

THE GOOD THAT PAIN CAN DO

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1–5



...to establish and exhort you in your faith...

Affliction, when we accept it with humility, can be instructive, a discipline that leads us to a deeper, fuller life. “Before I was afflicted I went astray,” David said, “but now I keep Your Word” (Psalm 119:67). Peter would agree: Affliction leads us not to live for ourselves “but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2).

Far from being an obstacle to our spiritual growth, pain can be the instrument of it — if we’re trained by it. It can push us closer to God and deeper into His Word. It is a means by which He graciously shapes us to be like His Son, gradually giving us the compassion, contentment, tranquility, and courage we long and pray for. Without pain, we wouldn’t be all that God wants us to be. His strength shines brightest through human weakness.

Has God set you apart today to receive instruction through suffering and pain? Endure this training patiently. He can turn the trial into a blessing. He can use it to draw you close to His heart and into His Word, teach you the lessons He intends for you to learn, and use it to bestow His grace on you.

God is making more of you — something much better — than you ever thought possible.

By faith a Christian can have poise
And rise above all that annoys —
Sustained and strengthened by God’s power
To live in victory hour by hour. — Hess¹

¹ http://preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_1-3_sermon_illustrations.htm

OPEN IT

1. Was there ever a time as a child or young adult when you had to say goodbye to someone you cared about because one of you was moving? What did you do to try to remain close with them? Did those efforts allow you to stay connected?

EXPLORE IT

READ 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1–5

2. How is Timothy described in the text?

3. What was his purpose for returning to Thessalonica?

4. What fears caused Paul to send Timothy back to Thessalonica?

GET IT

Therefore...

This important word ties this chapter back in with what Paul had talked about in the previous chapter: the family relationship that exists in the church. He had been a mother to the church, a father to them, and a brother. He had led them to the Lord, and he loved them. He said that they would be his glory and his joy at the coming of Christ, at the appearance of the Lord Jesus when all believers will receive their rewards.

Now because Paul had a real affection for them, he was frustrated in not being able to return to them. He had been hindered by Satan. Paul had to leave Thessalonica so quickly that there were many unfinished teachings and doctrines that he had not been able to develop fully. He not only longed to return, but he wondered about the future of the believers there. Paul desired to comfort them. In other words, he was demonstrating the thing he mentioned at the beginning of the letter — a labor of love.

Love is not affection or just a nice, comfortable, warm feeling around your heart. Love seeks the welfare of another. That is the way love is expressed for anyone. If you love someone, you seek his welfare and you actually would jeopardize your own life for the person whom you love.²

² McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson or Logos

5. Looking over verses 1–5, what can we learn about Paul’s relationship with the Thessalonians?

Could bear it no longer....

This indicates that they were unable to continue enduring the suspense that they felt because of the lack of personal communication with the Thessalonians. The continued separation from their beloved converts and the lack of information about their reaction under the pressure of persecution produced a strain of suspense that was unbearable. And there was ground for feeling anxious about their converts. If the unbelieving Jews were so relentless in their antagonism to the gospel as to hound the missionaries all the way to Berea, what might they be doing to their followers at home? The load of suspense was so heavy that they felt they had to take some action.³

6. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2–7. In what ways did Paul combat his feelings of anxiety about this young church he had started?

7. What areas of your life cause you anxiety? What can we learn from Paul’s example of combating anxiety in the text?

Paul had become increasingly anxious about not being able to be with this church he had come to love, so he sends Timothy to check in on things and minister to the people of Thessalonica. While it is clear that Timothy traveled back to the church, it becomes a bit foggy as to what he actually did while he was there.

8. Based on our text, what do you think Timothy was doing during his time in Thessalonica?

Establish: (*sterizo*) means to make firm or solid, to set fast, to fix firmly in a place, to establish (make firm or stable), to cause to be inwardly firm or committed, to strengthen. The basic idea is that of stabilizing something by providing a support or buttress (a projecting structure of masonry or wood for supporting or giving stability to a wall or building), so that it will not totter.⁴

Exhort: (*parakaleo*) means literally to call one alongside, to call someone to oneself, to call for, to summon. It can include the idea of giving help or aid but the primary sense in the NT is to urge someone to take some action, especially some ethical course of action. Sometimes the word conveys the idea of comfort, sometimes of exhortation, but always at the root there is the idea of enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence and with gallantry.⁵

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996

⁴ http://preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_31-3.htm#3:1

⁵ http://preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_31-3.htm#3:1

9. If you were Timothy, in what practical ways would you have accomplished this role of establishing and exhorting?

Establishing and Exhorting remind us the various ways God uses to grow His people. While this letter is 2000 years old, these two forms of ministry are the same "methods" we can utilize to strengthen the faith of other Christians, a need which is always present because every believer's faith is continually subject to testing.

10. If you were the Thessalonians, how do you think you would have responded to his visit and this type of ministry?

11. Have you ever been sent to strengthen another's faith? How did you help to establish and exhort the other person?

12. The New Testament is filled with scriptures that remind us of the importance of helping one another to grow in our relationship with Christ. What do the following passages tell us about this integral role we play in other believers' growth?

- Romans 15:4
- Galatians 6:1–2
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Hebrews 3:13
- Hebrews 10:23–25

a. Are these aspects of ministry alive and well in our church today?

b. What might keep Christians from living these out on a daily basis?

c. Think about your own life. How are you established and exhorted to follow Jesus more closely?

- d. **What role has your small group played in spiritual encouragement? Don't be afraid of this question. Be honest with your group.**

- e. **How could your small group do a better job of strengthening you in your Christian journey?**

*In 1Thessalonians 3:3, Paul is using the word destined (**keimai**) figuratively to say in essence that appointments with trouble are already on our Day-timers®. He tells the believers at Thessalonica that he had told them this would happen. It's part of God's program. Believers are to expect troubles and difficulties because they "are appointed to this." The encouragement and comfort of a fellow Christian (like Timothy's visit to the Thessalonians) during such trials can be an especially welcome source of strength to one's faith.⁶*

13. How does knowing ahead of time that trials and troubles will be a normal part of the Christian life help you to weather the storms when they come?

14. What does 1 Thessalonians 3:3 demand we do when we are sharing the gospel with others?

In verse 5, Paul was deeply concerned about the work of the tempter (the Devil). It seems that he was concerned that some disciples could be lost and therefore his work among them would have been in vain. This brings up some questions for us to think through.

15. Looking back to the first two chapters of this letter, what are the temptations Satan used to discourage the believers in Thessalonica?

- a. **In what ways does the tempter seek to draw you away from the Lord?**

- b. **What steps can you take today to keep him from being successful?**

⁶ http://preceptaustin.org/1thessalonians_31-3.htm#3:1