

# IN DARK TIMES

RESILIENT LEADERSHIP

*For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.*

– 2 CORINTHIANS 7:5

On an unforgettable Sunday morning in 1866, the great C.H. Spurgeon stunned his five thousand listeners when from the pulpit of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle he announced, "I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever gets to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to." For some of his audience it was incomprehensible that the world's greatest preacher could know the valley of despair. Yet twenty-one years later in 1887 he said from the same pulpit, "Personally I have often passed through this dark valley."

Martin Luther as subject to such fits of darkness that he would secret himself away for days, and his family would remove all dangerous implements from the house for fear he would harm himself. In the midst of one of these times, his wife Katherine entered his room dressed in mourning. Startled, Luther asked who has died. She replied that no one had, but from the way he was acting, she thought perhaps God had!

The truth is, godly believers experience dark times of anxiety, fear, hopelessness and even depression. Perhaps you're in a season of that right now. Depression has been called the common cold of the mind, for sooner or later most people catch it. God's servants are not immune.

- Q.** What is producing the most anxiety or stress in your leadership?
- Q.** What negative thoughts do you regularly struggle with?

In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul says, "*For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.*" In just one sentence, he gives three reasons for his depression:

1. **He was worn out.** He was physically exhausted by the incessant plots on his life by both Jews and Gentiles (See 2 Corinthians 1:8) It is universally acknowledged that fatigue is a standard cause of depression.

*"Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap."* – John Ortberg

2. **He felt tremendous pressure.** “.. but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts [on the outside] ...” Here, “afflicted” carries the idea of being squeezed or pressured. He couldn’t escape his predicament. It had personal implications for him but was something he was powerless to control or avert. Does this sound familiar to you right now?
3. **He feared.** The same Paul who stood before kings and hostile crowds to proclaim Christ had “fears within.” Even the greatest have inner fears and anxieties. In Paul’s case, his inner fears were for what would happen to everything he had worked so hard for and suffered so much for. His life’s work.

Galatians 4:11 – *I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

1 Thessalonians 3:5 – *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.*

2 Corinthians 11:8 – *I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

**Q.** What has brought you relief from your fears, anxieties and hopelessness?

### THE TITUS TOUCH

The divine answer for Paul’s depression was this, “*But God, who comforts the downcast [depressed], comforted us by the coming of Titus*” (2 Corinthians 7:6). Comfort came in a person named Titus. What did Titus say? “Paul, old friend, how are you? Oh, not so good, eh? You say you’re depressed? Come on, Paul. You’re an apostle! You can’t do this. Snap out of it. Here, let me read you a verse.” Of course not! Given the Jewish custom of the day, he likely greeted Paul with a kiss and embrace, then listened to Paul, empathized with his depression, participated in his hurt, and prayed with him.

Titus was powerless to stop the outside pressures that were burdening and afflicting Paul, just like we can’t completely shield ourselves or our friends from the health, social and financial impacts of what’s happening around us. But we can demonstrate our care for them.

*“Care is something other than cure. Cure means ‘change.’ A doctor, a lawyer, a minister, a social worker – they all want to use their professional skills to bring about changes in people’s lives. Care, on the other hand, is compassion. Often we are not able to cure, but we are always able to care.”*

**–Bread for the Journey by HENRI J.W. NOUWEN**

It's also worth noting that while it's not in the scriptural text, Paul obviously revealed his emotional state to Titus and allowed himself to be ministered to. For Paul – and for us – that requires that we lay aside the “good Christians don't have any problems” thinking. Paul chose to receive the comfort Titus brought. And so it must be with us as well.

Very often, God's plan for healing our dark seasons is by “the coming of Titus” – the Titus touch. We all *need* Tituses, and we all need to *be* Tituses.

### **Prayer**

Father, help me to be honest with myself, with You and with others about the concerns that burden me. Help me to recognize and receive the help You send to me and give me opportunities to show care for others as well. Amen.