovereign God's permitted it, don't ask why. Just say "what is it I'm supposed to learn so I can get over with this?" That's the quickest thing, is to get in close and ask Him what He's trying to teach you.

But what do we say?

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

Why me?

Why me again?

Why now?

Why did this have to happen?

Why didn't God 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?

p. 21

It's like WHY? WHY? WHY?

And when you get into WHY syndrome, you get cynical, you get hardened, you get angry, you get confused. And so learn to just suspect your judgment and leave it in His hand.

Henri J. Nouwen is a Catholic priest who left his chair at Harvard to go and become a priest at a handicapped children's home up in Canada—northern Canada.

And he wrote another book because right after he made that decision, not too long after that, he had a very serious car accident and was nearly killed. And it's called *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death* and this is what he says:

(*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, [what it was is he's walking down the side of an icy road and a guy with a van hit him with his mirror in the back when slid along the side of the road and just decked him. He says, 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

Isn't that great? I mean, in the midst of adversity, thinking he's about to die, he sees some strong hand in the accident forcing him to surrender. That guy is learning it quick.

We have a sweet lady who, along with husband and son Brian, were here at TrailWest a couple of summers ago. And Brian has had some horrible experiences in life so he's condemned to a wheelchair for his life. And Kathy has written a book that NavPress has just published and released called *Silent Pain*. Listen to what she says:

(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

Kathy, you're right on target.

Barbara Johnson, of course says:

(*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

You know that helps us. Getting a little handle on it anyway,

doesn't it?

Isn't it interesting that a dear little girl in high school would have a divine accident and she becomes the greatest illustration of suffering?

When you hear Joni Eareckson talk it's like you're listening to somebody who's been through many more years than her age pretends. You want to hear what she's got to say about being condemned to a wheelchair for her life?

(Healing and Holiness by C. Samuel Storms)

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*—[get this it's underlined] *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 [really] real.

pp. 53-54

Yes, God leads us 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.*

Understand—please—in this spiritual check-up that difficulty is a part of God's program for your spiritual development and that you and I as believers are DESTINED for this.

Christlike characters comes from the crucible.

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.

You see I couldn't stand it any longer. I needed to know whether our work was in vain and whether Satan was using the suffering to accomplish his purposes and therefore our work would be in vain.

Now what have we learned about Satan? Just kind of put the thing together in your mind.

He's in the hindering business.

He's deceiving us in the midst of our suffering.

What else is he doing?

He's tempting us to throw in the towel and to quit and not to believe that God is good.

And as a result, he's come down and snatched the seed of the Gospel away before it's had a chance to take root.

The trials have come in and choked it out, even if it did begin to take root, before it ever became fruitful.

So yes, he is in the business of tempting us in the midst of the suffering.

Now I know what you're saying. How does he do that? He does it by the use of the world and all of its allurements.

You see that in Second Timothy 4:10. It's so serious:

2 Timothy 4:10

Demas has forsaken me because of his love of this present world.

He couldn't stand the heat so he had to get out of the kitchen. He was suffering with Paul and the missionaries and he simply said "There's got to be a better way." So he left for Thessalonica.

The flesh that wants its own way and the comfort zone that doesn't want us to—that we don't want to follow our spiritual disciplines in our walk with God, so he uses all of those.

It's at this point that the FOUR Ds become a reality. When you're suffering, and he's tempting you, he's going to tempt you with:

1. DISCOURAGEMENT,
2. DEPRESSION,

3. DISOBEDIENCE, and
4. DEFEAT.

And he'll get you ever time.

If in fact he's successful in causing us to lose our confidence in God, he'll use discouragement, depression, disobedience and defeat.

Now, there's no question that the tempter's been at work in Thessalonica. 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.

Now what **THREE THINGS** have you learned about Satan's strategies here:

1. he **HINDERS**,
2. he **DECEIVES**, and
3. he **TEMPTS**.

Can I put a little flesh on that?

1. He HINDERS us from the pursuit of the will of God.
2. He DECEIVES us even as he did Eve in the garden with the pleasures of sin.
3. He TEMPTS us with the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them.

But do you believe First Corinthians 10:13 is in the Bible?
Have you cared enough to memorize it so you got it ready and you'll have a comfort zone when you're tempted?

1 Corinthians 10:13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but with the temptation also make a way to escape, or that you might be able to bear it.

Now that's exactly what Paul says in:

Galatians 4:11

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

It's been fruitless, I haven't accomplished a single thing.

You know there's a great hymn in our hymn books that I often

love to sing. In fact, I love the tune so much that it's become almost my very favorite hymn.

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.

There are ten lessons that come out of those verses.

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

Lesson #2: Paul was willing to forego the pleasures 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 the accomplishment of his purposes.

Dave Dravecky wrote a book called *Comeback*.

Dave was a pitcher for the San Francisco Giants when they discovered that he had cancer in his arm. And now, as a result of all that, he tried to make a comeback and pitch. His arm was shattered in Montreal as he was in the sixth inning of pitching one time during the comeback. And now he's lost his arm. Listen to this:

(*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 [did not] 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.

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Father, even as Dave has expressed this in his personal life, I pray that we can forge a biblical concept of suffering and that we can recognize the fact that it has nothing to do with regard to Your feelings toward us but that You have a big picture. And because of that picture, you use different circumstances in each of our lives to the full accomplishment of Your purpose. And that it is our selfish nature to want to resist those things, to misinterpret, to listen to the sly evil one trying to make us deviate and depart from an intense following of Yourself because of the suffering involved. Father, may we be men and women who will rise up and be able to face whatever comes, knowing that You have it all in control

and You're going to be glorified in the midst of it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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A Practical Study of 1 THESSALONIANS: Your Spiritual Checkup

“Victory in Areas of Vulnerability”

Key verse 3:10 — *“night and day praying as earnestly as possible that we might see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith”*

QUESTION NUMBER FOUR – ARE YOU DISCOURAGED BY THE PROBLEMS? – 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5

KEY VERSES 3:3, 4

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.

NOTES

QUESTIONS:

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What did Paul do to gain information about the Thessalonians, according to verse 1?

3. Describe in your own words Paul's emotional state, according to verse 1.

4. How does Paul describe Timothy in verse 2?

5. What is the two-fold mission of Timothy, according to verse 2?

6. Explain “deceived” and “destined” in relationship to suffering in verse 3.

7. What was Paul telling them in advance, according to verse 4?

8. How can Satan use suffering to his advantage, and what was Paul's fear, according to verse 5?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons 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.

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