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1 THESSALONIANS 4 Devotionals and Sermon Illustrations

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 Perfecting Holiness

I had not worked in my yard for several weeks, and I was amazed at how quickly weeds had sprung up and taken over. Weeds don't need tending; they seem to love to sprout up for anyone who just lets things go. A bed of beautiful flowers, however, takes watering, feeding, and of course, weeding. Flowers thrive under the care of one who is not afraid to get dirt under his fingernails.

The Christian life takes work too. It requires the commitment of one's whole being to Jesus—body, mind, emotions, and will—to have a life that is wholesome, attractive, uplifting to others, and fulfilling to oneself. Even then, weeds of selfishness and sinful attitudes can quickly spring up and overrun the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

That was the problem with many believers at Corinth. They had become overgrown with envy and divisiveness (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). So Paul told them to cleanse themselves from all "filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). By "holiness" he didn't mean they could be sinless, but blameless.

Lord, help us uproot any weeds of the flesh and the spirit before they become ugly habits. May the beauty of Jesus' character be what others see in us.—Dennis J. De Haan

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Keep Up the Good Work

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

We . . . urge you . . . to do this more and more. 1 Thessalonians 4:1

My son loves to read. If he reads more books than what is required at school, he receives an award certificate. That bit of encouragement motivates him to keep up the good work.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians he motivated them not with an award but with words of encouragement. He said, "Brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more" (1 Thess. 4:1). These Christians were pleasing God through their lives, and Paul encouraged them to continue to live more and more for Him.

Encourage someone today to keep living for God.

Maybe today you and I are giving our best to know and love and please our Father. Let's take Paul's words as an incentive to continue on in our faith.

But let's go one step further. Who might we encourage today with Paul's words? Does someone come to mind who is diligent in following the Lord and seeking to please Him? Write a note or make a phone call and urge this person to keep on in their faith journey with Him. What you say may be just what they need to continue following and serving Jesus.

Dear Lord, thank You for encouraging me through Your Word to keep living for You.

Encourage someone today to keep living for God.

INSIGHT: We may get weary (as if on a hamster's running wheel) sticking to sameness over and over again. Yet when what we are doing is worthwhile, it's worth doing "more and more" (1 Thess. 4:1). Not only do we reap rewards (in this life and the coming one), but we also have the opportunity to hear our Lord's eventual "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:23).

By Keila Ochoa

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Is Ambition Wrong?

Read: Colossians 3:22-24

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord. —Colossians 3:23

Is ambition wrong? Is it wrong to be driven, to push to be the best? It can be. The difference between right and wrong ambition is in our goal and motivation—whether it's for God's glory or our own.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul tells us that Christians are to live lives "to please God." For some, the drive to please Him is an instant transformation at the time of salvation; for others, the transformation is full of stutter-steps and mis-starts. Whether the change happens instantly or gradually, the Christian is to pursue God's goals, not selfish ones.

So, in the workplace we ask: "How will that job change help me serve others and glorify God?" Ambition oriented toward God is focused outward on Him and others, always asking how He has gifted us and wants to use us.

Paul suggests we work with "sincerity of heart, fearing God" (Col. 3:22). Whatever we're doing—in the board room, on the docks, wherever we're working—we're to serve as if doing it for God (vv.23-24).

We glorify Him most and enjoy Him most when we work with fervor and excellence for His pleasure, not ours. For His service and the service of others, not self-service and personal gain—because He deserves our all.

Lord, help me to apply zest to my work efforts
that I might please You. I offer my actions and words
today as a testimony to bring You glory.
Use me today to point others to You. Amen.

"We grow small trying to be great." —Eli Stanley Jones, missionary

By Randy Kilgore

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Keep Climbing!

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Encourage one another daily. Hebrews 3:13

Richard needed a push, and he got one. He was rock climbing with his friend Kevin who was the belayer (the one who secures the rope). Exhausted and ready to quit, Richard asked Kevin to lower him to the ground. But Kevin urged him on, saying he had come too far to quit. Dangling in midair, Richard decided to keep trying. Amazingly, he was able to reconnect with the rock and complete the climb because of his friend's encouragement.

In the early church, followers of Jesus encouraged one another to continue to follow their Lord and to show compassion. In a culture riddled with immorality, they passionately appealed to one another to live pure lives (Rom. 12:1; 1 Thess. 4:1). Believers encouraged one another daily, as God prompted them to do so (Acts 13:15). They urged each other to intercede for the body (Rom. 15:30), to help people stay connected to the church (Heb. 10:25), and to love more and more (1 Thess. 4:10).

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has connected us to one another. Therefore, we have the responsibility and privilege with God's enablement to encourage fellow believers to finish the climb of trusting and obeying Him.

When was the last time you needed to urge someone to keep following Jesus? Who has encouraged you or stirred you to pursue holiness, to keep praying, or to enlarge your love for Jesus and others?

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Encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

INSIGHT:

Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for being “a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess. 1:7). In today’s reading, Paul urges them to continue to live lives that “please God” (4:1). As believers, our desire should be to “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way” (Col. 1:10).

By Marvin Williams

The Weeding Process

1. Identify sins of the flesh or the spirit (Gal. 5:17-21).
2. Call them sin and confess them (1 John 1:9).
3. Stand firm in your position in Christ (Gal. 2:20).

If you yield to God, you won't give in to sin.

The Right Light - Eating in the dark is no fun. Low light in a restaurant is one thing; eating in a room with no light at all is another. The same is true in our walk with God. Unless we take advantage of the light He gives, we will miss seeing what He is doing for us.

We have an Old Testament picture of this—the tabernacle. As the priest entered a room called the Holy Place, he could see only by the light of a golden lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40). Like everything else in the room, it had been carefully fashioned according to the pattern God gave Moses (v.40).

The lampstand is a picture of spiritual light. The gold speaks of value. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The six branches coming out from the center shaft portray unity in plurality. The symbol of the almond blossom is linked to God's anointed priesthood (Numbers 17:1-8). When all this is combined with a New Testament reference that uses a golden lampstand to represent the church (Revelation 1:20), we have the complete picture. God gives light through the Spirit, who works through His congregation of anointed people (1 Peter 2:9).

Yes, the Holy Spirit provides us with the light we need. Are we daily spending time in prayer and reading God's Word so that we can take advantage of it?—Mart De Haan

Holy Ghost, with light divine,
Shine upon this heart of mine;
Chase the shades of night away,
Turn my darkness into day. —Reed

The light of God's holiness convicts
the sinner and guides the saint.

Housekeeping Of The Heart - As a young homemaker, I enjoyed cleaning our house from top to bottom. The trouble was, it never stayed clean for long. Eventually I discovered that if I kept our house reasonably tidy, it appeared to be clean even when it wasn't. Gradually I concentrated more on the appearance of a clean house and neglected thorough cleaning. This compromise was not only convenient, it was convincing. Sometimes even I was fooled. But on sunny days my clean-looking house was revealed for what it was—dusty and dirty.

In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites who concentrated on the appearance of holiness while neglecting their heart-holiness (Matt. 23:25). When the light of Jesus shined on them, He revealed the truth about their outwardly religious life. He didn't say these external acts were necessarily wrong, but they were wrongfully used as a coverup for wickedness. For them, inner housecleaning was long overdue.

Keeping up appearances in our housework isn't wrong, but pretending our hearts are clean is. Only those who are clean on the inside will welcome Jesus with confidence when He returns. Is your heart ready? Or is heart-cleaning needed? Now is the time to take care of it! —Joanie Yoder

Thinking It Over

What is the only way to get a clean heart? (Titus 3:3-6).

After we have put our faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16),

how do we keep our heart clean? (1 John 1:9).

At the heart of holiness is holiness of the heart.

A Walk In The Woods - A friend of mine wrote to me about certain "reservations" in his life—areas of secret sin that he reserved for himself and into which he frequently withdrew.

These "reserves" are like the large tracts of wilderness in my home state of Idaho. It may sound exciting to wander around these untamed regions by oneself, but it's dangerous.

So too, each journey into sin takes its toll. We sacrifice our closeness with God, forfeiting His blessing (Psalm 24:1-5), and we lose our influence on others that comes from purity of mind and body (1 Timothy 4:12).

The wild areas in us may never be fully tamed, but we can set up perimeters that keep us from wandering into them. One perimeter is to remember that we are dead to sin's power (Romans 6:1-14). We do not have to give in to it.

The second perimeter is to resist temptation when it first attracts us. Initial temptation may not be strong, but if we entertain it, it will in time gain power and overwhelm us.

The third perimeter is accountability. Find a person who will commit to ask you each week, "Have you 'taken a hike in the wild'? Have you gone where you should not go?"

Impurity is ruinous, but if we long for holiness and ask God for help, He will give us victory. Press on!—David H. Roper

O Lord, help us to recognize
When we begin to compromise;
And give us strength to follow through
With what we know is right and true. —Sper

Beware—the more you look at temptation, the better it looks!

Just A Closer Walk with Thee - Nobel Prize-winning physicist Martin Perl was asked what he attributed his success to. "My mother," he answered. "Every day when I came home from school she asked me, 'So, Marty, did you ask any good questions today?'"

David asked the best question of all: "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?" (Psalm 15:1). There are two words ancient Jews had for expressing the question "who?" One is similar to our usage. But David used another word here that asks, "What kind of person dwells close to God?"

The answer came in a series of character traits: "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart" (v.2).

It's one thing to know the truth; it's another to obey it. God delights to live on His holy hill with those who are holy—who reflect the reality of the truth they believe. He loves men and women who "ring true."

This psalm, however, is not about any holiness of our own that we think will qualify us to gain entrance to His presence. It is rather about the beauty of holiness that God forms in us as we dwell in fellowship with Him.

The closer we get to God, the more like Him we will become. —David H. Roper

More purity give me, more strength to o'ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains, more longings for home;
More fit for the kingdom, more used would I be,
More blessed and holy—more, Savior, like Thee.
—Bliss

Walk so close to God that nothing can come between.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 Are You Ready?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. —1 John 2:28

The yard man was coming, and I wasn't ready. I had hired a lawn service to put some special ingredients on my grass so it would

come up all green and happy when winter's chill finally headed out of town.

But I didn't know when the lawn service would send someone, and the residue of the previous autumn's leaf drop still lay on the ground. And there were the usual leftovers from a winter of windy days, kids building snow things, and trees losing their branches.

Day after day I feared that this would be the day. Unless I did some preliminary work, the yard man's activity would be less than successful. Finally, I found a Saturday when I had a few minutes to do my raking. It felt good to tie up that last bag of yard waste. Now I was ready!

I wonder. Do we ever feel that tension in our lives when we think about the any-moment return of our Lord Jesus? Do we think about all the things we need to get done? Those neighbors who need to hear about Him? Those words of forgiveness we owe someone? That back-burner relationship with God that must come to the front?

He's coming. We don't know when. What should we be doing today to keep us from being ashamed in His presence tomorrow? (1 Jn. 2:28).

For Further Study

When will Jesus return? (Mt. 24:36-44; Lk. 12:35-40).

What does 1 Thessalonians 4 say our conduct should be as we anticipate His return?

If Christ comes today, will you be prepared to meet Him?

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Don't Forget Monday

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, . . . to please God. —1 Thessalonians 4:1

God is quite popular on Sunday. Millions of people around the world stop what they're doing to visit a building where the sole purpose is to meet with others to worship, sing, and learn about God. But then Monday rolls around. What place does God have in their lives then? When the emphasis is on a thousand other things, they can easily go all week without considering Him.

Even among many believers who go to church on Sunday, God's name isn't spoken in reverence. Often His plans are not considered, and His guidelines for living aren't given a thought.

Where did we get the idea that God wants our attention only on Sunday? Certainly not from the apostle Paul, who said we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)—a sure sign that God is listening on Monday through Saturday too. Paul also wrote, "Rejoice always" (v.16), which indicates that we shouldn't stop singing just because the organ stops playing. And what about the command, "In everything give thanks"? (v.18). That would surely suggest that the rest of the week is just as full of opportunities to say, "Thank You, God."

Sunday is a special day to give direct attention to God. But it doesn't stop there. Don't forget Monday!

The Christian life is not confined
To church one day a week;
God wants us to obey His Word—

Each day His will to seek. —Sper

Worship God on Sunday, then walk with Him on Monday.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 Gentle Persuasion

Read: Acts 26:24-32

We urge you . . . that you may walk properly toward those who are outside. —1 Thessalonians 4:10-12

While teaching a college writing class, I used a textbook based on Aristotle's classic work Art of Rhetoric. He outlined three forms of persuasion that can apply to the way we witness to others about Christ.

1. Ethos (character). Henry Stanley said of Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone, "He never tried to convert me, but if I

had been with him any longer I would have become a Christian.” When people around us see the reality of Christ in our lives (1 Thessalonians 4:12), our words are taken more seriously.

2. Pathos (feeling). While touring Europe, a group of students from a Christian college witnessed to their busdriver. One girl tearfully pleaded, “If you don’t accept Jesus, you’ll go to hell. Please, please trust in Jesus.” That reminds me of Paul’s impassioned plea and its effect on King Agrippa (Acts 26:28).

3. Logos (reason). When we live a holy life, we will attract attention. This will lead to questions. It’s then that we are to be ready to give reasons for what we believe, and we are to do so gently and humbly (1 Peter 3:15).

Is God leading you to witness to someone? Ask for His help. One, two, or all three of these classic methods may help open the door of that person’s heart. —DCE

Thinking It Over

Why is your character so crucial to your witness?

Do nonbelievers sense your compassion for them?

Why do you believe in Christ? Have you told anyone?

When you know Christ, you want others to know Him too.

By David Egner

A Lesson From the Oak Tree - Have you ever noticed that in winter some oak trees retain their crisp, dry leaves long after the maples, the elms, and the walnuts have become bare skeletons? Even the strong winter winds and the early spring rains do not completely strip the oak branches of all their old leaves. But as springtime progresses, warmer winds blow and something wonderful begins to happen. Tiny buds start appearing at the tips of the twigs, and the dried remnants of the preceding season fall off. New life replaces the old.

At times, old habits cling to our lives with the same tenacity as those oak leaves. Even the winds of adversity do not remove all the lifeless leftovers of our fallen human nature.

But Christ, who dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is at work. His life within us continually seeks to push off the old habits—renewing us when we confess our sins, steadying us when we falter, and strengthening us to do His will.

When every effort to cast off an old sinful habit ends in failure, remember the mighty oak. Thank God for His Spirit who lives in you. Keep saying yes to His gentle urging to be kind, loving, compassionate, honest, and faithful. Those “lifeless old leaves” will eventually drop off. —Dennis J. De Haan

When stubborn sins tenaciously
Hold to their former place,
We must rely on Jesus’ strength
And His unfailing grace. —Sper

To get rid of a bad habit, start a good one—trust God.

Let’s Get Growing! - Several years ago my interest in flowers had our home resembling a nursery. There’s something about the presence of growing plants that I find very enjoyable. As I daily inspected their progress, I gained from my little green friends a new appreciation of the joy and necessity of the wonderful process of growth.

As Christians, we too are like plants. We should put down our roots, break up through the earth, spread out our branches, and burst into blossom. Such a thriving condition, however, isn’t always evident in our lives. It’s so easy to become bored and listless in the bland routine of our daily activities. Often we just hang on and merely exist without moving steadily toward maturity and fruitfulness.

At such times we are at a spiritual standstill and must allow Jesus the “Sun of Righteousness” (Malachi 4:2) to warm our hearts anew with His love. We must send our roots deep into the Word of God by meditating on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). Then we will be like a fruitful tree planted by rivers of living water, and our branches will extend outward in an ever-increasing influence and witness. They will be filled with blossoms that reflect the beauty of righteous living.

If we’ve become dormant, let’s get growing!—Mart De Haan

If God can make a tiny seed

Into a bloom so fair,
What can He make, O soul, of you
Through study, faith, and prayer? —Anon.

Decay starts when growth stops.

1Thes 4:1 Don't Make News

A story in our local newspaper reported that a \$1.73 billion highway and mass transit project in Denver, Colorado, was nearing completion on schedule and within the budget. But the story wasn't on the front page. In fact, it was tucked into a sidebar of brief summaries in small type on page 3 of the local news section. If the project had been plagued by fraud, delays, and cost overruns, no doubt it would have been headline news.

I've decided that "Don't Make News" might be a good motto in life. If we lie, cheat, and steal, that's news. If we live honestly and morally, we can have an unnoticed yet effective spiritual influence on people around us.

When Paul commended the Christians in Thessalonica for showing love toward each other, he urged them, "Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands ... that you may walk properly toward those who are outside" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

Since our goal is to please God in everything we do (v.1), it makes no difference whether anyone applauds our actions or not. We are called to be faithful, not famous. Bad behavior sells newspapers. Honesty and integrity honor the Lord. Don't make news! —David C. McCasland

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame,
I'd rather be true to His holy name. —Miller
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The world's applause cannot compare to the Lord's approval.

1Thessalonians 4:3 Dirty Laundry

Whenever my husband and I leave the house, our dog Maggie goes sniffing for old shoes and dirty laundry. She surrounds herself with what she finds and then sleeps with it near her nose. The familiar smells comfort her until we return.

Of course Maggie doesn't realize she's following a levitical command to "distinguish between ... unclean and clean" (Leviticus 10:10). Nor does she know she's violating it.

In a world still swirling in sin long after its catastrophic collision with evil, God commanded His followers to live holy lives (Leviticus 11:45). Distinguishing between clean and unclean is essential to that task.

Such discernment requires more than finely tuned physical senses. The apostle Paul wrote that the "natural man"—that is, a human being in his sinful state—"does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). It is the Holy Spirit who provides this wisdom (v.13).

Just as Maggie finds comfort in old shoes and socks, many people seek comfort in old dirty sins. We must be mindful that our comfort and consolation come from God, who loves us and who establishes us in "every good word and work" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).—Julie Ackerman Link

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.
See if there be some wicked way in me;
Cleanse me from every sin and set me free.
—Orr © 1966, Singspiration, Inc.

There is no true happiness apart from holiness,
and no holiness apart from Christ.

1Thessalonians 4:6 A Healthy Fear

and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also

told you before and solemnly warned you. - 1Thessalonians 4:6

During a severe thunderstorm, a mother tucked her child into bed and turned off the light. Frightened by the tempest, he asked, "Mommy, will you sleep with me?" Hugging him, she replied, "I can't, dear. I have to sleep with Daddy." Stepping out of the room, she heard, "That big sissy!"

Fear is real. But it's not always negative. In 2 Chronicles 17:3-10, we read about a healthy, positive fear that prevented neighboring countries from going to war against Judah. What had caused this fear? We are told that "the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat" (v.10).

A respectful fear of the Lord was also what King Jehoshaphat desired for his own people. So he made it a priority that they be taught God's Word. He knew that if the people were in awe of the Almighty, they would humble themselves and obey Him. Doing what was right would bring prosperity to Judah and respect from neighboring countries.

Proverbs 15:33 declares, "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom." Those who fear Him act with wisdom; they walk faithfully before Him as they obey His commands.—Albert Lee

God dwells in light and holiness,
In splendor and in might;
And godly fear of His great power
Can help us do what's right. —D. De Haan

The right kind of fear will keep us from doing wrong.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 - **Little Acts Of Love**

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

You yourselves are taught by God to love one another. —1 Thessalonians 4:9

When I was a young boy, I knew that my father was extremely fond of black walnuts. We didn't often get them, so the day I found one on the ground I was delighted! My first thought was to have my mother crack it so I could eat it myself, but then my love for my father took over. I saved it for him.

When he came home that evening, I gave him the walnut and said, "Here, Papa, I've been saving it all day just for you!" I thought it strange that he didn't want to crack it and eat it right away. It was not until 30 years later, after he had died, that I found it again. It was in a special place in his desk. Mother told me he considered it such a sincere token of my deep affection for him that he kept it as a memento.

Little acts of love are often appreciated far more than we realize. So let's keep in mind God's command to "love one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:9). By the power of the Holy Spirit, let's exchange our self-centered attitudes for heartfelt words and deeds that show our love.

Don't delay in performing even the smallest act of love today. Believe me, it will be appreciated, and it will be richly rewarded by the Lord. Little acts of love can make a big difference. —Henry G. Bosch

Like refreshing rain in summer
Or the gentle breeze in spring,
Just a little gift of kindness
Joy to someone's heart can bring. —Hess

To make a big difference in life, show a little love.

By Henry G. Bosch

1 Thessalonians 4:9 Looking For The Obvious

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

You yourselves are taught by God to love one another. —1 Thessalonians 4:9

A service station should provide what its name implies. Yet gas stations that offer free service seem to be a thing of the past.

In an article for the Detroit Free Press, Ellen Warren asked, "Can we get service at a service station?" She wasn't talking merely

about nostalgia but about basic services such as free air, clean and accessible restrooms, and road maps (at least ones to look at).

Warren located one station that did live up to its name, however. A sign out in front read: "Last and only gas station that offers FREE air and water, cold drinking water, clean restrooms, towels and hand fresheners, fuel gloves, travel information. Always open."

Expecting love from Christians should be just as reasonable as expecting service from a service station. The Thessalonians had been "taught by God to love one another" (1 Thessalonians 4:9), so Paul said he didn't need to write them about brotherly love. And Jesus told His disciples that love would identify them as His followers (John 13:35).

A service station without service is a contradiction. So is a Christian without love! Having received God's love (Romans 5:5) and being assured of it daily, let's show His love to others. —MRD II

If I can do some good today,
If I can help in what I say,
If by my deeds Your love convey,
Dear Lord, just show me how. —Brandt

They do not truly love who do not show their love. —Shakespeare

By Mart DeHaan

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 Hard Labor

Read: 2 Thessalonians 3:7-13

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. —Colossians 3:23

It's one of life's ironies that on Labor Day in the US and Canada, most of the workers get the day off. But that's for good reason. What better way to reward a hard-working populace than to give the laborers a holiday!

Labor Day seems like a good time to take a closer look at what it takes to offer our employers our best.

1. No matter what our task, it's our duty to work for God's glory (Colossians 3:23). In this sense, no job is better than another. Each should result in honor to God.
2. The way we work can earn the respect of those who do not follow Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). A boss shouldn't have to tell a Christian to use time well or to work hard.
3. Our work is one way to fulfill our dual purpose: to love God and others. Showing love to our co-workers is a good way to show that we love God (Matthew 22:37-40).
4. We must work to provide for those who depend on us. Harsh words of criticism are reserved for those who don't take care of their family (1 Timothy 5:8).

Having a job can be hard work. Even for those who truly enjoy their jobs, it's nice to have a Labor Day breather. But until the day comes when our work is over, our task is to make our labor a testimony to God's glory.

Whatever you are working on,
Engage in it with zest,
Because your work is for the Lord,
And He expects your best. —Sper

It's not the hours you put in that count, but what you put in the hours.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:11 G Campbell Morgan

That ye be ambitious to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands.—1 Th. 4.11

Here again we have adopted the marginal reading, because that is the exact meaning of the Greek word rendered "study." Here then is a revelation of proper ambition, and it is remarkable as contrasting with worldly ambition. Three things the Apostle exhorted these young Christians to be ambitious about. The first was to be quiet, and the word describes that which stands in sharp contrast to the passion for notoriety, the desire to be seen and known. He urges them to be ambitious to be secluded, hidden, quiet. The next was to attend to their own affairs, instead of interfering in the affairs of others. The last was to work with their own hands, rather than

live by the exertions of others. As we have thus endeavoured to state the ideas, we have seen the contrary and unworthy ambitions which so constantly master human life. The first is that for distinction, for the conspicuous position. The second is for the power and opportunity to meddle with the business of other people. The last is for freedom from the necessity for personal toil, gained through imposing work on others. How revolutionary Christianity is! How it cuts clean across popular conceptions, and runs counter to the mean desires of the human heart! And yet how great it is in all its constructive purposes! Think of the life which is described here by implication. The life of quiet strength and repose; the life that is arranged and orderly; the life that is honourably independent. Surely it is good to be ambitious for such a life. (Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

1Thessalonians 4:11 Drones

As I sat looking at my beehives, I was especially interested in the activities of a considerable number of bees that seemed to be busybodies. They were always buzzing, going in and out of the hive, but doing no apparent work. These nonproductive ones are called drones. They are male bees—much larger than a worker or even the queen. Their only function is to fertilize a queen and then die.

While waiting for a new queen to emerge, the drones spend their time visiting one hive after another. But they do no work; they make no honey; they build no comb; they can't even sting. And they're noisy! You should hear them buzz, but it's all bluff.

For a while drones are privileged characters, but when fall comes and the honey flow slackens, the worker bees will kill every drone! Not a one lives through the winter. The time of reckoning comes, and they are denied the reward of the workers.

In the apostle Paul's letter to Timothy, he warned about people who are active in the wrong kinds of activities—going from house to house as busybodies, stirring up trouble instead of serving others (1 Timothy 5:13).

Don't be a drone if you want to share in the heavenly treasures reserved for the faithful.—Mart De Haan

In service true of any kind,
Lord, happy I shall be,
If by my help some soul may find
The path that leads to Thee.
—Anon

God's house should be a hive for workers
—not a nest for drones.

God-Honoring Work - Several years ago in the South African territory of Kwa-Zulu, the government dug irrigation ditches on both sides of a river. This allowed the rich land to be farmed. The Christian Zulus on one side of the river produced lush crops and prospered. The traditional animist worshipers on the other side continued to live in abject poverty, producing almost nothing on the same kind of soil.

Why? The Christians believed they were responsible before God to work hard and live soberly. Their pagan neighbors, on the other hand, viewed work as the women's responsibility, while the men spent their time drinking and fighting.

The Bible tells us that as God's image-bearers we are to "have dominion over ... every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). It urges us to work with our hands so that we can provide for ourselves and others (Eph. 4:28; 1 Th. 4:11). Work, when performed with the right attitude, can be pleasurable and rewarding. Proverbs 27:23-27 portrays the beautiful interplay of diligent work on our part and faithful nurture on God's.

Whatever your job, do it diligently and gratefully. Through it you will find pleasure and experience God's blessing. --H V Lugt

We thank You, Lord, for giving us
The opportunity
To work to earn our daily bread
And share it willingly. --Sper

When God puts work into your life,
He expects you to put life into your work.

1Thessalonians 4:13 rv Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

Sorrow not, even as the rest, which have no hope. (r.v.)

Nature will have her due. Tears will fall, and hearts seem near to breaking. Nowhere does God chide the tears of natural affection;

how could He, since it is written that “Jesus wept”? But He sets Himself to extract their bitterness. Sorrow you may, and must; but not as without hope.

Those who die in Christ are with Him. — They are said to sleep, not because they are unconscious, but because their decease was as devoid of terror as an infant’s slumbers. Believers have all died once in Christ, and it was necessary to find a word which, whilst significant of death, was not death, in order to describe the moment of our farewell to this world and birth into the next. This word was furnished by Death’s twin-sister Sleep. The catacombs are covered with the brief significant sentence, Obdormivit in Christo (He slept in Christ). But just as in sleep the spirit is conscious, of which dreams bear witness, so in the last sleep. Absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord.

Those who die in Christ will come with Him. — They are now waiting around Him till He give the final order for the whole heavenly cortege, which has been collecting for ages, to move. The holy angels will accompany; but the beloved saints shall ride in the chariots of God as the bride beside the bridegroom.

Those who die in Christ shall be for ever reunited with us who wait for Him and them. — They shall come with Him. “God will bring them.” We, on the other hand, if we are living at that supreme moment, shall be changed and caught up to meet Him and them; and then, all one in Christ, we shall be for ever with Him, to go no more out.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Flight Plan

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

In missionary pilot Bob Griffin’s book *Cleared for Take-off*, one idea appeared often: A pilot must have a good flight plan. Airports require pilots to file a flight plan that includes their travel route and destination. A missionary pilot, often flying to and from small landing strips across uncharted territory, must know how to get where he’s going and where to put the plane down when he arrives.

He has to know the course to stay on if he has to “fly blind” through dense fog. Or he may have to know and rely on visual checkpoints such as mountain peaks and rivers. Every aspect of his flight must be known—especially the landing.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we too have a “flight plan.” We know that our destination is heaven, and we know that each day we are to follow the course of obedience that has been carefully mapped out for us in the Bible.

The final leg of our flight plan is found in these Bible verses: “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Th. 4:16-17).

What a flight plan!

God leads us in the path of righteousness
For His name’s sake, and as we walk that way
We know it leads at last to heaven above,
To which our souls will rise one glorious day. —Hess

The more you love Jesus, the more you’ll long for heaven.

By David Egner

The Heaven File

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

My wife Luann has a folder she calls her “heaven file.” It contains articles, obituaries, and photos, along with cards from the memorial services of family and friends. She keeps them, not as a sad reminder of people we have loved and lost, but in anticipation of our glad reunion with them in heaven.

Paul wrote of this wonderful expectation to the Christians in Thessalonica, so they would not grieve like people who have no hope. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

This passage speaks of our future joy together in the presence of Jesus Christ our Savior. For now, we on earth have fellowship with the Lord, and we experience what hymnwriter Samuel J. Stone called “mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.”

Much about the future remains a mystery, but we can confidently look forward to being in the presence of Christ with all the saints who have gone ahead.

When we asunder part
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again. —Fawcett

God’s children never say goodbye for the last time.

By David McCasland

1 Thessalonians 4:17 A Grand Reunion

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

Nineteenth-century evangelist D. L. Moody loved to tell a story about the fishermen who ventured far out on the Adriatic Sea. Each evening their wives would go down to the shore to await their husbands’ return after a long and perilous day.

Standing there, they would sing the first verse of a familiar hymn, then pause and listen intently. They knew their husbands were safe when they heard them singing the second verse as it was carried by the wind across the waves.

Moody said, “Perhaps if we’d listen, we too might hear—in this storm-tossed world of ours—some sound, some whisper borne from loved ones afar.” As he contemplated the Savior’s return and being united with his loved ones, he said it was as if he could almost hear the echo of their voices “breaking in music upon the sands of time.”

I like to think that even as we long to see our loved ones who have gone to heaven, they are eagerly awaiting the day when we’ll be together again. One of these days, whether we are “caught up together with them in the clouds” (1 Th. 4:17) or we pass through death’s valley, we’re going to have a great and grand reunion. Oh, what rejoicing there will be!

Friends will be there I have loved long ago,
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet, just a smile from my Savior, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me. —Gabriel

Death cannot separate those who are one in Christ.

By Richard DeHaan

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Grief Is Messy

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. —1 Thessalonians 4:13

The film *We Are Marshall* tells of the November 14, 1970, plane crash that took the lives of most of the Marshall University football team, the coaching staff, and many community leaders of Huntington, West Virginia. Seventy-five lives were lost in the crash, which devastated the university and the community. Through the composite characters of Paul Griffen and Annie Cantrell, the film dramatizes the aftermath of the crash. Their stories intertwine because Griffen’s son, Chris, was Annie’s fiancé. When Chris died, their lives were plunged into a year of pain that seemed unbearable. Why? Because, as Paul told Annie, “Grief is messy.”

He was right, grief is messy. All of us grieve at one time or another—including those of us who are Christ-followers. For the believer, however, there is something beyond the tears, pain, and loss. There is hope.

Writing to a church family who had seen loved ones taken in death, Paul acknowledged the reality of grief. But he challenged them not to “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Loss and death are part of life, but believers can face them, knowing that Christians never say goodbye for the last time. We can comfort one another (v.18) with the hope of the resurrection and a future reunion.

The Lord has promised to prepare
A place in heaven above—
A home where we will always be
With Him and those we love. —Sper

Because Christ lives, death is not tragedy but triumph.

By Bill Crowder

1Thessalonians 4:13-18 Ray Of Hope

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.
—1 Thessalonians 4:13

It was to be an exciting summer for our family. We had many activities planned, including a trip to Florida to help our daughter Julie begin her teaching career.

Instead, the summer of 2002 began with tragedy. When our teenage daughter Melissa was killed in an automobile accident on the last day of school, our summer of hope turned into a nightmare.

Right away, I began to pray that the loss of our bright, athletic, friendly daughter could have a positive impact on teenagers—first among her friends and then in ever-widening ways.

Toward the end of the summer, we did take that Florida trip to get Julie started, heavy-hearted as we were. As she began teaching, Julie never forgot the desire to see Melissa's life change the lives of others. She told her classes about her sister and her faith.

One day, a student talked to Julie after class. "I'm scared," she said, "because I'm not a Christian like Melissa was." Julie then led her to faith in Jesus Christ. I imagined Melissa rejoicing in heaven.

The summer of 2002 didn't turn out as planned, but we were thankful to see some fruit of a life well-lived. Even in our sorrow, God gave us this ray of hope. —Dave Branon

Lord, give us grace to trust You when
Life's burdens seem too much to bear;
Dispel the darkness with new hope
And help us rise above despair. —Sper

Even in life's darkest hour,
Christians have the brightest hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 WHEN SOMEONE IS GONE

Comfort one another with these words.- 1 Thessalonians 4:18

It was one of those rare times at our house when there was only one child around. Stevie's older sisters were off at camps and on mission trips, so it was a good time for a father-son airport outing.

We had just left McDonald's and were on our way to visit the cockpit of a DC-9 when Stevie surprised me. After I said, "This is fun, isn't it?" he replied, almost sadly, "Yeah,

but it's not as much fun without Melissa."

I figured his mind would be filled with thoughts of airplanes and burgers, so for him to think about his 8-year-old sister was unexpected.

His sentiment reminded me of how significant our loved ones are to us. When they're away, our activities can't make us stop thinking of them and wishing they were with us. That truth has special significance if we have loved ones who have died. The loss of their companionship is painful. Life is not the same without them.

In our sadness, though, God comforts us with the promise of 1 Thessalonians 4, which tells us that we do not need to "sorrow as others who have no hope" (v.13). We can look forward to the time when Jesus returns and we will be reunited with our believing loved ones. That truth is a big comfort when someone is gone.-J. David Branon

Think of the thrill we'll have meeting

Loved ones who've gone on before;
Think of the joy and the rapture,
Then think of parting no more. -Anon.

Death separates us for a time;
Christ will reunite us forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 DIRTY WINDOWS

The Shepherd's Home in Wisconsin has a problem with dirty windows. Although many of its residents are severely disabled, they love Jesus and understand that He has promised to return someday and give them new bodies. "Every day," said the superintendent, "some of them go to the windows and press their noses against the glass, looking for Him."

The expectation of those precious people is genuine. Their irreversible mental and physical limitations fuel their longing for the day when they will be perfectly whole and free.

The Holy Spirit enables us to keep alive that same hope. And it is a sure hope because it rests on two events, one past and one future -- the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20), and the reality that He will return to this earth someday (1 Th. 4:13-18). Paul united both truths in today's key verse (v. 14).

When the going gets tough, we must resist the temptation to give up on life, or to find morbid pleasure in complaining. Instead, we must stay obedient to the Lord, renounce sin, and keep our eyes on the future (1 Cor. 15:33-34). Then we can rejoice in the certainty that in the world to come our painful trials will be no more.

Let's keep looking for Christ's return.-- Dennis J. De Haan

One day at death or Christ's return
We'll shed this earthly life of care;
And we who've known and loved the Lord
Will in His perfect likeness share.
-DJD

The greatest joy on earth is the clear prospect of heaven.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 OUR ONLY HOPE

We should live ... godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope.- Titus 2:12-13

An unknown author wrote, "When I was first converted, and for some years afterward, the Second Coming of Christ was a thrilling idea, a blessed hope, a glorious promise, the theme of some of the most inspiring songs of the church.

"Later it became an accepted tenet of faith, a cardinal doctrine, a kind of invisible trademark of my ministry. It was the favorite arena of my theological discussions, in the pulpit and in print. Now suddenly the second coming means something more to me. Paul called it world."

From the human standpoint, there is no solution for the problems of the world. Leaders seem to be completely frustrated in trying to deal with the unrest and increasing violence in society. The only complete and permanent solution is found in the return of Christ. When He comes, He will set up His kingdom. He will rule the nations in righteousness, and "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).

As we await our Savior's return, let us keep on praying, working, and watching, while "looking for the blessed hope" - our only hope for this world.: - Richard W. De Haan

And for the hope of His return,
Dear Lord, Your name we praise;
With longing hearts we watch and wait
For that great day of days!- Sherwood

As this world grows darker,
the promised return of the Son grows brighter

1 Thessalonians 4:17 THE BIG DIFFERENCE

"We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."- 1 Thes 4:17

As I walked out of the chapel after a memorial service for a Christian friend, the funeral home director remarked, "You know, there's a big difference between the funerals of those who are Christians and those who are unsaved."

This man had witnessed hundreds of funerals and had been impressed by the striking difference between the behavior of true believers and those who did not have faith in Christ. He had observed that Christians are comforted by Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus... Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air"(1Thes 4:14, 17).

Of course, we do grieve when death temporarily separates us from our loved ones. But the grief is greatly eased and the heartache gently softened by the truth of God's Word: Christians who die go into the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, and they will accompany Him when He returns to this earth.

We who are looking for our Lord's second coming can take courage and find comfort in anticipating that glorious reunion. That's what makes the big difference!-- Richard W. De Haan

We'll meet again - perhaps today --
The dear ones who have passed away;
Oh, wondrous joy to meet them there
At that blest union in the air.-- Smith

The bright ray of hope in the darkening skies is the promised return of the Son.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 A Great Mystery

Many people love mysteries. It's exciting to put ourselves in the shoes of a detective and try to figure out "whodunit" as we turn the pages of a mystery novel. But there's a cliffhanger that we'll never resolve—until we experience it ourselves.

Those of us who have watched in sadness as someone close to us has died may wonder about their new existence. Our hearts ache to know what they are doing or where they are. If they had trusted Jesus Christ as Savior, we know they are in heaven. But, for now, a veil separates us from our loved ones and we cannot see behind it.

We do have a few clues about this mystery, though. We know that our departed loved ones are enjoying God's presence (2 Corinthians 5:8). We also know that they are recognizable and conscious of their surroundings—just like the rich man and the beggar Jesus spoke of in Luke 16:22-23. And we know that they haven't yet received the perfect body that will be theirs when Christ returns (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Beyond that, we are left with this truth: God, in His matchless love and power, is planning a glorious reunion. Then, our eternal rejoicing will begin. The last page of this great mystery has a happy ending. —Dave Branon

The Lord has promised to prepare
A place in heaven above—
A home where we will always be
With Him and those we love. —Sper

God's people never say goodbye for the last time.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Three Certainties

As I waited outside the Intensive Care Unit for changes in the condition of a loved one, I was reminded that death affects all of us: old and young, male and female, rich and poor.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle Paul comforted those who mourned the death of their loved ones. He told them that excessive grief resulted from being uninformed. Weeping for our loss is good, but we need not weep like those who have no hope. Instead, we must rely on three certainties of death.

The first certainty is that the soul does not die. The souls of departed believers are with the Lord (v.14). They have retired from this problematic world, and they "sleep in Jesus."

Second, Jesus will come for every believer. Whether a Christian is alive on earth or asleep in death, Jesus will return for all His children (vv.16-17).

Third, there will be a joyous reunion. "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (v.17).

Knowing these certainties brings comfort to believers when their friends and loved ones depart. Although we are separated from them for a while, we will meet again in the presence of our Lord. —Albert Lee

When facing death's shadow, remember the Light;
The shadows bring fear, and the dark shrouds our eyes;
But if we will turn to face Jesus the Light,
The shadows will fade as He brightens our skies.

—Lee

Sunset in one land is sunrise in another.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 How Would You Answer?

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout ... And the dead in Christ will rise first. —1 Thessalonians 4:16

Sir Norman Anderson was invited to give a television talk on the evidence for Christ's resurrection, a subject that he had written much about. When his son died of cancer, the program producers offered to cancel his participation, saying, "You can't speak about the resurrection when you've just lost a son." But Anderson said, "I want to speak about it now even more." And so, sad in heart but with great assurance, he spoke of Christ's resurrection, and ours as believers.

The resurrection of Jesus is no myth—it's a historical, well-attested fact. Indeed, it's an eternal fact! Jesus declared, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18).

Jesus spoke to His disciples about His own resurrection and reassured them, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). And Paul wrote of the Christian's resurrection, teaching that when a fellow believer dies we don't need to sorrow as those who have no hope (1Thessalonians 4:13).

When Lazarus died, Jesus assured Martha that whoever believes in Him, though he dies, shall live again (John 11:25-26). He then asked, "Do you believe this?" Martha replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God" (v.27). How would you answer?—Joanie Yoder

All flesh, as grass, shall pass away
From this vile world of sin and strife;
The one who sleeps in Christ today
Will wake to resurrected life.

—Benson

Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our own.

THE BIG DIFFERENCE - As I left a funeral home one day after a memorial service for a dear saint of God, one of the directors of the mortuary re-marked, "You know, there's a big difference between the funerals of those who are Christians and those who are unsaved!" I have never forgotten his words. What a testimony to the reality of the Christian faith! Here was a man who had witnessed hundreds of funerals and had been impressed by the striking difference between the behavior of true believers in a time of bereavement and those who had no faith. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that the unsaved should not sorrow like worldly individuals who have "no hope." The reason for Paul's admonition is found in the following verses, where the apostle describes the day when "... the Lord himself shall descend from heaven ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first ... [and] we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (1Thes 4:16, 17).

Let it be remembered, however, that even believers grieve when death separates them from their loved ones. After all, when human ties are broken, it does hurt and tears are bound to be shed. But notice Paul does not say that we do not sorrow at all. Rather he declares that we "... sorrow not, even as others who have not hope!" The grief is lessened and the heart-ache softened in the realization that those who died in Christ go into the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself, and the day is coming when with glorified, resurrected bodies all believers shall in one great, glad, grand reunion rise to meet the Lord in the air. No wonder Paul concludes this passage by saying, "Where-fore, comfort one another with these words!"

Those who are looking for that blessed hope find courage and comfort in the upward look. The thought of Christ's soon return and reunion with loved ones makes a big difference!

O how sweet it will be on that wonderful day,
So free from all sorrow and pain;
With songs on our lips and with harps in our hands
To meet one another again! —E. H. Gates, alt.

UNION with Christ here,
means REUNION with loved ones over There!
—GW

1Thessalonians 4:17 A HAPPY LIFE

Cornelia Dobner was 90 when she died and went to her home in heaven. Her life had been characterized by hard work, self-sacrifice for her family, and loyalty to God and her husband.

Soon after the funeral, two of her great-granddaughters put their feelings into words by writing notes to her. One of them, in the clear block printing of a 6-year-old, wrote, "I hope you have a happy life up in heaven."

That child's hope for her great-grandmother is an unquestioned certainty for every follower of Christ who dies. The Bible describes our eternal home as a place where there is no more suffering, sorrow, crying, pain, impurity, disease, nor evil (Rev. 21:4, 27). It also tells us what IS there: the Lamb (Jesus), the redeemed, the river of life, the throne of God, the tree of life, the light of God (Rev. 21:22; 22:1-5).

Jesus said that He would go and prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3). And the apostle Paul described it as the place where "we shall always be with the Lord" (1Thes 4:17). If that's not happiness, what is?

Yes, like Cornelia Dobner, every believer in Jesus can look forward to "a happy life up in heaven."-- David C. Egner

Beyond earth's sorrows, the joys of heaven,
Beyond earth's shadows, a glorious dawn;
Beyond earth's battles, sweet peace unending;
Beyond earth's sunset is heaven's morn.-- Gilmore

To be with Jesus forever is the sum of all happiness.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 In Transition

Read: John 11:17-27

We will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17

People post obituary notices on billboards and concrete block walls in Ghana regularly. Headlines such as Gone Too Soon, Celebration of Life, and What a Shock! announce the passing away of loved ones and the approaching funerals. One I read—In Transition—points to life beyond the grave.

When a close relative or friend dies, we sorrow as Mary and Martha did for their brother Lazarus (John 11:17-27). We miss the departed so much that our hearts break and we weep, as Jesus wept at the passing of His friend (v. 35).

"Whoever lives by believing in me will never die." John 11:25

Yet, it was at this sorrowful moment Jesus made a delightful statement on life after death: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (v. 25).

On the basis of this we give departed believers only a temporary farewell. For they "will be with the Lord forever," Paul emphasizes (1 Thess. 4:17). Of course, farewells are painful, but we can rest assured that they are in the Lord's safe hands.

In Transition suggests that we are only changing from one situation to another. Though life on earth ends for us, we will continue to live forever and better in the next life where Jesus is. "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (v. 18).

It is because of You, Jesus, that we have hope and are sure of a forever life. We're grateful.

For help in dealing with loss, read Life After Loss at discoveryseries.org/cb131

Because of Jesus, we can live forever.

INSIGHT: Martha, Lazarus's sister, is one of the most misunderstood characters in the New Testament. We usually think of her in

the context of Luke 10:38–42, where Jesus challenges her misdirected priorities. This often leads to the conclusion that she was somehow spiritually inferior to her sister, Mary. However, Martha is the one who expresses her confidence in Christ to do something about the death of her brother (John 11:21–22). And she makes a wonderful statement on the deity of Christ, showing that she, in fact, had great depth of spiritual understanding (v. 27). Bill Crowder

By Lawrence Darmani

1 Thessalonians 4:17 The Ultimate Reunion

September 27, 2014

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

I'll never forget the vigil of sitting by my dad's bed as he spent his last few days with us before slipping into eternity. To this day the moment of his passing continues to have a profound effect on me. My dad was always there for me. I could call him whenever I needed counsel. I have great memories of our days fishing together; we would talk about God and the Bible, and I would prompt him to tell those fun stories from his youth on the farm.

But when Dad took his last breath, I became aware of the irreversible finality of death. He was gone from this world. And my heart had a vacancy sign hung on its door.

Yet, even in the midst of such loss and grief, God's Word speaks encouragingly into the emptiness. The apostle Paul teaches us that at the coming of the Lord Jesus, those who have gone on before will rise first and we "shall be caught up together with them And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Now that's a reunion I'm really looking forward to! Not only to be reunited with my dad, but to be with Jesus forever.

C. S. Lewis said, "Christians never say goodbye." I'm eagerly awaiting that ultimate reunion! - Joe Stowell

Lord, in the midst of our sorrow and loss, remind us of the glorious eternal reunion that is waiting for us. Comfort us in our grief and fill our hearts with joyful anticipation of the day You will return!

O Death, where is your sting? —1 Corinthians 15:55

INSIGHT: In the Bible, sleep is a euphemism for physical death (Ps. 13:3; Matt. 9:24; 27:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60). Daniel 12:2 says, "Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." Jesus affirmed that "the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). On that day when Jesus returns, believers, "those who sleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14), will be resurrected first (v.16). Then the believers who are still alive will be "caught up" or "raptured" to meet Christ in the air (v.17).

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Long-Awaited Reunion

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

As a boy, I had a collie named Prince Boy, a great dog that I really loved. One day, he disappeared. I didn't know if he had been stolen or if he had simply run away—but I was devastated. I searched everywhere. In fact, one of my earliest childhood memories is of climbing a tall tree from which I could scan our neighborhood in hopes of spotting him. I desperately wanted my beloved dog back. For weeks, I was always watching and hoping to see Prince Boy again. But we were never reunited.

There's a much greater sense of loss when we think we'll never again see a loved one who dies. But for those who know and love the Lord, death's parting is only temporary. One day we will be reunited forever!

Paul assured the Thessalonians, "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The words that provide comfort to the grieving heart are together and we. These words of reunion indicate that followers of Christ don't ever have to experience permanent separation. For us, death is not a goodbye; it's a "see you later."

We'll be reunited one day

With our loved ones who have died
If they know the Lord as Savior—
Then with Him we will abide. —Sper

God's people never say goodbye for the last time.

By Bill Crowder

1 Thessalonians 4:13 So Long

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

[Do not] sorrow as others who have no hope. —1 Thessalonians 4:13

My grandfather refused to say “goodbye”; he felt the word was too final. So, when we would drive away after family visits, his farewell ritual was always the same. Standing in front of the green ferns that lined his house, he would wave and call out, “So long”!

As believers, we never have to say “goodbye” to the ones we love, as long as they have placed their trust in Jesus as Savior. The Bible promises that we will see them again.

The apostle Paul said that we should not “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13), because when Jesus returns, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves and—together with the believers who are still alive—will meet the Lord in the air (vv.15-17). We have confidence that one day in heaven there will be “no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying” (Rev. 21:4). It's in that wonderful place that “we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Christians have the hope of an eternal reunion with Christ and with believing loved ones who have passed away. That's why Paul exhorted us to “comfort one another with these words” (v.18). Today, encourage someone with the hope that allows us to say “so long,” instead of “goodbye.”

At death, God's people don't say “Goodbye,” but “We'll see you later.”

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

1 Thessalonians 4:17 This Could Be the Year

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are still alive and are left will . . . meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17

My dad was a pastor, and on the first Sunday of each new year he preached about the return of Christ, often quoting from 1 Thessalonians 4. His point was always the same: “This could be the year that Jesus will return. Are you ready to meet Him?” I'll never forget hearing that sermon at age 6, thinking, If that's true, I'm not sure I will be among those He's coming for.

I felt certain that my parents would be going to heaven, and I wanted to go too. So, when my dad came home after church, I asked how I could be sure. He opened the Bible, read some verses to me, and talked to me about my need for a Savior. It didn't take much to convince me of my sins. That day, my dad led me to Christ. I will be forever grateful to him for planting these truths in my heart.

In an increasingly chaotic world, what a hopeful thought that this could be the year Jesus returns. More comforting still is the anticipation that all who trust Him for salvation will be gathered together, relieved from this world's suffering, sorrow, and fear. Best of all, we'll be with the Lord forever!

Lord, keep me always mindful of Your inevitable return. Thanks for the assurance that this world is not all we have but that a blessed eternity awaits all who trust in You.

Perhaps today! Dr. M. R. De Haan

INSIGHT: Part of Paul's purpose in writing to the Thessalonians was to answer questions they had apparently sent to him, perhaps through Timothy (1 Thess. 3:6). It is helpful to remember that during the first century Scripture was still being written, so followers of Christ had incomplete information about many topics. In this case, the concern is what happens to believers who die before the Lord's return. Paul answers that believers who have died will be resurrected first (vv. 14–16). Then those who are still alive will be “caught up together with them” to meet Christ in the air (v. 17).

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Jesus Is Coming

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. —1 Thessalonians 4:16

A Scottish preacher once said, “The doctrine of the Lord’s second coming, as it appears in the New Testament, is like a lofty mountain that dominates the entire landscape.”

Commenting on that statement, author A. J. Gordon adds, “No matter what road you take, no matter what pass you tread, you will find the mountain bursting on your vision at every turn of the way, and at every parting of the hills. What first struck me in reading the New Testament was this: Whatever doctrine I was pursuing, whatever precept I was enforcing, I found it fronting toward and terminating in the hope of the Lord’s second coming. All paths of obedience and service lead on to that mountain.”

Someone has pointed out that there are more than 300 references to Christ’s return in the New Testament. One fact is clear—Jesus is coming back. Each day we are getting closer to that climactic moment. Today could be the day!

Are you ready? Knowing that Christ could return at any moment is a blessed hope and a comfort to all who have put their faith in Him (1 Th. 4:18; 5:11; Ti. 2:13). But He is also coming in fiery judgment on those who don’t know Him and who reject the gospel (2 Th. 1:7-9).

Be ready! Jesus is coming!

The Lord has said He will return
To judge the world someday;
Are you prepared for Him to come
Or hoping for delay? —Sper

Don’t complain about what this world is coming to; proclaim the One who is coming to this world.

By Richard DeHaan

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Snapshots Of Heaven

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

I asked my 10-year-old son Steve, “Why do you want to go to heaven?” I expected to hear something about streets of gold or not having to go to school or something similar. Instead, he said, “Because I want to see Grandpa.”

It’s been several years since my dad, Steve’s grandpa, went to be with the Lord. But I don’t think time will ever diminish how much Steve admires and misses his World War II veteran grandfather. That’s why the fact that Steve will see him again in heaven is so important to him.

The prospect of heaven is one of the most comforting truths in the Bible. Not only can we find hope in knowing that we will someday be in Jesus’ presence, but we can also anticipate seeing loved ones who are waiting for us on the other side (1 Th. 4:14,17).

Imagine a grieving widow who has the assurance of being reunited with her husband of 50 years. Imagine sorrowing parents knowing that their child who succumbed to disease will be reunited with them. What a wonderful hope!

The promise of reunion in heaven gives us a glimpse of what our eternal home will be like. The prospect of seeing the people we love gives us snapshots of heaven in an album of hope.

When my life on earth is ended
And I reach the other shore,
I shall meet my own dear loved ones
Who have gone that way before. —Reef

Goodbyes are the law of earth; reunions are the law of heaven.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:13 The Right Information

Read: 1 Thess. 4:13-18

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13

Our flight had been airborne about 15 minutes when the pilot announced that the aircraft had a serious problem the crew was trying to analyze. A few minutes later, he announced that it was a vibration and that we would have to return to the airport. Then the flight attendants made a series of step-by-step announcements explaining what was going on and what would happen once we were on the ground. In an event that could have been terrifying, the fears of the passengers were relieved because we were given the right information.

In the first century, a group of believers in Thessalonica were afraid that their believing loved ones who had died were gone forever and would miss out on the second coming of Christ. For that reason, Paul wrote, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). Paul's words of comfort were intended to soften their fears by giving them the right information, which made all the difference in the world. While grieving their loss, they could still have hope of a coming reunion with those who were in Christ.

In seasons of loss, we too can find comfort and hope because the Bible has given us the right information.

Death is not a period—it's only a comma.

By Bill Crowder

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 A Ray Of Hope

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.
—1 Thessalonians 4:13

It was to be an exciting summer for our family. We had many activities planned, including a trip to Florida to help our daughter Julie begin her teaching career.

Instead, the summer of 2002 began with tragedy. When our teenage daughter Melissa was killed in an automobile accident on the last day of school, our summer of hope turned into a nightmare.

Right away, I began to pray that the loss of our bright, athletic, friendly daughter could have a positive impact on teenagers—first among her friends and then in ever-widening ways.

Toward the end of the summer, we did take that Florida trip to get Julie started, heavy-hearted as we were. As she began teaching, Julie never forgot the desire to see Melissa's life change the lives of others. She told her classes about her sister and her faith.

One day, a student talked to Julie after class. "I'm scared," she said, "because I'm not a Christian like Melissa was." Julie then led her to faith in Jesus Christ. I imagined Melissa rejoicing in heaven.

The summer of 2002 didn't turn out as planned, but we were thankful to see some fruit of a life well-lived. Even in our sorrow, God gave us this ray of hope.

Lord, give us grace to trust You when
Life's burdens seem too much to bear;
Dispel the darkness with new hope
And help us rise above despair. —Sper

Even in life's darkest hour, Christians have the brightest hope.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Anticipation

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

I will come again and receive you to Myself. —John 14:3

At the beginning of March, my friend began a countdown. Marked on the calendar in her office were the 20 days left until the first day of spring. One morning when I saw her, she volunteered, "Only 12 more days!" A few days later, "Only 6!" Her enthusiasm started to rub off on me, and I began to keep track as well. "Just 2 more days, Jerrie!" "I know!" she beamed.

As believers, we have something to look forward to that is even more exciting than the anticipation of budding flowers and lots of

sunshine after a long winter. God has made many promises in His Word, and each one has been or will be fulfilled. But the certainty that Christ will return is one of the greatest promises of all. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. . . . Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,” and we’ll be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Although no one can know the exact day, we have God’s promise that Jesus will come back (Acts 1:7-11). As we celebrate the spring and coming Easter season, let’s encourage each other in anticipation of that day!

He is coming! Oh, the rapture
To behold His lovely face,
And to tell Him how I love Him,
Who has saved me by His grace. —Dimmock

Christ is coming—perhaps today!

By Cindy Hess Kasper

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “This Is It!”

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

The Lord Himself will descend from heaven Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up. —1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Have you ever had a time when you thought the Lord was coming back right then? Many believers in Jesus are so eager to “meet the Lord in the air,” as Scripture puts it (1 Thessalonians 4:17), that they have felt “This is it!” at one time or another.

My wife, Sue, who once worked in a Christian nursing home, recalls being aboard an elevator at the facility when she had “second coming” thoughts. She had closed the door and started up to the second floor when the elevator came to a halt. Sue was stuck between floors. As she waited, there was a jolt and a quick flash of light—and then nothing again.

Sue recalled later that the power of the light and movement startled her and made her think that something unusual was happening. In that moment, her mind went toward the much-anticipated return of Jesus. It was a “This is it!” moment.

Whether we have experienced this feeling is not important. What is absolutely vital is that we know we are ready at any time for the Lord’s return. If we have received Jesus as our Savior, we will find ourselves anticipating with excitement His appearing—eager to “stir up love and good works” in one another as we “see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

A little while—then Christ will come;
The glorious hour draws nigh
When He will come to take His bride
To dwell with Him on high. —Gilmore

Christ’s second coming is as certain as His first.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 4:13 A Well-Founded Hope

Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

I do not want you to be ignorant, . . . lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. —1 Thessalonians 4:13

A man in the community where I live was featured in a newspaper article because he enjoys ridiculing the Christian faith. He boldly declares his conviction that life has no meaning and that we have no basis for hope of life beyond the grave. He defiantly rejects the evidence for the existence of God and the historical record of Christ’s resurrection.

The day may come when he, like the atheistic philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), will long for a glimmer of hope and not be able to find it. In 1980, the ailing Sartre wrote, “Despair returns to tempt me. . . . The world seems ugly, bad, and without hope. There, that’s the cry of despair of an old man who will die in despair. But that’s exactly what I resist. I know I shall die in hope. But that hope needs a foundation.”

Within a month Sartre was dead. I wonder if he ever discovered that foundation. God’s Word teaches that the only basis for hope is the empty grave and the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15).

God has provided in Jesus Christ a rock-solid foundation for hope. Because He did rise from the grave, no one needs to die in

despair (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

What about you? Is your hope founded on Christ?

The Christian's hope is in the Lord—
We rest secure in His sure Word;
Although we're tempted to despair,
We do not doubt that God is there. —D. De Haan

Christ, the Rock, is our sure hope.

By Herbert VanderLugt

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 THE ULTIMATE REUNION

"In Christ all shall be made alive... Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." - 1 Cor. 15:22-23

The article in "Newsweek" magazine called it "the ultimate reunion." Was it a gathering of war veterans? Perhaps a banquet in honor of our country's living ex-presidents? No, it was nothing of the kind -- just a rumor that the surviving members of the popular music group the Beatles and Yoko Ono, widow of deceased Beatle John Lennon, were "thinking of doing something together again."

For those of us who recall the drug abuse and decayed morals of the cultural revolution the Beatles were part of, that rumor held no excitement. But there is another reunion that grabs the attention of Christ's followers, whether the media consider it newsworthy or not.

We anticipate with uplifted hearts the ultimate reunion that will take place when Jesus Christ returns to gather the whole family of God together. Dead believers will be resurrected first (1 Th. 4:16). Then, along with believers living everywhere on earth, we will all be united with our Lord to enjoy forever the splendor of His presence (v. 17).

But only those who have put their trust in the redeeming and returning Savior, the Lord Jesus, will share in that thrilling event. Will you be at the ultimate reunion? Make sure today!-- Vernon C. Grounds

Called to meet Him in the air--
My soul, look up and sing!
No sordid world to vex thee there--
Forever with the King!-- Bregenzer

Among Christians, there are no permanent partings.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:11 - During the American Civil War, General William T. Sherman drove his troops on his decisive march to the sea. In a fort on Kennesaw Mountain, he left behind a small contingent of men to guard the rations. General John Bell Hood of the Confederate Army attacked the fort, and a fierce battle followed. One-third of Sherman's men were killed or wounded and J. M. Corse, the general in command, was severely injured. Just as he was about to hoist the white flag and surrender, a message came through the signal corps set up on a chain of mountains. General Sherman was within fifteen miles of the fort and sent the message: "Hold fast. We are coming." Those few words so encouraged the defenders that they held on and kept the fort from falling into the hands of their attackers.

Our heavenly Commander has also sent us the assurance that He is coming. The Lord Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3). The fact that our Savior is coming again gives us hope. It makes us want to stand our ground. It encourages us to continue fighting the good fight of faith. It assures us of victory. Fierce as the battle may rage and difficult as the conflict may be as we serve Him, we dare not give up. Christ is coming again—perhaps today. —R. W. De Haan.

When faithfulness is most difficult, it is most rewarding.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 At The Cemetery

When a loved one dies and we go to the cemetery, we may join a long processional. We may sit or stand around the gravesite and listen respectfully while the minister commits the body to the earth and reads Bible verses about the resurrection. Then the casket is lowered into the ground. We may return later to leave some flowers and stand with heads bowed in memory and respect. Our loved one is dead, and we know we can never bring him back.

When Jesus went to the cemetery, it was different. His friend Lazarus had died, and when Jesus got to the tomb, He exercised His power and authority. He commanded: "Take away the stone" (John 11:39). "Lazarus, come forth!" (Jn 11:43). "Loose him, and let him go" (Jn 11:44).

We might wish with all our hearts that we could bring a loved one back, but if we were to give those commands nothing would happen. But Jesus has that ability, for He is "the resurrection and the life" (v.25). His power was demonstrated when Lazarus came out of the tomb—alive!

One day, Jesus will again be "at the cemetery." And when He gives the command, all the dead who believed in Him will "come forth" (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). What a day that will be! —David C. Egner

There'll be no sorrow there, no more burdens to bear,
No more sickness, no pain, no more parting over there;
And forever I will be with the One who died for me—
What a day, glorious day that will be! —Hill
©1965 Ben L. Speer

For the Christian, death is the doorway to glory.

Be Careful, He's Coming!

Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed. --1 John 2:28

When I was a teenager, our youth pastor and other people who talked to our youth group told us this: "Be careful where you go and what you do. You don't want to be embarrassed when Jesus returns."

It's been a long time since I've heard anyone say that, even though it's a truth that is firmly grounded in Scripture. In 1 John 2:28, the apostle suggested that Christians should live pure lives by abiding in Jesus, for we never know when He will return.

I'm not sure exactly why we don't hear this truth much anymore, but I have a good idea what a couple of reasons might be. For one thing, we may not really think Jesus could come back without warning. For another, we may not be as concerned as God wants us to be with living pure and holy lives.

The truth is, the Lord knows what we are doing at all times, and we should always be aware that we need to please Him with our words, actions, and attitudes. But the possibility of our being ashamed at His coming seems more sobering, since it is specifically mentioned in God's Word.

So what's the message? If we live every moment for Jesus, we can be confident that we won't be ashamed when He returns. --J D Brannon

O Lord, when you return for us,
May we not be ashamed
But filled with joy and confidence
That we will not be blamed.
-Sper

Looking for Christ's return
makes a difference in your life.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 From Here To Eternity

We shall always be with the Lord. —1 Thessalonians 4:17

According to a report in an online journal (disputed by other studies), if one 45-year-old man exercises regularly through the rest of his life and another guy the same age exists as a couch potato, the exercising man will live only 10 months longer.

It's good to take care of our bodies and it makes sense to exercise if we're able. But the idea of working hard to extend our lives looks futile when compared with "the ultimate life-extension plan." According to the Bible, you can extend your life from here to eternity.

Look at what the apostle Paul told the people at Thessalonica. Trying to encourage them about Jesus' return, he wrote, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Astounding! Those who make that quick exit will never die. And even if Jesus does not return while you are alive, if you know Him as Savior you will never die spiritually. You have "everlasting life."

Are you interested in extending your life? Go ahead and exercise. But don't forget that the ultimate life-extension plan is salvation through Jesus—your guarantee of living forever.—Dave Branon

Do you have questions about what it means to trust in Jesus for eternal life? Read [Where Do We Go From Here?](#)

Give your life to Christ
and you'll keep it forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Always

I love the words always and never. They hold so much hope! I would like to think that I could always be happy and that life would never fail me. But reality says that I won't always be happy and that the things I hope would never happen just might. So, as good as these words sound, they struggle to live up to their potential—unless you are thinking about the promise of Jesus' presence.

To a group of troubled disciples who feared facing life on their own Jesus said, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20). The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear" (Heb. 13:5-6). And the apostle Paul assures believers that after death, "We shall always be with the Lord" (1Th 4:17). How encouraging!

No matter how scary our journey may feel today or how hopeless our future may look, the assurance of His never-failing presence can provide us with the courage and comfort to make it through. And best of all, when this short life is over, we will always be with Him. No wonder Paul encourages us to "comfort one another with these words" (1Th 4:18). - Joe Stowell

Jesus said He's always with us,
He will never leave our side;
Someday we'll be in His presence
Where forever we'll abide. —Sper

Confidence in God's presence is our comfort.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 TOGETHER FOREVER"

... so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:17

My wife Margaret and I have found it very interesting to walk through cemeteries. Our children cannot understand, thinking it rather morbid and gruesome. We don't see it that way — death is a reality, and we might as well face it. The believer, especially, should be able to look it "straight in the eye," since Christ has removed its "sting." The real reason for our strolls, however, is to read the various epitaphs on the markers. They tell a great deal about a person's past life and his future hope. We have had many good sermons from the "messages" engraved on tablets of marble. For instance, First Thessalonians 4:16 is inscribed on my father's gravestone as a testimony. It speaks of "That Blessed Hope" which pervaded and influenced his entire ministry and life.

Just a few days ago, we saw a number of markers in a St. Petersburg cemetery, all bearing the message "Together Forever." The thought struck me with real force — these words can either express a tremendous blessing or a terrible fate. I don't know anything about the people buried there; but if they truly knew the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, the fact that they — husband and wife — were "together forever" with the Lord was a most comforting thought. However, if they were not saved, they were "together forever" all right, but in the place of suffering and separation from God. This is almost unbearable to contemplate.

First Thessalonians 4:17 tells of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ when we who know Him will be caught up together with our loved ones in Christ, and then "shall we ever be with the Lord." That thought, "together forever" with Him, certainly brings comfort and joyous anticipation to the heart of every believer. We would cry out with John in Revelation, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

When we all get to Heaven,
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory.
—Eliza E. Hewitt

He who is on the road to Heaven
should not be content to go alone!

1 THESSALONIANS 5

Devotionals and Sermon Illustrations

1Thessalonians 5:1-2 Life's Final Deadline

"Prepare to meet your God" - Amos 4:12

We're all confronted with deadlines! Bills must be paid, licenses renewed, tax returns filed-- the list goes on and on.

One deadline we all face is of supreme importance, however. The Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Except for believers who are living when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), everyone will die. And all people from the beginning of history will stand before God in judgment. How foolish to neglect the preparation necessary for this inevitable accounting!

In Luke 12, Jesus told a parable of a rich man who planned to build bigger barns to store all his earthly goods so that he could live out his days in pleasure and ease. But God unexpectedly announced, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you" (Luke 12:20). His ultimate deadline had arrived.

Are you ready to meet God? If you've never received Christ, as your personal Savior, do so without delay! Believe that He shed His blood on the cross to forgive your sins, and that He conquered death by rising from the grave. Ask Him to save you. Then you can face life's final deadline with confidence! - Richard W. De Haan

Life is uncertain,
Death is sure;
Sin the cause,
Christ the cure.- Anon

Don't wait till the 11th hour to repent --you may die at 10:30!
If you believe that Jesus lives, you don't need to fear death.

1Thessalonians 5:1-3 Nothing is Ever Sure

In November 1975, the huge freighter Edmund Fitzgerald sank in the cold waters of Lake Superior during a fierce storm. Only a week before the tragedy, chief steward Robert Rafferty had written to his wife, "I may be home by November 8. However, nothing is ever sure." The prophetic irony of his words was noted in a newspaper article listing the 29 crew members who perished in the disaster.

Not a day passes without a reminder that our earthly life can end at any moment. All we need to do is read the obituary column. One message comes through loud and clear: We're here today, but we may be gone tomorrow! "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14).

Is our only certainty, then, the sobering prospect that at any moment we may be thrust into eternity? No! Christ is the anchor of the soul. He paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. If we admit our guilt before God, we will receive forgiveness and eternal life by trusting Him. He has promised to remain with us, even in the hour of death.

Does your earthly life seem futile because "nothing is ever sure"? Then trust Christ! He provides a joyous certainty about eternity that can be yours right now.—Dennis J. De Haan

Life is uncertain,
Death is sure,
Sin is the cause,
Christ is the cure! —Anon.

It's never too soon to accept Christ,

but at any moment it could be too late.

News Bulletin - The news bulletin commanded attention. Several inmates had escaped from a penitentiary. They were armed and considered extremely dangerous. A police spokesman stressed to the community the importance of caution. He said, "These men are desperate. They have nothing to lose. They have killed and could kill again."

Deuteronomy 7 contains a far more serious warning. Overall, the passage is a positive expression of blessing. It shows the willingness of God to help those who trust Him. But that's not the whole picture. Did you catch the "news bulletin" in verse 10? The Lord alerted Israel to be on the lookout—not for bad men roaming the streets but for a good God who will destroy all those who hate Him.

It's true. Evil men are not the only ones to be feared. We are also to fear our good God. Even though He is merciful and full of compassion, His awesome holiness makes all other kinds of fear look mild by comparison.

We might not like to face this sobering truth. But God will not always be patient with those people who have no love or respect for Him. That's a news bulletin we can't afford to miss. —Mart De Haan

You've heard the news—there's no escape—
The Lord is coming to make right
The wrongs in this dark world of hate;
So make your choice—come to the Light. —Hess

Live today as if you will stand before God tomorrow.

1Thessalonians 5:1-11 YOUR LAST DAY

"Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober."-- 1 Thessalonians 5:6

What if you were told this morning that today was to be your last day on earth? How would you spend its fleeting hours? Whom would you insist on seeing? Would your behavior differ radically from what it usually is?

Someone has wisely said, "You should treat every day as if it's your last one, because one of these days you're going to be right."

There's no getting around it. Whether our earthly life ends by accident, illness, the ravages of age, or our Lord's return, one of these days will be our last. That's why we should guard so carefully the things we do and the words we say.

We ought to be tying up the loose ends of long-neglected matters by expressing our love and gratitude to others, by seeking reconciliation with an alienated friend, or by sharing the gospel with a neighbor.

Perhaps you've even been putting off accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior until some more convenient day. But that day may never come. Since your last day on earth can be so unexpected, heed Paul's inspired words: "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).

Are you living each day as if it were your last?-- Vernon C. Grounds

Believe in Christ, redeem the time,
Prepare without delay;
That death is certain should affect
The way you live today.-- Hess

What would you change if this day were your last?

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 It's For Sure!

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. —John 14:3

Before our second child was born, my wife and I attended a childbirth class offered by the hospital. During the course we watched a film designed to relieve the fears of expectant parents. All of us had questions like: When will the labor begin? Will there be plenty of time to get to the hospital? Will the delivery be hard? And what about our baby? Will it be a boy or a girl? Will it be large or small? Will it be healthy?

The narrator then summed it up like this: "Yes, there are so many questions left unanswered. But one thing is for sure: You will

deliver. You will give birth!" The class laughed. One thing was certain—the baby would come.

The experience reminded me of the Lord's second coming. We have so many questions about it. What will it be like? Will it be a startling experience? Will we be happy when we see Jesus? Where will we be when it occurs? Will we be living, or will we be among those who are raised from the dead?

Yes, as we anticipate the birth of that new day, there are many unanswered questions. But one thing is for sure—He is coming! That is why we should prepare ourselves through faith, hope, and love (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Then we will be ready for the blessed event. —MRD II

Jesus may come at any time, so we should be ready all the time.

By Mart DeHaan

1 Thessalonians 5:1-22 OUR LORD'S RETURN

Nearly 2,000 years ago Jesus said, "I am coming quickly." Since then, some have wrongly tried to predict when He will return. Others have scoffed. Was Jesus wrong? Did something happen that He didn't foresee?

Of course not! We view time from the perspective of our own brief life span. But to the eternal God, "One day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

Jesus told His disciples that God had not given them specific information about "times or seasons" (Acts 1:7). He wanted them -- as He wants us -- to live in an attitude of expectation. Paul echoed this when he spoke of Christ's return as "the blessed hope" (Ti. 2:13).

But how do we live expectantly? Jesus instructed the disciples to be witnesses to all the world (Acts 1:8). Paul said, "Watch and be sober" (1 Th. 5:6) and love other believers (vv. 12-15). John urged us to walk in close fellowship with Jesus (1 Jn. 2:28-3:3) and to purify ourselves so that we will "not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (2:28).

The Lord's any-moment return is no cause for date-setting but for watchful expectation. Let's serve Him in every aspect of our lives, and one day we'll hear Him say, "Well

done, good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21).- Herbert Vander Lugt

Blessed are those whom the Lord finds watching,
In His glory they shall share;
If He shall come at the dawn or midnight,
Will He find us watching there?-- Crosby

A watching Christian will be a working Christian

1 Thessalonians 5:6ff Colonist Victory

During the Revolutionary War, a loyalist spy appeared at the headquarters of Hessian commander Colonel Johann Rall, carrying an urgent message. General George Washington and his Continental army had secretly crossed the Delaware River that morning and were advancing on Trenton, New Jersey where the Hessians were encamped. The spy was denied an audience with the commander and instead wrote his message on a piece of paper. A porter took the note to the Hessian colonel, but because Rall was involved in a poker game he stuffed the unread note into his pocket.

When the guards at the Hessian camp began firing their muskets in a futile attempt to stop Washington's army, Rall was still playing cards. Without time to organize, the Hessian army was captured. The battle occurred the day after Christmas, 1776, giving the colonists a late present—their first major victory of the war. (Today in the Word, MBI, October, 1991, p21)

1 Thessalonians 5:6 Waiting . . . And Watching

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. —1 Thessalonians 5:6

A father arrived to pick up his son after a church youth meeting. As he drove into the parking lot, he saw his pre-teen son by the exit door—completely oblivious to his dad's arrival. The father decided to see how long it would take his son to look around and discover that he was there. Twenty minutes went by before the dad finally honked the horn to get his son's attention.

"Where have you been?" his son asked when he got in the car.

"I've been sitting right here for 20 minutes," his dad replied, much to the surprise of his son.

Do you think we'll be a little like that preoccupied son when Jesus returns for us? Oh, we won't fail to see Him when He comes back. He'll make His presence abundantly clear to us. But are we so busy with the details of life that we are not looking for Him and preparing for His arrival? Or are we watching—eager to see Him come?

It's not easy to keep focused on the return of the Lord. We have so many things to take care of that we push Christ's return to the back of our minds. If so, "Let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (1 Th. 5:6).

To be prepared for Christ's coming, we need to be actively watching—and ready.

When Jesus comes to reward His servants,
Whether it be noon or night,
Faithful to Him will He find us watching,
With our lamps all trimmed and bright? —Crosby

We are to be ready for the last moment by being ready at every moment. —Bonar

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 5:8 Is There Any Hope?

On December 17, 1927, a submarine sank off Provincetown, Massachusetts, and forty crewmen died. In the failed rescue attempt, one diver heard a trapped sailor tap out a pathetic question in Morse code: "Is there any hope?"

The disciples must have been asking the same question at their last meal with Jesus. The One they loved the most was going away to a place where they could not immediately follow.

Although packing His bags to leave, He promised to return for them. When they least expected it, He would walk up the front path, climb the porch steps, and knock boldly on the door. Jesus told His disciples to feed on that hope because He was the hope for years to come.

This hope became a major theme of the New Testament. In essence, Paul pictured Christians skydiving in reverse, free falling upward through the clouds, reaching out their hands to His, and floating into eternity (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Peter proclaimed a sure hope because of Christ's resurrection (1 Peter 1:3) and challenged everyone to be ready to give a reason for that hope (3:15).

Until Jesus returns we have a message for those sleepwalking on trails that lead to a hopeless end. We on the other road—the one of endless hope—must awaken them with our shouts of joy, "He is the Christ. He is coming again. He is our hope!"

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Helping Hand

An 89-year-old man who enjoys creating new words to describe old problems calls a person who finds fault with everything an *againstovist*. "Whatever you suggest," he says, "that person is against it, and will find something wrong with everything you do."

I have pondered his words and too often find myself guilty of being the kind of person he describes. What I would like to call being a "realist" is, in truth, more like being an "againstovist." And that is not pleasing to God.

In the 58th chapter of Isaiah, the prophet said that the sacrificial lifestyle God desires includes: "to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free" (v.6), to "take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness" (v.9).

If I'm oppressing someone by my critical spirit and stinging words, then God says it's time for me to change. He doesn't want me to find fault; He wants me to give freedom and release. Instead of pointing an accusing finger, I am to lend a helping hand.

I can't think of a new word to describe the person who lifts burdens and gives freedom, but I'm sure my friend can. And I hope that word describes me. — David McCasland

It was only a sunny smile
And little it cost in the giving,
But it scattered the night like morning light
And made the day worth living. —Anon.

Build people up—don't tear them down.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Johnny's Race

Read: Hebrews 10:19-25

Comfort each other and edify one another. —1 Thessalonians 5:11

When 19-year-old Johnny Agar finished the 5k race, he had a lot of people behind him—family members and friends who were celebrating his accomplishment.

Johnny has cerebral palsy, which makes physical activity difficult. But he and his dad, Jeff, have teamed up to compete in many races—Dad pushing and Johnny riding. But one day, Johnny wanted to finish by himself. Halfway through the race, his dad took him out of his cart, helped him to his walker, and assisted Johnny as he completed the race on his own two feet. That led to a major celebration as friends and family cheered his accomplishment. “It made it easier for me to do it with them behind me,” Johnny told a reporter. “The encouragement is what drove me.”

Isn't that what Christ-followers are meant to do? Hebrews 10:24 reminds us, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (niv). As we model the love of our Savior (John 13:34-35), imagine the difference it could make if we all set out to encourage each other—if we always knew that behind us we had a group of friends cheering us on. If we took the words “comfort each other and edify one another” (1 Thess. 5:11) seriously, the race would be easier for all of us.

Help us, Lord, not to think that we can go through
life without others. Cure us of our independent
spirit. Use us to bless others and humble
us to accept encouragement.

A word of encouragement can make the difference between giving up or going on.

INSIGHT: The “Holiest” (Heb. 10:19) was a reference to the Holy of Holies in ancient Israel's tabernacle and temple. It was viewed as the dwelling place of God among His people and could only be entered once a year, and then only by the high priest. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy of Holies to atone for the people's sins for another year. However, the work of our High Priest, Jesus, is so complete that we now have the freedom to enter into God's presence at any time. In fact, we can enter boldly because as a result of Christ's sacrifice we are welcomed into the Father's presence. This intimate relationship we have with our Father causes us to want to share His grace with others.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 5:11 The Swagger

Read: Romans 16:1–4,13,21–23

Encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11

In the summer of 2015, Hunter (aged 15) carried his brother Braden (8) for a fifty-seven-mile walk to raise awareness of the needs of people with cerebral palsy. Braden weighs sixty pounds, so Hunter needed frequent rest stops where others helped him stretch his muscles, and he wore special harnesses to disperse Braden's weight. Hunter says that while the harnesses helped with the physical discomfort, what helped him most were the people along the way. “If it weren't for everyone cheering and walking with us, I wouldn't have been able to do it. . . . My legs were sore, but my friends picked me up and I made it through” His mom named the arduous trek “The Cerebral Palsy Swagger.”

The apostle Paul, who we think of as strong and courageous, also needed to be “picked up.” In Romans 16 he lists a number of people who did just that for him. They served alongside him, encouraged him, met his needs, and prayed for him. He mentions Phoebe; Priscilla and Aquila, who were co-workers; Rufus's mother, who had been like a mother to him as well; Gaius, who showed him hospitality; and many more.

Encouragers pick others up when troubles weigh them down.

We all need friends who pick us up, and we all know of others who need our encouragement. As Jesus helps and carries us, let us help one another.

Lord, in Your wisdom You established Your church as a place for us to love and care for each other. Help me to extend the grace I've received to others.

Encouragers pick others up when troubles weigh them down.

INSIGHT: The letter to the Romans is arguably Paul's most intensely theological letter. Yet in Romans 16, he issues more personal

greetings than in any other letter—twenty-seven! These personal greetings, included at the close of a theological letter about the nature of the gospel, serve as a significant reminder. The message of the death and resurrection of Jesus is not merely a piece of intellectual information. The doctrines that form the foundation for our rescue in Christ are not an academic exercise. These truths describe the love of God for human beings who have names and faces and struggles and victories. The gospel is the story of God's unflinching love for people—people like those listed here. People like you and me.

By Anne Cetas

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Stay Close

Read: 1 Peter 4:7-11

Comfort each other and edify one another. —1 Thessalonians 5:11

My friend and I were traveling together, and she seemed a bit frazzled. When we got to the airport, she forgot to have her identification readily available and couldn't find her reservation confirmation number. The ticket agent waited patiently, smiled, and then helped her at the "self" check-in. After receiving her ticket, she asked, "Where do we go next?" The agent smiled again, pointed at me, and said to her, "Stay close to your friend."

That can be good advice for all of us when our lives get frazzled—stay close to your friends. Although Jesus is our best friend, we also need relationships with fellow believers to help us survive in this life.

In his first epistle, Peter was writing to believers who needed one another because they were suffering for their faith. In a few short sentences in chapter 4, Peter mentioned the need to receive and give "fervent love," prayer, and hospitality (vv.7-9). He also included the need for believers to use their spiritual gifts to minister to one another (v.10). In other passages, we're encouraged to comfort each other with the comfort we've been given by God (2 Cor. 1:3-4) and to build each other up in love (1 Thess. 5:11).

When life gets difficult and we get frazzled, staying close to our Christian friends will help us to get through.

When our friends encounter trials, We can help them if we're near; Some may need a word of comfort, Others just a listening ear. —Sper

Staying close to godly friends helps us to stay close to God.

By Anne Cetas

1 Thessalonians 5:11 What Type Are You?

There are two types of people in the world," someone once said, "those who come into a room and say, 'Here I am!' and those who come in and say, 'Ah, there you are!'"

How different are those two approaches! One says, "Look at me! I need attention"; the other says, "Tell me about yourself." One says, "I'm important"; the other says, "You are important." One says, "The world revolves around me"; the other says, "I'm here to serve you."

Wouldn't it be great to be known as that second kind of person—someone others love to have around? Someone who displays the love of Christ openly and unashamedly?

The New Testament gives us some practical suggestions about becoming the kind of person who demonstrates Christ's love. We are told to give preference to one another (Romans 12:10), edify one another (Romans 14:19), care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), forgive one another (Colossians 3:13), comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and pray for one another (James 5:16).

There should be only one kind of Christian: the "love one another" kind. What type are you? —Dave Branon

Lord, teach us the secret of loving,
The love You are asking today;
Then help us to love one another;
For this we most earnestly pray. —Anon.

People with a heart for God have a heart for people.

1Thessalonians 5:12-13a Opening the Door

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord

and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. - 1Thessalonians 5:12-13

When my wife and I went out to lunch with some friends, I noticed that the husband went around to the passenger side of the car and opened the door for his wife. I said to him, "Some women might consider that demeaning." "That's right," he said. "One woman saw me do that and remarked, 'I'm sure she's perfectly capable of opening the door for herself!' I told her, 'I don't open the door for my wife because she's incapable. I do it to honor her.'"

Jesus treated women with the utmost respect and honor (John 4:1-38; 8:3-11; 19:25-27). Likewise, in 1 Peter 3:7, husbands are instructed to live with their wives "with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel." Men and women both have their weaknesses, but in general, women are physically weaker than men and have unique needs and sensitivities. This in no way means they are inferior. In fact, Peter said that as Christians, men and women are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1Peter 3:7).

Opening a door for a woman may seem to some like an old-fashioned courtesy. But it can also be a wonderful tribute to both the man and the woman if it symbolizes the honor and respect one has for the other. —Dennis J. De Haan

THINKING IT OVER

Read Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:3.

How can you apply the truths of these verses

to male and female relationships?

We honor God when we honor one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:12–28 Do We Have To?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16

Joie started the children's program with prayer, then sang with the kids. Six-year-old Emmanuel squirmed in his seat when she prayed again after introducing Aaron, the teacher. Then Aaron began and ended his talk with prayer. Emmanuel complained: "That's four prayers! I can't sit still that long!"

If you think Emmanuel's challenge is difficult, look at 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray continually" or always be in a spirit of prayer. Even some of us adults can find prayer to be boring. Maybe that's because we don't know what to say or don't understand that prayer is a conversation with our Father.

May we grow in our intimacy with God so that we will want to spend more time with Him.

Back in the seventeenth century, François Fénelon wrote some words about prayer that have helped me: "Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads one's heart, its pleasures and its pains, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles, that He may comfort you; tell Him your joys, that He may sober them; tell Him your longings, that He may purify them." He continued, "Talk to Him of your temptations, that He may shield you from them: show Him the wounds of your heart, that He may heal them If you thus pour out all your weaknesses, needs, troubles, there will be no lack of what to say."

May we grow in our intimacy with God so that we will want to spend more time with Him.

For further study, read about Jesus's example of prayer in John 17 and Luke 5:16.

Prayer is an intimate conversation with our God.

INSIGHT: Paul ends this letter with a frenzy of instructions. In today's verses, one small string of phrases is closely linked and includes a key to their significance: "for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (vv. 16–18). We often wonder what God's will is for us in our circumstances. Phrases like these, though couched in a presentation that seem to minimize their importance, help us to clarify what it is that God desires of us. Do you want to follow God's will? "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

By Anne Cetas

1Thessalonians 5:12-22 THE CHURCH CURE

Be at peace among yourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:13

There don't seem to be many things that people agree on these days, but I have recently noticed a general consensus about at least two items: People are recognizing that violence is a growing problem and that smoking truly is a health hazard.

A couple of recent surveys show, however, that the government may not be the best place to find answers for these two problems. In a 1993 issue of the Family Research Report, one study indicated that those who attend church regularly smoke less than the general population. Likewise, church going was seen as a key characteristic of violence-free families. Merely walking through church doors, of course, does not change us. But the truths taught in the church, as well as the encouragement from other God-fearing people, do affect us (1Thes 5:14-22). We can worship our God, grow in our walk with Him, and surround ourselves with others who love Him. These are great incentives to do what is right.

Attending church does not make us perfect. But following God's teaching and worshipping the Lord will certainly go a long way toward making us better.- J. David Brannon

Our week is deficient without this one goal: To honor the Lord's Day and nourish our soul; The help that we need for the trials we face Will come as we worship and draw on God's grace. - Dennis J. De Haan

To keep growing in Christ,
keep going to church.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 Spot Bowling

Imagine what the game of bowling would be like if you couldn't see the pins you were trying to hit. In 1933, Bill Knox did just that—and bowled a perfect game.

In Philadelphia's Olney Alleys, Bill had a screen placed just above the foul line to obscure his view of the lane. His purpose was to demonstrate the technique of spot bowling, which involves throwing the ball at a selected floor mark on the near end of the lane. Like many bowlers, Bill knew that you can do better if you aim at a mark close to you that's in line with the pins. He proved his point with a perfect 300 game of 12 strikes in a row.

Spot bowling illustrates part of a wise approach to life. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the return of Christ, he reminded them that the ultimate goal of their salvation was to "be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thes 5:23). Paul taught them to focus their eyes on near actions that were in line with that goal. He urged them to comfort one another, help the weak, warn the wayward, pray without ceasing, and rejoice always. Then he added that we must do this in the power of Christ who is working in us (vv. 23-24).

Lord, help us to see what we can do today that will keep us focused on Your eternal goal for us. - M. R. De Haan II

1 Thessalonians 5:14 Look Close

Imagine what bowling would be like if you couldn't see the pins. Well, in 1933 Bill Knox bowled just such a game—and had a perfect score!

The event took place in Philadelphia. Bill wanted to demonstrate the technique of spot bowling, in which you throw the ball at a mark on the floor just beyond the foul line. He had a screen placed over the lane so he couldn't see the pins at the far end but could still see the marks. He knew that a bowler can throw more accurately when aiming at a mark that is close rather than at pins a long way off. He proved his point by bowling a perfect game of 300—12 strikes in a row!

Spot bowling reminds me of Paul's words in today's Bible reading. He told the Thessalonian believers that the ultimate goal of their salvation was to "be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Although this could be done only by Christ, who was working in them (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24), their part was to focus on "near actions" that were in line with that end. He urged them to comfort one another, help the weak, warn the wayward, pray without ceasing, and rejoice always (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22).

Lord, help us to concentrate on what we can do today to stay in line with Your eternal goal for us. —Mart De Haan II —Mart De Haan

Thinking It Over

Which admonitions in 1 Thessalonians 5 do you find difficult to obey? Why?

What can you do to overcome that difficulty?

Keep eternity's goal in sight by walking daily in God's light.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 G Campbell Morgan

Rejoice alway; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks.-- 1Thess 5.16-17

These three injunctions stand out in clear light upon this last page of the letter. Probably without design on the part of the writer they are closely related to the threefold description of the Christian experience with which the letter opens. In a work of faith they had turned to God; in all that such a revolution meant let them "rejoice always." In a labour of love they were serving the living God; let them maintain that service by remembering to "pray without ceasing." In patience of hope they were waiting for the Son from heaven; let them, therefore, "in every-thing give thanks." The one secret of true and constant joy is that of our right relation with God. To be reconciled to Him, to have access to Him, to stand in His favor—these are the results of turning to Him; and these are the things that make for perpetual joy. The one reason for prayer which is at once acceptable to God and of prevailing power, is that of a maintained service. To practice our fellowship thus, is to prevail in whatever labour He appoints. The one cause for perpetual thanksgiving is that upon all the shadowed pathway there shines the light of the glory that is to be revealed when the Son shall come again. Concerning all these injunctions the Apostle said: "This is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward." That is our strength--God's will, and the enablement of Christ Jesus! (Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible).

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Who Has Time To Pray?

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-18

Pray without ceasing. —1 Thessalonians 5:17

Do you feel guilty because you aren't able to spend long periods of time each day in prayer? Perhaps you have a regular but brief time when you read the Bible and pray, but you lack a sense of God's presence in your life. You feel you aren't communicating enough with your heavenly Father.

That's a problem that plagues individuals whose lives are incessantly busy. Here is some helpful advice for 20th-century disciples from the 17th-century French writer François Fénelon. "Learn," he counsels, "to make good use of chance moments: When waiting for someone, when going from place to place, or when in society where to be a good listener is all that is required—at such times it is easy to lift the heart to God and thereby gain fresh strength for further duties One moment will suffice to place yourself in God's presence to love and worship Him, to offer all you are doing or bearing, and to still all your heart's emotions at His feet."

We can train ourselves to maintain an awareness of the Lord's presence with us throughout the day and to talk with Him as we are able. That's how we can fulfill the Savior's directive to "abide in Me" (Jn. 15:4), and obey the apostle's command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Th. 5:17).

There is no time of night or day
When God can't hear us as we pray;
There is no time, there is no place,
When we can't draw upon His grace. —DJD

To make the most of your time, take time to pray.

By Vernon C. Grounds

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Free Prayer

A pastor was asked to call on a woman in a psychiatric hospital and pray for her. After his visit, he thought how good it would be for somebody to go there regularly and pray for the residents. The "somebody" turned out to be him. On a table in one of the wards, he put up a sign saying "Free Prayer." Later he recalled, "Suddenly I had 15 people standing in line to get prayed for."

People often ask for our prayers, but do we faithfully pray for them? Many times we see others in great need but find it easier to discuss their plight with friends rather than to intercede for them. But people need and want our prayers.

Paul concluded his call to put on "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13-17) by writing, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (v.18).

Oswald Chambers often referred to prayer as "the ministry of the interior" and said, "There is no snare, or any danger of infatuation or pride in intercession; it is a hidden ministry that brings forth fruit whereby the Father is glorified."

Faithful prayer—whether in public or private—is one of the greatest gifts we can give others.—David C. McCasland

To give to others what they need,
We show no greater care
Than when we give them to the Lord,
Upholding them in prayer. —D. De Haan

Our intercession may be the key to God's intervention.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 All Day With God

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Pray without ceasing. —1 Thessalonians 5:17

Brother Lawrence (1614–1691) felt intimately close to God as he humbly scrubbed pots and pans in the monastery kitchen. Certainly Brother Lawrence practiced specific times of devotional prayer. But what he found more life-transforming was prayer during the workday. In his devotional classic *Practicing the Presence of God*, he says, "It is a great delusion to think our times of prayer ought to differ from other times. We are as strictly obliged to cleave to God by action in the time of action as by prayer in the season of prayer." In short, he advocated that we "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

That's a helpful reminder, because sometimes we tend to compartmentalize our lives. Perhaps we pray only during church worship, small-group Bible study, family devotions, and personal quiet times. But what about during our workday? To pray on the job does not mean we have to fall to our knees with clasped hands and pray aloud. But it does mean that work decisions and relationships can be brought to God throughout the day.

Wherever we are and whatever we're doing, God wants to be a part of it. When prayer enters every aspect of our lives, who knows what God might do for His glory!

Let's always keep the prayer lines open,
Knowing God is always there;
For we upon His name may call
Anytime and anywhere. —D. De Haan

True prayer is a way of life, not an emergency detour!

By Dennis Fisher

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Is It Time To Pray?

When people face trials, they often turn to prayer only as a last resort. I knew a man who was fighting a valiant battle with cancer. As people observed the gradual effect on his body and lifestyle, one person said, "Well, they've tried everything else. I guess it's time to begin praying."

Another man was going through an extremely difficult time at work. It was a crisis of major proportions that had ominous implications for him and for the future of his company. He just couldn't resolve it. Finally he said, "I've tried everything I know to get through this situation and nothing has worked. It's time to start praying."

In both of these instances, prayer was seen as a last-ditch effort to resolve the problem. Only after all other options were eliminated did the person decide to pray. It was a desperate "grasping at straws."

Instead of prayer being a last resort, it should be one of the first things we do. The Lord answers prayer, and He wants us to come to Him continually with all of our needs (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The Bible tells us to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer ... let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

So don't wait. It's always time to pray. —David C. Egner

Any hour when helping others
Or when bearing heavy care
Is the time to call our Father—
It's the proper time for prayer. —Zimmerman

Prayer should be our first response rather than our last resort.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray as God Would Have Us Pray

British writer Samuel Chadwick had this to say: "To pray as God would have us pray is the greatest achievement on earth. Such a prayer life costs. It takes time. All praying saints have spent hours every day in prayer. In these days, there is no time to pray; but without time, and a lot of it, we shall never learn to pray." - H G Bosch

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

Psalms, Incense, Praise

The well-known English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) wrote something that would be good to remember at the start of each day: "Let your thoughts be psalms, your prayers incense, and your breath praise." Let's look at each of these phrases.

Let your thoughts be psalms. The 150 psalms have a variety of themes, including praise, God's character, and expressions of dependence on the Lord. Throughout the day we can turn our thoughts into psalms by meditating on God's holiness, His worthiness of our worship, and how much we need Him.

Let your prayers be incense. In the tabernacle of the Jews, incense was burned continually to offer a sweet savor to the Lord (Exodus 30:7-8). Our prayers are like incense to God (Psalm 141:2), bringing to His nostrils the pleasing scent of our adoration and need for Him.

Let your breath be praise. The book of Psalms concludes with the words, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!" (Psalm 150:6). Talking about God and offering Him words of praise should be as natural to us as breathing.

Keep the Lord in your thoughts, prayers, and speech today. —David C. Egner

Worship, praise, and adoration
All belong to Jesus' name;
Freely give your heart's devotion,
Constantly His love proclaim. —Anon.

A heart filled with praise brings pleasure to God.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Prayer Marathon

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-28

Pray continually. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Do you struggle to maintain a consistent prayer life? Many of us do. We know that prayer is important, but it can also be downright difficult. We have moments of deep communion with God and then we have times when it feels like we're just going through the motions. Why do we struggle so in our prayers?

The life of faith is a marathon. The ups, the downs, and the plateaus in our prayer life are a reflection of this race. And just as in a marathon we need to keep running, so we keep praying. The point is: Don't give up!

There is never a day when we don't need to pray.

That is God's encouragement too. The apostle Paul said, "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17), "keep on praying" (Rom. 12:12 nlt), and "devote yourselves to prayer" (Col. 4:2). All of these statements carry the idea of remaining steadfast and continuing in the work of prayer.

And because God, our heavenly Father, is a personal being, we can develop a time of close communion with Him, just as we do with our close human relationships. A. W. Tozer writes that as we learn to pray, our prayer life can grow "from the initial most casual brush to the fullest, most intimate communion of which the human soul is capable." And that's what we really want—deep communication with God. It happens when we keep praying.

Dear Father, we often struggle to spend time with You. Help us to make the time, and help us sense Your goodness and presence.

There is never a day when we don't need to pray.

INSIGHT: The Wycliffe Bible Commentary provides illumination on how Paul's concluding prayer in 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 summarizes key points covered in this epistle: "Paul embraces all his exhortations in a prayer for sanctification, and assures the believers that a faithful God will answer it. . . . Though human surrender and obedience are necessary, sanctification is essentially a divine work (cf. Rom. 15:16; Eph. 5:26). Wholly (holoteleis) implies that no part is lacking; the whole person is to be kept blameless."

Every aspect of human nature is to be made whole in Christ.

By Poh Fang Chia

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 Glad to be Home

In wintertime, a condition known as a "whiteout" sometimes occurs along the Lake Michigan shoreline. The air becomes so filled with powdery snow that you can't see more than a few feet ahead. You feel totally helpless, especially if you're driving, and that's what we were doing on a bitterly cold December day.

Our family had been invited to my sister's house for Christmas dinner. As we headed west toward Lake Michigan, the weather became treacherous, but we made it to our destination. Later, however, as we were driving home after dark, the situation grew even worse. The expressway was covered with ice, traffic slowed to a crawl, and several cars were in the ditch. Then all at once we were enveloped by a brief whiteout. Believe me, it was frightening. After a slow, tedious journey, we finally reached Grand Rapids and pulled into our driveway. I think every member of the family said, "I'm sure glad to get home!"

I wonder if we'll have a similar feeling when we enter heaven. The dangerous "whiteouts" of our earthly journey will be over. The temptations, stresses, and failures will all be in the past. Best of all, we'll be safe with our Savior.

Yes, we'll be so glad to get home!—David C. Egner

When we all get to heaven,
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory.
—Hewitt

Heaven for the Christian is best spelled H-O-M-E.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 A Flat Thanks

In everything give thanks.- 1 Thessalonians 5:18

The day before Christmas became a thanksgiving day for my family. The station wagon was packed with kids and travel stuff for the 400-mile trip to Grandma's. As is our custom, before leaving we asked God to protect us on the road. He did, but in an unusual way.

As we were cruising down I-75 in Ohio, we ran over some debris in the road. It made a lot of noise, but did no damage - or so we thought. With every passing mile we figured that the crises had passed. When we pulled off the expressway for gas a few miles later, though, we were in for a deflating surprise. I felt a sickening, sloppy feeling in front of the car. Both front tires had gone flat. We weren't happy with having to replace the tires, but we were thankful for God's care. Thankful that we didn't have an accident. Thankful that the tires stayed inflated until we got off the expressway. Thankful for the tow truck sitting at the gas station. Thankful that a repair shop was open. We were thankful for God's answer to our prayer.

Our trials, were nothing compared with what the apostle Paul endured. yet he gave thanks to God, and he said we should be thankful "in everything." Any day can be thanksgiving day, even when things go wrong.- J. David Brannon

We should be ready to give the Lord thanks
for blessing as well as for test;
Hearts that are thankful is all that He asks;
Let's trust Him to give what is best.- Bierema

Quote for the Day: If you pause to think, you'll have cause to thank.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - How thankful we can be that we serve a God who is sovereign, loving, all-wise, and all-powerful. Nothing frustrates Him. Nothing stops Him. Nothing escapes His attention. He can take all things—both good and bad—and work them together for the benefit of His children. This truth not only gives us great confidence, joy, and peace, but it also enables us to give thanks "in everything" (1 Thess 5:18).

"God's plan leaves nothing out. All things ... work together for good—all things, even trials, at which we murmur and complain. The storms which threaten to uproot the trees really root them more firmly and deeply in the soil. The blows that one might think would make the cast-iron brittle really cause it to undergo a sort of [tempering] and increase its strength and tenacity. The enforced rest of sorrow and pain, sickness and disappointment, John Ruskin compares to the rest in which there is no music, but the making of music; not the end of the tune, but a pause in the choral hymn of our lives, during which the Divine Musician beats the time with

unvarying count, catching up the next note as if no breaking-place had come between" (A. T. Pierson, Vital Union with Christ).

When we love the Lord and pass through deep waters, we can give thanks because we know that all things, even the bad, are working together for our good. —R.W.D.

God causes many a tight place to open into the right place.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 - A story is told about a vendor who sold bagels for 50 cents each at a street corner food stand. A jogger ran past and threw a couple of quarters into the bucket but didn't take a bagel. He did the same thing every day for months. One day, as the jogger was passing by, the vendor stopped him. The jogger asked, "You probably want to know why I always put money in but never take a bagel, don't you?" "No," said the vendor. "I just wanted to tell you that the bagels have gone up to 60 cents."

Too often, as believers, we treat God with that same kind of attitude. Not only are we ungrateful for what He's given us—but we want more. Somehow we feel that God owes us good health, a comfortable life, material blessings. Of course, God doesn't owe us anything, yet He gives us everything.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, "Here dies another day, during which I have had eyes, ears, hands, and the great world round me. And with tomorrow begins another. Why am I allowed two?" The psalmist said, "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24).

Each day, whether good or bad, is one more gift from our God. Our grateful response should be to live to please Him. —Cindy Hess Kasper

Living for Jesus a life that is true,
Striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me. —Chisholm

Life is a gift from God to be lived for God.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Just the Right Amount

A woman who prepared meals for hungry farm workers during the harvest season would watch them consume every bit of food on the table. Then she'd say, "Good. I fixed just the right amount."

Many of us struggle to feel that way about the resources entrusted to us. At the end of a meal or the end of a month, do we really believe that God has given us enough? When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11), how much do we expect God to supply? As much as we want? Or as much as we need?

Health experts say that a key to good nutrition is eating until we feel satisfied, not until we are stuffed full. In every area of life, there is a difference between genuine hunger and having a greedy appetite. So often, we want just a little more.

In Jesus' teaching on prayer, He said: "Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (Matthew 6:8,31).

As the Lord supplies our needs, perhaps we should see His provision from a new perspective and determine to express our thanks by saying, "Father, You gave me just the right amount."—David C. McCasland

Thanks, O God, for boundless mercy
From Thy gracious throne above;
Thanks for every need provided
From the fullness of Thy love! —Storm

When it's time to breathe a prayer of thanks, don't hold your breath.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 The Bull

The following humorous story appears in the autobiography of Clarence E. Macartney: As two men were walking through a field one day, they spotted an enraged bull. Instantly they darted toward the nearest fence. The storming bull followed in hot pursuit, and it was soon apparent they wouldn't make it. Terrified, the one shouted to the other, "Put up a prayer, John. We're in for it!" John answered, "I can't. I've never made a public prayer in my life." "But you must!" implored his companion. "The bull is catching up to us." "All right," panted John, "I'll say the only prayer I know, the one my father used to repeat at the table: 'O Lord, for what we are

about to receive, make us truly thankful.”

This fictitious story suggests a valuable truth. No matter how severe trial, Christians should give thanks in everything. - R W De Haan

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Details, Details

Read: Philemon 1:4-16

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Details make a difference. Ask the man from Germany who planned to visit his fiancée for Christmas but ended up in snowy Sidney, Montana, instead of sunny Sydney, Australia.

Prepositions in our language seem like insignificant details, but they can make a big difference. The words “in” and “for” are an example.

The apostle Paul wrote, “In everything give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18). That doesn’t mean we have to be thankful for everything. We need not be thankful for the bad choices someone makes, but we can be thankful in the circumstances because the Lord can use the resulting difficulties for good.

The letter to Philemon illustrates this idea. Paul was imprisoned with Onesimus, a runaway slave. He certainly didn’t have to give thanks for his bad situation. Yet his letter is full of gratitude because he knew that God was using it for good. Onesimus had become something more than a slave; he was now a beloved brother in the Lord (v.16).

Knowing that God can use all things for good is more than enough reason to give thanks in everything. Giving thanks in difficult circumstances is a small detail that makes a big difference.

Father, thank You that in every trial, challenge, and difficulty, You are behind the scenes working things out for our good. Help us to see Your hand in everything. Amen.

God has not promised to keep us from life’s storms, but He will keep us through them.

By Julie Ackerman Link

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Everyday Blessings

Read: Acts 16:16-29 | Bible in a Year: Nehemiah 1-3; Acts 2:1-21

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Missionary Benjamin Weir was held hostage in Lebanon and imprisoned under miserable conditions for 16 months. In his first interview after his release, he was asked how he spent his time and how he dealt with boredom and despair. His answer stunned the reporters. He simply said, “Counting my blessings.”

“Blessings?” they responded.

“Yes,” he explained. “Some days I got to take a shower. Sometimes there were some vegetables in my food. And I could always be thankful for the love of my family.”

We can understand why the reporters were astonished. It’s hard for most of us to be consistently thankful for the commonplace blessings that make life pleasant and comfortable—the unfailing supply of our daily needs, the provision of food and shelter, the companionship of friends and families. There are times when we may even forget the wonderful mercies of God’s redeeming grace.

Paul and Silas, though they were beaten, thrown into prison, and placed in stocks, were still “singing hymns to God” (Acts 16:25). May we learn from them, and from Benjamin Weir, to count our blessings no matter what our circumstances. We have many reasons to rejoice.

Are you ever burdened with a load of care?

Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?

Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,

And you will be singing as the days go by. —Oatman

Praise to God comes naturally when you count your blessings.

By Vernon C. Grounds

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Contentment

Read: Philippians 4:4-13

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

A poet once wrote: "As a rule, man's a fool. When it's hot, he wants it cool. And when it's cool, he wants it hot. Always wanting what is not."

What an insightful observation on human nature! So when we read in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" we wonder, Can this be possible?

For Paul it was. Philippians 4:12-13 describes Paul's response to life: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (NIV). Paul's relationship with God superseded whatever he did or did not have. His contentment was not based on his circumstances, but on his relationship with Christ.

Paul reminds us that contentment doesn't happen overnight. It's something that we learn. As our relationship with God develops over time and through experiences, we learn to trust God more and ourselves less. Paul knew that Christ would give him the strength to persevere in whatever situation he encountered (v.13).

No matter what you're facing today, through prayer you can receive the strength to be content.

The world is filled with so much good
That brings us joy and pleasure,
But true fulfillment only comes
When Christ we love and treasure. —Sper

We find contentment at the same place we find salvation—in Christ.

By Albert Lee

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Thankful In All Things

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

My daughter is allergic to peanuts. Her sensitivity is so acute that eating even the tiniest fragment of a peanut threatens her life. As a result, we scrutinize food package labels. We carry a pre-filled syringe of medicine (to treat allergic reactions) wherever we go. And, when we eat out, we call ahead and quiz the wait staff about the restaurant's menu items.

Despite these precautions, I still feel concerned—both for her current safety and for her future safety. This situation is not something I would naturally be thankful about. Yet, God's Word challenges: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). There's no getting around it. God wants us to pray with thanksgiving when the future is uncertain, when heartbreak hits, and when shortfalls come.

It's hard to be grateful in difficulties, but it's not impossible. Daniel "prayed and gave thanks" (Dan. 6:10), knowing that his life was in danger. Jonah called out "with the voice of thanksgiving" (Jonah 2:9) while inside a fish! These examples, coupled with God's promise that He will work all things together for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28), can inspire us to be thankful in all things.

Thanks for roses by the wayside,
Thanks for thorns their stems contain.
Thanks for homes and thanks for fireside
Thanks for hope, that sweet refrain! —Hultman

In all circumstances, we can give thanks that God has not left us on our own.

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Thanks For Fleas

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

In everything give thanks. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

Corrie ten Boom was an inspiration and challenge to thousands of people after World War II. Hearts were stirred and lives changed as she told with moving simplicity about God's sufficiency to meet her needs, even as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp.

Not only was the camp filthy, but there were fleas everywhere. Corrie's sister Betsie, who was imprisoned with her, insisted that 1 Thessalonians 5:18 was God's will for them: "In everything give thanks." But giving thanks in a flea-infested place seemed unrealistic to Corrie—until she realized why the guards didn't come into their barracks to make them stop praying and singing hymns. They wanted to avoid the fleas! So, the prisoners were free to worship and study the Bible. The fleas, yes, even the fleas were agents of grace, and something to be thankful for.

What are some of the "fleas" in our lives? They aren't the big difficulties, but the petty annoyances. They are the little trials from which we can't escape. Is it possible that they are one of the ways the Lord teaches us spiritual lessons and helps us to increase our endurance?

When we are tempted to grumble, let's remember the fleas and give thanks. —VCG

For all the heartaches and the tears,
For gloomy days and fruitless years
I do give thanks, for now I know
These were the things that helped me grow! —Crandlemire

If you pause to think, you'll find cause to thank.

By Vernon C. Grounds

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Give Thanks!

Read: Leviticus 23:15-22

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

At harvesttime it's natural to thank God for the bounty of His blessings. The Feast of Weeks in ancient Israel, established in Leviticus 23, was a week of joyous celebration and feasting in gratitude for the harvest (Dt. 16:9-12). Even today as farmers gather their crops, many give thanks to the Lord for the abundance of their harvest.

But what if untimely and persistent rain keeps the farmer from getting his machines into the fields and harvesting the ripe grain? What if a sudden hailstorm flattens the corn? Or a summer drought dries up the fields?

The apostle Paul wrote, "In everything give thanks" (1 Th. 5:18). That may sound unrealistic. But think about it. The Jews were instructed to celebrate the Feast of Weeks whether the crops came in or not. Likewise, we are to give thanks to the Lord "in everything." After all, our praise is to God, not to a barn full of hay or a crib full of corn.

Yes, we can give thanks. We can do so whether the day goes smoothly or we meet aggravating problems. We can be grateful if we're rich or poor, when we're feeling well or if our health fails. In every circumstance, we can affirm God's goodness and discover reasons to give thanks to Him. After all, our gratitude is to Him and for Him.

Consider what the Lord has done
For you and those you love;
Then give Him thanks with hearts of praise
For blessings from above. —Sper

We don't need more to be thankful for, we need to be more thankful.

By David Egner

1Thessalonians 5:16-20 Give Thanks

In Lansing, Michigan, during the winter, we don't get many sunny days. But last year God blessed us with one of those beautiful days, and it seemed that almost everyone was thanking God, except me. As I left my office, a man said, "What a wonderful day we're having. This is a gift from God!" To which I replied, "Yes, but we're getting snow later this week." What ingratitude!

In his letters, the apostle Paul helped his readers to develop a theology of gratitude. He wrote about thanksgiving more often than any other New Testament author. From the 23 times he used the word, we learn a few lessons about thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was always directed toward God and never toward people. People were gifts from God, and Paul thanked God for

their growth, love, and faith (1 Cor. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:2).

Thanksgiving is given through Jesus for everything (Col. 3:15,17). Paul believed followers of Jesus could be thankful for everything because God is sovereign, and He is working things out for the believers' good (1 Thess. 5:18).

May we intentionally be aware of God's gifts all around us, and respond with gratitude. In response to God's gifts, it's natural to say, "Thank You, Lord."

Lord, for days that are sunny or gray we simply
want to say, Thank You! And for the daily grace
You give us in Your Son, may we always be faithful
to say, Thank You! You are so good to us.

Gratitude is a natural response to God's grace.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 A Gratitude Visit

Counting your blessings promotes good physical health, according to a study by some US doctors. Volunteers who kept weekly gratitude journals reported fewer aches and pains than those who recorded daily hassles or neutral events.

A "gratitude visit" was developed by Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman to promote strong emotional health. He tells people to think of someone who has made an important difference in their lives. He asks them to write the story of how that person has helped them, and then to visit that person and read the story aloud. Tests show that a year later the people who had done so were happier and reported fewer episodes of depression. Even more important, think of what it must have done for those who were thanked!

The apostle Paul had a long list of people who had helped him and for whom he was grateful (Rom. 16:1-16). He wrote that Phoebe had "been a helper," Priscilla and Aquila had "risked their own necks" for his life, and Mary had "labored much" for him. And he took time to write his thanks in a letter to the church at Rome.

Who has helped to shape your life? Could you make a gratitude visit—for their sake, and for yours? —Anne Cetas

Consider what the Lord has done
Through those who've shown you love;
Then thank them for their faithful deeds,
For blessings from above. —Sper

Gratitude should not be an occasional incident but a continuous attitude.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Mary Chestnut's father-in-law had the enduring habit of returning thanks after his meals. As he left the table he would invariably say, "I thank God for a good dinner." When asked why he didn't pray prior to eating, he replied "My way is to be sure of a thing before I return thanks for it."

Christians never fear that giving thanks involves a gamble. Their experience verifies that nothing will ever be more certain than God's provisions for life. The feeding of the four and five thousand people offers a parable of God's provisions. After everyone had eaten to complete satisfaction, seven and twelve basketsful remained. Left over! Ready to serve to others! That's what Jesus accomplishes with those who commit themselves to him. For the use of Peter's boat, Jesus filled the nets so full of fish they began to tear and the boats nearly to sink. The divine bounty proved so lavish it threatened disaster! If that for the use of a boat, what will God give for the use of a life?

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Knowing God's Will

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. —1 Thessalonians 5:18

I tell my friends in jest that I make three difficult decisions every day: What should I eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner? I live in Singapore, where we enjoy the food of the Chinese, Malay, and Indian cultures, to name just a few. We are spoiled by having so many choices.

Life is full of decisions—far more serious ones than choosing what to eat. Perhaps this explains why some people constantly wonder what God's will is for their lives.

Discovering God's will is not necessarily a complicated process. He has given us many simple and clearly stated principles for life. For example, we are told, "This is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). In 1 Thessalonians 4:3 we read, "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality." And in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 we are told, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

As we live by faith and do what the Bible clearly tells us to do, we can be sure the Lord will lead us through the difficult decisions when the options may not be clear. Above all else, God's will is that we submit to Him and be willing to follow wherever He leads.

If you will choose to do God's will
And follow what is right,
God will confirm to you His truth
And give you greater light. —D. De Haan

The best way to know God's will is to say "I will" to God.

By Albert Lee

Related Resource: [The Will Of God](#)

1 Thessalonians 5:18 Missing Groom

A young woman named Anne Steele had encountered one trial and disappointment after another. Being a devout Christian, she continuously sought to praise God—even in sorrow. She was engaged to be married, and had looked forward to her wedding day with eagerness. The big day finally arrived and so did the guests—but the groom was missing. After about an hour of waiting, a messenger brought the tragic news that Anne's fiancé had drowned. The sudden shock was almost too much for her, but after a while she regained her spiritual composure.

Later Anne Steele penned the song that is still found in many hymnbooks:

Father, whate'er of earthly bliss Thy sovereign will denies,
Accepted at Thy throne of grace, let this petition rise:
Give me a calm, a thankful heart, from every murmur free!
The blessings of Thy grace impart, and make me live to Thee.
- H G Bosch

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Mirage

Samuel Baker tells of a regiment dying of thirst in the Arabian Desert. In the distance they thought they saw water, but their Arabian guide warned it was only a mirage. They argued, the guide was killed, and the whole regiment rushed toward the water. Mile after mile, the mirage led the thirsty troops deeper into the desert. Too late they realized the truth. They died pursuing a fantasy. (Moody Monthly, September 1984)

1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test the Teachers

Revelation. To some people, it's more than just the name of the last book of the Bible. To some self-promoting preachers, revelation is something God personally gives to them. In most cases, however, what they say God has given them contradicts His teachings in the Bible.

Have you ever been exposed to those who claim to have had a special "revelation" or "word" from God? If so, be careful. Unless what a person proclaims as truth can be verified by the clear teaching of the Bible, it is personal opinion at best and heresy at worst—not divine revelation.

The Scriptures warn us not to add to nor take away from what God has revealed to us in His written Word. Deuteronomy 4:2 tells us, "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it." Similar warnings are found in Deuteronomy 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6, and Revelation 22:18. It is indeed a precarious position for a person to put himself in—claiming to add to God's inspired Book.

If someone attempts to teach a doctrine not found in the Bible, beware—no matter how polished and well-known the person is. Test the teachers you hear by God's Word. If they talk of receiving a revelation, make sure they aren't violating God's clear warnings. — Dave Branon

God's Word must verify the truth
Of what is wrong and what is right,

And test what seems so real to me
Of feelings, sense, and sight. —D. De Haan

Test all teaching by the truth of God's Word.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 - Allergic To . . .

Read: Titus 3:3-11

Abstain from every form of evil. —1 Thessalonians 5:22

One of our grandchildren is allergic to several kinds of foods. Milk, cheese, eggs, and ice cream are among the items she has to avoid. Even a small amount of these things is detrimental to her health.

She's not alone in being required to avoid certain things in life. While her allergies are related to her physical well-being, each of us as believers in Jesus has dangers we need to stay away from to maintain spiritual health. Scripture gives us a clear indication of what we are "allergic to" spiritually.

Every kind of evil (1 Thess. 5:22). This should cause us to think about the choices we make, because taking part in what is clearly evil is not good for our spiritual vitality.

Foolish disputes and arguments (2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9). This takes discernment, for some arguments have merit in defending the faith. But those for which there is no answer or which have no bearing on truth only cause dissension.

Sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). The Bible says that any sexual activity outside the boundaries of a marriage between a man and a woman is immoral (Gen. 2:24; Ex. 20:14; 1 Cor. 7:2; Heb. 13:4).

Are we willing to make the effort to steer clear of things we are spiritually "allergic to"?

Today avoid sin's tempting lures
And evil thoughts subdue,
Or sinful things may take control
And someday master you! —Bosch

To avoid sin, nip it in the bud of temptation.

By Dave Branon

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 rv Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily

The God of Peace Himself sanctify you wholly. (r.v.)

Our God has set Himself the work of our sanctification. As the Greek indicates, He looks upon us as his inheritance, and He will not rest until He has brought every acre of territory under cultivation. It is not enough that briars and thistles should be exterminated; they must be replaced by the rare growth of Christian virtue, which is Christ.

The work of sanctification is quiet and silent. — It is wrought by the God of Peace. The mightiest forces of nature are stilled; and when God comes with power into the human spirit there is often no hurricane, tempest, fire, or earthquake, but the thrilling whisper of the still, small voice. Do not be afraid, as though God would treat you roughly. So long as peaceful, gentle methods will effect his purpose, He will gladly employ them.

The work is also gradual. — We are not made faultless, but preserved blameless; i.e., we are kept from known sin, preserved from incurring perpetual self-reproach. "There is no condemnation." I saw the other day the love-letter of a little boy to his father. It was anything but faultless; but the father, at least, did not count it worthy of blame, since he carried it next his heart. So we are not to be faultless, as judged by God's perfect standard, till we are presented before the presence of his glory; but we may be blameless up to our acquaintance with the Divine will.

The work is from within outwards. — Notice the order — spirit, soul, body. The Shechinah of his presence shines in the holy of holies, and thence pours over into the holy place, and so into the outer court, until the very curtains of the body are irradiated with its light. He will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Glass Beach

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

"On the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession." Malachi 3:17

Early 20th-century residents of Fort Bragg, California, disposed of their trash by throwing it over a cliff and onto a nearby beach. Cans, bottles, tableware, and household garbage accumulated in huge, disgusting piles. Even when residents stopped depositing trash on the beach, it remained an embarrassment—a dump seemingly beyond reclamation.

Over the years, however, wave action broke up the glass and pottery and washed the rubbish out to sea. The pounding surf rolled and tumbled the glass fragments in the sand on the ocean floor, frosting and smoothing the surface and creating gemlike "sea glass," which it then deposited back onto the beach. The surf created a kaleidoscopic beauty at which visitors to Glass Beach now stare in wonder.

Relax in God's #love today.

Perhaps you feel as though your life has become a dump—a mess beyond hope. If so, you need to know that there is someone who loves you and waits to redeem and reclaim you. Give Jesus your heart and ask Him to make you pure and clean. He may tumble you a bit, and it may take time to smooth away the rough edges. But He will never give up on you. He will make you into one of His jewels!

Lord, when we have nothing left but You, we are right where You want us. You can use any situation for Your glory and our good. You never give up on us. Help us to relax in Your love.

God loves us too much to let us remain as we are.

INSIGHT: Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians to assure the believers that Jesus is indeed coming back, even though we don't know when. Everyone who believes in Him—both the living and the dead—will meet Him in the air and be with Him forever. After assuring us of this wonderful truth (see ch. 4), Paul reminds us in today's reading that while we eagerly wait for Christ's return, God is working in us to prepare us to be in His presence.

By David Roper

1 Thessalonians 5:23 The Cost of Sanctification

When we pray, asking God to sanctify us, are we prepared to measure up to what that really means? We take the word sanctification much too lightly. Are we prepared to pay the cost of sanctification? The cost will be a deep restriction of all our earthly concerns, and an extensive cultivation of all our godly concerns. Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God's point of view. It means to secure and to keep all the strength of our body, soul, and spirit for God's purpose alone. Are we really prepared for God to perform in us everything for which He separated us? And after He has done His work, are we then prepared to separate ourselves to God just as Jesus did? "For their sakes I sanctify Myself ... " (John 17:19). The reason some of us have not entered into the experience of sanctification is that we have not realized the meaning of sanctification from God's perspective. Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us. Are we really prepared for what that will cost? It will cost absolutely everything in us which is not of God.

Are we prepared to be caught up into the full meaning of Paul's prayer in this verse? Are we prepared to say, "Lord, make me, a sinner saved by grace, as holy as You can"? Jesus prayed that we might be one with Him, just as He is one with the Father (see John 17:21-23). The resounding evidence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is the unmistakable family likeness to Jesus Christ, and the freedom from everything which is not like Him. Are we prepared to set ourselves apart for the Holy Spirit's work in us? (Chambers, O: My Utmost for His Highest)

1 Thessalonians 5:24 Do Your Best And Leave The Rest

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. —1 Thessalonians 5:24

Have you at some time found yourself under extreme pressure? Have there been episodes in your life when you were so burdened by tasks and responsibilities that there was simply no breathing space to prepare for your service to God?

That was the experience of a pastor by the name of A. J. Gossip. During one hectic week, he didn't have his customary amount of time to prepare his sermon. As he walked to his pulpit that Sunday morning, he felt guilty about the scanty sermon notes in his hand. It seemed that the Lord was asking him, "Is this the best you could do for Me this week?" And Gossip honestly replied, "Yes, Lord, it is my best." He told a friend later that Jesus took that ill-prepared piece of work and in His hands "it became a trumpet" to his congregation.

The apostle Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to give their all for God (1 Thess. 5:14-22). They were to exhort, warn, comfort, rejoice, pray, and express their gratitude to God—among other things. We too should always do our best in our Christian life and service. But when pressure-periods come and we just don't have the time we feel we need, we should do the best we can and then prayerfully trust God's faithfulness (v.24).

Give of your best to the Master,
Give Him first place in your heart;
Give Him first place in your service,
Consecrate every part. —Grose

Be faithful—and leave the results to God.

By Vernon C. Grounds

1Thessalonians 5:24 God Is Faithful

At the end of every year, I set aside some time to review the previous 12 months and record God's faithfulness to me and my family. I may leaf through a calendar, my appointment book, or prayer diary to jog my memory. Then, on a piece of paper labeled "God's Faithfulness" I'll write everything that comes to mind as evidence of God's love and care. It's a wonderful way to look back at the year and look forward to a fresh beginning.

My list will certainly include instances of God's grace and provision. But it will also chronicle God's presence during times of difficulty and disappointment. And it must include my failures and sins, which He has been "faithful and just" to forgive (1 John 1:9).

The prophet Jeremiah found that God's trustworthiness appeared as a light during the darkness of desperate circumstances. In his lament over the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Today, why not take time to record God's faithfulness to you and thank Him for it. —David McCasland —David C. McCasland

Lord, help us bring to mind each day
Past blessings that You've sent our way;
And may these blessings from above
Remind us of Your faithful love. —D. De Haan

Adding up your blessings will multiply your joy.

1 Thessalonians 5:25 Praying Friends

Read: 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Brethren, pray for us. —1 Thessalonians 5:25

I met my friend Angie for lunch after having not seen her for several months. At the end of our time together, she pulled out a piece of paper with notes from our previous get-together. It was a list of my prayer requests she had been praying for since then. She went through each one and asked if God had answered yet or if there were any updates. And then we talked about her prayer requests. How encouraging to have a praying friend!

The apostle Paul had a praying relationship with the churches he served, including the one at Thessalonica. He thanked God for the faith, love, and hope of the people (1 Thess. 1:2-3). He longed to see them, and asked God "night and day" that he might be able to visit them again (3:10-11). He requested that the Lord would help them "increase and abound in love to one another and to all" (v.12). He also prayed that their hearts would be blameless before God (v.13). They must have been encouraged as they read about Paul's concern and prayers for them. Paul knew too his own need for God's presence and power and pleaded, "Brethren, pray for us" (5:25).

Loving Father, thank You for wanting us to talk with You. Teach us all to be praying friends.

I need the prayers of those I love
While traveling on life's rugged way,
That I may true and faithful be,
And live for Jesus every day. —Vaughn

The best kind of friend is a praying friend.

By Anne Cetas

1 Thessalonians 5:25 Five-Finger Prayers

Prayer is a conversation with God, not a formula. Yet sometimes we might need to use a "method" to freshen up our prayer time. We can pray the Psalms or other Scriptures (such as The Lord's Prayer), or use the ACTS method (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). I recently came across this "Five-Finger Prayer" to use as a guide when praying for others:

When you fold your hands, the thumb is nearest you. So begin by praying for those closest to you—your loved ones (Philippians 1:3-5).

The index finger is the pointer. Pray for those who teach—Bible teachers and preachers, and those who teach children (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

The next finger is the tallest. It reminds you to pray for those in authority over you—national and local leaders, and your supervisor at work (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

The fourth finger is usually the weakest. Pray for those who are in trouble or who are suffering (James 5:13-16).

Then comes your little finger. It reminds you of your smallness in relation to God's greatness. Ask Him to supply your needs (Philippians 4:6,19).

Whatever method you use, just talk with your Father. He wants to hear what's on your heart.—Anne Cetas

Our prayers ascend to heaven's throne

Regardless of the form we use;

Our Father always hears His own

Regardless of the words we choose. —D. De Haan

It's not the words we pray that matter,

it's the condition of our heart.