

>> MY NAME IS CLIFF GOODWIN, AND I WELCOME YOU HERE TODAY FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL. THE HONOR AND PRIVILEGE IS MINE TO BE ABLE TO SIT DOWN WITH THE WORD OF GOD OPENED BEFORE ME AND TO HAVE YOU TUNED IN FOR THIS TIME OF BIBLE STUDY TOGETHER. I INVITE YOU TO TAKE YOUR BIBLE DOWN AT HOME AS WELL SO THAT WE MIGHT OPEN THE RICHES OF GOD'S WORD AND APPLY THESE TEACHINGS TO OUR LIVES. THE WORD OF GOD IS TRULY THE NOURISHMENT OF THE SOUL. YOU MIGHT REMEMBER THAT JESUS SAID IN MATTHEW 4:4, MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT BY EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDETH OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD. AND SO TRULY, THE BLESSING AND THE PRIVILEGE IS OURS TO HAVE THE BIBLE. NOW, THAT BEING SAID, I'VE ENTITLED OUR STUDY FOR TODAY SIMPLY, GOD STRENGTHENS HIS CHILDREN. GOD STRENGTHENS HIS CHILDREN. THIS WILL BE SOMEWHAT OF A TEXTUAL STUDY COMING OUT OF 1ST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 3, BASICALLY INVOLVING VERSES 1 THROUGH 5. AND SO YOU MIGHT OPEN YOUR BIBLE THERE AT HOME, 1ST THESSALONIANS 3, BEGINNING AT VERSE 1. THE THESSALONIANS WERE A GROUP OF CHRISTIANS THAT WERE BASICALLY BORN IN ADVERSITY. AND OF COURSE I'M REFERRING TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN ANCIENT THESSALONICA. WE HAVE A BIBLICAL RECORD OF THIS AS FOUND IN ACTS CHAPTER 17. AND IF YOU WERE TO PERUSE THE FIRST TEN OR SO VERSES OF THAT CHAPTER, WELL, THEN YOU WOULD BE IMPRESSED WITH THE FACT THAT BASICALLY FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH IN THAT CITY, THERE WAS PERSECUTION, THERE WAS ANTAGONISM AND ADVERSITY. AND SO IN A VERY REAL WAY, THE CHURCH WAS BORN THERE OUT OF ADVERSITY. AND SO THIS PROVED TO BE A GREAT TRIAL FOR THE CHILDREN OF GOD IN ANCIENT THESSALONICA, AND YET IT WOULD APPEAR AT LEAST FOR A WHILE THAT THE BRETHREN RESPONDED THERE QUITE WELL. AND SO THERE ARE MANY THINGS IN THIS EXAMPLE, THE EXAMPLE OF THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH, FROM WHICH YOU AND I CAN DRAW LESSONS, EXAMPLES FOR US ALONG THE LINES, OF COURSE, OF THE FACT THAT GOD STRENGTHENS HIS CHILDREN. HE WAS ABLE TO STRENGTHEN THE THESSALONIAN BRETHREN, AND STILL TODAY HE WILL STRENGTHEN HIS CHILDREN AS WELL. NOW LET'S CONSIDER THE FIRST OF THREE OR FOUR POINTS TOGETHER. NUMBER ONE, WE NEED TO REALIZE THAT AS GOD STRENGTHENS HIS CHILDREN, GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL. GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL TO THIS STRENGTHENING PROCESS. I THOUGHT ABOUT OTHER WAYS I MIGHT WORD THIS FIRST POINT. I COULD HAVE SAID GOD'S WORD IS KEY. I COULD HAVE SAID GOD'S WORD IS ESSENTIAL. BOTH OF THOSE STATEMENTS WOULD HAVE BEEN TRUE. I'VE CHOSEN TO GO AHEAD AND USE GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL. IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS AT THE VERY HEART, YOU MIGHT SAY, OF GOD'S STRENGTHENING HIS CHILDREN, HIS PEOPLE. LET'S LOOK AT 1ST THESSALONIANS 3:2. WE'LL BEGIN WITH THE SECOND VERSE OF THE CHAPTER. AND SENT TIMOTHEUS, OUR BROTHER AND MINISTER OF GOD, AND OUR FELLOW LABORER IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, TO ESTABLISH YOU AND TO COMFORT YOU CONCERNING YOUR FAITH. PAUL OF COURSE WAS IN ATHENS LATER ON AFTER HE HAD LEFT THESSALONICA, AFTER HE HAD LEFT BEREIA. BUT EVEN WHILE HE WAS IN ATHENS, HE SENT TIMOTHEUS BACK TO THE THESSALONIANS TO COMFORT THEM CONCERNING THEIR FAITH. WHAT GOOD WOULD TIMOTHEUS OR TIMOTHY, IF YOU WILL, WHAT GOOD WOULD HE HAVE BEEN TO THIS IMPORTANT PROCESS? AND THE KEY STATEMENT WE NOTICED THERE IN VERSE 2 IS THAT TIMOTHY WAS A FELLOW LABORER IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. TIMOTHY WAS A GOSPEL PREACHER, A GOSPEL TEACHER, IF YOU WILL. AND SO AS HE WENT BACK TO THE THESSALONIANS AND AS HE LABORED WITH THEM, HE WOULD HAVE DONE SO IN WORD AND DOCTRINE, TEACHING THE GOSPEL PRINCIPLES TO THOSE BRETHREN AFRESH. AND YOU KNOW, NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU AND I HAVE BEEN CHILDREN OF GOD, WE STILL NEED CONTINUED BIBLE TEACHING. AND TIMOTHY WOULD HAVE PROVIDED THAT FOR THE THESSALONIANS. NOW STAY IN

1ST THESSALONIANS 3 AND MOVE DOWN WITH ME TO VERSE 5. FOR THIS CAUSE, WHEN I COULD NO LONGER FORBEAR, PAUL SAID, I SENT TO KNOW YOUR FAITH, I SENT TIMOTHY TO KNOW YOUR FAITH, LEST BY SOME MEANS THE TEMPTER HATH TEMPTED YOU, AND OUR LABOR BE IN VAIN. THERE PAUL AGAIN MENTIONS, I SENT TIMOTHY; BUT THIS TIME HE SAID, I WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAITH, OR I WANTED TO KNOW YOUR FAITH. YOU AND I, WE'RE MINDFUL OF THE FACT FROM ROMANS 10:17 THAT FAITH COMES BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD. AND SO THE REASON THE THESSALONIANS HAD FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST TO BEGIN WITH, THE VERY FACT THAT THEY WERE CHRISTIANS RESTED ON THE REALITY THAT THEY HAD HEARD THE WORD OF GOD. THEY HAD BEEN TAUGHT THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AND HAD RESPONDED THERETO IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE. AND SO AS TIMOTHY WAS SENT BACK TO WORK WITH THOSE BRETHREN AND TO COMFORT THOSE BRETHREN EVEN AMID THEIR TRIALS AND THEIR PERSECUTIONS, NO DOUBT HE LABORED IN THE GOSPEL. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN THE PREACHING AND THE TEACHING FURTHER OF THE WORD OF GOD. LET'S PAUSE AND MAKE APPLICATION TO OUR LIVES AND OUR CHRISTIAN SITUATION TODAY. FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE MODERN-DAY CHRISTIANS, MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST, WHAT WE NEED TO REALIZE IS THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS STILL CENTRAL TO OUR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH. HOW OFTEN WE MIGHT PRAY TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER THAT HE WOULD STRENGTHEN US, THAT HE WOULD GIVE US STRENGTH AND EMBOLDEN US AND HELP US TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT. AND THOSE ARE NOBLE PRAYERS, TO BE SURE; BUT WHAT WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT SO OFTEN THE WAY THAT GOD DOES THIS IS THROUGH THE POWER OF HIS WORD. AND SO IT WOULD BE RATHER FOOLISH, TO PUT IT VERY BLUNTLY, IT WOULD BE FOOLISH FOR US TO PRAY TO GOD, ASKING HIM TO STRENGTHEN US, AND THEN NOT TO COUPLE SUCH PRAYERS WITH ARDENT, FERVENT BIBLE STUDY. EVERY ONE OF US, AS NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANS, WE MUST BE BIBLE STUDENTS. THAT'S SIMPLY PUT. AND I WANT US TO LOOK AT ANOTHER SCRIPTURE OR TWO THAT UNDERGIRDS THIS POINT. LET'S NOTICE NOW ACTS 20:32. THE BIBLE SAYS THERE, AND NOW BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED. PAUL IS SPEAKING TO THE ELDERS IN THE EPHESUS CHURCH OF CHRIST PROBABLY FOR THE LAST TIME HERE UPON THIS EARTH, AND HE SAYS I'M COMMENDING YOU, I'M ENTRUSTING YOU, IN A SENSE, TO THE WORD OF GOD. PAUL SAYS I MIGHT NOT SEE YOU FACE TO FACE ANYMORE, BUT THE WORD OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR STRENGTH. I'M COMMENDING YOU TO THE WORD OF GOD. IT IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED. NO DOUBT THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD WAS SOMETHING THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL KNEW WELL, AND IT WAS SOMETHING IN WHICH THE APOSTLE PAUL HAD GREAT CONFIDENCE AND GREAT FAITH. ONE MORE PASSAGE IS FOUND IN 1ST TIMOTHY 4:16. TIMOTHY WAS THE ONE THAT PAUL COMMISSIONED, YOU MIGHT SAY, SENDING HIM BACK TO THE THESSALONIANS TO COMFORT THEM CONCERNING THEIR FAITH. WELL, PAUL WROTE THIS TO TIMOTHY IN AN EPISTLE PERHAPS LATER ON, NO DOUBT PROBABLY A FEW YEARS LATER. HE SAID IN THERE IN 1ST TIMOTHY 4:16, TAKE HEED UNTO THYSELF AND UNTO THE DOCTRINE. CONTINUE IN THEM, FOR IN DOING THIS, THOU SHALT SAVE THYSELF AND THEM THAT HEAR THEE. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE WORD OF GOD? WELL, VERY IMPORTANT. SO MUCH THAT WE AS GOSPEL MINISTERS, AS PREACHERS AND TEACHERS OF THE WORD OF GOD, WE'VE GOT TO GIVE CAREFUL HEED TO WHAT WE TEACH. WE HAVE TO GIVE CAREFUL HEED TO THE DOCTRINE THAT WE ESPOUSE AND THAT WE PROPAGATE AMONG OTHERS. BECAUSE IF IT'S NOT TRUE DOCTRINE, IF IT'S NOT SOUND DOCTRINE, WELL, THEN IT'S REALLY NOT FAITH-BUILDING TEACHING AS WELL. PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE, QUOTE, FAITH, BUT

THEY DON'T HAVE BIBLICAL FAITH IF IT'S NOT ROOTED IN THE BIBLE. THINK ABOUT HOW SIMPLE THAT IS AND YET AT THE SAME TIME, HOW SERIOUS AND HOW PROFOUND. AND SO YES, DOES GOD STRENGTHEN HIS CHILDREN TODAY AS HE STRENGTHENED THE THESSALONIANS OF THE FIRST CENTURY? THE ANSWER IS YES. AND POINT NUMBER ONE, GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL TO THAT STRENGTHENING PROCESS. BUT NOW POINT NUMBER TWO, SOMETHING ELSE I'D LIKE FOR US TO CONSIDER FROM THE EXAMPLE OF THE THESSALONIANS. AND THAT IS THAT GOD CAN USE SUFFERINGS AS WELL. GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL ALL THROUGH THIS PROCESS, NO DOUBT; BUT SOMETHING WE MIGHT NOT LIKE TO ADMIT OR LIKE TO REALIZE IS THAT GOD CAN USE SUFFERINGS IN YOUR LIVES AND IN MINE TO MAKE US STRONGER PEOPLE, TO MAKE US BETTER CHILDREN OR BETTER SERVANTS IN HIS KINGDOM. GOING BACK TO OUR TEXT IN 1ST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 3, LET'S READ VERSES 3 AND 4 TOGETHER. VERSE 3 SAYS, THAT NO MAN SHOULD BE MOVED BY THESE AFFLICTIONS; FOR YOURSELVES KNOW THAT WE ARE APPOINTED THEREUNTO. FOR VERILY, WHEN WE WERE WITH YOU, WE TOLD YOU BEFORE THAT WE SHOULD SUFFER TRIBULATION EVEN AS IT CAME TO PASS, AND YE KNOW. ONE THING IS FOR SURE: AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE APPOINTED TO SUFFER FOR THE CAUSE. PAUL WOULD TELL TIMOTHY YEARS LATER IN 2ND TIMOTHY 3:12, YEA, AND ALL THAT WILL LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS SHALL SUFFER PERSECUTION. THAT'S A SPIRITUAL REALITY IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S CHILDREN. WE ARE APPOINTED TO SUFFERING. NOW, YOU COULD DO ENTIRE STUDIES ON THAT VERY TOPIC, AND OF COURSE THAT'S BEYOND OUR PURVIEW OR OUR SCOPE PRESENTLY, BUT LET ME JUST SUPPLY THIS. REMEMBER IN EPHESIANS CHAPTER 5 THAT WE AS CHRISTIANS ARE CHARACTERIZED, WE ARE DESCRIBED AS BEING CHILDREN OF LIGHT. AND IT'S RATHER SIMPLE FOR US TO THINK OF IT IN THIS WAY. LIGHT IS HATED BY THE DARKNESS, IF YOU WILL. AND OF COURSE, I'M TALKING ABOUT MORAL LIGHT, MORAL DARKNESS, SPIRITUAL LIGHT AND DARKNESS. AND IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM, THE DARKNESS HATES THE LIGHT. AND VARIOUS PASSAGES ARE BROUGHT OUT THROUGHOUT THE WORD OF GOD THAT SHOW US THE HOSTILITY AND THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL, BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS. AND SO THAT BEING AS IT IS, WE ARE TOLD IN SCRIPTURE, AND WE SHOULD READILY ACCEPT THE FACT THAT IF WE CHOOSE LIGHT, IF WE CHOOSE TO BE CHILDREN OF GOD BY HIS GRACE, AND THAT'S THE BEST CHOICE WE WILL EVER MAKE, WELL, THEN WE NEED TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT TRIALS, SUFFERINGS, CRITICISMS, PERSECUTIONS, THESE THINGS WILL COME OUR WAY. AND PAUL HAD TOLD THE THESSALONIANS THAT, AS WE'VE READ NOW IN 1ST THESSALONIANS 3:3-4. AND YOU AND I TODAY AS MODERN-DAY NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANS, WE WOULD DO WELL TO REALIZE THAT AND TO ACCEPT THAT FACT. LET'S CONSIDER A BOOK THAT HAS MUCH TO SAY ABOUT SUFFERINGS AND EVEN SOMEWHAT TO SAY ABOUT HOW THOSE SUFFERINGS CAN BE USED BY GOD TO STRENGTHEN US IN THE LONG RUN AND TO MAKE US BETTER SERVANTS, MORE FAITHFUL CHILDREN. THAT BOOK, OF COURSE, IS THE BOOK OF 1ST PETER. SO LOOK WITH ME TO 1ST PETER CHAPTER 1 FIRST OF ALL, AND CONSIDER VERSES 6 AND 7. SO LET'S LOOK AT 1ST PETER 1:6-7. HERE THE WORD OF GOD READS, WHEREIN YE GREATLY REJOICE, THOUGH NOW FOR A SEASON IF NEED BE YE ARE IN HEAVINESS THROUGH MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS, VERSE 7, THAT THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH, BEING MUCH MORE PRECIOUS THAN OF GOLD THAT PERISHETH, THOUGH IT BE TRIED WITH FIRE, MIGHT BE FOUND UNTO PRAISE AND HONOR AND GLORY AT THE APPEARING OF JESUS CHRIST. NOW, THESE ARE TWO MOST INTERESTING VERSES THAT WE FIND IN 1ST PETER CHAPTER 1. FIRST OF ALL, NOTICE IN VERSE 6 THAT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS ALMOST AN OXYMORON IN A SENSE, ALMOST A PARADOX WOULD BE A BETTER WORD. YOU MIGHT BE THINKING, WELL, HOW IS IT SEEMINGLY A PARADOX? WELL, IN VERSE 6, HE MENTIONS THAT WE

ARE GREATLY REJOICING, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME HE MENTIONS THAT WE ARE IN HEAVINESS, GREAT GRIEF OR SORROW THROUGH MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS. THAT'S A VERY APT DESCRIPTION OR DEPICTION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. WE AS CHRISTIANS, WE REJOICE GREATLY IN OUR SAVIOR AND IN OUR SALVATION, IN OUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. WE REJOICE GREATLY. AND YET ALSO AT TIMES, AT LEAST, WE HAVE HEAVINESS, WE HAVE GRIEF AND SORROW. WHY? WELL, BECAUSE OF THE PERSECUTIONS, BECAUSE OF THE TRIALS THAT WE ARE CALLED UPON TO ENDURE. AND SO THAT'S A VERY FITTING DEPICTION OF CHRISTIANITY THERE IN VERSE 6. NOW, IN VERSE 7, PETER TELLS US THAT THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH CAN BE BENEFICIAL, IT CAN BE PRODUCTIVE. AND HE LIKENS IT TO THE GOLD ORE THAT IS PASSED THROUGH THE CRUCIBLE, IF YOU WILL. THAT GOLD ORE IS PUT INTO THE CRUCIBLE, IT IS EXPOSED TO FIRE AND IMMENSE HEAT. AND YOU KNOW WHAT THAT DOES TO THE GOLD ORE? IT BURNS AWAY THE DROSS, THE IMPURITIES, AND IT MAKES THE GOLD ORE REFINED. IT PRODUCES PURER GOLD. IT MAKES THE GOLD BETTER, IF YOU WILL. AND PETER'S POINT IN VERSE 7 IS THAT WHILE YOU AND I PASS THROUGH THE TRIALS WE HAVE IN THIS LIFE, WE CAN BE MADE BETTER. GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US, HEBREWS 13:5, HE WILL NEVER LEAVE NOR FORSAKE US, AND IF WE HOLD TIGHTLY TO HIS WORD, REMEMBER, HIS WORD IS CENTRAL THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS, HE WILL STRENGTHEN US, AND THOSE VERY TRIALS, THEY CAN MAKE US BETTER IN THE END INSTEAD OF MAKING US BITTER. AND THAT'S AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION. LET'S STAY IN THE BOOK OF 1ST PETER. THIS TIME MOVE TO THE FINAL CHAPTER, CHAPTER 5, AND NOTICE WITH ME WHAT PETER SAID NEAR THE END OF THIS BOOK STILL ABOUT THE IDEA OF SUFFERING TRIALS. VERSE 8, BE SOBER, BE VIGILANT, BECAUSE YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL AS A ROARING LION WALKETH ABOUT, SEEKING WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR. WHOM RESIST, PETER SAYS, RESIST STEADFAST IN THE FAITH, KNOWING THAT THE SAME AFFLICTIONS ARE ACCOMPLISHED IN YOUR BRETHREN THAT ARE IN THE WORLD. BUT THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, VERSE 10, WHO HATH CALLED US UNTO HIS ETERNAL GLORY BY CHRIST JESUS, AFTER THAT YE HAVE SUFFERED A WHILE, MAKE YOU PERFECT, STABLISH, STRENGTHEN, SETTLE YOU. DEAR FRIENDS, SO MANY THINGS MIGHT BE OBSERVED FROM JUST THESE THREE VERSES, 1ST PETER 5:8-10. FIRST OF ALL, WE NOTICE THE ADVERSARY, THE ARCH ENEMY WHO IS ABACK ALL SUCH PERSECUTIONS AND SUFFERINGS AND TRIALS. THAT IS THE DEVIL HIMSELF. BUT THEN WE ALSO NOTICE IN VERSE 9 THAT YOU AND I, WHEN WE SUFFER AS CHRISTIANS, WE'RE NOT THE LONE RANGER, SO TO SPEAK. WE'RE SUFFERING THE SAME AFFLICTIONS THAT THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND THROUGHOUT HISTORY, YOU MIGHT SAY, BASICALLY THE SAME GENERAL AFFLICTIONS ARE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD IN ALL OF OUR BRETHREN. WE'VE ALREADY NOTICED 2ND TIMOTHY 3:12, ALL THAT WILL LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS SHALL SUFFER PERSECUTION. AND SO YOU'RE NOT THE LONE RANGER. NEITHER AM I. WHEN WE SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE, MATTHEW 5:10, WE'RE SIMPLY DOING, WE'RE ENDURING WHAT ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE TO BEAR, WHAT ALL OF US WILL FACE, BECAUSE DARKNESS HATES THE LIGHT. BUT THEN EVEN MORE STRIKINGLY THERE IN VERSE 10 OF 1ST PETER 5, WE NOTICE THAT PETER SAYS AFTER A WHILE, AFTER YOU HAVE SUFFERED A WHILE, GOD WILL STABLISH, THAT'S A WORD THAT CAN BE TRANSLATED STRENGTHEN, GOD WILL STRENGTHEN AND SETTLE YOU, AGAIN POINTING OUT THE FACT THAT TRIALS CAN MAKE US BETTER IF IN FACT WE HOLD TO GOD AND HIS WORD THROUGHOUT. TRIALS CAN MAKE US BETTER. SO POINT NUMBER ONE, GOD'S WORD IS CENTRAL TO HIS STRENGTHENING OF HIS CHILDREN. POINT NUMBER TWO, GOD CAN AND DOES USE SUFFERINGS IN OUR LIVES TO STRENGTHEN US AND TO MAKE US BETTER AND STRONGER. NOW POINT NUMBER THREE. GOD USES HIS PEOPLE. AND THIS SHOULD BE OBVIOUS ENOUGH, BUT THE GREAT GOD OF HEAVEN, HOW MARVELOUS

FOR US TO CONSIDER THAT AS HE WORKS UPON THIS EARTH, OBVIOUSLY HE WORKS THROUGH HIS WORD; BUT WHAT DO YOU HAVE WHEN YOU TAKE THE POWER OF HIS WORD AND YOU PUT IT IN A PERSON? YOU HAVE HIS PEOPLE, YOU HAVE HIS CHILD, IF YOU WILL. AND GOD WORKS THROUGH HIS CHILDREN EVEN TO STRENGTHEN OTHERS OF HIS CHILDREN. WE SEE THIS IN 1ST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 3. LOOK BACK TO VERSES 1 AND 2 TOGETHER THIS TIME. VERSE 1, WHEREFORE, WHEN WE COULD NO LONGER FORBEAR, WE THOUGHT IT GOOD TO BE LEFT AT ATHENS ALONE, AND SENT TIMOTHEUS OUR BROTHER. PAUL DIDN'T JUST SAY MY BROTHER; HE SAID OUR BROTHER. HE WAS A BROTHER TO THE THESSALONIANS AS WELL. AND A MINISTER OF GOD, AND OUR FELLOW LABORER IN THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. WHY SEND TIMOTHY BACK, PAUL? TO ESTABLISH YOU AND TO COMFORT YOU CONCERNING YOUR FAITH. GOD USES HIS CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN OTHERS OF HIS CHILDREN. THAT'S NOT ONLY A BEAUTIFUL THOUGHT, A REASSURING THOUGHT, YES; BUT WHEN YOU AND I PONDER THAT AS CHRISTIANS, IT'S ALSO A CALL TO DUTY. GOD HAS WORK FOR YOU TO DO, GOD HAS WORK FOR ME TO DO. WHEN WE SEE A BROTHER OR SISTER STRUGGLING, WHEN WE SEE SOMEONE FACING DIFFICULT TRIALS, WHEN WE SEE SOMEONE FIGHTING WITH TEMPTATION, GOD CAN USE YOU, HE CAN USE ME TO BE AN AID, TO STRENGTHEN THAT BROTHER OR THAT SISTER AND TO KEEP OUR ARM AROUND THEM METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING, TO USHER THEM BACK INTO THE SAFETY OF THE FOLD, PERHAPS. WE NEED TO BE MINDFUL OF THAT AS GOD'S PEOPLE. HE'S LOOKING TO USE US AS HIS FAITHFUL CHILDREN SO THAT WE MIGHT BE A BENEFIT AND A BLESSING TO OTHERS. HOW NOBLE THAT IS, AND WHAT PURPOSE AND WHAT MEANING THAT GIVES US IN LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. LET'S CONSIDER WHAT JESUS TOLD PETER ON AN EARLIER OCCASION AS WE HAVE RECORD, OF COURSE, IN LUKE CHAPTER 22, NOTICE WITH ME BEGINNING AT VERSE 31. JESUS SAID, AND THE LORD SAID, SIMON, SIMON, BEHOLD, SATAN HATH DESIRED TO HAVE YOU, THAT HE MAY SIFT YOU AS WHEAT. BUT I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE, SIMON, PETER, THAT THY FAITH FAIL NOT; AND WHEN THOU ART CONVERTED, STRENGTHEN THY BRETHREN. NOW, FOLKS, IT CANNOT GET ANY CLEARER, I SUPPOSE, THAN THAT RIGHT THERE. JESUS WAS TALKING TO PETER, AND HE ESSENTIALLY TOLD PETER, PETER, YOU'RE GOING TO FALL, YOU'RE GOING TO STUMBLE; BUT I HAVE PRAYED FOR YOU, THAT THIS STUMBLING WOULD NOT PROVE TO BE YOUR ULTIMATE DEMISE. I'VE PRAYED THAT YOUR FAITH WOULD NOT UTTERLY AND COMPLETELY FAIL. AND WHEN YOU'RE CONVERTED, PETER, WHEN YOU ARE BROUGHT BACK TO A RIGHT STANDING AND A RIGHT PLACE WITH ME, PETER, I INTEND TO USE YOU FOR GOOD. I INTEND THAT YOU WILL BE USED TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BRETHREN. HOW IMPORTANT THAT IS. AND WHAT A WONDERFUL THING TO CONSIDER, THAT WE AS CHRISTIANS, WE HAVE WORK TO DO, WE HAVE PURPOSE, OUR LIVES HAVE MEANING, THAT GOD IS ABLE AND THAT GOD DESIRES TO USE US IN HIS SERVICE. HOW WONDERFUL THAT IS. GOD USES HIS CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN EACH OTHER. ONE MORE TEXT ALONG THESE LINES, IT'S FOUND IN HEBREWS CHAPTER 10. NOTICE VERSE 24, AND LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE, THE WORD PROVOKE THEIR MEANS TO STIR UP, IN A GOOD WAY HERE, TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS, NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS, BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER, AND SO MUCH THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY APPROACHING. FRIENDS, THIS PASSAGE NOT ONLY SHOWS US THAT WE CAN STIR UP, WE CAN PROVOKE AND STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS, BUT THIS ALSO SHOWS US THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WEEKLY ASSEMBLIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE. ONE OF THE CRUCIAL OPPORTUNITIES WHEREIN YOU AND I MIGHT STIR UP AND STRENGTHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS BY BEING WITH THEM IN THE WEEKLY ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH. AND THEREFORE, WE ARE TOLD NOT TO FORSAKE, NOT TO FORSAKE THE ASSEMBLIES. NO, NOT EVEN IN THIS

POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, DO NOT FORSAKE THE ASSEMBLIES. HOW IMPORTANT THAT IS. NOW, A FINAL POINT TODAY BEFORE OUR TIME EXPIRES. GOD STRENGTHENING HIS CHILDREN. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. HIS WORD IS CENTRAL. GOD CAN USE SUFFERINGS TO MAKE US BETTER. GOD USES HIS CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER. BUT AS WE CLOSE, LET'S BE REMINDED THAT EVEN THOUGH GOD CAN AND WILL STRENGTHEN HIS CHILDREN, NUMBER FOUR, GOD EXPECTS MAN TO DO HIS PART. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING WHEREIN YOU AND I SIT BACK, AND WE'RE LIKE, WELL, GOD, STRENGTHEN ME. I'M WAITING. NO. NOTICE IN 1ST THESSALONIANS 3:2 AGAIN, AT THE END OF THAT VERSE, PAUL SAYS OF TIMOTHY, TO ESTABLISH YOU AND TO COMFORT YOU, NOTICE, CONCERNING YOUR FAITH. YOUR FAITH. AND THEN AGAIN IN VERSE 5 OF 1ST THESSALONIANS 3, FOR THIS CAUSE, WHEN I COULD NO LONGER FORBEAR, I SENT TO KNOW YOUR FAITH, LEST BY SOME MEANS THE TEMPTER HATH TEMPTED YOU, AND OUR LABOR BE IN VAIN. OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES, OUR CHRISTIANITY IS STILL PERSONAL. IT'S YOUR FAITH; IT'S MY FAITH. AND SO WE HAVE TO MIND AND BE DILIGENT ABOUT OUR OWN SPIRITUALITY, ABOUT OUR OWN GROWTH, ABOUT OUR OWN CHRISTIAN WALK. WILL GOD HELP US? YES. WILL HE STRENGTHEN US? ABSOLUTELY. BUT HE WILL NOT DO WHAT WE CAN AND SHOULD DO FOR OURSELVES. I WANT TO THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR BEING WITH ME TODAY AND FOR CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT GOD STRENGTHENS HIS CHILDREN.

>> (SINGING)