

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“MAINTAINING HOPE”

For individual study or group discussion

When Paul pens his second letter to the Thessalonians, he recalls their situation: they are new believers facing hardship, persecution, and confusion concerning Christ’s return. Yet Paul boasts about their love and faith despite severe persecutions and afflictions. His words of encouragement to them should strengthen us today and help us to answer the same question the Thessalonians faced: **How do we maintain hope when it’s hard?**

Celebrate growth in grace. (vv. 1–4)

Paul begins the second letter to the Thessalonians by thanking God for their growing faith, love, and perseverance. Their endurance in the face of hardship was itself a testimony to God’s grace at work. How do we celebrate growth in grace when life is hard? As theologian J.I. Packer explains, growth in grace is not measured by the absence of suffering but by the deepening of faith, love, and endurance through it: *“God uses chronic pain and weakness, along with other afflictions, as his chisel for sculpting our lives. Felt weakness deepens dependence on Christ for strength each day. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away. To live with your ‘thorn’ uncomplainingly is true sanctification. It is true healing for the spirit. It is a supreme victory of grace.”*¹

- Look back at 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16. In what way did trials give evidence that God was at work in the church at Thessalonica?
- As you’ve gone through difficulties, have those difficulties caused you to grow in love for God and others? If so, how?

Anticipate Christ’s return. (vv. 5–10)

Next, Paul turns the Thessalonians’ eyes forward: their present suffering, he says, points to their future glory. Drawing from Isaiah 66, Paul places their suffering within the larger redemptive story—one that ends with Christ’s return, judgment of evil, and a renewal of all things. God’s people are vindicated in their present sufferings, while those who wanted nothing to do with Jesus, in the end, get what they want: relational distance from their Creator and King (v. 9). According to NT theologian Greg Beale: *“Paul, following Isaiah, is saying that an essential difference between the people of God and the people of the world lies in their desires: the former love God, and their passion for him makes them want to please him, which issues in acts of obedience. Others who do not love him, have no desire to please or obey him.”*² And when believers live faithfully amid hardship, their suffering becomes a preview of the glory to come (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

- Read Isaiah 66:4, 15–16. How does Paul, in verses 7–8, echo Isaiah’s warning that those who reject God’s Word will face judgment?
- Read Romans 8:17. In what way do believers obtain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Petition for God’s power. (vv. 11–12)

Finally, Paul prays that God would empower the Thessalonians to live worthy of their calling so that Christ would be glorified in them. God knows our weaknesses and limitations. Every act of faith and perseverance today anticipates our final transformation. God’s power enables us to live faithfully now, even as we long for the day when Christ’s glory will fill us completely.

- Read Romans 8:18–28. According to Paul, how do we maintain hope when life gets hard?
- How does the truth of Romans 8:18 bring hope in seasons of waiting or hardship? How have you personally experienced hope?

DATE: October 26, 2025

SPEAKER: Wil/Brian

SERIES: 2 Thessalonians

PASSAGE: 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

Family Dinner Table

Polycarp

from Ligon Duncan’s 1&2 Thessalonians for You

“About the year AD 156, right in the middle of the 2nd century, an 86-year-old pastor from Smyrna in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) was arrested by the local Roman provincial ruler for refusing to worship the emperor. His name was Polycarp. He had been appointed to be a pastor in the little city of Smyrna by John the apostle. He was probably about 25 years old when John died. And when the local Roman ruler told him that unless he denied Jesus and worshiped the spirit of the emperor he would be burned at the stake, he refused to recant his love of and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is part of what he prayed before he was burned at the stake: *‘I give thee thanks that thou has counted me worthy...that I should have a part in the number of thy martyrs.’* It’s such a striking prayer. Is that how we would think about it if we ourselves were called upon to suffer, to be afflicted, or even to die—because of our love and trust in Jesus Christ?”

- Dr. Richard B. Gaffin in the 1979 *Westminster Theological Journal* wrote that our fellowship in Christ’s sufferings can be far broader than persecution for our faith. Our lived experience under the curse of sin with its *“decay and pervasive, enervating weakness...when borne for Christ and lived in his service, there is ‘the fellowship of his sufferings.’”*³ Read 2 Corinthians 12:9–10. Where do we get the strength that we need to endure daily trials and to live the Christian life?

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Woodlands Gathering,
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PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

David and Eowyn Stoddard, serve
with MTW Europe

¹ Packer, J.I. *Hot Tub Religion*. 1987, Wheaton, IL. Tyndal House Publishers, Inc. 192

² Beale, G.K. 1 & 2 *Thessalonians*. 2003, Downers Grove, IL. IVP Academic. 190

³ Gaffin, Richard B. *The Usefulness of the Cross*. The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol 41, No. 2. Spring 1979. 228–246