

January 24, 2010

Trying Times

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13, 1 Peter 1:6-9

Would you agree that every person has some type of difficulty that could drag them down? It may be anything from a broken fingernail to a broken marriage, from a cold to cancer. But every person could find an excuse to be irritable, cross, or depressed. Paul faced persecution because he was a Christian. Perhaps we have not faced that trial, but we have trials of our own. How we respond to them is important. Paul sent his spiritual son Timothy to check in on the Thessalonian church, to see how they were doing in their faith.

1. 1Thess 3:1-3. Who was experiencing the trials: Paul or the Thessalonians? Why would Paul send Timothy to Thessalonica? Are you experiencing any trials or persecutions? Where can you find some support? **Rom 8:18**. How does that help us? To whom would Paul send you to *strengthen and encourage*? Have you ever been on the receiving end of such encouragement? Were you appreciative or annoyed?
2. vss. 4-5. Why would Paul have fear? Have you ever feared for another person's relationship to Jesus? What did you do about it? How was Paul able to predict that he would be persecuted? **John 15:18-19**. **1John 3:13**. How does *the world* express its *hate* for Christians? Have you experienced this? Were you shocked by it? How did you respond? How does the tempter work on us today, to make our faith useless?
3. vs. 6. What did Timothy's report about the Thessalonians do for Paul's attitude? What attributes did this church have that Paul treasured? Could Timothy give Paul such a report about us? Do you have any *pleasant memories* of Christian fellowship with someone now separated from you? Is there a way to re-connect with that person? What if that person is deceased?
4. vss.7-10. What gave Paul courage or comfort to carry on through his distress? When you go through hard times, what –or who—most encourages you? Is there someone right now whom you could encourage? What holds you back from doing so? Paul had joy because of the faithfulness of this church body. How are you doing on that joy thing? Would others' faithfulness bring you joy? Would it cause you to praise or thank God? Why or why not?
5. vss. 11-13. Paul's parting words, a benediction to this church. Is he seeking a blessing for them or himself? How does going through hard times intensify the love you feel for others who have shared in that experience with you? Paul desired that this church be *blameless and holy* when Jesus returns. Is that really possible? Do you desire to be *blameless and holy*? If it is not a reachable goal, why try? What would be some evidence of love that *overflow for each other and everyone else*? What can we do when our reservoir of love is NOT overflowing? **John 13:35, 1Cor 13:4-7**.

6. 1Pet 1:6-7. A favorite of mine. How does suffering or hardship ‘refine’ our faith? What drives out the impurity? Can you testify that your faith is strengthened by times of trials? How?

7. vs. 8-9. Peter has just celebrated the resurrection of Jesus, and says this leads to belief and steadfast faith. How can you believe in something you haven’t or cannot see? **Heb 11:1 (KJV).** What proves the resurrection for you? Does this belief bring you *inexpressible and glorious joy*? Do you ever think about your secure salvation? How does this build your joy? Is your faith bringing you joy? If not, why not? What kinds of things can pull our eyes or thinking away from the Godly things that bring joy? **Hebrews 12:2-3.**

Which of Paul’s encouraging acts do you have the hardest time doing for another person?

- Telling them how important they are to me
- Affirming what they are doing well
- Helping them find meaning in their struggles
- Taking time to be present with them

What seems to block you most frequently from being with the people who most need your presence and support? Time? Attitude? Other? What can be done to overcome those obstacles?

Action steps:

1. Contact a person you know is having a hard time, and give encouragement.
2. Help a church visitor to feel welcome.
3. Take one action to “complete what is lacking in your faith”

