

Living Victoriously in Difficult Times



Kay Arthur, Bob & Diane Vereen

4minute
BIBLE STUDIES

Living Victoriously in Difficult Times

Kay Arthur, Bob & Diane Vereen

PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

LIVING VICTORIOUSLY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB). © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org).

Italics in Scripture quotations reflect the author's added emphasis.

ISBN 978-0-307-45767-7

Copyright © 2004 by Precept Ministries International

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

WATERBROOK and its deer colophon are registered trademarks of Random House Inc.

Printed in the United States of America

2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

SPECIAL SALES

Most WaterBrook Multnomah books are available at special quantity discounts when purchased in bulk by corporations, organizations, and special-interest groups. Custom imprinting or excerpting can also be done to fit special needs. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@WaterBrookMultnomah.com or call 1-800-603-7051.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mother's group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the group with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone “wanting more” than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

LIVING VICTORIOUSLY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Have you ever felt overwhelmed by your circumstances, believing no one else has ever suffered in the same way? Did it seem as if no one could possibly understand your pain?

Do you wonder why life so often seems unfair? Some people seem to get everything they want and never have any real problems, while others seem to struggle all of their lives, facing one challenge after another. Some seem to get away with inflicting pain on the innocent, without experiencing any punishment in return. Has God turned His back on His children who are suffering, or is there purpose in the pain? How can we face the injustices and suffering of this world while clinging to faith in an all-powerful God?

These questions and more will be addressed in our six-week inductive study, as we gain a biblical understanding of God's perspective of our struggles. You will discover how to respond when you find yourself in the midst of difficult challenges—and you'll find hope for enduring faithfully to the end.

WEEK ONE

Once we entrust our lives to God, are we exempt from the pain and difficulties of life? Does our relationship with Him provide protection against suffering? We will begin this week's study by looking at a group of people whose circumstances shed light on these questions.

OBSERVE

The passage we'll be reading was written by the apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica.

Leader: Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5.

- Have the group circle each **you** and **your** that refers to the recipients of this letter.

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say those key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure to mark every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking references to the recipients of Paul's letter? How would you characterize their relationship with God? What was happening to them?

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5

³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

⁵ This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

- How were they responding to their circumstances?

INSIGHT

The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. The Greek word translated as *perseverance* in 2 Thessalonians 1:4 is *hupomone*, which means "patience or endurance in difficult circumstances." This word indicates the Thessalonians were not surrendering to their circumstances nor were they running away to get out of the situation.

The Greek word translated as *faith* in verse 4 means "to believe, to be fully persuaded." In this context it shows that their faith and trust was in God, who enabled them to accept their circumstances and cope with these trials.

Also in verse 4, the Greek word translated as *endure* is *anecho*, which means "to patiently wait." God gives the believer inner strength to enable him to be steadfast, to patiently wait in the midst of difficult circumstances.

- What additional insights did you gain from the definitions of these words regarding the response of the Thessalonians to their circumstances?
- According to these definitions, what enabled the Thessalonian believers to cope with their situation?
- How does your standard response in difficult situations compare with that of the Thessalonians? If Paul were describing your faith, in what ways would his description differ from or be similar to this passage in 2 Thessalonians?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:4-8.

- Have the group mark every reference to **persecutions, afflictions** (*afflict, afflicted*), and **suffering**, like this:

MMV

2 THESSALONIANS 1:4-8

⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

⁵ This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

⁸ dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

INSIGHT

The Greek word for *persecutions* is *diogomos*, which means "hostile persecutions." It involves being pursued by enemies.

Afflictions is translated from the Greek word *thlipsis*, which means "to crush or to squeeze." It refers almost invariably to something that comes upon one from outward circumstances.

The Greek word translated here as *suffering* is *pascho*, which means "to be acted upon or to be affected by some outward circumstances."

Afflict and afflicted are translated from the Greek word *thilbo*, which means "to press or to be troubled." It indicates sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances or antagonism from others. To be afflicted is to be oppressed with evil.

DISCUSS

- Look back to where you marked each of the key words in the text and discuss what these definitions reveal about the pressures the Thessalonians were enduring.
- What truths did you learn from the circumstances and the example of the Thessalonians that you can apply to your life?

OBSERVE

Let's look at some other verses where Paul wrote about suffering in the life of a believer.

Leader: *Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 2:1,2,14; and 3:4. Have the group do the following:*

- Circle the pronouns **you** and **your**, which refer to believers in the Thessalonian church: ○
- Draw a box around the pronouns **we**, **us**, and **our**, which refer to Paul and those who were with him.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-7

⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1-2,14

¹ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain,

² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.

¹⁴ For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews....

1 THESSALONIANS 3:4

For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

Leader: *Read aloud these same verses once more.*

- *This time have the group mark every reference to **tribulation, suffered, mistreated, and affliction:** **WV***

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from making the references to the Thessalonian believers and Paul?
- Based on what you have seen to be true of their circumstances, what do you think the Thessalonians were examples of (1 Thessalonians 1:7)?
- How does this relate to what you learned in 2 Thessalonians 1?
- Based on what you've learned, how would you describe the believer's relationship with suffering?
- How does this relate to your life?

OBSERVE

Let's look at some other passages in which Paul spoke to believers about persecution and suffering.

Leader: *Read aloud Philippians 1:29-30 and 2 Timothy 3:12.*

- Circle all references to **the believer**, including pronouns.
- Mark **sufferings** and **persecution**, as before: *WV*

INSIGHT

The word *granted* in Philippians 1:29 is translated from the Greek word *charizomai*, which means “to grant as a favor or to show kindness.” It is the verb form of the noun for grace. Suffering is a privilege God gives to the believer, a form of grace that shows His favor toward us.

PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30

²⁹ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:6-10

⁶ For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

⁷ and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

DISCUSS


- According to these verses, and the definition of the word *granted*, what conclusions can you draw regarding suffering and the believer?
- How does this relate to your present circumstances or to what you can expect as a believer?

OBSERVE

Let's return to 2 Thessalonians 1, where we began this week's study, and see what Paul told the Thessalonians about those who afflicted them.

Leader: *Read aloud 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.*

Have the group...

- draw a box around each phrase with the words **those** or **these**, which refer to people who afflict believers:
- mark every reference to **time** with a clock: 

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about those who afflict believers? What will happen to them and when will it happen?
- According to this passage, when will the believer be relieved from affliction?
- How do the truths you have just learned affect you?
- In the light of all you have studied this week, what have you learned about the role of suffering in the life of a believer? How will this impact your response to difficult circumstances?

8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

WRAP IT UP

We often hear conflicting messages about suffering. Some of the popular teachings of the day indicate that once you have become a believer, your problems are resolved. Some preachers tell us that God intends for all His children to be wealthy and healthy. They claim that success, prosperity, and trouble-free living are yours for the taking—if you have enough faith or if you confess God’s promises.

Is this teaching consistent with the Word of God? Is it consistent with what you have learned this week?

Like thousands of believers before us, we are living in difficult times. Christians all around us are under attack. When we stand up for God’s truth, we find ourselves trampled by others marching under the banner of “tolerance.” And we find that we’re not immune to the pressures, suffering, and pain of daily life that threaten to crush us.

How will you respond to suffering? Will you spend your time complaining or perhaps even hide your faith? Will you try to escape persecution, or will you follow the example of the Thessalonians and persevere?