

When we go through difficulties we often feel like God has abandoned us. Sometimes we feel like David in the Psalms:

***Psa 13:1-2 NKJV**<sup>1</sup> How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?*

*How long will You hide Your face from me?*

<sup>2</sup> *How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily?*

*How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

The believers in Thessalonica were experiencing severe trials and persecution. In the midst of those difficulties Paul, who had first preached Christ to them, had to escape quickly from Thessalonica and continue his ministry elsewhere. One of the key points of this letter is here in Chapter 3: Though they may be experiencing trouble, and though Paul had to leave quickly, he did not leave them without help. God had not abandoned them. They could rely on the Lord in the midst of their trials and troubles.

**We can expect difficulties in this life, but God has provided resources to give us strength.**

**Read whole chapter.**

- I. We can be strengthened by submitting to God's will. 3:1-5
  - A. 3:3-4 God's will for the Thessalonians involved a good deal of suffering and difficulty; the same was true for Paul. The same may be true for you and me.
  - B. In fact the same was true for Jesus. Remember his anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, before he went to the cross, when he prayed to his Father saying, "Not as I will, but as you will," and "Your will be done."
  - C. When it comes to driving home hard truth, no one was better than the Scottish Baptist Oswald Chambers:

*As long as you maintain your own personal interests and ambitions, you cannot be completely aligned or identified with God's interests. This can only be accomplished by giving up all of your personal plans once and for all, and by allowing God to take you directly into His purpose for the world. ... I must learn that the purpose of my life belongs to God, not me. God is using me from His great personal perspective, and all He asks of me is that I trust Him. I should never say, "Lord, this causes me such heartache." To talk that way makes me a stumbling block. When I stop telling God what I want, He can freely work His will in me without any hindrance. He can crush me, exalt me, or do anything else He chooses. He simply asks me to have absolute faith in Him and His goodness. Self-pity is of the devil, and if I wallow in it I cannot be used by God for His purpose in the world. Doing this creates for me my own cozy "world within the world," and God will not be allowed to move me from it because of my fear of being "frost-bitten."*

*(My Utmost for His Highest, by Oswald Chambers)*

II. We can be strengthened by focusing on the work God is doing within us. 3:1-5

A. Trials can build character:

**Jms 1:2-4 NKJV** <sup>2</sup>My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup>knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup>But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

B. Trials can build hope:

**Rom 5:3-5 NKJV** <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

C. Trials can equip us to minister to others in need:

**2 Cor 1:3-4 NKJV** <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>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.

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III. We can be strengthened by the example of others. 3:6-8

A. During times of persecution or pressure, these early believers encouraged one another. Christians who stand firm in the Lord encourage people in two directions:

1. Their teachers can see the benefit of their work in the faithful.
2. Those who are new in their faith can then learn from their example.

B. Example of Armand's letter. Now that he's in college, his faith has become his own.

IV. We can be strengthened by giving God thanks. 3:9

A. Paul repeatedly brings up the thanks he offers to God for various believers. In Romans 1 he provides a negative example. A lack of thankfulness led to idolatry in the ancient world.

**Rom 1:21-23 NKJV** <sup>21</sup>because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

V. We can be strengthened by rejoicing in the Lord. 3:9

A. We do well to remember those powerful words from Nehemiah, when, in the midst of difficult times, the Israelites heard the words of the Law:

**Nehemiah 8:10 NKJV** Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for **the joy of the Lord is your strength.**”

- VI. We can be strengthened through the ministry of prayer. 3:10
- A. When others pray for us, God answers by providing us with supernatural strength.
  - B. When we pray for others, they are strengthened, but somehow it’s clear that we are strengthened too. Prayer reinforces our fellowship with God.
  - C. Notice the parallel in this section with another passage in 1 Thess. 5. Paul repeatedly emphasized the importance of thankfulness, rejoicing and prayer.

**1 Thess 5:16-18 NKJV** <sup>16</sup>Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

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- VII. We can be strengthened through continuous growth. 3:10-12
- A. There’s a spiritual principle that says that you have to keep growing or you begin going backwards in your faith. The Thessalonian church was a church that was committed to spiritual growth – and Paul was committed to seeing them grow:

**1 Thess 4:1 NKJV** Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

**2 Thess 1:3 NKJV** 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.

- B. Peter encouraged believers to grow in the grace of God.

**2 Peter 3:18 NKJV** but **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

- C. This concept was explained well by J.C. Ryle, Anglican Bishop of Liverpool in the 1800s, in his book *Holiness*):

*When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply this—that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked. He feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart. He manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength, from faith to faith and from grace to grace.*

VIII. We can be strengthened by looking forward to Christ's return. 3:12-13

A. The Scriptures remind us that we should be eagerly waiting for Jesus – looking forward to His return with tangible anticipation.

**1 Cor 1:7-8 NKJV** <sup>7</sup>so that you come short in no gift, **eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,** <sup>8</sup>who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 9:27-28 NKJV** <sup>27</sup>And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, <sup>28</sup>so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. **To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.**

B. And in the next chapter Paul reminds us that we should “comfort one another” by reminding each other of the return of Jesus Christ.

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**Review: God has not abandoned us.**

**The Resources God Has Given to Keep Us Strong**

- I. We can be strengthened by submitting to God's will. 3:1-5
- II. We can be strengthened by focusing on the work God is doing within us. 3:1-5
- III. We can be strengthened by the example of others. 3:6-8
- IV. We can be strengthened by giving God thanks. 3:9
- V. We can be strengthened by rejoicing in the Lord. 3:9
- VI. We can be strengthened through the ministry of prayer. 3:10
- VII. We can be strengthened through continuous growth. 3:10-12
- VIII. We can be strengthened by looking forward to Christ's return. 3:12-13

**Review handout: Prayer in 1 & 2 Thessalonians**