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Living Victoriously in Difficult Times

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Kay Arthur, Bob & Diane Vereen

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BIBLE STUDIES

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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P R E S S

LIVING VICTORIOUSLY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

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LIVING VICTORIOUSLY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by your circumstances, believing no one else has ever suffered in the same way? Did it seem as if no one could possibly understand your pain?

Do you wonder why life so often seems unfair? Some people seem to get everything they want and never have any real problems, while others seem to struggle all of their lives, facing one challenge after another. Some seem to get away with inflicting pain on the innocent, without experiencing any punishment in return. Has God turned His back on His children who are suffering, or is there purpose in the pain? How can we face the injustices and suffering of this world while clinging to faith in an all-powerful God?

These questions and more will be addressed in our six-week inductive study, as we gain a biblical understanding of God's perspective of our struggles. You will discover how to respond when you find yourself in the midst of difficult challenges—and you'll find hope for enduring faithfully to the end.

WEEK ONE

Once we entrust our lives to God, are we exempt from the pain and difficulties of life? Does our relationship with Him provide protection against suffering? We will begin this week's study by looking at a group of people whose circumstances shed light on these questions.

OBSERVE

The passage we'll be reading was written by the apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica.

Leader: Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5.

- Have the group circle each **you** and **your** that refers to the recipients of this letter.

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say those key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure to mark every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking references to the recipients of Paul's letter? How would you characterize their relationship with God? What was happening to them?

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

⁵ This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

- How were they responding to their circumstances?

INSIGHT

The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. The Greek word translated as *perseverance* in 2 Thessalonians 1:4 is *hupomone*, which means "patience or endurance in difficult circumstances." This word indicates the Thessalonians were not surrendering to their circumstances nor were they running away to get out of the situation.

The Greek word translated as *faith* in verse 4 means "to believe, to be fully persuaded." In this context it shows that their faith and trust was in God, who enabled them to accept their circumstances and cope with these trials.

Also in verse 4, the Greek word translated as *endure* is *anecho*, which means "to patiently wait." God gives the believer inner strength to enable him to be steadfast, to patiently wait in the midst of difficult circumstances.

- What additional insights did you gain from the definitions of these words regarding the response of the Thessalonians to their circumstances?
- According to these definitions, what enabled the Thessalonian believers to cope with their situation?
- How does your standard response in difficult situations compare with that of the Thessalonians? If Paul were describing your faith, in what ways would his description differ from or be similar to this passage in 2 Thessalonians?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:4-8.

- Have the group mark every reference to **persecutions**, **afflictions** (**afflict**, **afflicted**), and **suffering**, like this:

MMV

2 THESSALONIANS 1:4-8

⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

⁵ This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

INSIGHT

The Greek word for *persecutions* is *diogomos*, which means "hostile persecutions." It involves being pursued by enemies.

Afflictions is translated from the Greek word *thlipsis*, which means "to crush or to squeeze." It refers almost invariably to something that comes upon one from outward circumstances.

The Greek word translated here as *suffering* is *pascho*, which means "to be acted upon or to be affected by some outward circumstances."

Afflict and afflicted are translated from the Greek word *thilbo*, which means "to press or to be troubled." It indicates sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances or antagonism from others. To be afflicted is to be oppressed with evil.

DISCUSS

- Look back to where you marked each of the key words in the text and discuss what these definitions reveal about the pressures the Thessalonians were enduring.
- What truths did you learn from the circumstances and the example of the Thessalonians that you can apply to your life?

OBSERVE

Let's look at some other verses where Paul wrote about suffering in the life of a believer.

Leader: Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:1,2,14; and 3:4. Have the group do the following:

- Circle the pronouns **you** and **your**, which refer to believers in the Thessalonian church: ○
- Draw a box around the pronouns **we**, **us**, and **our**, which refer to Paul and those who were with him.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-7

⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-2,14

¹ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews....

1 THESSALONIANS 3:4

For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

Leader: *Read aloud these same verses once more.*

- *This time have the group mark every reference to **tribulation, suffered, mistreated, and affliction: WV***

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from making the references to the Thessalonian believers and Paul?
- Based on what you have seen to be true of their circumstances, what do you think the Thessalonians were examples of (1 Thessalonians 1:7)?
- How does this relate to what you learned in 2 Thessalonians 1?
- Based on what you've learned, how would you describe the believer's relationship with suffering?
- How does this relate to your life?

OBSERVE

Let's look at some other passages in which Paul spoke to believers about persecution and suffering.

Leader: Read aloud *Philippians 1:29-30* and *2 Timothy 3:12*.

- Circle all references to **the believer**, including pronouns.
- Mark **sufferings** and **persecution**, as before: *WV*

INSIGHT

The word *granted* in *Philippians 1:29* is translated from the Greek word *charizomai*, which means “to grant as a favor or to show kindness.” It is the verb form of the noun for grace. Suffering is a privilege God gives to the believer, a form of grace that shows His favor toward us.

PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

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

2 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10

⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

DISCUSS

- According to these verses, and the definition of the word *granted*, what conclusions can you draw regarding suffering and the believer?
- How does this relate to your present circumstances or to what you can expect as a believer?

OBSERVE

Let's return to 2 Thessalonians 1, where we began this week's study, and see what Paul told the Thessalonians about those who afflicted them.

Leader: *Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10. Have the group...*

- draw a box around each phrase with the words **those** or **these**, which refer to people who afflict believers:
- mark every reference to **time** with a clock: 🕒

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about those who afflict believers? What will happen to them and when will it happen?
- According to this passage, when will the believer be relieved from affliction?
- How do the truths you have just learned affect you?
- In the light of all you have studied this week, what have you learned about the role of suffering in the life of a believer? How will this impact your response to difficult circumstances?

⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

⁹ These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

¹⁰ when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

WRAP IT UP

We often hear conflicting messages about suffering. Some of the popular teachings of the day indicate that once you have become a believer, your problems are resolved. Some preachers tell us that God intends for all His children to be wealthy and healthy. They claim that success, prosperity, and trouble-free living are yours for the taking—if you have enough faith or if you confess God’s promises.

Is this teaching consistent with the Word of God? Is it consistent with what you have learned this week?

Like thousands of believers before us, we are living in difficult times. Christians all around us are under attack. When we stand up for God’s truth, we find ourselves trampled by others marching under the banner of “tolerance.” And we find that we’re not immune to the pressures, suffering, and pain of daily life that threaten to crush us.

How will you respond to suffering? Will you spend your time complaining or perhaps even hide your faith? Will you try to escape persecution, or will you follow the example of the Thesalonians and persevere?



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No-Homework Bible Studies

That Help You Discover Truth For Yourself

