

Discipleship and Troubled Times

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:2-4).

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:3-5).

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet 1:6-9).

“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, while it is said, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me’” (Heb 3:12-15).

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb 6:11-12).

“Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and

In time of testing, trial, and affliction, our true loyalties are revealed. We certainly see this principle continually illustrated in Scripture in the lives of the saints who have gone before us. **Discipleship helps prepare the Christ-learner for difficult times.** Maturing believers play a vital role in training growing believers in the spiritual disciplines necessary for stability. Disciple-making is a *spiritual boot camp*—it has rightly been said, *the more you sweat in training, the*

less you will bleed in battle. At Gospel for Life, we train disciples to wield the spiritual weapons which God has provided (2 Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-20).

God sends trials for a very important reason. Our flesh is naturally double-minded, we tend to distribute our support over both faith and sight. But, testing makes us choose, causing a true believer to consolidate his reliance upon the Lord. God is honored by our faithfulness under testing (1 Pet 1:6-9). At Gospel for Life, we are committed to the preparation of our disciples for the fight of faith (1 Tim 1:18; 6:12).

The apostle Paul, the iconic disciple-maker, saw the necessity of building up the brethren for the *fight of faith*. In First Thessalonians, we find Paul preparing his converts for suffering. The apostle knew that the evil one is a cruel enemy. When believers encounter trouble, the enemy uses every lie imaginable. Scripture describes this intense temptation as the ‘evil day’ (Eph 6:13). Amidst painful trials, the devil may insinuate, “You deserve this,” “God has abandoned you,” “If you were spiritual this would not be happening to you.” In the Thessalonica region, persecution of believers was becoming intense and Paul feared that the devil, the old trickster, may have effectively attacked the Thessalonian’s faith. But, praise God, the apostle’s preparation of these believers for difficulty was a critical puzzle piece in their victorious response to opposition. Listen to his letter to these young believers: “. . . we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 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. For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord” (1 Thess 3:1-8).

OPTIONAL

The faithful men and women who make up that ‘cloud of witnesses’ in biblical history (Heb 12:1) were not ‘loners’; they walked with other obedient believers and drew strength and endurance from close fellowship with their brethren.

The war is not won or lost by one battle. For the Christian life is an ongoing series of battles in which the true disciple of Christ exercises daily spiritual sight in his dependency upon his Lord.

For, affliction ultimately exposes our actual foundation and source of trust. Is it the sandy support of this world or is it the rock of God's unfailing Word (Mt 7:24-27)?