



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

God's State Department

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 4
Tim Badal | January 31, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 3:1–5



My name is Tim Badal and I serve as the teaching pastor here at Village Bible Church. We've been in a series entitled "Ready," about how to be prepared in all circumstances for whatever God may bring our way. Even though things may be difficult, God says that He will give us all the strength we need for the events of today and He gives us a bright hope for tomorrow.

First Thessalonians talks about the return of Jesus Christ. One day Christ will come and He will rescue His people from the daily grind of everyday life. He's going to rescue us once and for all from the presence of sin. We have hope that this truth will become a reality—maybe in our life, maybe in the lives of our children, maybe 50 generations from now, we don't know—but we have the hope that He is going to come again.

In this series we've been looking at the letter of 1 Thessalonians. The Apostle Paul wrote it in the first century to a church in northern Greece in the city of Thessalonica, which still exists today as the second largest city in Greece. Paul articulated some important truths in this letter. The reason he wrote it is that he had only spent a short time with the people of Thessalonica. They had come to know Jesus and were walking the walk and talking the talk. They were honoring and serving God in amazing ways.

Then all of a sudden an angry mob arose who disagreed with the ways and truths of Christianity, and they ran Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, out of town. So they went to the city of Athens, in the southern part of Greece, and passed some time there. Some believe it was as short as six months while others say it was as long as a year to a year and a half. Paul was becoming anxious and wondering, "Are the Thessalonians okay? We love them. They are our hope and glory. We love to boast about them and all they do. But they are so young in the faith. I hope they're okay." In our passage today we'll learn a little bit more about their story and how you and I can be ready as they were.

First Thessalonians 2:17–3:5 says:

⁷But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

³Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

All of us know right now, because we can't get away from it, that we are in the middle of a presidential election cycle. There are more than a dozen men and women who are vying for what is seemingly the most important job on the face of the earth. Some would say it is the most difficult job in the world. The presidency has a lot of facets and components to it. Did you know that one of the requirements for our president is that he needs to be in 180 different places at once? Every day he has to represent himself and our country in 180 different places. We know that President Obama does not have super human strength, nor does he have the ability, as Jesus Christ did, to be in different places at the same time. So how is our president in 180 places at once? The job of the president is to be our lead diplomat in all things. That means he is our chief negotiator, dealing with foreign

relations, and he's the executor of all that we do as a nation. While the branches of government do different things, that's the president's job. We have relations with 180 different countries that have all kinds of issues and struggles. Their economies are different; their religions are different; their ways of life are different. If the United States is going to be part of a global community, we need to make sure that we are addressing all of those issues with these different countries.

How do we do that? The president can't be in all of those places at once, so with the help of congress he appoints ambassadors to go to those countries and speak on his behalf, with his authority and in his place, addressing all the different relationships we have with those countries. We do that so we will be good neighbors and help in times of need. We make sure that all things are done in a fair and orderly way. The president depends on these men and women to serve effectively in each of those countries as assigned.

When you're an ambassador you're usually outnumbered. An ambassador lives in the embassy. The land that the embassy sits on is considered American soil. So that area is sovereign territory of the United States. But once the ambassador leaves that sovereign ground, he or she is a minority. There won't be a lot of other Americans in that country.

Timothy was sent out by Paul to serve as an ambassador because Paul could not go himself. But Timothy was not the only person who has been appointed as an ambassador. Second Corinthians 5:20 says we are all Christ's ambassadors. If we have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ and call ourselves Christians, then we have been given the job of representing our King and our country. I'm not talking about the United States but the Kingdom of heaven and the Ruler of that Kingdom, Jesus Christ. We do so by going and serving in a place where the King and His country may not be fully known. We may be a minority in that place, but our job is to tell the world around us the message of the One Who has sent us.

Just as Timothy shared with the Thessalonians all that Paul had shared with him, so we are called as God's ambassadors to share all that Christ has shared with us. In this passage we see a model of what it means to be a good ambassador—how we ought to serve, how we ought to take care of our own lives, the things that we need to be concerned about—and we'll look at this under three headings.

1. God is sending us to serve others.

If we are part of God's State Department and are ambassadors of Jesus Christ, then God is sending us to serve others. Imagine that you are with Paul, Silas and Timothy. You're sitting with them in Athens enjoying some delicious gyros and Greek yogurt with a side of kebobs. Then to top it off you enjoy some sweet baklava. Then Silas turns to Paul and says, "Paul, why aren't you eating? You love this stuff! We even got you extra tzatziki sauce. Why do you look so depressed?"

Paul says, "I can't get my mind off the Thessalonians. Remember those sweet times of fellowship we had? Remember how we shared the gospel with them and how they received the Word of God? They received us with open hearts. They loved on us and cared for us. They ministered to us. We love them! We were there for the sole purpose of raising them up in the ways of God and His Word. What a great time! We got to know such great people. But you guys remember that fateful day when the mob came. I was scared! I wondered what they were going to do. They grabbed us and took us out of the city. They tried to imprison us. Remember Jason and his friends? They were fined just for knowing us. Then we went just a short distance to Berea, but those same thugs came there and ran us out of Berea too. I miss Thessalonica! I miss those great people. I wonder how they're doing. I wonder if they're still walking with the Lord. I wonder if they're getting along with one another. I wonder if some of those same persecutors are hurting them and trying to hinder God's work in their lives. I wonder if they've fallen into false doctrine and teaching. Oh, how I miss the Thessalonians!"

Then Paul looks up and says, "I've got an idea! Silas and I can't go. The last time we went we were imprisoned. We can't show our faces there. We might hurt the Thessalonians by coming again and associating with them. But Timothy is young. The authorities never worried about you. You were never imprisoned. You weren't involved in the mob action. You could go back and find out how things are going. You could make sure things are being done in an orderly way. You can take them by the hand and love on them and minister to them as you know Silas and I would do. Would you go do that?"

When I see the name Timothy in that passage I am quick to ask the question, "What does that passage have to do with me?" If you have the luxury of having your name in the Scriptures, it makes it really easy to apply that particular text to your own life. It's kind of like when you're in a room and someone yells your name, but they're calling for someone else. You still look. Paul says, "Timothy, this is what we're going to do. This is what we want you to be part of. This is what we think your mission should be. Timothy, you're going to be our ambassador. You're going to be the one who tells the Thessalonians how to live godly lives."

Timothy was a young guy. In 1 Timothy 4:12 Paul tells Timothy, *“Let no one despise you for your youth.”* So we know Timothy was a young guy when 1 Timothy was written. First Thessalonians was written ten years before 1 Timothy. Ten years later Timothy was still being called young and naïve. We don’t know how old he was. Many scholars believe Timothy was somewhere between his early twenties and early thirties. He was in no position to serve as a philosopher in Greek culture or as a rabbi in Jewish culture. But they sent him anyway.

The great thing about Timothy in this situation was that he had a Greek father and a Jewish mother. He was going to a Greek city where the language was Greek but there was also a synagogue there, which meant there were enough Jews to need a place of worship. So even though he’s young, Timothy would have the uncanny ability to speak both languages, understand both cultures and to speak with some level of authority into the people’s lives of both cultures.

But we also know some possibly negative attributes about Timothy. He was possibly named Timothy because he was known for being an incredibly timid man. Over and over again Paul told him that he had to stand up for what was right. He needed to stand up against people who were trying to knock him down, as well as the church. He was a sickly man. He had all kinds of stomach issues. Paul was always trying to tell him, *“Try this. Take that. It will help your unsettled stomach.”* Maybe his stomach issues were due to the anxiety he had in his heart.

I want you to notice a couple of things about Timothy. Nowhere in all of Scripture, especially in First and Second Thessalonians, do you see any excuses from Timothy as to why he shouldn’t have gone. This young man, who in the Scriptures had seemingly never been out from under Paul and Silas’ shadow, was now given a lone ranger assignment to head up to the relatively far away city of Thessalonica and lead the people. Nowhere in the text does it say, *“I organized meetings and activities but I never led the Bible study.”* *“Paul, I was okay to open in prayer for the group but you’re asking me to preach the Word? He didn’t say, “That’s a long journey. I don’t want to go.”* He didn’t say, *“I don’t have the time.”* He didn’t come up with all the excuses that we come up with today. In obedience he said, *“I’ll do it.”*

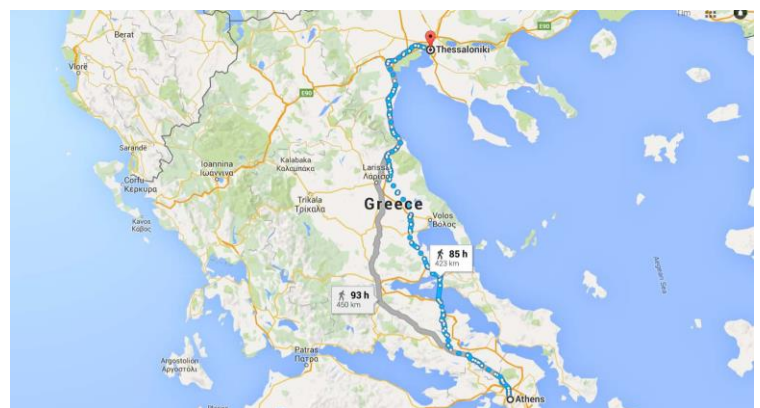
I remember in the last presidential cycle during a Republican presidential debate, Jon Huntsman, who was the ambassador to China under President Obama, was being charged with working for the enemy—a democratic president. Jon Huntsman responded, *“When the President of the United States asks for your help and calls you into service, you do it.”* I like that. I like it even more for us as Christians. When God calls and says, *“I need you to serve,”* we don’t respond with excuses. We don’t respond by looking at our calendars and saying, *“I’m super busy right now.”* We don’t say, *“I’m not qualified enough.”* Our response is, *“Yes! I will do it.”* That was exactly what Timothy did.



This map shows Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East with Jerusalem and Israel in the lower right corner. We’re focused on the nation of Greece there in the middle. We see that Thessalonica is in the north of Greece. In this up close map of Greece we see the way that Timothy would have taken to Thessalonica. It is called The Ignatian Way. It was there in the first century and it’s still there today. What would Timothy have been doing on that journey? What were his thoughts? What was his process moving forward? There were three things that Paul told Timothy to do.

Encourage the world with the gospel

In the text Paul says, *“We sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ.”* He was going to encourage the world with the gospel. What was Timothy going to do on his trip? Many times we read the Scriptures through our own lens rather than the lens of the person writing it. I can tell you what Timothy didn’t do on his trip. After he waved goodbye to Paul and Silas, he didn’t put in his ear buds, turn on his iPod, and head out, not talking to anyone. I have a teenage son, and once those headphones come on, he is dead to the world. He doesn’t need to talk. He’s a growing



boy who has to eat all the time, but as long as he has his music he's good. He can go for hours not talking to a single person. But Timothy didn't have that luxury.

As he went along the Ignatian Way he would have come into contact with hundreds of people. During the first century, the way of travel was also the way of commerce. They didn't have Amazon, the Internet or newspaper ads for sales. As you ran into people you would stop and have conversations. The questions would usually go like this: "Who are you? Where are you from? Where are you going? What's your business?" Many would say, "My business is doing commerce here and to go and sell my goods there." Or, "I'm going to visit family."

Timothy didn't have any of those reasons. Timothy would say, "I'm going as a follower of Jesus Christ to a church in the city of Thessalonica. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ, Who was a Nazarene. He preached and taught the Word of God in Jerusalem. He was a Man of God, set apart by signs and wonders. But the chief priests and people of His day rejected Him and crucified Him. There were a lot of questions about what would happen to Jesus after the cross, because He had said in three days He would rise from the dead. And He did! Now there are a whole group of us following Jesus and His resurrection. We're waiting for His return. So I'm going to Thessalonica because this gospel is changing lives. It's impacting both Jews and Gentiles. A man named Paul, who saw Jesus Christ after His resurrection, has given me a job. He's a great teacher, and he has sent me to make sure the church has all that it needs."

"How are you going to do that?"

"I'm going to love on them and minister to them. I'm going to care for them."

"We don't do that. In our world it's dog eat dog. It's survival of the fittest. Why would you do that?"

"Because Christ's love compels me to do that."

Many of us put evangelism in a box where we have to have all the right words and props before we share the gospel. At the heart of evangelism is speaking to others about your journey with Christ. Tomorrow there are going to be people on the journey of life, and many times we will just talk about what they're talking about, do what they're doing, live like they're living because we don't want to look any different from the world. We just want to look like we're going about the world's business. But what Paul makes clear is that our entire lives should cause people to see that everything we do is leading people to Jesus.

"What'd you do this weekend?"

"I went to church."

"Why would you go to church?"

"Because I believe in Jesus Christ. He has changed my life."

"What do you do at church?"

"We open the Word of God. We sing songs that announce the greatness of all that God has done. We pray. We reach out to people and love on them. We give our tithes and offerings to the Lord. We give to people who are in need. We make sure that everybody has what he or she needs so that nobody is in want. What did you do this weekend?"

"I watched some football."

"Well, we're on a different journey."

We don't have to do it in a pompous way; we just need to let people know about the work that God is doing in our lives. "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. The reason I live is that He has called me to be His ambassador."

Establish the faith of others

When Timothy got to Thessalonica, verse two says he was to "...*establish and exhort you in your faith.*" The word "establish" in the Greek means "to make stable; to set firmly; to fix; to strengthen; to render constant; to confirm one's ideas or mind." Paul is deeply concerned that the Thessalonian church is full of Christians who look like Jell-O jigglers. Do you remember how your mom used to mold the Jell-O into shapes and you could hold them up and wiggle them around? There was no form to it. There was no structure to it; it just kind of wiggled around. There was nothing holding it in place. Paul says, "That's not good for us as Christians."

What a truth for us today! Some of us are Jell-O juggler Christians. We're kind of here but not really. We're not really holding to any stance or beliefs or pursuit in life. The reason Paul was concerned about this was that he knew he had left them with all kinds of trials and tribulations. He spoke of the afflictions in their lives. He said, "I don't want you to just be wobbling around in this world. I want you to be set firm and resolute."

How true is that for us parents when it comes to our kids! We don't want our kids to just be jiggling around. We want them to have a set of ideals and beliefs that are resolute and have a biblical worldview. He says, "I want to establish you."

There's a passage in the Old Testament that tells the story of when the children of Israel were fighting their enemies. God had commanded His great leader, Moses, to lead the people into battle. He was to stand at the high place so that all the soldiers of Israel could see him. God said, "Your job is to direct the people because they need to know that their leader is with them. I want you to hold your arms outstretched with the staff of Aaron in your hands. Hold that pose so that the men of Israel will always know you are there. It's a symbol that I am with you and I am with them in battle."

The battle went on for quite a while. The Bible says that it lasted into the evening. Poor Moses hadn't worked out his upper body like he should have and he was growing tired. He began to wobble. Probably the worst thing in the world to do, if you're not already doing it on a daily basis, is to hang ceiling drywall. Your arms are extended the whole time. That's how we should punish criminals. It's excruciating pain. When you're holding your arms out like that, your whole body begins to shake and you feel like you can't take it anymore. While Moses was struggling, his brother Aaron and his friend Hur knew what God had told Moses and knew Moses wasn't going to be able to stay in that position on his own to lead the Israelites to victory. So they got on each side of Moses and held up his arms to give him relief and establish him so that he could hold that position. That's what Paul was telling Timothy to do: go to a wobbly group of Christians and help them remain steadfast. Make sure that they are able to stand under the weight. Those afflictions and trials were weighing them down.

We as Christians need to understand that God is calling us to do the same thing. When we see someone who is shaking and struggling we don't say, "Just drop it. It's too heavy for you." We don't yell at them and say, "Well, it's your own fault that you lifted that heavy item." We come and strengthen their arms to hold up the load.

On Friday some dear friends of ours came for a casual night of fellowship. It turned into a deep night as hurts and pains in their family began to come out. Our job was not to say, "You guys are dumb. You guys are foolish." Our job was to love on them and hold up their arms so that they can carry the weight they're bearing. People have walked into church this morning with wobbly legs and arms. They're dying for someone to come and establish them. Paul loved the Thessalonians enough to send Timothy to strengthen them.

Exhort others to grow in Christ

The word "exhort" in our text is the Greek word *parakaleó*. You've probably heard that word in Greek before if you're familiar with the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is called the paraclete—the Helper, the One Who comes alongside. That is the definition of *parakaleó*. Timothy's job was to encourage the Thessalonians by coming alongside them. Why? Because they were in danger of falling spiritually—giving up on their faith and walking away.

A couple of weeks ago on our cruise we did something you wouldn't think you could do in the Caribbean Sea. We went ice-skating. There was actually an ice rink on that boat and four of the Badals went ice-skating. There was some concern about someone as large as me skating around on thin blades. So I was the cameraman. Noah did a great job. He rollerblades a lot so ice was no big deal for him. Joshua did a pretty good job because he has roller-skated before. But Luke had a miserable time. Every time that little boy touched the ice he was on his butt. He was disappointed and frustrated. But we also have a pro ice skater in our family: my wife Amanda. She loves ice-skating. She can skate forward and backwards. She enjoys it. She would say we don't do it enough. She took our son and lifted him up and said, "Hold my hand. Let's do this together." When she did that, Luke started to skate. He was no longer just falling over. He was actually skating. He was enjoying the very thing that he longed to do but couldn't do on his own. Luke couldn't do it on his own, so someone who was good at doing what he was called to do came alongside him, took him by the hand and helped him do it.

Paul told Timothy, "I want you to grab the Thessalonians' hands and come alongside them." That means there has to be intimacy. You can't do this via Skype. It's going to be hard. "Take those who are wobbling by the hand and help them do what they can't do on their own. You're going to teach them and minister to them. You're going to model for them what it looks like to be a Christian."

As an ambassador of Jesus Christ, how are you doing at encouraging the world with the gospel, establishing others in their faith and coming alongside them, encouraging and exhorting them in such a way that they can do what God has called them to do? That's what being an ambassador is. The job of the church and the elders of the church is to lead in that way. Who do you know who is new to the faith or maybe going through troubles? Maybe they're struggling. We have no idea what God might be calling us to.

You say, "How do I do this?" You change the way you come in on Sunday morning. Many of us come to church on Sunday morning thinking, "What about me? I hope they sing the songs I like. I hope Tim's message impacts me. I hope people ask about my week." Why don't you flip the coin and say: "When I go to church I hope they sing the favorite songs of the person sitting next to me. I hope Tim's message will impact them. I hope people will enter and that I won't walk by people I don't really know. I'm going to get involved in their lives and understand who they are. I want to make sure they don't leave this place the same way they came in, but that they would feel loved, nurtured, cared for and ministered to. I want them to leave a little more established and encouraged in the faith that God has given them." Ambassadors are called to serve others.

2. God is reminding us about our walk.

Remain steadfast in our footing

Notice in verse three Paul changes directions and says, "By the way Timothy, remember that as an ambassador you have to be concerned about yourself as well. You can't just worry about others. You have to take care of yourself as well." Starting in verse three it says:

...that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

Paul shifts his grammar from "you" to "us" and "we." He says, "We need to make sure that we're not moved by these afflictions. While I'm anxious and struggling to know how you're doing, I'm not moved in such a way that I'm losing my faith, but I'm concerned you might be." Going back to that illustration about Amanda and ice-skating, if Amanda is falling on her face on the ice, then what good would she be for my son? So the person who is doing the ministry must be a person who is unmoved by the things of the world.

Paul pivots to Timothy and says, "Are you unmovable? Are trials going to be a problem for you? You're going into battle. You're young and timid. Are you going to be resolute?" He says, "Timothy, you need to remain steadfast in your footing so *'that no one be moved by these afflictions.'*" You can't be God's ambassador if you're unsure of your calling. You have to know why you're in that foreign land. You have to know why you are a minority in a world that's focused on self and sin. So Paul was worried about the Thessalonians, that they would be wobbly Christians.

When he says, *"...that no one be moved,"* it's a Greek word that had two uses. First you could use that phrase *"...no one be moved"* when speaking of an excited dog that's wagging its tail. The idea here is comparing a person to the tail of the dog that's being wagged. They're here one day and over there the next. They have no set position or ideas. They're constantly moving back and forth. It's similar to the Jell-O jiggle concept. They're unstable in all that they do. The book of James says they're tossed to and fro (James 1:6). Paul was worried that these young Christians would vacillate between the truth of Scripture one day, then to the lies of the world the next.

That truth applies to us today as well. We go to church on Sunday and say, "Praise be to God! God's Word is true." Then we get into the world and forget the Word of God and begin to believe the devil's lies. We begin to follow the world's ways of life. Paul said to Timothy, "You cannot be moved. You're going to be their north star. You're going to be their compass. You're going to be that point that doesn't move, so that when they see you modeling your faith before them, they won't be moved."

The second way to use the phrase *"...no one be moved"* is the idea of one who is literally trembling or shaking. The focus is on movement in this phrase. Instead of being secure and stable, you're either the tail of the dog being wagged left and right or you're a person who is literally convulsing. The convulsing would be for one of two reasons. You would use this Greek word if you saw someone shaking in fear. You would say, "You're moving all over the place. Your fear is driving you to a place you shouldn't be." Or you would use this phrase when you saw someone so filled with rage that they were shaking. Whatever is going on in their hearts is affecting them in such a way that you can see it physically.

Paul says the Thessalonians could either have been fearful—persecution was all around them and they were scared, which might cause them to give up on the faith—or they would become angry because of the persecutors, and they would start to do to the

persecutors what the persecutors were doing to them. "I don't like these guys who keep coming in and wreaking havoc in our church. Let's get a group together and go beat them up! Let's go give them what they gave us. They deserve it! Let's go get our revenge." Paul said they shouldn't be moved by fear or rage; Timothy should model for them that because God is in control, we can have certainty in the issues of life. We can remain steadfast.

Recognize that affliction is our fate

Paul says, "I want you to know that these afflictions, persecutions, trials and tribulations you're dealing with are part of our reality. God promised them to us. Christ preached about them. The apostles dealt with them and you've seen us deal with them firsthand." What a sobering thought that Paul gives: we are destined for this.

I wonder how the prosperity preachers would preach this passage? I don't think it's part of their preaching schedule. In the prosperity gospel you don't deal with afflictions. Everything will go well for you. The gospel means health, wealth and happiness. Paul told Timothy, "We're destined for afflictions." Peter says, "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*" (1 Peter 4:12).

Let me tell you this about afflictions and the Christian life because what Paul is saying is very important: Christians recognize we're on the road to heaven. But if that's the case why does it so often feel like hell? Why does the road of salvation feel at times like the road of condemnation? Why does the road of assurance and certainty at times feel like the road of wavering and doubt? The reason why God would allow the Thessalonians to go through trials and afflictions is the same reason God allows it for us. God could have said, "As soon as you come to know Christ everything will go well with you." But nowhere in Scripture do we see that in any way. In fact, the most faithful individuals are the ones who seemingly have it the most difficult.

There are three reasons why God allows suffering:

1. God allows us to suffer because we have the opportunity to participate in the sufferings of Christ. As Christ followers we get the unique opportunity to follow Christ. You don't just hang out with your friends when things are going well. Friendship can be compared to being a fan of the Cubs: you're committed to them through the good, the bad and the hundreds of years of ugly. If your friend calls and says, "I won the lottery!" you're excited for them. But when a friend calls and says, "We're broke!" a true friend is there in those times as well.

Many Christians are willing to be with Jesus when His friendship gives us something. But the Bible makes it clear that if we really want to be followers of Jesus Christ we must be ready to suffer with Christ. Amanda and I just celebrated our 18th wedding anniversary and on Facebook I wrote, "I wouldn't want to live life's ups and downs with anyone but you." We've had a great life and we've had wonderful times of triumph and celebration, and I'm glad she's been by my side for those. But I'll be honest with you; it has been the greatest joy to walk alongside my wife in her season of struggle. In those moments there's a greater intimacy. We get to watch how God grows us in those circumstances. I want to be there for her because I know in my times of struggle it's sure good to have a friend there. So we participate with Christ in His suffering.

2. Suffering and affliction will always lead to the development of character and perseverance. James 1: 2 says, "*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.*" Romans 5:3-5 says, "*Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.*" Trials and tribulations grow us. We are like trees in times of drought that are digging our roots deeper into the ground to find the sustenance and nutrients that we need so that we may flourish. Trials cause us to dig deep into the ground of our faith to allow us to grow.
3. Trials give us a hunger for Christ's return. If everything is going great and the way we want it to, then why does Jesus need to return? If we're so happy in this world of sin and struggle, then why in the world do we need Jesus to come, redeeming and reconciling all things to Himself? Why would we need God to renew anything? But as we grow older we come to realize that this life is "*...vanity of vanities! All is vanity*" (Ecclesiastes 1:2) as Solomon did, because we work and toil and there's nothing new under the sun. And we say to the Lord, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus! This isn't satisfying and I want to be with You and see You face to face." So afflictions give us a hunger for Christ's return.

We need troubles not so they can shake us out of our Christianity, but so they can grow us. But we need people to stand beside us.

3. God is warning us about the dangers

At the end of the text, Paul gives one final truth about being an ambassador. He says tell others and serve others with the gospel, take care of yourself and make sure you're representing Christ well, being a light in a world of darkness. Then he gives a warning about the danger. Verse five says, *"For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain."* There are two things we are warned about here. Paul wanted a status report on the faith of the Thessalonians.

Evaluating our faith

Many of you know I run a catering business and send out crews to do events. The worst moment of a catering job for my crew is the inevitable phone call that I make to the crew leader on the job. I want to know how their assignment is going. They think their boss is meddling. I say, "I pay the bills so I get to meddle. Live with it." But what I'm wanting is a status report. "Are you there? Are things going as they should? How's the food looking? How are the customers doing? Any questions?" It should be a quick status report and it usually is. I want that because I have a vested interest in what's going on there, but I'm not there. I'm represented there, but I'm not there personally, so I'm looking for some feedback on our service. I want to hear from people on the ground about what's going on there and they give me a report.

Paul was asking Timothy for a status report. Paul says, *"I sent to learn about your faith."* "How are the Thessalonians doing, Timothy? Are they growing? Are they maturing? Or have they gone into neutral?" What a great reminder for us as we enter into a new year. Each of us as employees has received our W-2's for the year. Your W-2 tells you what transpired the year before—what you got paid, the vacation time you used, your hours of overtime—and it gives a synopsis of what your year looked like. You don't remember all of that but you now have on a sheet of paper what you accomplished last year.

This week we're going to be turning out our annual report for the church and it will report what we did last year. As Christians we need to do an annual report in our lives and ask the question, "From January 2015 to December 2015 has there been growth in my life? Have I changed? Have I become more like Christ?" Paul was asking for a status report.

Every Christian should ask, "Am I growing in my walk with Jesus Christ? Are there areas of service that I wasn't involved in a year ago that I'm involved with now? Am I more open and bold about my faith now than I was at the beginning of the year?" We have to ask those questions. Each of us has to ask ourselves, "Am I really growing in my faith?"

One pastor put it this way: "There are only two gears in the Christianity car: forward and reverse." But so many Christians believe there's a neutral. You're either going forward or backwards. How are you in your faith?

Defending against our foe

Paul was worried about the tempter. He said, *"I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain."*

A little over three years ago, the United States came under attack and we lost American lives. A group of enemies came onto our soil and took American lives in cold blood. I'm not talking about San Bernardino, the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. I'm talking about what happened in a far off country called Libya. In a city called Benghazi we had a consulate on sovereign territory. It was where the ambassadors, diplomats and residents of America who served the people of America resided. Terrorists attacked it. Why did they attack there? Why didn't they attack the homeland? The answer is very easy: those men and women who attacked the consulate in Benghazi knew that there was no chance they could do that in the homeland. It would never happen. Our Air Force, our Navy, other military branches or our police would have stopped it. There's no way that could have happened here. So what did they do? They did the next best thing. They went to the mission outpost of the United States and they attacked it.

The devil cannot attack heaven. That's off limits. God will deal with him very quickly. So what does the devil do? He does the next best thing: he goes after the ambassadors. He goes to our mission outposts—Tim in Hinckley, you in Yorkville, you in Aurora, you in your workplace, you in your school—and he tempts you. He says, "If I can get this ambassador to stop doing what he's supposed to do, then people won't come to know Jesus. If I can get him focused on other things, to live in this country as if he's only one of its inhabitants, then he'll forget that the job he's been given from the homeland is to be an ambassador of the gospel of Jesus Christ." So Paul says to the Thessalonians and to Timothy, "Don't forget that the devil is there." First Peter 5:8 says, *"Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* The tempter is active.

Are you an ambassador? Learn these truths from Timothy and his faithfulness, as well as the example we get from the Thessalonians. Then we will be ready as ambassadors for what God calls us to, whether it's today or tomorrow.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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