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"Seasons of Suffering"
2 Thessalonians 1
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We all experience seasons of suffering. Christians are not exempt. Life is full of challenges that can be overwhelming and crushing. What can we learn from suffering and how can we make it through those seasons? In this study, we find encouragement out of 2 Thessalonians 1.

1. Context
    a. The letter
        i. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians a few months after 1 Thessalonians while on his second missionary journey in Corinth (51 A.D.).
    b. The church
        i. This letter was written to the church at Thessalonica, which Paul founded in 50–51 A.D.
        ii. The Thessalonica church was made up of mostly Gentiles and a few Jews (**Acts 17:4**).
    c. The city
        i. Thessalonica, now called Thessaloniki, is located in Greece.
        ii. In Paul's day, the city had a population of around 200,000.
        iii. Today, it has a population of around 300,000.
        iv. It was an important port city on the Aegean Sea.
        v. Originally, the city was named "Therma" because of its hot springs.
        vi. Later, it was renamed after Alexander the Great's half-sister Thessalonike.

2. **2 Thessalonians 1:1–12**

"[1] Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

[2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3] We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, [4] so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, [5] which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; [6] since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, [7]

and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

[8] in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [10] when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

[11] Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, [12] that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

a. "Silas" is the contracted form of the name *"Silvanus"* (verse 1)

3. A continuation
    a. Paul had ended his first letter to the Thessalonians by speaking on the second coming.
        i. **1 Thessalonians 5:9–11** – *"[9] For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*

        [11] Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing."

        ii. Paul told the Believers at Thessalonica to comfort each other with the understanding that they would not have to face the tribulation coming on the world after the rapture.
    b. Paul continued this theme into 2 Thessalonians because the Thessalonian Believers feared they had missed the rapture.
        i. The Thessalonian Believers had experienced great persecution.
            1. **Acts 17** records that while Paul was in Thessalonica, he came to the synagogue first as was his custom and reasoned with the Jews for three successive weeks.
            2. Although many Greeks believed and some Jews, numerous Jews did not believe and stirred up the people into a mob.
            3. The mob attacked the house of Jason, thinking that Paul and Silas were staying with him.

4. The mob then dragged Jason to the market square and accused him of harboring the men who'd turned the world upside down.
5. While Paul and Silas managed to escape 50 miles south to Berea, the persecution against Christians continued.

ii. Because of these trials, the Thessalonians assumed they were going through the tribulation period.
1. **2 Thessalonians 2:1–2** – *"[1] Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, [2] not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come."*

iii. Knowing that the rapture was to precede the tribulation, they assumed that they had missed Jesus' return.

c. Paul reassured the Thessalonian Believers that suffering was not proof they had missed the rapture.
i. Suffering will come.
ii. A falling away from the faith will come (apostasy).
iii. The Antichrist will come.
iv. But fear not, Jesus will come!
1. **DISCUSS**: How does this hope put your current trials into perspective?

4. Suffering will come.
a. Christians are not exempt from suffering.
i. We are saved from suffering through God's wrath, but not from suffering in general.
1. **John 15:19–20** – *"[19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] . . . If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* (ESV)
2. **John 16:33** – *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* (ESV)
3. **2 Timothy 3:12** – *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* (ESV)

ii. Expect temporary suffering to precede your eternal reward.
1. **DISCUSS**: Why are some Christians under the misconception that they are exempt from suffering? How does this misconception affect the Believer who is suffering and how he/she interacts with others suffering around him/her?

b. Christians can suffer well.
    i. Paul reassured the Thessalonians that they had not missed the rapture.
    ii. Paul commended them for enduring in the face of persecution.
        1. **2 Thessalonians 1:3–4** – *"[3] We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, [4] so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure."*
        2. Paul boasted about how well the Thessalonians handled tribulation!
    iii. The word "tribulation" (verse 4) comes from the Latin **tribulum**, which was a threshing tool to separate wheat from chaff.
        1. The tool was made of connected boards that shared a jagged underside used for threshing.
        2. The oxen would carry the **tribulum** over the grain, with a person standing on the top of the boards to add their weight to the threshing process.
        3. After that, they took a winnowing fork so they may leave behind only the edible grain kernels.
        4. Similarly, if we let them, tribulations can remove the chaff of our lives, leaving behind the good that God is working in us.
        5. **DISCUSS**: How has God used trials to remove chaff from your life? How does that affect how you now view trials?

5. Suffering offers instruction.
    a. While the Thessalonians were facing persecution for loving Jesus, suffering in general can teach us many things.
    b. The four things suffering teaches us:
        i. Suffering teaches us what we can't learn in good times.
            1. C.S. Lewis once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."
            2. It is during trials that we hear God most clearly and loudly.
            3. Joni Eareckson Tada had a diving accident at age 17 that turned her into a wheelchair-bound quadriplegic.
            4. In her book *The God I Love,* Joni concluded that "sometimes God allows what he hates to accomplish what he loves."
            5. Though God may hate to see His children suffer, He loves to see what suffering accomplishes in bringing us closer to Him.

6. Joni called her condition a gift.
7. Trials are often how we learn to cling to Jesus.
8. **DISCUSS**: How has God taught you to cling to Christ?

ii. Suffering matures us.
1. Trials expose what we need to work on.
2. **DISCUSS**: How have trials exposed your spiritual weaknesses?
3. Jesus uses trials to shape His people like a blacksmith uses heat to shape metal.
4. **Romans 5:3–5** – *"[3] We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."* (ESV)

iii. Suffering is a normal part of life.
1. We do not have to do anything to invite suffering into our lives for trials to come.
2. **1 Peter 4:12–13** – *"[12] Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."* (1984 NIV)
3. **DISCUSS**: What does it mean to *"rejoice"* amid trials? Have you experienced this sort of joy?
4. Sometimes, suffering is simply the result of a fallen world.

iv. Suffering on earth does not compare to the glory of heaven.
1. **Romans 8:18** – *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*
2. God will balance every unjust scale and give rest to His people when we go to Him in death or He comes to us at the rapture.
3. **2 Thessalonians 1:5–10** – The Thessalonians' patience amid suffering was *"[5] manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; [6] since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, [7] and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, [8] in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [10] when*

He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."

4. **DISCUSS**: Have you learned to be patient in tribulation? How is this patience a witness to an unbelieving world?
5. In your trials, you can hold onto this truth: You will have rest in the presence of the Lord.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV).