I love that familiar second verse of “Amazing Grace” don’t you? That verse reminds us that from here to eternity each of us will go through lots of “hard times” until that day when our faith is made sight.

I want you to think back on some of the hardest times you have ever been through.

*Perhaps it was a time of deep, dark depression after losing a loved one.

*Perhaps it was a time of financial difficulty when you didn’t know if you were going to keep your head above water.

*Or maybe it was a time of serious marital problems and you didn’t know if your marriage would survive.

*Or perhaps it was a time when one of your children went off the deep end and gave you lots of heartache.

We all go through “hard times” in this life.
As we continue with our series of messages from I & II Thessalonians please turn with me to I Thessalonians the third chapter, and let’s read verses 1-8.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,

2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—

7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

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P R A Y E R
In these eight verses, Paul shares with us SIX TRUTHS that will teach us “How To Survive Hard Times” in this life.

Truth #1: Hard Times Can Be Very UNSETTLING (vs.1-3a)

1 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,

2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions

1. If you remember in our previous message, Paul had told the Thessalonians of his desire to come and see them again in person, but that Satan had somehow “hindered” him from making that visit.

2. But God brought something good out of that bad situation. For one, Paul wrote these two wonderful letters of I and II Thessalonians to encourage the saints in Thessalonica as well as the saints in all generations.

3. The other good thing that God brought out of this was that Paul sent young TIMOTHY, his “son in the faith” to the Thessalonians in his place.

   By calling Timothy “our brother,” and “minister of God” and “our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ” Paul was assuring the Thessalonians that Timothy was well-equipped to minister to them in his absence.
4. Why did Paul go to such great lengths to make sure the spiritual needs of the Thessalonians were being met? He tells us in VERSE 3........

3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions

5. Remember while Paul was away from them the Thessalonian Christians had undergone a great deal of persecution from their own countrymen.

And Paul knew from experience, that “hard times” can be very unsettling to one’s Christian faith.

6. The Greek word Paul uses for “unsettling” in this third verse literally means “to tuck the tail.”

ILLUSTRATION: When we are walking out little beagle, Mattie, if she hears a loud noise or a gun shot off in the distance, she tucks her tail and hunkers down.

7. When “hard times” do you become “unsettled?” Does your faith in GOD get “rattled?” Do you “tuck your tail between your legs and cower down in fear?”

8. What message does that send to the world? What does that reveal about our faith?

Does it reveal that our faith is only strong when when everything is going right? Does it reveal that the faith that carries us to Church on Sundays isn’t strong enough to carry us through the tough times?

9. One way you and I can survive the “hard times” is to be on guard that our faith doesn’t become unsettled.
Truth #2: Hard Times Have Been APPOINTED By God (v.3b)

3b “for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.”

1. Do you know God appoints “hard times” for every true Christian?

2. There is a Greek word used to describe hardships. It is the word “thlipsis.”

   thlipsis means to be “PRESSED” or “SQUEEZED.”

   Think of “grapes” being put in a winepress to squeeze out all the juice.

   Think of holding an orange in your hand and squeezing all the juice out of it.

3. God has “appointed” some hard times for each and every Christian for the purpose of “pressing” or “squeezing” out of us anything that is impure, unholy or hypocritical.

4. While it may seem cruel of God to “appoint” hard times for us, it actually reveals the depth of His love for us.

   You see, if God never “appointed” hard times our faith would remain weak and shallow.

   If we never had our faith tested, challenged, pressed or squeezed, our faith would never grow.
5. And so the next time you and I go through some “hard times” we can survive if we will remind ourselves that God has “appointed” our hard times to help our faith grow.

The next truth falls right in line with this one..............

Truth #3: Hard Times Should Be EXPECTED (v.4)

4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

1. I like the way it is worded in the New American Standard Bible.......

   1Thessalonians 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.

2. Paul is remind the Thessalonians that the suffering he is going through as well as the suffering they are going through is not by “accident” or by “coincidence” or because they have had a run of “bad luck.”

3. Paul said, “we kept telling you in advance” that all of us would go through some hardships! We expected this! We knew these times would come!

4. Brothers and sisters we ought to expect to go through some really hard times before the LORD comes to get us or we go home to be with Him.
Remember those words of James?

James 1:2 My brethren, count it pure joy WHEN YOU FALL INTO VARIOUS TRIALS.......notice James didn’t say, “If you fall into various trials,” he said, WHEN!

That means WE OUGHT TO EXPECT HARD TIMES! WE OUGHT TO EXPECT TRIALS! WE OUGHT TO EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE SOME LOSSES, SOME SORROW, SOME GRIEF, SOME TROUBLE in this life.

5. Brothers and sisters, none of us are going to heaven on a smoothe, four lane interstate! We are going to heaven on a narrow road and we must EXPECT some BUMPS and CURVES......and HILLS and VALLEYS all along the journey.

6. And you know what? If we learn to EXPECT some HARD TIMES it will help us to survive the hard times!

Truth #4: Hard Times Bring Increased TEMPTATIONS (v.5)

5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

1. One of Paul’s major concerns regarding the Thessalonians was that with HARD TIMES come greater temptations from Satan.

2. Think about it! When you and I go through HARD TIMES we are more vulnerable to Satan’s attacks.

   -When are you most vulnerable to discouragement and depression? In HARD TIMES!

   -When are you most vulnerable to complain and grumble? In HARD TIMES!
-When are you most vulnerable to give up and quit? In HARD TIMES!

-When are you most vulnerable to let down your spiritual guard? In HARD TIMES!

3. You see, one of the secrets to surviving HARD TIMES in life is to be on the alert that Satan is prowling around like a “roaring lion” to take us down in our most vulnerable moments.

Truth #5: Hard Times Can Be OVERCOME By Faith (v. 6)

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—

1. Paul was absolutely thrilled when he received word from Timothy that the Thessalonian Church hadn’t fallen apart during “hard times” but rather they had overcome by faith.

2. Have you noticed whenever there is a tragedy of some sort here in America, people turn to their faith in God for strength and comfort?

   -After the terrorist attacks of SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, did you hear one solitary soul say, “We know we can count on our money to get us through this?”

   -After hurricane KATRINA hit, did you hear one solitary person say, “We have faith that our government is going to get us through this?”

   -After the tragic school shootings in NEWTOWN, CT, did you hear any of those families say, “We know our material possessions will get us through this?”
3. Hard times have a way of helping us sort out what really matters! It is during the “hard times” we come to realize the most important thing we have in this life is our faith in Almighty God! And it is that FAITH that will get us through!

Truth #6: Hard Times Provide Us With An Opportunity To ENCOURAGE Others (vs. 7,8)

7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

1. Paul is telling the Thessalonian Christians how much their faith in “hard times” encouraged him!

   In v.8 Paul was letting them know that because their faith remained strong in the hard times, it encouraged him to be strong in his hard times.

2. Do you know how you and I respond to “hard times” says more about our faith in God than attending 1,000 Church services?

3. If you and I will look at our “hard times” as an OPPORTUNITY rather than an OBSTACLE, God can use us as a great encouragement to our fellow Christians and a great witness to our unbelieving relatives and friends!
C O N C L U S I O N

As we close this evening let me offer a word of encouragement.

Perhaps most of you here tonight are not going through any hardships at this present time. Perhaps right now you are traveling a fairly smooth road and all is well in your life.

But maybe there is one, just one here tonight is really going through a “hard time.” If that person is you, let me encourage you NOT to give up or quit! God hasn’t forsaken you, for He promised, “He would never leave us or forsake us.”

HARDSHIPS are not pleasant, but they are necessary for our spiritual growth! God doesn’t promise any of us “smooth sailing” all the way to heaven, but He does promise a safe landing!