

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

STUDY FOUR

When Your Comfort Zone Gets the Squeeze

1 Thessalonians 3:1–8

According to the Bible, pain is a valid, necessary part of life. Although we may not like it, we can learn to live with it and learn lessons from it. Like the Thessalonians, we can find real help in our struggle when we see pain from God's perspective.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

It's a rite of passage as the calendar grinds along from the dog days of July to the crisp mornings of early November. Across the US, from middle school through college, cross-country runners dot the landscape, faithfully logging their miles across hill and dale—along bustling roads, craggy trails, and plush golf course fairways.

Individually and independently, each runner decided to join the team. These runners quickly learn, if they hadn't already been informed, two things about their chosen sport. First, *suffering is inevitable*. One doesn't train through extreme weather, across treacherous terrain, dodging a myriad of hazards, without counting the cost. Second, *pain is essential*. None of the runners will complete the season—never mind excel and be awarded—if they are unwilling to embrace pain. Pain serves as a tutor and as an opportunity to reflect on the necessity of breaking through physical and mental barriers.

When workouts are complete and final preparations are made, weekday runners transform into Saturday racers. It's a chance to prove their mettle. Coaches have meticulously designed and coordinated the training, orchestrated the details, managed the injuries, and exhorted their charges to perform with excellence. Now, they can hardly contain themselves on race day. They long to catch a glimpse of their athletes during the race, to see if all the preparation has paid off and hasn't been done in vain.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

When Your Comfort Zone Gets the Squeeze

1 Thessalonians 3:1–8

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we find the apostle Paul, much like that fatherly coach, longing to catch a face-to-face glimpse of his beloved Thessalonian believers whose lives were “getting the squeeze” from persecutors. Was Paul’s earlier investment in their lives paying spiritual dividends? Were they still running the race? Or had they dropped out? Let’s pick up the story of Timothy’s visit to the fledgling church.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

We embark on a study about the inevitability of suffering and the essentiality of pain. Reflect on the psalmist’s prayer in *Psalms 119:67, 71, 75*, and then record your own prayer to the Lord in the space provided below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Written from Corinth, 1 Thessalonians reflects Paul’s deep affection for new believers and his longing to see them. Chapter 1 records Paul’s thanksgiving for the believers’ faith, loving deeds, and enduring hope. In chapter 2, Paul assured the Thessalonians of his good intentions.

“We were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children,” Paul wrote (1 Thessalonians 2:7). He was also like a father who “pleaded,” “encouraged,” and “urged” his children to honor God with their lives (2:12). As any parent separated from his or her children would feel, Paul ached to see the believers in Thessalonica. What concerns and fears do you think raced through Paul’s mind?

Let’s rejoin our study in 1 Thessalonians 3:1–8 and discover what Paul did to ease his burdened heart.

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Observation: An Encouraging Report Despite Their Affliction

A technique in the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method is to imagine yourself in the scene as you make your observations.¹ In the passage, Paul recalls his time in Athens, before he traveled to Corinth. As you read the passage and answer the questions below, picture yourself sitting beside Paul while he was alone, restless with worry.

Paul's Concern—1 Thessalonians 3:1–2

According to *1 Thessalonians 3:1–2*, what was Paul's first order of business? What two qualifications did Paul highlight about Timothy? What was Timothy's twofold mission?

Paul's Theological Perspective—1 Thessalonians 3:3–5

Paul's hope, via Timothy's leadership, was "to keep [them] from being shaken by the troubles [they] were going through" (1 Thessalonians 3:3). How might affliction disturb or shake a person's faith?

Observe *1 Thessalonians 3:3–5*. Paul buttressed the believers' faith by explaining his theological perspective on suffering. He shared two related facts in 3:3–4. What theological truth did Paul remind them about, and how did he reinforce it?

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Paul repeated his reason for sending Timothy in 1 Thessalonians 3:5, adding what warning that all believers must heed?

Paul's Response—1 Thessalonians 3:6–8

What might have happened if the Thessalonians *had* succumbed to the pressures of persecution, suffering, and temptation? Initially, they might have felt *resentment toward authority figures*—mainly Paul. They also might have experienced *isolation from Christian friends*—even family members. And they might have felt *indifference toward biblical teaching*, pushing aside precious words of Scripture.

Thankfully, Timothy's return and report poured a healing balm on Paul's troubled mind. Read [1 Thessalonians 3:6–8](#). What words open 3:6? What does this contrastive phrase expectantly communicate to the reader?

Timothy's good news focused on three particulars found in 3:6–7. Record below the three phrases which relieved Paul's concerns.

Concern	Phrase of Reassurance
Resentment toward authority	
Isolation from Christian friends	
Indifference toward biblical teaching	

In order to underscore the depth of his relationship with the Thessalonian church, Paul employed an “if . . . then” connective clause in 3:8. What is the point of his statement?

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We're not isolated, granite islands who live like rocks of Gibraltar. We are eroding pieces of soil on the seashore. And that old wave is beating against us. We need each other. Timothy's presence must have been a great encouragement.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Suffering and Faithfulness in the Christian Life

An important aspect of biblical interpretation is the author's use of *repetition*, which Paul incorporated in this passage in *1 Thessalonians 3:1–2, 5*. After rereading these verses, what was Paul's intention? What concern was he underscoring? What emotion is evident?

Paul's theme centers on persecution, suffering, and pain. Paul had endured much of that himself and promised the young-in-the-faith Thessalonians that storms were surely coming. What theological principles was Paul teaching them?

The Thessalonians ran the risk of spiritual shipwreck if they hadn't anchored their faith in Christ, the suffering Savior. How does "the tempter" try to entice us to abandon Christ when we're in pain?

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Timothy was sent to the Thessalonians to strengthen (*histemi*) and encourage (*parakaleō*). Review the Greek terms *histemi* and *parakaleō* from the *definition* paragraph from Mounce’s Greek dictionary at billmounce.com or use a *commentary* from your resources. In your own words, what was Timothy commissioned to do for the Thessalonians? How have mentors like Timothy and others in our Christian community strengthened and encouraged you?

What principle did Paul model and teach to help us stay true through adversity?

One of the great battles of the young Christian is the adversary coming in when suffering attacks. The adversary finds that weak link in the armor and penetrates. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Pain as God’s Preferred Path

An easy, flower-lined path is not always God’s design for our earthly pilgrimage. In fact, pain may be His preferred path to lead us closer to Christ and build our Christlike character.

Many biblical writers address suffering and pain, including God’s intended purpose for His followers. Read each Scripture passage in the chart below and record God’s purpose for pain.

Scripture	Pain’s Purpose
<i>Philippians 1:27–29</i>	
<i>2 Corinthians 4:7–10, 16</i>	
<i>1 Peter 4:12–16</i>	
<i>Ecclesiastes 7:13–14</i>	

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If you were to summarize the benefit of pain for spiritual pilgrims in one sentence, what would you say?

Suffering is inevitable. There's no getting around it. You will not escape it, nor will your children, nor have your parents. It is a road traveled by all. It's a painful, albeit inevitable, path. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Accepting Pain

Adversity . . . suffering . . . pain—these are not comfortable topics, nor ones warmly welcomed. In light of Paul's teaching, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers two truths to help stabilize us in times of trouble.

First, *having our comfort zone invaded as Christians is essential, not unfair*. The winds of suffering force us to sink our spiritual roots into Christ. No one wants pain, but it's the only way for our faith to deepen.

Second, *suffering hardship as soldiers in battle is expected, not unusual*. This world is enemy territory. Stay prepared and stand firm in the Lord.

Jesus, Paul, the Thessalonians, and many others in Scripture have endured suffering and pain. How does this fact help you embrace all that God would have for you?

What have been some *growth points* from pain in your life? How have you seen God work through your trying circumstances? How have these hardships drawn you closer to your suffering Savior and helped you identify with Him?

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What specific hardship are you experiencing right now? Who, like Timothy, can come alongside you to strengthen and encourage you in your faith? What do you need from him or her? What do you need most from the Lord?

Are you willing to run the race of faith that God has for you, no matter where He may lead and regardless of the rocky terrain? If we had to run alone, certainly we would quit the race. But Christ goes with us each step of the way, to strengthen and to cheer us on. With Him we can endure to the finish line.



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You for being faithful to me in warfare, Father. Thank You for taking away the luxuries of the bedroom and the comforts of the kitchen and the soft, padded carpet of a living room and pushing me into the streets. Enable me to learn and never forget what You are teaching me. May I, from this day forward, resist the temptation to avoid the pain. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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