

The Thessalonian Church's Secret to Joyful Hope in the Midst of Excruciating Trials

The Christians at Thessalonica were experiencing tremendous hardship when Paul sent a second letter to them. They were undergoing trials that threatened to break their faith. But despite these pressures, their commitment to Christ remained strong. That's why Paul could say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brothers, as it is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you abounds toward each other" (2 Thess. 1:3).

These Christians were going through the most unbelievable, most intense persecution, and yet their incredible faith caused the apostle Paul to use a word that he never used anywhere else in all of his letters. It's a Greek word that means "bound, compelled, obligated." That's how strongly the apostle felt about giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians. Paul was saying, in effect, "Your faith has been so incredible in the midst of crushing circumstances that I feel I owe God my gratitude."

Jesus empowers us to face every trial with faith in His promises.

We must be prepared for trials and suffering. After all, Jesus promised us it would be this way: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ... I chose you out of the world, the world therefore hates you. ... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:18-20).

Now, it's not the sort of promise that people want to talk about. It's not the kind of statement that gets turned into a decorative print or written on a coffee cup. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation" (John 16:33b). But when

it comes, do not despair. Jesus assured His disciples in the very next breath, "But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

That was the secret to the Thessalonians' faith, and it's the secret to deepening *your* faith. Jesus empowers us to face every trial with faith in His promises, the same ones the Thessalonians had: He is returning soon; He is preparing a place for us—a city with eternal foundations; His victory is sure; no one can snatch you from His hands.

Rooted in these, you can look forward to the end of history and, like the Thessalonians, "count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith develops patience" (James 1:2-3).

Prayer: *Lord, thank You for the example of the Thessalonians' faith. May I have the kind of faith that considers it pure joy when I face trials. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. {eo}*

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