

Grow and Discern Resource Sheet

Series: *Formed for the Future, Faithful for Now*

Date: 6/22/25 **Title:** Formed Through Fire, Strengthened in the Family **Text:** 1 Thess. 3

We hate the idea of suffering and trials. There is nothing about how we are created that would suggest that experiencing trials is a good thing. However, we do indeed experience difficulties in this world and more than that, in our passage Paul lets the Thessalonians know this a certainty even for God's people. More than that as God's people we are to encourage each other by reminding ourselves of the spiritual benefit of these trials so that they do not overwhelm our faith.

Key Sermon Points

Introduction

There are two foundational truths we need to be aware of and hold onto as we consider our main passage:

- **The enemy is a real threat to God's people (2:18).** We want to hold to the fact that the Christian life and the church pursues its mission in the face of opposition. We must never lose sight of that. In fact, it's possible to look great our faith life until we encounter the enemy's resistance.
- **The redemptive gospel smashes individualism (2:19).** Paul shows that as God's people; our spiritual destiny is tied together since we are in a covenant relationship with the Lord and one another. We are together with the Lord, in one covenant community.

1. Trials must be met with spiritual resilience (3:1–5)

Firstly, and as a reminder, Paul seeks to make our faith immune to trials by setting the expectation that they are inevitable (1 Peter 4:12, John 16:33) and yet also spiritually beneficial (Romans 5:3-4, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7). Trials become for us a kind of **spiritual therapy** that works to help our souls heal the injuries caused by our sinful nature, e.g., trials train us not to be prideful (cf. 2 Cor.12:7) and worldly (2 Cor.4:16-18). So, in order that we will be prepared for the day of the Lord, we need to be resilient and persevere in difficulties and trials.

Because our instinct is to avoid all difficulty, **we need spiritual wisdom so we can discern how the Lord would have us respond in challenging circumstances.** Don't decide what you want to do, instead discern what the Lord is doing and saying to you. Developing a discerning mindset depends on our prayer life with the Lord, our understanding of what God's priorities are according to his word, & being surrendered to his will above our own.

2. Gospel community is a covenant connection (3:6–8)

Gospel community > relationship community. Human beings are created for community, and we have seen lots of examples of that in popular culture, e.g., the TV shows Cheers,

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Friends, Living Single, and many others. We need one another and friendship is core to that. Moreover, there is a great epidemic of loneliness in our time.

However, God's vision for covenant community goes further than relationships and rests on a redemptive commitment among people who are imperfect but connected in Christ. The metaphor the Lord gives for this connection is "the body" which we see in 1 Cor.12:21-26. We learn that we are not dispensable to each other and so we need to work to preserve our connections and unity (Eph.4:3)

3. An increasing faith & an increasing love gives strength that lasts (3:9-13)

Paul's hope for the Thessalonians is that they would increase or grow such that love overflowed from them to all the saints and everyone. So, love is not something you work to produce but is the fruit of our growth. Paul layers on that growth as he longs for their hearts to be strengthened so they will be morally upright (blameless) in holiness. We should be reminded of the necessity of holiness (2Cor.7:1, Heb.12:14) as we aim to be faithful until we are in the Lord's presence.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on "discernment being more than deciding." How can we remind ourselves that God's aims and ways go beyond our instinct for self-preservation? Consider Rom.12:2.
2. When do you think it is OK to break a covenant relationship? In other words, how do we recognize covenant unfaithfulness among God's people? Discuss.
3. Often, we become drained and tired of trying to love those who are difficult to love. How does spiritual growth and becoming more like Jesus enable us to love when it's not easy?

Meditating on Formation

1. **"Suffering & trials are spiritual therapy."** Meditate on Paul's experience in 2Cor.12:7-10. What is the Lord saying to you from this text about specific circumstances in your life?
2. **"Covenant community > relationship community."** Are there people in your relationship orbit you have treated transactionally? Ask the Lord to show you how to approach them with covenantal love and commitment.
3. **"Blameless in holiness."** Because our justification is grounded in Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, it's easy to lose zeal for personal holiness. Are there areas in your life that the Lord is calling you to be more "blameless in holiness?" Reflect & pray on them.