

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 15, 2021 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

Steadfast
CHRISTIANITY
A Study of Second Thessalonians

**“Light For Dark Days
2 Thessalonians 2:13-17**

“¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” -2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 (NKJV)

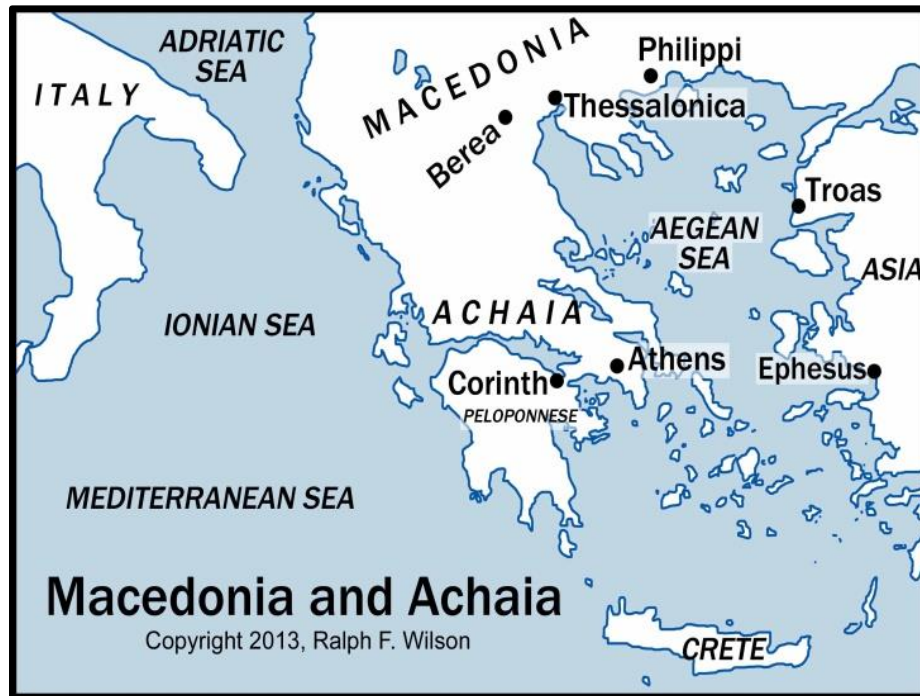
Here is our overview of 2nd Thessalonians briefly... again, just to help us get the picture in historical context...

Overview of 2nd Thessalonians:

- (1) TYPE OF LITERATURE: A first century letter**
- (2) AUTHOR OF THE LETTER: The Apostle Paul (with Silas and Timothy)**
- (3) PLACE OF THE WRITING THE LETTER: Corinth**
- (4) DATE OF THE LETTER: Written from in approximately A.D. 51-52**
- (5) PURPOSE OF THE LETTER: (1) To deal with false teaching, (2) To encourage believers in the midst of persecution**

BRIEF HISTORY OF THESSALONICA: The city of Thessalonica is know today as Salonika and is the second largest city in Greece. It came into being in 315 B.C. Founded by the Greek general Cassander, who later became king of Macedonia. Thessalonica developed into a major commercial port and military launching point. At the time that 2 Thessalonians was written, Thessalonica was the capital and the most populous city in Macedonia, boasting over 200,000 people. **FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA:** During Paul's second missionary journey (A.D. 49-52), he and Silas persuaded many in this bustling seaport town to follow Christ. The city's jealous religious leaders incited a riot bringing charges of sedition against

Paul and Silas for worshipping Christ over Caesar (Acts 17:5-7). The two men were forced to flee by night to Berea (Acts 17:10).



If you could completely turn off the ability to experience pain would you do it? If you could be born with out the ability to ever experience pain, would you want to be? What would it be like to never experience pain again?

Approximately one out of very 400,000 babies is born with a rare genetic disease known as *familial dysautonomia*. This disease prevents a child from feeling pain. At first reflection, the inability to experience pain may seem like a blessing. Imagine the possibilities...

- A football player who doesn't feel the pain of contact
- A boxer who can endure a terrible beating in the ring and not feel hurt
- A woman who can bear children without the pain of childbirth

The tragedy is that a child with this disease will never live long enough to know the glory of the gridiron or the joy of childbirth. Such a child will receive cuts, burns, and broken bones... never feeling anything. A cavity will rot the tooth without an ache. A broken bone will puncture the skin before anyone is aware of the fracture. An appendix will burst without a sharp pain in the side and spread deadly and fatal infection throughout the body before the person even knows it's ruptured.

So, in some ways, pain can be a good thing. It can be God's warning device that something is wrong... like a red light on the dashboard that alerts you to the fact that the engine is hot or the battery is low or the oil pressure is dropping. Pain can also be a signal of something very, very right that's just in transition. Whether from youthful muscles exerted in play or from a birth canal stretched to seemingly impossible limits, pain signals change, growth, development... the birth of something new.

There are many kinds of pain... physical, emotional, spiritual... each with its own kind of intensity. Pain can be a chronic, dull discomfort, or it can be a sudden jolt of such magnitude that it causes you to reel and collapse. Pain often seems pointless, but God assures us that it is always purposeful. Remember Paul's words in **Romans 8:28**, *"²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

FIVE REASONS WE SUFFER

Pain is a part of life. In God's curriculum, it is a course we can either drop nor simply audit. But in seeing the course through to semester's end, we receive full credit on our final transcript... listen to Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**, *"¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* At the beginning of a semester, course objectives are outlined in each professor's syllabus. Similarly, with regard to pain, God has at least five objectives He may want to accomplish in our lives.

5 Objectives God's Uses in Our Suffering:

- 1. God can use pain to develop our faith** – As the saying goes "No pain, no gain." Just as endurance is developed in a long-distance runner through strenuous exercise, so faith grows through testing. James, the half-brother of Jesus wrote, in **James 1:2-4**, *"² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* ***In practical ways, how does pain and suffering develop our faith? Be specific.***
- 2. God can expose error through pain** – Heat has a way of bringing impurities to the surface, whether they are in our theological understanding or our ethics/behavior(s) Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:13-15**, *"¹³ Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."*
- 3. Our relationship with God grows through pain as we learn obedience** – It is by falling and scraping our knees that we learn to walk safely. **Hebrews 5:8** says, *"⁸ Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."*
- 4. God can use pain to create humility in how we relate to others** – Our thorns in the flesh have a way of piercing pride and deflating an overblown estimation of ourselves. That seems to be a message we get from Paul's own "thorn in the flesh." He wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:7**, *"⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."*
- 5. Our suffering can bring glory to God as we respond with grace** – As suggested by the "Shorter Westminster Catechism," the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. God's glory and our highest good form the mountain lake into which the winding tributaries of our pain eventually flow. **1 Peter 4:16**, *"¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."*

FOUR WAYS WE CAN ENCOURAGE THE SUFFERER

When suffering steamrolls a life, it can leave the person feeling flattened and deflated on the cold, hard concrete. Crushed by the rolling weight of persecution, the Thessalonian believers were like the man in Jesus' parable who were beaten by thieves, robbed, and left for dead. Paul, however, was not like the priest and the Levite, who looked the other way and went about their business. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17, he took on the role of the Good Samaritan, attending to his friends in Thessalonica who lay bloodied along life's roadside (see Luke 10:25-37). His approach provides us with a first-aid kit we can use to help those who suffer... and to help ourselves when we're the ones who are hurting.

4 Ways We Can Encourage the Sufferer:

- 1. We can offer compassion (2 Thess. 2:13)** – To truly help hurting people, we must first “enter into” their pain. We must ask ourselves, “What does it feel like to suffer?” We must look beyond the circumstances to the heart of a person. Often it's not the pain of the wound but the accompanying indignity that hurts the most. Consider the following scenarios: A friend who once embraced you now shuns you. A vicious rumor about you spreads like fire in a dry canyon, incinerating your reputation. You make one mistake, but instead of receiving support and understanding, you are betrayed, stepped on, kicked while down, and tossed aside

Have you suffered like that? If so, you probably felt isolated and alone. You may have questioned your own worth. You were devastated... confused... disoriented. What did you need most of all? You needed someone to affirm your dignity as a person and encourage you. You longed for someone to be thankful for you, for someone to show you love. This is the sort of first aid that we must give to others and the kind that Paul administered to the beaten-down Thessalonians.

In the first portion of 2 Thessalonians 2:13, he offered this encouragement... *“¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”*

Can you feel his compassion? By giving thanks for the Thessalonian believers, he upheld their dignity. By referring to them as *“brethren beloved by the Lord,”* he affirmed the Lord's love for them and their security within the family of God.

If you are enduring pain and suffering yourself, remember this... in spite of how others treat you, you are “beloved by the Lord.” If you're in His family, He'll never slam the door in your face. You may run away like the prodigal son, but God will never disown you. Even in a far country, you can have the assurance that there will always be a place for you and loving arms to embrace you when you return... always!

- 2. We can offer instruction (2 Thess. 2:13-14)** – Suffering frequently causes disorientation and disillusionment. Suffering believers need instruction to reassure and reorient them, to bring God's promises back into focus. Paul wrote in our passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, *“¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief*

in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

These two verses are loaded down with theology that helps to stabilize, steady and sturdy the person who is suffering...

2 Ways 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 Help the Christian Who Suffers:

(1) **Your chosen** – First, these verse tell the suffer... “God has chosen you for salvation; you’re still in His family even though you may not feel like it.”

(2) **Your called** – Second, they remind him or her... “God has called you. You didn’t whistle for help. He did the calling.” Paul’s brief by weighty doctrinal points had the effect of a strong anchor on a windblown ship. They stabilized the Thessalonian believers whose faith had been tossed and wind-whipped by trials. *Good theology has a steadying effect on suffering people who can’t see God’s hand in the fierce storm(s). Why do you think this might be true?* It lifts their focus from the present predicament to the overarching purpose(s) of God... which had its beginning “in the eternity of the past and will lead to the “eternity of the future.” Theologian John R.W. Stott eloquently wrote, “In the eternity of the past God chose us to be saved. Then he called us in time, causing us to hear the gospel, believe the truth and be sanctified by the Spirit, with a view to our sharing Christ’s glory in the eternity of the future. In a single sentence the apostle’s mind sweeps from ‘the beginning’ to ‘the glory.’ There is no room in such a conviction for fear about Christian instability. Let the devil mount his fiercest attack on the feeblest saint, let the Antichrist be revealed and the rebellion break out, yet over against the instability of our circumstances and our character, we set the eternal stability of the purpose of God.”

3. **We can offer exhortation (2 Thess. 2:15)** – Besides compassion and instruction, hurting people need exhortation. To “exhort” means “to give warnings or advice.” In verse 15 of our passage Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to persevere. Notice his words in verse 15, *“¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”* Paul’s exhortation referred to the situation described earlier in chapter 2.

- The Thessalonians were shaken from their composure and disturbed by some false information (v.2)
- They were being deceived (v.3)
- And they were forgetting some of the teaching Paul had given them earlier (v.5)

False teaching had shaken them, and their faith was being threatened because of it unless they took measures to steady and secure their faith.

Two commands formed Paul’s exhortation to “stand fast” and “hold the traditions.” Picture a person planting his or her feet in a secure spot with knees bent and shoulders squared in a determined, defensive stance. Then that person stabilizes further by clinging to something fixed. Feet on the ground; hands gripping something solid... the “traditions,” Paul said. These are the teachings of Jesus Christ that had been handed down by the apostles. The key to withstanding the onslaught of false teaching was for the Thessalonians to hang on to true teaching.

For us, the command is the same. In times of suffering, nothing is more stabilizing than the truth of Scripture... nothing. Trials pressure us to try something new. We might be drawn toward a new belief, the latest doctrinal twist, or perhaps a self-help program that “guarantees” to make us feel better, but Paul’s exhortation for us is to remain stubbornly loyal to the tried-and-true doctrines of the faith. Like Paul, we are to encourage those who suffer by pointing them toward the truth of God’s Word.

4. **We can offer intercession (2 Thess. 2:16-17)** – The final two verses of the chapter form a brief prayer on behalf of the Thessalonian believers... notice it in verses 16-17, “¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.” Notice what Paul does and doesn’t pray for... What Paul does and doesn’t pray for suffering believers?

- *He does pray for God to comfort them*
- *He doesn’t pray for God to circumvent the storms for them*
- *He does pray for God to strengthen them*
- *He doesn’t pray for God to spare them*

Actually, it sounds very much like what Jesus’ prayed for believers in John 17:15-19, “¹⁵ I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”

When the storm of life come sweeping over us, we, like the disciples, want calm. Whatever the route, we want to avoid the storms. But in most cases, the most direct route to maturity is through the storms, not around them. Look carefully at the words of God in Isaiah 43:2... I love this, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.”

Notice that the words “through” is used three times in the passage. God does not guarantee a life full of sunshine and free from storms. What He does guarantee, however, is His loving care over us as we go through those times. The next two verses in Isaiah 43... verses 3 & 4 begin with the words (v.3), “For I am the Lord your God...” and (v.4), “You are precious in my sight...”

The calm in the storm is God’s watchful eye. If you are suffering today, are you focusing on the wind and waves, or are you making eye contact with the One who considers you precious in His sight? Your focus will determine whether you sink in your circumstances or walk above them (see Matthew 14:29-30). If someone you know is suffering, offer prayerful intercession for them and remind them of these truths.

THREE BENEFITS FROM SUFFERING

Why does God allow pain in our lives? That’s a question we have all asked at one time or another. As much as we yearn to make sense of our suffering, God doesn’t always give us the answers we want to hear. Often silence is the only response we get, despite our desperate pleadings. Part of the

faith-building process of trials is learning to let go of the need to know why and focusing on the good that difficult experiences can produce in us. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, the Apostle Paul lists three benefits reserved for those who make it through suffering's collision course. Let's look at these as we close this evening's study.

3 Benefits from Suffering:

1. **The ability to comfort others** (2 Cor. 1:3-4) – “³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”
2. **A dependence on God** (2 Cor. 1:8-9) - “⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our ^[d]trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.”
3. **Learning to give thanks in everything** (2 Cor. 1:10-11) – “¹⁰ Who delivered us from so great a death, and ^[d] does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, ¹¹ you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on ^[e] our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.”

Like food, clothing, and shelter, these verses address our basic needs during suffering. They point to God who can leave us warmed and filled. In Him, we find a light in the darkness that leads us into a harbor of peace that shelters us from the storms. These verses reveal not only the path where our suffering leads but also the tender hand of God who leads.