

STEADFAST CHRISTIANITY

A STUDY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

STUDY FIVE

Light for Dark Days

2 Thessalonians 2:13–17

My message can be stated in one simple sentence: Be sure you listen to God in the days of your pain.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

CONGENITAL *Insensitivity to Pain* (CIP) is a rare genetic disorder affecting the human nervous system. The disorder prevents people from feeling pain. At first blush, the inability to experience pain may seem like a blessing. Tragically, however, people with this disorder have a very short life-expectancy. They endure gashes, burns, and broken bones—without a hint of pain. A broken bone may puncture the skin before awareness of the fracture. Decay will rot a tooth without an ache. An appendix will rupture, spilling toxins throughout the body without the telltale abdominal pain.

So, pain has a purpose. It may be God’s warning light that something is *wrong* and needs attention, like a dashboard light that alerts you to an overheating engine. Or pain may be a sign of something going *right*. A woman’s labor pains signal a coming birth, and oh the joy the mother feels after her baby is born!

The Thessalonian believers had just taken their first steps in faith when persecution knocked them to the ground. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord, instead of Caesar, was considered treason, and refusing to worship local deities risked angering the Roman false gods, so the idolaters believed. It’s possible that the Thessalonians’ own family members and friends had turned against them. Some in the church may even have been martyred for their faith. They were living through extremely difficult times.

But their pain wasn’t a sign of something wrong. Rather, it was a sign that they were true followers of Christ, and God was birthing something good in them and through them.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians that their pain was a sign they were on the right path. He inspired them with a prayer that models four ways to encourage those who are suffering—reminding them that in their dark times, Christ’s overcoming light of love shines all the brighter.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. (1 Peter 5:10 NLT)

As you open God's Word, express to God your gratitude for His faithful presence with you in the darkness. Record your prayer below.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul had instructed the Thessalonians in his first letter about the rapture—the coming of the Lord Jesus to gather believers to Himself. When the gales of persecution and blows of affliction assailed them, however, the church feared that the quaking of God's judgment had begun. They agonized over whether they had missed the rapture.

In our previous passage, 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, Paul assured them that their persecution wasn't God's judgment. He explained the signs of the day of the Lord—the removal of the restraining influence, the great rebellion, the appearing of the Antichrist who will delude the world with satanic power, and the final destruction when Christ returns in power.

Paul concluded chapter 2 in prayer—just as he concluded chapter 1. Let's join Paul on his knees and hear how he encouraged the hurting yet faithful believers in Thessalonica.



Observation: Encouraging the Suffering

Observation often reveals the outline of a text.¹ Take your time observing Paul's prayer, looking for his flow of thought as he moves from point to point. Finding the main verbs helps reveal the structure of the paragraph. Paul was a linear thinker, so his points often build on each other. Read [2 Thessalonians 2:13–17](#), observing Paul's logical progression.

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Show Compassion—2 Thessalonians 2:13

To help those hurting, we must first “enter into” their pain. Paul showed compassion in 2 Thessalonians 2:13a by upholding the Thessalonian believers’ *dignity* and affirming their *security*. Which phrase in the verse displays each quality in Paul’s compassionate response?

Offer Instruction—2 Thessalonians 2:13–14

Suffering debilitates and disorients us. To reassure and reorient his readers, Paul stabilized them with two weighty points of doctrine. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13b–14, he framed his theology around two verbs—*chose* and *called*. Why did God choose them? Why did God call them? What time span did Paul imply in these two verses?

There is absolutely nothing that will stabilize us in a time of suffering like biblical truth—nothing. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Bring Exhortation—2 Thessalonians 2:15

While compassion comforts the *heart* and instruction addresses the *mind*, exhortation speaks to the *will*. In a biblical context, to *exhort* means to urge, encourage, or advise. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, what was Paul’s twofold urging? How do those commands relate to one another? What were the Thessalonians to hold on to? Why do you think Paul needed to exhort the believers?

Perhaps you don’t need compassion as much as you need exhortation. You may be teetering on a tightrope about to fall, and you need to be told, “Stand firm. Hold fast. Don’t give up.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Conclude with Intercession—2 Thessalonians 2:16–17

Paul closed by praying on behalf of these suffering believers. Reading like a benediction, how did Paul's prayer reassure them? For what two things did he pray?

Notice, Paul didn't pray for God to take the believers out of their trials. Rather, he asked God to comfort and strengthen them *through* their trials. How does Paul's prayer reflect a mature mind-set and an eternal perspective?

There's a lot of theology here. The one thing needed to stabilize the suffering believer is a sound dose of carefully presented theology.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: God's Purpose in Our Suffering

In God's curriculum, suffering is a lifelong course we can't skip, drop, or audit. We must see the course through to its end, and then we will receive full credit on our final transcript—"an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17 NASB). Just as professors embed course objectives in a syllabus, God also embeds "suffering objectives" in His divine syllabus: Scripture.

Paul's prayer gave the Thessalonians the tools they would need to graduate. Why was it vital for them to know they were "beloved by the Lord" and "chosen . . . from the beginning" (2 Thessalonians 2:13 NASB)?

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How do you interpret Paul's instruction that their salvation "came through the Spirit" (2 Thessalonians 2:13)? And how does the Spirit sanctify them, or make them holy through their "belief in the truth" (2:13)?

What does it mean for us to "share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:14)? How does this hope encourage sufferers?

What do the "traditions which you were taught" refer to (2:15 NASB)?

Paul concluded his prayer with key themes in 2 Thessalonians 2:16: "our Father, who has loved us," "grace," "eternal comfort," and "a wonderful hope." How have these themes—the Father's love, grace, eternal comfort, hope—stabilized you and helped your faith grow through recent trials?

I have never ever met a Christian whom I admired—whose life was deeply used by Christ—who was a stranger to suffering. Never. I don't think I ever will. Listen when God speaks in your pain. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Correlation: Suffering Woven Through Scripture

Suffering is a common scriptural theme. We might say it's Christ's *pledge* to us. According to [John 16:33](#) and [Philippians 1:29](#), we will suffer in our journey from earth to heaven. What insight does each verse offer?

While we suffer, we find refuge under God's hand of *protection*. God usually doesn't take us around suffering; rather, He takes us through it. What priceless truths in [Isaiah 43:1–2](#) stabilize you?

Suffering comes with a *promise*. According to [2 Thessalonians 1:4–8](#), what high calling does our suffering point to? What does [Romans 8:31–34, 38–39](#) guarantee about our heavenly standing and eternal security?

Finally, we can count on *practical* benefits from suffering. What benefits from his hardships did Paul outline in [2 Corinthians 1:3–5, 8–11](#)?

Not only are we exhorted in Scripture to believe in Jesus Christ, but we have been granted the assignment of suffering for His namesake. If you're suffering, you're right on target, you are right on course. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Benefits from Suffering

In God's sovereign plan, suffering is purposeful. Pastor Chuck offers five ways that God uses pain for His purposes.

1. *God uses pain to **develop our faith**.* “When your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow” (James 1:3).
2. *God **exposes error** through pain.* Just as impurities float to the surface in a crucible, suffering makes us aware of false teaching we need to correct or negative traits that need addressing.
3. *God can use suffering to help us **learn obedience**.* Even Jesus “learned obedience from the things he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).
4. *God can use pain to **cultivate humility**.* “To keep me from becoming proud,” Paul wrote, “I was given a thorn in my flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7).
5. *Our suffering can **bring glory to God**.* “If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:16 NASB).

Which of these ways has God used suffering in your life? As difficult as pain is to endure, what growth has it produced in you? How have you sensed God's presence through it?

Paul's prayer highlighted four elements of encouragement: compassion, instruction, exhortation, and intercession. Have you experienced these forms of encouragement from others? What uplifted you the most during your dark days?

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How might you encourage someone using Paul's prayer as a model? In what ways can you comfort another person who's experiencing a hardship similar to one you've endured?

Christ is the lighthouse that leads you through your soul's dark night into God's harbor of peace. Follow His light and draw hope from His presence. He will never leave you to suffer alone. He is always with you and will guide you through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Thank You, Father, for inviting me to come to You. Thank You for being open to me in my deepest needs. Thank You for men and women who have ministered to me in my heartache and brokenness, when I have needed Your help and they have shown compassion. They have instructed and even exhorted and often interceded for me. May I do that for those today who are hurting, and I ask You to be their comfort and their shield and their guide through the stormy and difficult waters of their present suffering. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1986, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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