

# How to Thrive in Hard Times

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Preacher: Logan Thune

[ 0 : 0 0 ] to be praised. Lord, thank you that we can praise you through our singing, and thank you that we can bring you glory through hearing your word preached and listening and applying it to our lives. So, Lord, thank you that all through today's service your name can be praised and you can be glorified.

So, Lord, I pray that you would bless the preaching of your word as we open it up in a couple minutes, and that you would just help us to listen and honor you in our hearts, in our minds, and then in our lives as we apply it. Lord, thank you for the opportunity to sing to you this morning and praise you and glorify your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. You may be seated.

And, well, church, this morning we have the privilege of welcoming a guest speaker, Logan Thune, to address us from God's words, or God's word. A few words about Logan. Logan serves as a bivocational pastor at Emmaus Road Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where he was ordained in 2019. He's married to Zoe, and the two of them are raising four children. Logan works full-time in the financial services industry and also serves on the board of a growing Christian classical school in Sioux Falls. Now, I've had the privilege to get to know Logan on a number of occasions over the past year or so, and I can personally commend him and his preaching to you for a few reasons, a number of reasons.

First, Logan is a very thoughtful man. He is well-read in a number of areas, from education to culture building to theology, and it's just fun. It's just a joy to be able to stand with him and talk and hear what he's reading and what he's learning and how he's applying it to his life and what he's doing with what he's learning. He's very thoughtful. He's very well-read.

Second, Logan is a dedicated family man. He loves and appreciates his wife, Zoe, and is intentionally raising his children, depending on the Lord, to love God and grow in godly character.

[ 2 : 0 2 ] So really respect that about Logan. And then third, I know you're making me uncomfortable, but I just want to commend Logan to you. Third, Logan's a godly man. He's dedicated to the Lord in all things. He's grounded in God's word, and he's faithful in building Christ's church. So I really think he's someone that we can learn from and benefit from hearing God's word through him today.

So I'm grateful he's here with us. We're going to share God's word. So would you please welcome Logan as he comes up to open up God's word this morning. Good morning, Providence Community Church. It's good to be back here again and see some familiar faces from the last time. Dove, thank you for that introduction. Excited to be bringing God's word to you this morning. If you are familiar with medieval warfare, which if we're honest, I think you should be, then you know that an army inside a castle can withstand a siege even though it might be outnumbered 10 to 1. As long as the siege works are kept away from the castle walls, the people inside the castle will remain victorious in battle as long as their provisions and their supplies can last. But a castle cannot withstand an attack like a siege when someone treacherous inside the castle opens the gate in the middle of the night to let the enemy inside the castle walls. As someone once said, two traitors within the garrison may do more hurt to it than 2,000 besiegers without. And though you might like to charitably think that things like that never happened, a brief reading of medieval literature will show you that treachery was not that all uncommon. What happens inside the castle is more important than what happens outside the castle. And in the same way, what happens inside the church is more important than what happens outside the church. In our text this morning, we will see how God means to protect and purify his church by keeping those inside it safe and secure. So if you have your Bibles with you, you can turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3. We're going to be continuing in your sermon series looking at verses 1 through 9.

And if you're physically able this morning, I would invite you to stand as we read from God's holy and authoritative word. 2 Timothy 3 verse 1.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth. Men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We ask that you would bless the preaching of it this morning. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would apply it to our lives, that you would make us obedient to it. Help us to receive it humbly, to tremble at its warnings, and to trust all its promises. God, would you make us more and more like your son? We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

[ 6 : 41 ] Amen. You may be seated. In our text this morning, there is a marked transition from and a contrast with the end of chapter 2. The first word of chapter 3 is the word but, and it represents a new context for what Paul is going to say here. While both chapters deal with opponents to the gospel, the word but indicates that here in this section the stakes are going to be raised. This is predicated on the fact that the intensity of the opposition and corruption that Timothy faces has grown. In chapter 2, Paul had hopes of confronting the false teachers. He had hopes that confronting them would perhaps lead them to repentance. But what you'll see here is that these opponents now, in chapter 3, Paul says that they must be dealt with differently and Timothy needs to be ready for what is about to come. The main point of our text this morning, and the main thing that Paul wants Timothy to know, is that in difficult times,

God's worker must be vigilant towards sin and constant in hope. God's worker must be vigilant towards sin and constant in hope. This is how Timothy is to survive the last days. And furthermore, this is how we are to survive the difficult times that we face in our day and in our lives. So here's the blueprint, not just for surviving, but for thriving in hard times. There are three things that are demanded of us.

One, we must beware of sin. Two, we must stay away from wicked people. And three, we must take heart in the truth. Beware of sin. Paul says, but understand this. There are two explicit commands in our text this morning, and this is the first one. It's easy to overlook and pass by. But Paul's saying, do not be naive, but know this. The word here is a present tense imperative. It's like Peter saying to the elect exiles, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. So Timothy, don't be caught off guard. Today, we might chuckle and say, are you surprised at the clown world that we live in? Does it shock you that people call good evil and evil good? Did you really think that people would be in full-scale rebellion against obvious things? Don't be surprised, Paul says. Explicitly, he says that these difficult times will come in the last days. So what exactly are the last days? In one sense, the last days were specific to Paul and Timothy. Notice that Paul is referring in this text to real opponents in real life in their real context. These aren't just hypothetical opponents out there in the future somewhere.

There was a looming judgment that was to come on Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the times really were going to get out of hand for Timothy. The Judaic aeon was ending, and wickedness was going to run rampant, and the church needed to gird its loins for the pending predicament. In another sense, we can understand the last days as the days inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ, and marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, as referenced in Acts chapter 2.

Following this latter view, one theologian says that the last days represent the universal condition of the church. Depending on how the issue is framed, I think that both views are appropriate. In the last days, whether then in Paul and Timothy's day or now, we should expect and understand that there will be difficulty for the Christian. This difficulty will be marked by clusters of egregious sins leading people away from the faith, and we see these listed in verses 2 through 4. There are a variety of sins mentioned here. Paul references 17 different adjectives and two different contrasts in this list.

[ 11 : 30 ] The two main themes that permeate this list are related to disordered love of self and disordered love of pleasure. And while it's not wrong to have a healthy love of self and pleasure, it's easy for those things to turn sour and destructive. They often give way to other sins and depravity. Regarding this list of sins, John Calvin says, to spend time in explaining every word would be superfluous, for the words do not need exposition. Only let my readers observe that self-love, which is put first, may be regarded as the source from which flow all the vices that follow afterwards. He who loveth himself claims a superiority in everything, despises all others, is cruel, indulges in covetousness, treachery, anger, rebellion against parents, neglect of what is good, and such like. As it was the design of Paul to brand false prophets with these marks, that they might be seen and known by all, it is our duty to open our eyes that we may see those who are pointed with the finger. The list Paul gives here in 2 Timothy 3 is similar to the list of sins that he mentions in Romans chapter 1 verses 29 through 32, and you can check those out and compare them on your own time. But these lists, these are people with disordered loves and without any natural affection. They are those who have no regard for their parents or others. And as St. Augustine once asked, if anyone fails to honor his parents, is there anyone that he will spare? The inferred answer is obviously no. What's perhaps most staggering about the list of sins mentioned in these verses is that the people committing these sins, they claim that they know God. Verse 5 says that they are having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. In other words, their lives are devoid of the work of the Spirit, which would have produced godliness in them. Instead, these people, their lives reflect a counterfeit spirituality and religiosity which is not marked by the presence and the power of God. In other words, we could say that these are fake and phony Christians. Now it's easy to think that the people that Paul describes here, they're those people over there, the ones that are at a safe arm's length away from us, it's an entirely different thing to read this text and to recognize our own potential to fall prey to these very same things. We should read this text and this list of sin as a warning to us. We should hold up the mirror to our own faces lest we too would become hypocrites and liars devoid of God's power.

This isn't something that we're just automatically immune to. So do not be ignorant about sin, but be aware of sin.

Next, we must stay away from wicked people. Look at the end of verse 5. Paul says very bluntly, avoid such people. This is the second command that's given in our text. It is possible that this command has church discipline and excommunication in view, but I think that a simple reading of the text reveals that at a minimum, Christians ought to avoid blatant sinners and false teachers. I'm not saying that we have the luxury of ignoring the fact that Jesus was called the friend of sinners or to misuse a command like this to avoid evangelizing the lost and the broken, but I am saying that there are hardened sinners that should not be trifled with. This is a casting your pearls before swine type of situation. Being too comfortable with bad company will corrupt your good morals. Obviously, you might not sin by osmosis, but you can deceive yourself into thinking that you are immune to their influence. And Paul reminds us that there should be no quarter for those who normalize sin in the midst of the church. As Psalm 1 says, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. So don't stand in their way. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, right? This goes for vices just as much as it goes for virtues. So how does Paul indicate that we recognize these people? He shows us that we recognize them by their tactics, and we recognize them by those who they target. So what are the tactics of these people? Verse 6 indicates that they slink around secretively with devious methods and seductive schemes. Notice how Paul uses the word creep to describe them. Creeping is what robbers do. It's what raccoons do. It's what cowards do. These people fit the description that the apostle John gives of those who love the darkness rather than the light. He says, for everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed. These people lurk in the dark. They are subtle. And unironically, many of the sins that pervade our day aren't very overt sins but are rather ideological. They hang out in the background.

We might think of white knights who peddle the lies of feminism while attempting to parade their virtues. Or those who creep around the church lending a very concerned ear and listening ear to anyone who will offer a morsel of gossip to them. Or those who elevate feelings to an untouchable status and refuse to allow the truth to reform or correct their perceived feelings regardless of their accuracy. Perhaps you recognize tactics like these. Perhaps you know people harboring secret sins. These people carefully navigate the perimeter to find their unsuspecting victims. Secondly, these people are recognized by who they target. So who exactly do they target? Paul tells us that they prey on the vulnerable. They try to capture weak women, Paul says. A different translation uses the word silly women. Some commentators might try to limit this description by locating it specifically with a few women in Ephesus who are being deceived.

But I think that Paul has more in view here. Similar to the way that he appeals to creation and to Eve's deception in 1 Timothy 2 verse 14 when he prohibits women from exercising authority over men, it seems that Paul again is recognizing that women are wired in such a way that makes them particularly susceptible to being led astray like this. These false teachers, they knew this reality. They may have even known it better than some professing complementarians and they capitalized on it. They intentionally sought out these women to seduce and to manipulate. Notice that not only are women in view here, specifically it's women with guilty consciences. As verse 6 says, it's those burdened with sin and led astray by various passions. On the one hand, these are women whose sin is being leveraged against them. Like a child who's controlled by someone that pinches their ear. Or like a horse with a bit in its mouth, these women are steered by the weight of their past sin.

[ 20 : 12 ] On the other hand, these are women who are carried away by diverse desires. We might call them the followers of fads. While in Paul's day this might have referred to various Gnostic heresies that people were being drawn to. Perhaps in our day we might refer instead to those who chase fad dieting or immodest and idealistic Instagram accounts or raunchy romance novels and movies. Those who are enslaved by manipulative men going from one to the next. As one commentator says, a foolish head and a filthy heart make people an easy prey to seducers. Verse 7 says that these women were always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. They were looking for fulfillment and satisfaction and holiness and truth in all the wrong places. They were constantly learning but unable to land anywhere. They were constantly striving but unable to find salvation. These women, they needed good men and good pastors and good fathers to protect them from these false teachers and wolves. Men who would walk in the light and not in the darkness. Men who would fight for them. Men who would remove these wicked people from their midst. That's why Paul tells young pastor Timothy not to accommodate these wicked people. He commands him instead simply to avoid such people.

Lastly, he encourages Timothy to take heart in the truth. What's important here is the way in which this last encouragement comes to us in our text. And I want to briefly highlight four things that will help you take heart in dark and difficult times. First, remember the story. Paul starts by naming two men, Janus and Jambres.

We don't exactly know who these men are or where their names came from because they're not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. But we do know that they were commonly regarded as the arch nemesis of Moses.

According to traditional and extra-biblical sources, these men were the magicians of Pharaoh's court who opposed and countered the mighty acts of God in the book of Exodus. Paul wants Timothy to know that what has gone on will come around again. Essentially, what he's telling Timothy is that he needs to remember his Bible. He needs to remember the story. Elsewhere, Paul says, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. And no time is this truer than when the times are dark and difficult.

Second, he is to recall the outcome of the story. Don't just remember the story, but remember the outcome. The pattern in the Old Testament is the same pattern as in the last days. Just as Moses overcame Janus and Jambres, so Paul and Timothy will overcome the false teachers and wolves of their day. They will not get very far, the text says, for their folly will be plain to all. God's representatives and God's truth will triumph over all errors and opposition. So take heart, because this isn't the first time that the truth has been challenged and it is not the last time it will be challenged either.

[ 24 : 00 ] As Matthew Henry says, though the spirit of air may be let loose for a time, God has it in a chain. Satan can deceive the nations and the churches no further and no longer than God will permit him.

And if this is the truth, which we know that it is, then how should we respond? Third, we should resolve to continue resisting evil. There's no time to be complacent or off our guard when it comes to sin.

As my favorite musician Josh Garrel says, says, how do good men become part of the regime? They don't believe in resistance. And how do otherwise faithful Christians fall prey to temptation and sin and apostasy? They don't believe in resistance. This text wants to wake you up to the dangers of sin, because in dangerous and dark times sin lurks around every corner. This is especially true for those who guard and watch the flock as pastors. Again, John Calvin says that Paul informed Timothy that when the church faces difficult times, it will require in the pastors uncommon fidelity, diligence, watchfulness, prudence, and unwearied constancy, as if he enjoyed enjoying Timothy to prepare for arduous and deeply anxious contests which awaited him. And hence we learn that so far from giving way or being terrified on account of any difficulties whatsoever, we ought, on the contrary, to arouse our hearts for resistance. So church, resolve to resist sin. And fourth and lastly, we should rejoice and rest in the triumph of the truth. Did you know that the truth did not fail in Moses' day? And it did not fail in David's day or the prophet Daniel's day? Did not fail in Christ's day or in Paul's day? It did not fail in Athanasius's day, did not fail in Luther's day, and it will not fail in our day either. So take heart. Listen to what Athanasius said in the third century. He said, since the Savior came to dwell among us, not only does idolatry no longer increase, but it is getting less and gradually ceasing to be. Similarly, not only does the wisdom of the Greeks no longer make any progress, but that which used to be is disappearing. And demons so far from continuing to impose on people by their deceits and oracle givings and sorceries are routed by the sign of the cross if they so much as try. On the other hand, while idolatry and everything else that opposes the faith of Christ is daily dwindling and weakening and falling, see the Savior's teaching is increasing everywhere. Worship then the Savior who is above all and mighty, even God the Word, and condemn those who are being defeated and made to disappear by Him. When the sun has come, darkness prevails no longer.

Any of it that may be left anywhere is driven away. Should we expect anything different than that in our day? Do we not serve the same Lord and Christ? Will God's Word fail us now? Will the foolish and the wicked prevail? The answer is no. God reminds us as He reminded Timothy, they will not get very far.

So let me ask you, have you trusted in Christ? Have you been set free from your sins? Then fear not the evil day or the difficult times that you face. Instead, lean into all of the things that are true about those who have been united to Jesus. Listen to the encouragement that Paul gives to the Colossian church as he reminds them about what Christ has done. He says, therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him. Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

[ 28 : 43 ] Then a few verses later in verse 13, here it is, this is good news for all the people who have been united. God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him. This is good news for all those who find their shelter in Christ Jesus. So are you safe and secure in Christ? If not, then come to Him in repentance and faith this morning. Providence Community Church, here is the charge I will leave you with from our text this morning. Man the ramparts. Do not be ignorant towards sin. Purge the evil person from among you and do not accommodate sin. And most of all, do not lose heart or give up hope. In hard times, this is how you will thrive. For He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. Let's pray.

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