

Most people don't know about Samuel Pierpont Langley. In the early 20th century, many people were pursuing the dream of flight. And Samuel Pierpont Langley had, what we assume, to be the recipe for success. Langley was given \$50,000 by the War Department to figure out this flying machine. Money was no problem. He held a seat at Harvard and worked at the Smithsonian and was extremely well-connected; he knew all the big minds of the day. He hired the best minds money could find and the market conditions were fantastic. *The New York Times* followed him around everywhere, and everyone was rooting for Langley. Then how come we've never heard of Samuel Pierpont Langley?

A few hundred miles away in Dayton, Ohio, Orville and Wilbur Wright, had none of what we consider to be the recipe for success. They had no money; they paid for their dream with the proceeds from their bicycle shop. Not a single person on the Wright brothers' team had a college education, not even Orville or Wilbur. And *The New York Times* followed them around nowhere. The difference was, Orville and Wilbur were driven by a cause, by a purpose, by a belief. They believed that if they could figure out this flying machine, it would change the course of the world.

Samuel Pierpont Langley was different. He wanted to be rich, and he wanted to be famous. He was in pursuit of the result. He was in pursuit of the riches. And lo and behold, look what happened. The people who believed in the Wright brothers' dream worked with them with blood and sweat and tears. The others just worked for the paycheck. They tell stories of how every time the Wright brothers went out, they would have to take five sets of parts, because that's how many times they would crash before supper.

And, eventually, on December 17th, 1903, the Wright brothers took flight, and no one was there to even experience it. We found out about it a few days later. And further proof that Langley was motivated by the wrong thing: the day the Wright brothers took flight, he quit. He could have said, "That's an amazing discovery, guys, and I will improve upon your technology," but he didn't. He wasn't first, he didn't get rich, he didn't get famous, so he quit.

The study of what causes people to persist is fascinating. And it might be helpful for us to contemplate why WE persist with our Christian faith (and service) – through our own hardship... trials... and persecution. ... When we don't get what we want – will we quit? ... Why are we motivated? ... If you and I don't receive the recognition we were hoping for... (or any other disappointment)... will our service for the Lord diminish in any way...?

The believers in Thessalonica had many “good” reasons to quit. (Well... “good” reasons - by the standards of most people today.) ... As we open Paul's second letter to them... we will see that Paul marveled – because they hadn't given-up... even though they faced severe persecution. ... And using the same standard... (modern common sense)... Paul could not be faulted if he had given-up trying to correct them... on the very same matters that he wrote his first letter in order to establish.

Thessalonica... like all the capital cities within the Roman Empire... were the hardest places for Christians to survive... because of the fanatical intensity of emperor worship in those centers. ... Christian converts were removing their loyalty to this cult. ... Not only that... but the religious leaders of the Jewish synagogue were opposing the growth of the Christian

community. ... The Jews saw Christians as a heretical sect of Judaism... They also felt threatened that Rome might come down hard against Judaism (because of its association with it.)

The Thessalonians (therefore) faced a two-front spiritual and social battle—from both the Jews and the Gentiles. ... But there was also a THIRD front. Besides the abiding effects of these external struggles... the believers also faced a new threat from within the church.

The Christians in Thessalonica were grateful to God for Paul's first letter... but it did not immediately solve all their problems. ... In fact... as their persecution grew worse... some believers thought they were living in the time of the Tribulation.

Perhaps it was a letter from an outside person who was seen as important... (we will see some hint of this)... or a spreader of falsehood right there among them. But some false teacher was propagating views concerning the return of Christ... and the coming day of the Lord - contrary to what Paul had taught them in his first letter.

Their hearts had been stirred. Some people were filled with fanatical expectation and even gave up their jobs in anticipation. They had concluded that since the Lord's coming was so near... they ought to quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for Him. They became idle. This meant that the other members were under an extra burden to care for them.

Others were filled with fearful apprehension. After all... terrible things were to happen. ... In spite of the positive assurances in Paul's letter that the

church would not go through the Great Tribulation... some people still were not convinced. ... Their false teacher had aggravated the situation.

So Paul had to write a second letter. ... We can be glad that he did because he tells us some fascinating details about end-times events that are mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. Besides giving us a vivid description of the Antichrist... he tells us that the Day of the Lord will not come until after two events take place. (When we get to chapter 2... we will see what those are.) ... **[ P A U S E ]**...

Only a letter from a trusted friend with unquestioned authority... could set the church in Thessalonica back on the straight path. ... This second epistle corrects the errors in the Thessalonian church (again.) It was probably written toward the end of Paul's stay in Corinth or sometime near the end of A.D. 53.

Paul begins with these words...

### **2 Thes. 1:1**

These are virtually the same words with which he began his first letter.

Paul enjoyed Roman citizenship... had been born and raised a Jew... and had been brought up in a Greek city (Tarsus.) ... He was thoroughly conversant with the best and the worst of all three worlds. ... He planned with all of the strategy of a Roman... thought with all of the clarity of a Greek... and believed with all of the passion of a Jew.

Paul never knew a stranger. He never met a man of whom he was afraid. He never met anyone to whom he could not talk about Jesus. He was at home preaching to the Jewish high priest... or Roman governor's and

Kings... the Philippian jailor... or Lydia and a handful of women at the riverside. ... He made tents to support his missionary work... and was willing to pick up sticks for a campfire. ... He was as unafraid of Nero - as he was of Peter. ... He was as willing to tell a man to his face that he was a hypocrite (even though that man was Israel's high priest)... as he was to breathe new life into a poor fellow who had fallen asleep at one of his meetings. ... He was an intellectual genius... had a heart of gold... a will of iron... and a deathless vision of a lost and dying world desperately in need of Christ.

Paul was the perfect General for conquering the world - with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Silas was second in command. He was fully capable (himself) of confronting the doctrinal errors and their practical implications... (You see) in Acts 15:32... we are told that Silas was a bona fide prophet. So he stood behind Paul's teaching - as a divinely ordained authority.

Silas was a close friend of the apostles in Jerusalem. He was loved and trusted by men such as Peter and James. ... But he wasn't impulsive like Peter... or narrow-minded like the stern James. ... He tramped the long... dusty highways with Paul. ... He shared in both the blessings and the beatings.

(But... now... get this!)... He never intruded himself. ... If not for the fact that Paul was forever mentioning him in his letters... we would never know that Silas was there. ... He never sought the limelight... never broke rank... we never see him dragging his heels... He was (just) never out of step.

Silas's command of the Greek language would open many doors. ... And in the heated debates that so often followed... Silas would be right there... answering questions... adding his testimony... pointing to key Scriptures... and supporting Paul - all of the way.

Paul and Silas (themselves) had endured suffering and imprisonment for the sake of the gospel — a fact well known to their disciples in Thessalonica. So when they gave instruction about the persecution that the Thessalonians were experiencing – it was NOT empty advice.

(Now let's acknowledge Timothy.) ... Timothy was Paul's personal aide... ever at the apostle's beck and call... ever ready... and ever willing. ... He would run here... there... and everywhere at a nod or a word from Paul. ... No task was too small or too great for Timothy. Paul loved him as though he were his own son.

Timothy was half Gentile and half Jew... a fusion... of being more Jew than Gentile - through his association with his mother and grandmother... and more Gentile than Jew - through his association with his pagan father and Paul.

Paul trusted him. – And that about says it all! Because Paul knew how to size up a man. ... He did not have a great deal of patience with fools... quitters... or cowards. Paul knew that if he gave Timothy a task... it would be done. Also... it would be done promptly and cheerfully. It would be done right.

These three relentless soldiers had just invaded a new continent (Europe.) And Satan followed them... trying to erase their victories in Thessalonica.

## 2 Thes. 1:2

Even though this is fairly typical of the way Paul opened all of his letters... this greeting sure had a lot of relevance to their situation in Thessalonica. In the midst of their suffering... God's grace and peace was their only hope. ... Christians can be at peace - even in the midst of trials and persecution. This was Paul's desire for the Thessalonians.

If you have experienced God's grace... then you know something about His peace. Peace is the world's softest pillow – not even Mike Lindell (the MyPillow guy on TV) can give you a better night's sleep. Real peace comes as a free gift (undeserved grace) – when we turn to Christ. People pay lots of money to their psychiatrist to get it. But it does not come from psychological gyrations. People will pay a lot of money for exotic vacations... and cruises... or go from seminar to seminar... looking for a peace that lasts. ... But it ONLY comes from a supernatural source. It comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul never tired of writing this same greeting in all his letters. They simply summarize what the gospel is all about. And the Thessalonian believers sure could have used such a reminder!

## 2 Thes 1:3

Suffering at the hands of Jews on one side... suffering from Gentiles on the other... and facing false teachers from within... the last thing the Thessalonians needed from Paul in these opening verses - was criticism ... or even a sad song of pity.

Their future didn't look very bright. ... False belief about the Day of the Lord was spreading like the Covid-19 virus. And just like what we experienced in 2020 (and still face)... they met feelings of confusion... fear... and strong discouragement. All of this was sweeping through the body of Christ in Thessalonica... weakening and disorienting them.

So... in this context... where they were sinking deeper into the depths of hopelessness... Paul gives them a burst of optimism to help keep them buoyant... with their heads above water. ... He expresses his gratitude to God for them. ... Why? Because they were responding to the means of grace available to them. (They were not perfect... some doctrinal and practical matters still had to be sorted out. ... But for the most part... they were a joy to Paul's heart. ... And he tells them.)

Paul thanked God for their growth. Growth is evidence of life. Nobody expects a pebble to grow. Vigorous growth is evidence of vigorous life. The thing that struck the apostle about his Thessalonian converts was their growth in faith.

We tend to think of faith as something that is steady... stable... and never-changing... like a possession that we either have... or we don't. ... '*I wish I had your faith*', a person might say... just like they would say '*I wish I had your curly hair*' or '*bright smile*'... as if faith were a genetic endowment. ... Or we complain '*I've lost my faith*' like '*I've lost my car keys*', as if it were a commodity.

*But faith is a relationship of trust in God*... and like all relationships is a living... dynamic... growing thing. ... There are degrees of faith... as Jesus



implied when he said ‘*You of little faith*’ ... and... ‘*I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith*’.

The Thessalonians “growing faith” ... was... (no doubt)... a product of their persecution. ... An easy life most often leads to a shallow faith. ... The great men and women of faith in that chapter of the Bible we all call “the Hall of Faith” (Hebrews 11)... all suffered in one way or another... or faced tremendous obstacles... so that their faith could grow.

A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.

**1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)**

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*

**All** believers must expect their faith to be tried... because this is the way God proves whether or not their decision to follow Christ is genuine. ... Faith... (like a muscle)... must be exercised to grow stronger. ... Tribulation and persecution are God’s ways to strengthen our faith. Warren Wiersbe writes:

*“You do not become patient and persevering by reading a book or listening to a sermon” ... (even this one.) “... You have to suffer. And God never wastes suffering. Trials work **for** us - not **against** us... If we trust God and yield to Him, then trials will produce patience and maturity in our lives. If we rebel and fight our circumstances, then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials that He might build character into our lives.*

The saying is well-used... and perhaps a little worn out. But it is no less than very true: God can grow a mushroom overnight... but it takes many years — **and many storms** — to build a mighty oak tree!

Not only were the Thessalonians' relationships with God developing... but so were their relationships with other people. ... Suffering can make us selfish. ... But when suffering is mixed with grace and faith... it produces love. ... When Christians suffer... their faith reaches *upward* to God... and their love reaches *outward* to their fellow believers.

### **2 Thes 1:4**

Paul... (still encouraging them)... (still helping them keep their heads above water as the torrential persecution poured down on them)... wrote: "We **OURSELVES** boast of you..." And Paul wrote this in a very interesting way. ... "We" is strongly emphatic... and is much more emphatic than we would expect. It implies a strong contrast. "As for us..." "WE (on our part)... boast about you..."

Naturally... the genuine believers in the recently established church were rather restrained in speaking about their own spiritual condition. They were humble. And Paul (in essence) is saying: "*I know that you won't... but **WE** **WILL** BOAST about you...*" And then he boasts about their perseverance under the heavy weight of persecution.

### **2 Thes. 1:5**

It is (at first sight) somewhat difficult to follow the apostle's train of thought (here.). ... To us... the fact of suffering seems to deny - rather than to prove - that God is working out his righteous purpose. ... But what greater evidence could there possibly be... (that a believer has a secure and glorious future)... than an endurance... growing faith... and increasing love - while being persecuted...? It proves to others that God is at work (supernaturally doing what we cannot do ourselves.) **He** is producing this!

The way we act in times of trial... is an opportunity for proving to others that God is at work inside of us. ... Are you letting God use your difficulties this way? ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

However... I believe that there is something else this verse is (also) telling us.

Believers! You and I are not just laying up treasures in heaven by our actions here on earth right now. We are in training for the roles we will have in the coming of God's full kingdom. ... When Christ (physically) comes back to this earth to reign... we are going to come with Him... and we will participate with Him... in His administration during His 1,000 year reign.

We will be taken up in the rapture and be with Jesus while the earth is judged through the Tribulation... Then we will return with Him and be part of His righteous administration (the Kingdom of God.) Paul spoke of this... when he admonished the church at Corinth to settle the problems they were having with each other.

**1 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)**

*<sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

I am not sure why we will need to judge angels... But this tells me that we are going to have great responsibility in helping to administer the Kingdom of God.

(Now)... "*being found worthy of the Kingdom of God*" does not mean: "being found righteous enough to be part of it." If you have given your life to Christ... you have already passed the entrance exam. No. This

worthiness relates to where we will fit in the Kingdom. What role will we have. ... Our worthiness will be according to our training (especially in times of trial.) Train well... and you will be worthy of roles that have greater responsibility and honor.

Now... let me go back... to how I introduced today's passage.

“It might be helpful for us to contemplate why WE persist with our Christian faith (and service) – through hardship... trials... and persecution. ... When we don't get what we want – will we quit? ... Why are we motivated? ... If you and I don't receive the recognition we were hoping for... (or any other disappointment)... will our service for the Lord diminish in any way...?

I hope not. I pray that we would be motivated by what Paul tried to motivate the Thessalonians with.

#1. Let God prove that He is at work – supernaturally producing what you cannot possibly produce in yourself. In the midst of your hardship – be growing in your faith and love.

#2. Be motivated by a dream about the future. See yourself as training well for the full Kingdom of God that is about to come – when Jesus returns. Anticipate being found worthy of a greater role and honor in Christ's administration.

... The wright brothers only dreamed about flying. They were motivated by such an inconsequential desire – compared to ours!