

## PERSEVERING FAITH

2 Timothy 4:9-10 NKJV

<sup>9</sup> Be diligent to come to me quickly;

<sup>10</sup> for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica-Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

- *In Apostle Paul's epistle written to Timothy as he awaited execution in a Roman prison he made a startling statement—"for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica."*
- *To recognize the full impact of this statement one must consider that Demas had been Paul's faithful and close traveling companion for a number of years. In two of Paul's other epistles, Demas is mentioned and even named among Paul's "fellow laborers," signifying the close relationship Demas once had with Paul.*

"Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you." (Colossians 4:14).

"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers." (Philemon 1:23-24).

- *In spite of Demas' unfaithfulness—turning his back on Christ and forsaking Paul at one of the most critical times in his life, Paul was not discouraged or bitter, even though he would have been greatly saddened by Demas faltering in his faith.*

"At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them." (2 Timothy 4:16).

- *Immediately after Paul spoke of Demas' abandonment, he described how he was left alone to face his accusers in a Roman court—"At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me."*
- *Amazingly, Paul was not vindictive toward Demas because of his betrayal, or other believers who may have turned away from him in his time of tribulation.*
- *In fact, Paul even desired that their unfaithfulness toward him would not be counted against them—"May it not be charged against them."*
- *The depth of the betrayal Paul experienced from believers as his ministry and life were coming to a close can be seen when earlier in Paul's last epistle he related how those whom he tenderly and tirelessly ministered to in the churches in Asia had also forsaken him—"This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." (2 Timothy 1:15).*

- *Paul explained how he was able to stand strong and firm in his faith.*

**“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen! (2 Timothy 4:17-18).**

- *One of the main reasons Paul was not shaken or embittered by the unfaithfulness and betrayal of some of his fellow believers and friends is that his hope was not founded in men but in Jesus who was always with him—“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.”*
- *Paul’s confidence was in God’s unwavering faithfulness. He was not distracted by the temporal disappointments of this life. His eyes focused on the heavenly glory that awaited him—“And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.”*
- *In spite of the outward appearance of the circumstances, Paul did not feel God had failed him nor did he feel he had failed God. He was jubilantly confident that he had, by the grace of God, fully completed the ministry that the Lord Jesus had given him.*

**“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8).**

- *Demas’ falling away would have shocked many because of his longstanding relationship with Paul. He would have received in-depth instruction in the Word of God from Paul. He would have both witnessed and experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. The reality and faithfulness of Christ would have been fully evident to him.*
- *Since Demas was seen as a strong Christian who had been a traveling companion of the great apostle Paul, his act of fear and unbelief could have shaken some Christian’s faith. Some may have wondered, “If Demas has denied his faith, where is the reality of God in all this?!”*
- *Demas’ life was not in imminent danger since he was free to depart while Paul was in prison facing certain death. However, Demas fled in fear while Paul continued unwaveringly in his faith and commitment to Christ.*
- *How is it that Demas had a crisis of faith which led him to forsake his close friend Paul and deny his faith in Christ “having loved this present world,” while Paul stood strong and unwavering in his commitment to Christ even in the face of death?*

- *This is the question which we will explore to learn how to develop persevering faith and not falter or stumble no matter what we may face.*
- *Just before Paul told Timothy that Demas had faltered in his faith and fled, he encouraged and exhorted Timothy to fulfill God's calling on his life and make full use of every opportunity the Lord gave him to spread the Gospel and to strengthen the churches.*

**“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:1-2).**

- *Paul's instructions to Timothy provided some element that would help him and us to cultivate persevering faith.*
- *As persecution against the church increased, Timothy needed encouragement to carry out God's plan for his life. Timothy himself was imprisoned for his faith. “I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.” (Hebrews 13:23, NIV).*
- *While Paul awaited trial, he did not spend his time idly. “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” (Acts 28:30-31).*
- *First, we need to keep in mind that each believer must stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and account for how they lived their lives—“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”*
- *The Judgment Seat of Christ does not deal with our salvation since that was settled at the cross the moment we put our faith in Christ.*
- *The Judgment Seat of Christ is where believers will be judged on how we have lived our lives, used our gifts, fulfilled our calling, and how much we have become like Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the fruit inspector and bestows upon each believer rewards, crowns, and inheritances according to our fruitfulness.*

## **2 Corinthians 5:9-10 NKJV**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

- *The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a place of great rejoicing and glory for some believers and a place of great shame and disappointment for others.*
- *Second, Paul exhorted Timothy to use every opportunity to do the work that God had called him to do—“Be ready in season and out of season.”*
- *In season—when men’s hearts are open and circumstances are favorable.*
- *Out of season—when men’s hearts are hardened and the circumstances are filled with difficulties, hardships, and persecution.*
- *We also need to be ready in season and out of season to use every opportunity to grow and mature in our relationship with Christ, whether we face pleasant times or difficult and painful times. Wasting our time and opportunities is one way the enemy tries to weaken our faith so we will become spiritually negligent.*

#### **Ephesians 5:15-17**

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

- *Third, the purpose of our lives is not to spend our time pleasing ourselves but to serve and care for others according to the gifts and talents God has given us. Paul instructed Timothy to proclaim the Good News to all those around—“Preach the word!”*
- *Timothy, as a pastor, was also to strengthen, encourage, and bring correction to those under his care—“Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*
- *Next, Paul described to Timothy the conditions that can cause believers to become spiritually weak resulting in their faith being shipwrecked.*

#### **2 Timothy 4:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;

<sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

- *A crisis of faith only occurs after there has been a slow erosion of faith.*

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine”

- *First, there is an erosion of sound and healthy doctrine. Instead of believers submitting to the authority of Scripture they decide what parts of the Bible they will accept as truth.*

- *Some may say that we need to interpret the Bible from its historical context and determine which parts are no longer applicable to us in modern society. This is a subtle way of denying the authority of Scripture.*
- *Eventually, morality and truth become subjective and an ever shifting standard dictated by social norms.*

**“but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers”**

- *Their motivation for ignoring certain portions of the Bible or misinterpreting Scripture is to justify their unbiblical lifestyle or unbiblical beliefs.*
- *There are plenty of teachers who are willing to say those things which will tickle their itching ears and support unbiblical and ungodly lifestyles—“they will heap up for themselves teachers”*

**“and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”**

- *The end result will be that they will stop listening and believing the truth and turn to fables or fictional stories.*
- *It is this slow erosion of faith that undermines the very foundation by which a Christian can stand in the face of opposition, suffering, and persecution.*
- *Once their faith has been eroded, the doubts that come against them, which they deem as a crisis of faith, are simply the straw that broke the camel’s back and the pebble that caused a decaying foundation to collapse.*
- *Paul exhorted Timothy to be watchful and willing to suffer afflictions for the sake of truth and not to compromise the truth nor forsake the calling that God placed on his life.*

**“but you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:5).**

- *A crisis of faith in one Christian can precipitate a crisis of faith in another Christian. Don’t allow other Christian’s failures and doubts to shake your faith in Christ —“But be watchful in all things.”*
- *Do not be surprised or dismayed when hardship and trials come, but be prepared for them—“endure affliction.”*
- *Continue faithfully in the ministry and purposes God has for your life—“do the work of an evangelist.”*

- *Look toward the finish line and anticipate when, at the end of your life, you will stand before Jesus and hear the words “well done good and faithful servant.”—“fulfill your ministry.”*
- *Let’s look at some examples of how the foundation of our faith can be eroded.*
- *Some Christians would say that the first eleven chapters of the Bible are not to be taken literally but are simply an allegory that does not reflect how God really created the world.*
- *Some would say the days of creation were not literal days, but in reality God used the Big Bang theory of creation, evolution, and slow processes through eons of time to create the Universe and all its different life forms.*
- *Evolution is one of these fables which unbelievers have spun to explain the Universe and life without invoking the possibility of God. “and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”*
- *As believers we do not have to turn to fables created by men who desire to deny the reality of God. We have God’s Word which explains the process God used and which does not contradict scientific evidence.*
- *Once the foundational stone of Genesis, Chapter one is undermined, the next question is: “Was there a literal Adam and Eve?”*
- *Was there original sin?*
- *Was death the product of sin or was death part of God’s original creation? If death and decay were part of the original creation how could God declare everything He created to be very good?*

#### **Genesis 1:31 NKJV**

<sup>31</sup> Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

- *The Bible says death was the result of Adam and Eve’s sin.*
- *Evolution would say death has always been present and it is one of the mechanisms of evolution.*
- *Scripture teaches about a real Adam and Eve and original sin.*
- *Jesus died to bring an end to the death and destruction sin produced, but if death was part of the original creation then Jesus’ sacrifice shouldn’t remedy death since that was part of God’s perfect creation.*

- *Paul believed in Adam and Eve's existence and that death was a result of Adam and Eve transgressing God's commandment.*

#### **Romans 5:14 NKJV**

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

- *Then the next question arises: Was there an actual worldwide flood and was there an actual Noah who built an ark?*
- *If there was a real worldwide flood then this explains the fossil record and how much of the earth's geological column was formed rapidly during Noah's flood.*
- *However, if there was no Noah or worldwide flood then Jesus and the New Testament writers were wrong because they all clearly believed it.*

#### **Matthew 24:37-39 NKJV**

<sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

<sup>38</sup> For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,

<sup>39</sup> and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

- *Can a person be a Christian and be saved without believing in the literal meaning of the first eleven chapters of Genesis?*
- *Absolutely, because salvation is based in our faith in Christ and believing that Jesus Christ as God came as a man, born of a virgin and that He suffered and died on the cross for our sins and that the third day He overcame death and was bodily resurrected.*

#### **Romans 10:9-10 NKJV**

<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

<sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

- *However, once we begin to question the clear teachings of Scripture we are beginning to erode the very fabric of truth that will help us to stand strong against the onslaught of doubts that both the world and the devil try to heap on us.*
- *I am not saying that they are not Christians. They may have a strong faith, love, and commitment to Jesus, but do not take Genesis literally. This position can be dangerous*

*as it challenges the authority of Scripture and can lead to confusion and an erosion of faith for themselves and those who listen to them.*

- *Some denominational churches became increasingly liberal when they began to question the authority of Scripture. Although they may not have intended to do so they finally came to the point of rejecting the miraculous, including Christ's virgin birth and resurrection resulting in a Gospel that excluded Jesus as the Son of God.*



The shepherd that missed out.

- *Even modern day archeology concedes that the Bible describes real places and real people and is useful in locating these places.*
- *However, unbelieving archeologists still deny the veracity of the supernatural events that the Bible describes. Their denial is not based on an archeological rationale but simply because they do not believe in the God of the Bible.*
- *Skeptical archeologists deny that the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt actually occurred. Instead, they surmise that it was simply a myth which the Jews fabricated.*
- *Here is their reasoning: They surmise that if the Exodus had actually occurred it would have taken place around 1200 BC and there is no archeological evidence that any natural catastrophic events took place in Egypt at that time nor was there any evidence of a mass exodus of slaves.*
- *However, Christian archeologists date the Exodus at around 1450 BC. Interestingly enough, in the archeological records of Egypt some natural catastrophic events disrupted the kingdom around that time.*



- *The reason the Christian archeologists date the Exodus at 1450 BC is because the Bible actually gives the date of the Exodus.*

### **1 Kings 6:1 NKJV**

**<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.**

- *The reason non-believing archeologists reject using the date provided by the Bible for the Exodus is because they have chosen to reject the supernatural.*
- *As one non-Christian archeologist put it, “It is ridiculous to believe that Moses threw down a stick and it became a snake.” Thus his dismissal of the biblical date for the Exodus had nothing to do with science or archeology, but his total rejection of the supernatural and of God.*
- *He simply did not believe that the Exodus ever happened because He didn’t believe in the miracles recorded in the Bible.*
- *However, if a Christian is not aware of the source of the attacks against his faith by so called unbiased skeptics, he can easily drink the “Kool Aid” and find his faith in God’s Word slowly being eroded.*
- *Skeptics have tried to attack the Christian faith by questioning the historical accuracy of the Bible. However, archeology has actually validated the Bible.*
- *Others have tried to attack the Christian faith by questioning the reliability of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that make up the Bible. But again there is substantial evidence to show how amazingly reliable the manuscripts have remained as they have been transmitted down through the ages.*
- *Skeptics have tried to paint the Bible as contrary to common sense and they mock the miracles recorded in the Bible. But for those who have put their faith in Christ and choose to follow Him we experience similar supernatural events.*
- *A skeptic will never see a miracle—only unexplained events. We who have put our faith in Christ have the joy of seeing God answer our prayers and wonderfully lead and guide us daily by His Holy Spirit.*
- *However, one of the biggest issues that have unhinged some Christians and caused them to walk away from their faith in Christ is the problem of all the suffering in the world.*
- *The suffering in this world knows no bounds. It is found in every corner of the world and it touches every life.*

- *Much of the suffering seems to be pointless. It touches Christians and non-Christians. It befalls innocent and helpless children and the frail, the infirm, and the elderly and everyone in between. It can manifest itself in the form of wars, pestilence, disease, birth defects, mental anguish, mental illness, poverty, and social injustice to name only a few.*
- *However, the Bible provides clear reasons for the suffering and calamities that befall people and nations. Below are a few of the reasons for suffering.*
- *One reason there is suffering in the world such as natural disasters, plagues, and droughts is simply because we live in a fallen world.*

#### **Romans 8:20-21 NKJV**

<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

<sup>21</sup> because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

- *Sometimes the sickness and calamities that befall people or nations are the results of sins they have committed or destructive decisions they have made.*

#### **John 5:14 NKJV**

<sup>14</sup> Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

- *Sometimes people experience sickness and suffering that is not the result of anything they have done. However, God wants to use those times as an opportunity to invade your life, meet your need, and reveal His love.*

#### **John 9:2-3 NKJV**

<sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”

- *Sometimes the Lord allows hardships and trials into our lives to draw us closer to Him, purify our lives, and produce godly character.*

#### **James 1:2-3 NKJV**

<sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

- *Sometimes Christians go through times of suffering and persecution for the sake of the ungodly that they may have an opportunity to hear the Gospel and meet someone who genuinely loves Jesus and who loves them even at the expense of their own lives.*

**Luke 21:12-13 NKJV**

**12** But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.

**13** But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.

- *When we as Christians suffer for the sake of Christ we identify with His sufferings and it produces within us a deeper level of intimacy and fellowship with Jesus.*

**Philippians 3:8-10 NKJV**

**8** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

**9** and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

**10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

- *Skeptics may not like the answers the Bible offers for suffering but the answers the Bible gives are both internally consistent and consistent with the reality of the condition of the world.*
- *If the Bible stated Christians would be spared troubles, persecution, heartbreak, or pain that would then be a valid challenge to the veracity of the Scriptures since that does not reflect reality. However, the Bible says quite the opposite—"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." (Matthew 24:9).*
- *Worldwide persecution of Christians is becoming an increasingly common occurrence.*
- *The Bible also says that natural and man-made disasters will increase as the time of Christ's return draws near.*

**Matthew 24:6-8**

**6** And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

**7** For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

**8** All these are the beginning of sorrows.

- *What is the real reason for a Christian's faith to slowly erode until they experience a crisis of faith that leads them to a place where they totally abandon their faith in Christ?*

- *The key word is “abiding.” Those Christians who turn their back on Christ and even deny believing in Jesus invariably went down the long road of failing to daily abide in Christ. The vibrancy and joy of daily spending time in prayer and meditating on God’s Word begins to wane.*

#### **John 15:4-8 NKJV**

**<sup>4</sup> Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.**

**<sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**

**<sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**

**<sup>7</sup> If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**

**<sup>8</sup> By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.**

- *When we do not abide in Christ we wither and dry up spiritually just as a branch that does not abide in the vine.*
- *The parable of the prodigal son found in Luke, Chapter fifteen, provides us with a clear picture of how a believer can turn his back on Christ.*
- *The younger son began to see his father as unreasonable and withholding from him those things which would make his life enjoyable.*
- *So the younger son decided to get out from under the “oppressive hand” of his father, take his inheritance, and leave.*

#### **Luke 15:11-13**

**<sup>11</sup> Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.**

**<sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.**

**<sup>13</sup> And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.**

- *From the parable it is evident that the father was both loving and generous as seen at the end of the story when he received his prodigal son with open arms of love and forgiveness.*
- *How did the son develop such a distorted and perverted view of his loving father?*
- *Long before the prodigal left home he had left home in his heart. He had stopped fellowshiping with his father and enjoying his father’s love and wisdom.*
- *The delight that the son had once experienced with his father became a distant memory which was gradually replaced by a false image of an uncaring and unloving father.*

- *The son's departure from his father's home represents his crisis of faith, but the son's withdrawal from fellowship with his father leading up to his departure represents the erosion of his faith.*
- *Ultimately, the son realized what he had left behind. He began to understand and appreciate his father's true character of love and generosity. He realized that even his father's servants were living wonderful lives while his choices had resulted in needless loss and sorrow.*

#### **Luke 15:17**

**<sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"**

- *Sometimes what God speaks to us may seem difficult to understand. His words need to be heard with ears of faith, all the while trusting in the character of God.*

#### **John 6:53**

**<sup>53</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."**

- *The Lord does not always make things easy for us to understand because He wants us to learn to live by faith and trust in His character.*

#### **John 6:61**

**<sup>61</sup> When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you?"**

- *Those disciples of Jesus who had not really come to trust Him and His love were offended by His words and chose to turn away in unbelief.*

#### **John 6:66**

**<sup>66</sup> From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.**

- *However, Jesus had given them the secret of understanding His words if they were willing to come close to Him and hear. "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63b).*
- *Then Jesus turned to His twelve disciples and challenged them with this question: "Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"" (John 6:67).*
- *Peter rose to the occasion with a wonderful and shining declaration of faith.*

#### **John 6:68-69**

**<sup>68</sup> But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**

**<sup>69</sup> Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

**Romans 1:17**

**<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”**

- *To live by faith does not mean we must check our brains at the door but it does mean that we don't need to answer every question to trust in God's Word.*