

1 THESSALONIANS

Lesson 4: Dealing with Crisis

1 Thessalonians 3: 1-13

For this lesson, I'd like you to read all of Chapter 3 and, rather than answer specific questions about the chapter's verses, consider this one overall question: What happens to us when we are faced with a crisis? After you have read Paul's words to the church at Thessalonica, take some time to think about a time, or times, that you or someone you know has faced great crisis in their life. How did they react to it? Perhaps today you are facing a crisis, the loss of a job, poor health, the death of a loved one, or some other devastating event. What effect is it having on you?

I suspect that when we look deep inside ourselves, we will see that several things can initially overwhelm us during a crisis; specifically, loss of control or a sense that our lives are in chaos. Our certainty regarding our life's goals, beliefs, and even our general outlook on life can be adversely affected. Our faith can weaken, we may find it difficult to pray in any focused way, and our witness may not be as strong as it was.

For some, a serious crisis can bring on a backslidden lifestyle—a separation develops in our walk with God, and we feel as though we are alone. Our attendance at church, Sunday school, or other Christian activities becomes spotty, and we withdraw into ourselves. In fact, in Elijah's life, he even went and hid in a cave because his fear was so great.

Crisis, particularly an unexpected crisis, can throw our lives and our faith into complete turmoil. Such was Paul's concern for the church at Thessalonica. It is difficult today for us to completely understand the situation that Paul and the church faced. Christianity was brand new, not something most people knew about, and it was turning the Jewish community and the Gentile community upside down. Paul himself was under attack, as we saw in our earlier studies. The church there suffered as well, since the person who had brought them the Gospel message—Paul—was not only being ridiculed and loudly criticized, but he was imprisoned and unable to come to Thessalonica.

Concerned about the Christians at Thessalonica, as well as their faith and commitment, Paul sent Timothy on a reconnaissance mission. Timothy returned with great news! The church was still there, still committed, and still faithful. This was encouraging news to Paul, who then commended them on their faith and their great love for one another.

Why do you suppose they remained faithful? How did they face crisis and come through it? What can we learn from their experience that we can apply in our own lives?

First, they had Paul as leader and a model Christian.

Their faith and resolve was obviously strengthened by how they saw Paul handle adversity and how they saw his faith grow through each challenge he faced. Do you have someone who inspires you? Have you looked at how other believers handle trouble and evil in their lives? Are you a model to someone else? When we face crisis, we need a model, we need someone we can look up to. Christ is that perfect model, and he will provide us others in times of trouble whose faith will comfort us.

Secondly, they had the Word of God.

Now in those days, the "Bible" as we know it still did not exist. Scripture in those days would have been primarily the Old Testament and various church letters, such as the letter that we are currently studying, bolstered by the Apostles' personal eyewitness testimony about Christ.

We can rest assured that as Paul and Timothy began the building process in Thessalonica, they would have relied heavily on God's Word—the Old Testament. We can therefore conclude that during the church's struggle, it relied heavily on this as well. So let's take a look at what they would have seen when they examined God's Word, and perhaps what they would have learned from the testimony of Paul and others. What we will see will provide us with the reassurance that we, too, need as we face our own personal crises and faith challenges. For if we can learn to face our tribulations with Christ at our side, our faith will grow strong; and we can become an inspiration, a model, and a minister to others in times of trouble. Here's what they could have read:

Isaiah 41:10

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Isaiah 55:8

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 40:31

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

In addition, from Paul or the testimony/witness of others they would have also heard:

Romans 15:4

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (This tells us that the Old Testament—the "scriptures" "written aforetime" will give us hope.)

Matthew 6:25-33

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

And finally, again from their "scriptures":

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

When all seems lost around us, when our world is full of chaos, and when we can't see tomorrow for the evil of today; we can have this reassurance: God is on the throne, and He is watching over each of us. Trust in Him and in His Son Jesus. He will get you through, and He will give you victory if only you will let him.

Thanks for enduring. I realize that this lesson is different than normal, but quite relevant I believe.

May God show us how to live out our faith and apply what we learn in our daily lives.

In Christ,

Wes