

Read also Deuteronomy 8:2-6. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Father's Day reminds us of the aspiration for men to be good, good fathers. Christian fathers have the example of God as our Father. God is forever loving, faithful, and continually teaching us. While we are never perfect as human beings, we aspire to be faithful in our love for our family, be faithful in teaching our family God's ways, and faithful in concern for our children's future.

- A good father leads by example, living out moral, responsible behavior for the long haul to shape the character of his children
- A good father teaches his children the ropes
- A good father listens to God and teaches his child to seek God
- A good father is concerned for the future of his children.

Paul treated his church at Thessalonica as a father treats his children.

So Paul was away from this new church but it was like leaving his children. He sure missed them and so he tried to stay connected. In the 1st century, travel took time. People connected by writing a letter and sending it by messenger to be read to the recipients. For example, Phoebe was the bearer of Paul's letter to Rome. Timothy was the bearer of Paul's letter to Thessalonica. Timothy knew Paul very well and so he represented all that Paul was.

In the 1st century, the reputations of both writer and bearer mattered. In the 1st century, honor, praise, and glory were most prized possessions. People who spoke publicly and were respected lived respectable lives. As a person's words were retold, people recalled that person's pattern of life.

Do you consider your pattern of life and its impact on others, particularly on your family? Do you connect someone's reputation to how they act?

Paul had high hopes for people at Thessalonica. Let's read it: 1 Thes. 2:17-3:10

Paul loved these people as a father. But just as a father worries about how his children will handle life's adversities, Paul was concerned for this church when persecution arose. He had enough experience that he knew trouble would come. How would they handle it? That was the concern.

When kids move away, don't you wonder how they will do? (Will they make their bed, wash their clothes, take a shower?? -- ☺ just kidding!) Seriously, will they study? Will they make the transition into the workplace?

Paul was on pins and needles about these new Christians just like a parent would be concerned about the child leaving the nest and entering the world to make their own way—*will they survive the persecution?* And Paul had high hopes that they would.

“You know trouble will come,” he said. “I prepared you.”

Here's what happened. Acts informs us that some of the Jews at the Thessalonica synagogue who did not embrace Paul's testimony got furious over the people who believed Paul and followed Jesus. They recruited some ruffians from the marketplace, created a mob, and set the city in an uproar. These people searched Jason's house for Paul and Silas because he had entertained them but they weren't there. The men dragged Jason before the city authorities, accusing him of being a traitor because he was harboring "these men who have turned the world upside down," who were ruining the beliefs of their city. Jason had to post bond while the officials investigated the charges. (See Acts 17:1-10)

So would the Thessalonian church keep the faith in face of such chaos? This had happened because they were Christians. But like a parent, Paul had high hopes for them.

Sometimes Christians wonder why God would let that happen. Here are Paul, Silas, and Timothy who were being a witness; giving of themselves; doing everything they could to live for God. They had suffered a lot for the Message, and now their new converts were suffering, too.

It hurts to see someone you love as if they were your own child be subject to such trouble. It is like when you have an enemy and the enemy knows the best way to hurt you is to go for your kid. Paul wanted to go to them but though he made plans, the plans did not work out. (I suspect that his safety was at risk.)

Would the folks at Thessalonica be able to handle it, especially if Paul was unable to be there? Would they stand strong? Or, would they say, "We didn't know this new Christ-following way was going to be so dangerous," and then fall away.

How do we live when our beliefs are contested? What do you do? Do you seek support? Do you continue to go to church? Do you talk to a fellow Christian? Do you pray?
To stand strong under pressure you need all these things. These are the best things you can do.

God has known for a long time that in this world there is opposition to God. There is a difference between those who seek God and those who resist God. That difference has shown up since the earliest pages of the Bible. But God wants us to realize we were created for more than what we can see and feel. We were created for a spiritual realm. In order to help us see it, God tests us.

God tested the children of Israel in the desert to see what was in their hearts—

- Would they have faith?
- Would they trust God and obey?
- Would they keep moving forward, even though it was taking much longer than planned?
- Would they learn to live in that spiritual reality?

We are tested to help us be strong under pressure. (Show pictures)

Testing is a good thing—though not pleasant at the time. However, Paul says in 1st Corinthians, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (10:13).

Think of a circumstance, trial, or temptation that has helped build your faith.

When I went to California for seminary, it was a significant financial commitment. I came home for a break in June. My husband took me to lunch and we were sitting outside on a lovely patio enjoying our meal. He quietly told me he had lost his job; the company was folding. Wow, it hit hard. We had two kids in college—and then my seminary bills. My children needed to complete their education much more than I needed to further mine.

Should I quit? Come home and get a job?

We pondered what to do. And we decided to take a risk to trust God. It was scary, but it felt really good.

As I went back to school, I thought, this is where the rubber meets the road. I had prayed. He had prayed. We felt called to do this. So we did. It cost us.

But there were other times earlier in life when we had both experienced similar trials. For me it was being a single parent and making ends meet by trusting the Lord; being a part of a small group in my church in Oak Cliff, continuing to learn about living by faith. For Dean, it was closing down his business during a recession where many people owed him lots of money. He decided not to go bankrupt but to ask the Lord to help him pay back the people who loaned him the startup money, which he eventually did. He prayed and the Lord helped him.

For both of us, we learned that there was more in life than just “bread” – money. We learned the power of prayer, the power of God to see us through, and the great value of having a church home of Christians who cared and helped.

We were like the children of God in the desert who had to rely on God each and every day. They found that they were fed, and they had shoes on their feet and clothes on their backs, and so did we. We learned to trust God for the things we could not see. We learned to live in and for that spiritual reality.

And God came through. Unexpected gifts from Hackberry Creek Church paid part of my tuition. Then, Dean got a job that provided enough to replenish our savings.

The Thessalonians learned that the spiritual realm was indeed a reality they could lean on even when people tried to shut them down. Paul learned to trust God’s timing and look for alternatives, like sending Timothy instead. They learned that God does not give you more than you to bear but shows a way through when you live by faith, hope, and love.

Eventually the faith of all of those Christians—Paul, Silas, Timothy, and the Thessalonian church did turn the world upside down and hundreds of thousands of people became believers because they stood strong under pressure.

Your authentic faith in times of trouble can change everyone around you. It may not change them immediately, but your willingness to stand for and trust Jesus will see you through is a witness much more so than your words alone.

Are you facing adversity? Are things not working out quite to your own plans? Trust God. God has a reason. And Jesus will make you stand in His time.

AMEN