

In the first half of this chapter, Paul gave a defense of his team's behavior and motivations to counter his accusers. In our passage today, he continues that defense and addresses the persecution they are experiencing. ⁹ *For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.* 1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul was determined not to let anything get in the way of the gospel being received. He became all things to all men in order that they might be saved (1 Corinthians 9:22ⁱ). If it meant sixteen-hour work days, so be it. He set aside his own rights to be sure nothing would get in the way of the message. If they might think he was in it for the money, then he would provide for himself. His whole team followed his example and together labored with their hands to cover their expenses.

This example Paul set is elaborated on in 1 Corinthians 9. Paul addressed the right of a pastor or missionary to be supported by those they minister to. However, he went on to say, *“Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.”* 1 Corinthians 9:12b ¹⁹ *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.* 1 Corinthians 9:19

Paul died to himself to serve others all for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:31ⁱⁱ). His God-given desire was to share with them in the gospel blessings. To see people come into the kingdom and mature in the faith was more desirable to him than having his own way, enjoying whatever he might personally desire. He was experiencing God giving him godly desires that so superseded all other desires as to make them irrelevant. He had become a man after God's own heart. He died to self so that Christ might live in him (Galatians 2:20ⁱⁱⁱ). That is why he could declare the testimony of the next verse.

¹⁰ *You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.* 1 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul set the bar very high for church planters: holy, righteous, and blameless! But that is God's standard for all of us (5:23^{iv}). The church planter and elders are always being observed, and when they visibly fall short, it gives the critics a chance to disregard the gospel. When churches set a bad example in their town they are a poor example of Christ, and it is usually because individuals insist on their way.

Holy, righteous, and blameless should be the example all believers set when they mature in the Lord. He has given us the power to become that kind of witness (1 Timothy 6:12^v). People are watching. Some people are searching for the truth. If we come across as worldly, they will look somewhere else. But if they see holy, righteous, and blameless behavior, they will know they have found something worth searching out.

After Paul's team left Thessalonica, some of the new believers' fellow Greeks who saw them refusing to offer sacrifice to Greek gods must have tried to dissuade them from continuing in the faith by criticizing Paul. But Paul could help the church counter the criticisms by asking them to remember what they witnessed of his behavior. And even more serious, he declared God as a witness to his heart. Man can misjudge a person's motives, but God knows our hearts.

If you are falsely accused of something and your witness is blameless, take a stand. The congregation will have seen your witness and in most cases stand with you. If you are blessed to have godly elders that meet the biblical qualifications, they will stand with you. March on, for there is much fruit to come, and the resistance is evidence of it (Philippians 1:28^{vi}).

¹¹ *For you know how, like a father with his children,* ¹² *we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own*

kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2:11,12 In verse 7 he said his team was gentle like a nursing mother with her children. Now he says they were like a father with his children. Here we have another trio of instructions for leaders: exhort, encourage, and charge the flock to live in a manner worthy of God. Why? Because He has called you into His own kingdom and glory!

What did they exhort them? They exhorted them to obey the commands of the Lord Jesus, to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, to love one another, to share the good news of Jesus at every opportunity, to let Christ reign in our hearts as we obey the leading of God's Holy Spirit (4:9^{vii}; Matthew 28:20^{viii}). No doubt Paul told them to continually crucify their old nature and live in newness of life, to hide Scripture in their hearts, and to be ready to give a defense of the hope that we have with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15^{ix}). He will exhort them in chapter four to live quietly, mind their own affairs, work with their own hands, and not be dependent on others (4:11,12^x). In chapter five he will review with them a list of proper Christian behavior. (See 5:12-20.) The essence of that exhortation is to walk in the Spirit and not the flesh by giving specific examples of what that looks like. His is describing what it looks like to live in a manner worthy of God.

Let us take a moment to ponder the wonder of God calling us to His own kingdom and glory. The first request in the Lord's Prayer is for God's kingdom to come. That is followed by an explanation of what that looks like, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Matthew 5:12 God's kingdom is where His will is done. A kingdom consists of people and territory. So, what God has called us to is a place where His good will is always done. His will is what is good. When Moses wanted to see God, God said, "*I will cause all my goodness to pass before you.*" Exodus 33:19a God is the very definition of goodness. The expression of that goodness is glory. God has called us to do His will in the earth while we live and reign with Him and continue to do His will when His kingdom will cover the whole earth. That is glorious.

I come to that conclusion about glory from what others have written but mainly because of what Jesus said when two disciples told Him that the Greeks wanted to speak with Him. Jesus' response was very unusual. He said, "The hour is come for the Son of man to be glorified" (John 12:22-24^{xi}). He was speaking of His crucifixion. The next verse makes it clear. ²⁴ *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* John 12:24 How is crucifixion glorious? It displays the very heart of God, His goodness, His grace, His mercy, His love, and His justice. When Paul writes that they are called to God's kingdom and glory, He is not saying they are going to do a happy dance and shine. He is saying we are called to do God's will which expresses His goodness. YOU are called to express God's will and His goodness now and in eternity. That means a death to our carnal nature and living life in Christ now and forever (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xii}). That is wonderful beyond description!

¹³ *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.* 1 Thessalonians 2:13 One of the greatest joys of those who proclaim God's Word is when it is received as the very Word of God. We know what His Word has done and continues to do in our hearts. We often sow the seed and see a kind response that is merely polite. But when someone is open to the Word and receives it as the Word of God, life is springing forth. The Holy Spirit is tangible in the fruits of the Spirit. Joy overflows along with tears. It reminds me of watching the birth of my children. I was just overwhelmed with awe and wonder.

When we know our hearers are just taking it as the word of men, we are disappointed that they are not receptive, but we know God must draw them at the right time. At least we hope the Word of God spoken to them will one day be watered by someone else and eventually germinate.

It is the Word working in us that brings about a change of priorities and desires. When we cling to a verse that addresses our weakness, we find it gives us the power to change (Psalm 119:11^{xiii}). The Word changes the way we see ourselves and the world. It puts the greatest hope before us and calls us heavenward.

We should also note that Paul is claiming that his team is preaching is the very Word of God. That is why his letters are in our Bibles. He is an apostle, chosen by God to convey the gospel of Jesus. He is aware of the anointing upon him. He sees the fruit from his evangelism. He heard the prophetic word of Ananias who prophesied over him the calling of God upon his life (Acts 9:15,16^{xiv}). He saw the risen Lord Jesus and was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2^{xv}). His teaching all comes out of sacred Scripture which gives it authority unlike that of the mere words of man's opinions. But we should also see he declared that they received the Word from *us*. He is including Silas and Timothy's proclamation of the gospel as also being the very Word of God. We can conclude that when anyone proclaims the Word of God there is a supernatural power at work in those who will accept it as such. Do you come before the Word of God in your home or at church with your heart prepared to be changed by it? God spoke through Isaiah and said that His Word accomplishes His purpose and succeeds in what He sent it to do, like rain causing a seed to germinate and grow (Isaiah 55:11^{xvi}). Some people come to church with a spiritual umbrella so the rain of the Word cannot penetrate their hearts. Others come with plowed up soil expecting the rain to soak in.

¹⁴ *For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,* 1 Thessalonians 2:14 The church of Thessalonica followed the example of the churches in Judea. The churches of Judea became the target of the Jews. There are extra-biblical writings that tell of how the rabbis in the latter half of the first century despised the churches and warned their fellow Jews to stay clear of them. They called them cursed, the spawn of Satan. Sometimes the persecution went beyond boycotting them in the marketplace to physical violence. But the church of Judea responded with love and forgiveness. Certainly, Paul was not addressing all Jews, but those who resisted the good news of Jesus and who killed the Lord Jesus. Paul was not antisemitic, he was a thoroughly Jewish. But like prophets before him, he called out the leadership that resisted the Messiah.

The church of Thessalonica was persecuted by their Greco-Roman culture at the incitement of the local Jewish leaders. The Christians were accused of having a king other than Caesar (Acts 17:5-10). They were kicked out of the guilds for not worshiping the guild god. They were blamed for any natural tragedy as if the gods were angry with their faith. In court they would always be the underdog. But they had the same response to this persecution as the church of Judea did. They were loving and forgiving. That was a more powerful behavior than the persecution and helped the church to grow. People will not see our faith as different from any other religion unless we respond to hardship differently. It is the Word of God working in us that enables us to be loving and forgiving.

Suffering is a part of life in this fallen world. The Christian finds it to be a blessing from God for a number of reasons. *John Piper examined various passages of Scripture that speak of suffering and articulated five reasons why suffering takes place: 1. Repentance: suffering is a call for us and others to turn from treasuring anything on earth above God. 2. Reliance: suffering is a*

call to trust God, not the life-sustaining props of the world. **3. Righteousness:** suffering is the discipline of our loving heavenly Father so that we come to share his holiness. **4. Reward:** suffering is working for us a great reward in heaven that will make up for every loss here a thousand-fold. **5. Reminder:** suffering reminds us that God sent his Son into the world to suffer so that our suffering would not be God's condemnation but his purification.

In a few verses Paul will contrast the suffering of the believer for spiritual growth with the suffering of judgment that comes upon those who resist the gospel, a suffering of judgment. Our suffering is to make us more like Christ, whereas the suffering of the unbeliever is God's righteous wrath on their rebellion toward His goodness.^{xvii}

¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind 1 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul is classifying the Jews who were resisting the good news of Jesus with those Jews decades earlier who killed the Lord Jesus and even before that killed the prophets. His words line up with Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. *³⁴ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!* Luke 13:34a The first in his list of crimes is the greatest of crimes. They killed their own Messiah. It is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the owner of the vineyard which he rents out to tenants. At the time of the harvest, he sends servant after servant to collect the rent only to have them come back beaten by the renters. He finally sends his son believing they will respect him. But the renters kill the son. Jesus asked the Jewish leaders what the owner of the vineyard should do. They announce their own sentence when they said, "Put the miserable wretches to death!" (See Matthew 21:33-44.) The crime of all crimes is rejection of the Lord of Life who gave us life to redeem us. The mercy of God sent prophets to warn the nations, only to have them murdered by the very people they were trying to save.

Paul adds the third crime of driving Paul and his team out. He is classifying his team as messengers of God rejected by the very same type of people who killed the Savior and the prophets. They were chased out of town after town for announcing the very thing Jews lived for, the coming of the Messiah. We must be careful to see that this is not like current antisemitism. Paul was a Jew. Most of the leadership of the early churches were Jews. Jesus was a Jew. The issue is not with ethnicity or religion, but with the response to God's messengers.

Paul adds a fourth crime. They displease God. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9^{xviii}), so by their resistance of the love and mercy of God, they displease God. He would be pleased if they heard the message, repented, and embraced His forgiveness and grace. That is what many were doing when John the Baptist preached. But when the religious leaders came to see what was happening, John the Baptist called them a brood of vipers (Luke 3:7^{xix}). When Jesus asked who sent and anointed John, the religious leaders would not answer (Matthew 21:24-27^{xx}). Their hearts were too hard to acknowledge they were sinners in need of God's grace. What blindness! And it is present wherever men and women resist the gospel.

What could be clearer than the fact that mankind has a wicked heart (Jeremiah 17:9^{xxi})? Look at the news. Look at the behavior of people. Look at your own thoughts. Look at all the times you refused to help a person in need. See how our ego insists on our own way. Look at the way we justify not doing what we know is right or argue for what we know is wrong. Even as we read this passage and think about these people, we tend to see them as completely different kinds of people, instead of recognizing our old nature is just like them.

¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last! 1 Thessalonians 2:16 Paul concludes their list of sins by adding that they oppose all mankind when they hinder Gentiles

from hearing the gospel. The gospel changes the heart and makes a better society. Wherever great revivals have taken place crime rates drop to almost nothing and people are productive and joyful. That is the fruit of the gospel in homes, or towns, or nations. It is the truth of the gospel that ended slavery and orders us to live in love even toward our enemies. It is the gospel that started hospitals and schools and continues to do so around the world. To oppose the gospel going to the nations is to oppose all mankind. That spirit of resistance is alive and well today.

The cultures of the world always stand at a crossroad of whether the gospel prevails or hedonism prevails. Hedonism comes in all kinds of dress that looks gracious and kind, but one reason sin is sin is because it harms people whom God loves. If you want people to live free and be productive and fulfilled, the gospel is the answer. One of the tricks of Satan, the great distorter of truth, is the claim that fulfilling your fallen desires is freedom and happiness. It becomes bondage. That same lie teaches that religion is bondage and keeps us from freedom and joy. Satan always flips the truth on its head. Have you noticed how people tend to blame others for the things of which they are guilty?

Filling up the measure of their sin is a phrase we see in the Torah. It seems that there is a limit man reaches where the heart is so hardened that it cannot change. In Genesis 15:16 God told Abraham his descendants would be in Egypt for 400 years until the cup of iniquity of the Amorites was filled up. Then Abraham's descendants were to come and execute judgment on them and take the land. An angel told Daniel that transgressors will reach their limit before a king will arise and bring great destruction (Daniel 8:22,23^{xxii}). *Greg Beale says that "the concept of 'filling up sins' occurs elsewhere at significant redemptive-historical epochs to describe the opponents of God's plan to subdue earth with his truth by his redeemed people. God stated in each case that his enemies had to complete a certain amount of sin before they could be considered ripe for definitive judgment, which would always conclude a particular epoch and launch another."* It consistently appears when God is judging an old nation, an old way of doing things, and is moving into a new work.^{xxiii} Jesus told the Pharisees that they fill up the measure of their fathers (Matthew 23:32^{xxiv}). The end of one epoch was ushering in the New Covenant in Christ's blood. God has limits that are just according to His omniscience, and which coincide with the end of an old era and beginning of a new one. We could say that is the theme of the book of Revelation. Whoever opposes the gospel puts themselves under the wrath of God for they are opposing the grace and mercy of God and insisting on their own judgment (Psalm 2:1-4^{xxv}).

Wrath has come upon them at last, also translated as forever or until the end. I understand Paul to be saying that they have reached their limit and their judgment has begun. Was it the famine in Jerusalem, or the slaughter of thousands of Jewish pilgrims under governor Camunus during the Passover feast, or the expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius. All of these events were happening around the same time that Paul penned this letter. The Jewish revolt would start in just 18 years, in which Jewish leaders would lose their rights and the temple and access to Jerusalem. Witherington sees the Greek in this statement of wrath to be temporal and not leading to the final or forever wrath of God.^{xxvi}

God does not judge a people because of their ethnicity. He sees each heart. Some Germans used this verse and others to justify the Holocaust. That is a distortion of the Word of God to justify a terrible atrocity. Paul is not speaking against his own race but rather saying that those who did the deeds he described are under God's wrath. God is the judge, and His judgment is based not on ethnicity but on what we do with His Son.

Paul was helping the Thessalonians and us to see that persecution for living a Christian life is quite normal. In fact, one might say that not being persecuted in some way is unusual

(2 Timothy 3:12^{xxvii}). The Greeks would have seen the persecution of the church as sign that the gods had cursed them, but Paul is saying it is a sign that they are faithful. Jesus told us to rejoice when we are persecuted because that puts us among the prophets who were as well (Matthew 5:12^{xxviii}). We must be careful not to fall into the same mindset: that believers experiencing difficulty are somehow not being blessed. Difficulties build character and other graces (Romans 5:3-5^{xxix}). We can count them among our blessings. It causes us to more fully lean on our Savior (Song of Songs 8:5a^{xxx}).

Paul has presented two kinds of suffering, one being God's just wrath upon a rebellious people and the other the discipline and instruction to purify and transform the believer. It can be difficult to see the latter as the loving hand of our heavenly Father helping us mature. The Apostle Paul knew that loving hand could be difficult to bear, but he also knew it was a blessing in disguise (2 Corinthians 12:7^{xxxi}). He lived under the wrath of God when he was persecuting followers of Jesus. But when as the rabbi Saul he embraced the mercy and grace of the risen Lord, his zeal did a 180-degree shift to proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. He lived both kinds of suffering. His heart suffered while he was a persecutor, and his body suffered as a proclaimer. We are reading about the fruit that came from that suffering: churches, disciples, these letters, and a testimony that has stood the ages encouraging us today.

The Thessalonians knew there was nothing they could do to stop the persecution they were experiencing. But when we get to the end of our efforts, **there is wonderful peace in realizing everything is in the hands of our loving Father** and what He allows in our lives will ultimately end up being for our good (Genesis 50:20^{xxxii}). Then we can let go of trying to change the situation and love and honor our Savior in the midst of it. My prayer for us is that we will find that no matter what God allows in our lives, we will find Jesus to be all we want or need especially in times of pain or turmoil. This world is not our home. It is a wilderness journey on our way to the promised land. But when we put our head on Jesus' bosom and love him and receive his love, it is a foretaste of the day when we will be home at last.

Questions:

- 1 Why did Paul and team support themselves?
- 2 What should be the testimony of an elder?
- 3 What should the state of our hearts be toward God's Word?
- 4 How should we respond to suffering?
- 5 Whose example did the Thessalonians follow in persecution?
- 6 What is the main thing that displeases God?
- 7 What is behind the expression "filling up the measure of their sin"?
- 8 What are the two kinds of hardship and the difference between them?
- 9 How can we embrace difficulty and have peace?
- 10 What did God speak to your heart through this passage?

ⁱ **1 Corinthians 9:22 (ESV)**

²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 15:31 (ESV)**

³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

ⁱⁱⁱ **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

^{iv} **1 Thessalonians 5:23 (ESV)**

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

^v **1 Timothy 6:12 (ESV)**

¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

^{vi} **Philippians 1:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

^{vii} **1 Thessalonians 4:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

^{viii} **Matthew 28:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

^{ix} **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

^x **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,

¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

^{xi} **John 12:20-24 (ESV)**

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

^{xii} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xiii} **Psalms 119:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

^{xiv} **Acts 9:15-16 (ESV)**

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

^{xv} **2 Corinthians 12:2 (ESV)**

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.

^{xvi} **Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

^{xvii} ¹ James H. Grant Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The Hope of Salvation*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 73–74.

^{xviii} **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

^{xix} **Luke 3:7 (ESV)**

⁷ He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

^{xx} **Matthew 21:24-27 (ESV)**

²⁴ Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

^{xxi} **Jeremiah 17:9 (KJV)**

⁹ The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

^{xxii} **Daniel 8:22-23 (ESV)**

²² As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power. ²³ And at the latter end of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their limit, a king of bold face, one who understands riddles, shall arise.

^{xxiii} ¹¹ James H. Grant Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The Hope of Salvation*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 77.

^{xxiv} **Matthew 23:32 (ESV)**

³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

^{xxv} **Psalms 2:1-4 (ESV)**

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ³ “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

^{xxvi} Witherington, Ben, III, *1&2 Thessalonians, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

^{xxvii} **2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

^{xxviii} **Matthew 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

^{xxix} **Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

^{xxx} **Song of Songs 8:5a (ESV)**

⁵ Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

^{xxxi} **2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

^{xxxii} **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.