



THE LOOKOUT

JULY 2022

Unit: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Theme: Walk Worthy

Overview: The Christian experience is often referred to as a journey, pilgrimage, battle, or race. One of the major metaphors for following Jesus is *walk* (meaning, "live this way"). And this *walk* is more like a march than a stroll. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians are likely among the earliest New Testament documents, and the word *walk* occurs six times in those letters. In this unit students will learn how that walk is motivated by love, how it requires endurance and spiritual alertness, and how people who take this walk can leverage their time.

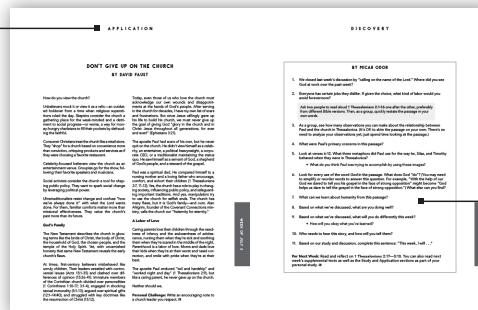
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JULY 17, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Be alert and practice self-control, faith, hope, and love.**

UNIT: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

THEME: Walk Worthy

LESSON TEXT: 1 Thessalonians 4:16—5:18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 13:13; 15:20-28, 35-52;
1 Peter 4:7-10; 5:6-11

BE ALERT FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

BY MARK SCOTT

Being brain-dead is no small thing. Without divine intervention, being brain-dead likely means permanent, irreversible, and complete loss of brain function. Spiritual brain-deadness is also no small thing. This comes when believers are not alert to the things of God. Their spiritual antennae are not receiving any signals. The Thessalonians were spiritually brain-dead about a major doctrine—the return of Jesus. Both their joy and their daily living took a hit as a result.

The doctrinal emphasis comes early in many of Paul's Epistles (think Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians). But the doctrinal centerpiece of 1 Thessalonians comes in chapters 4 and 5. The call to moral excellence in Christian living seems to lead up to and finds its basis in the doctrinal emphasis of the book. This section on the return of Christ is one of the longest in the New Testament. It begins in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. Evidently some of the believers felt as if those who had died before the return of Jesus would miss out on his second coming. Paul was writing to correct that fallacious thinking.

The Reality of Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

The return of Christ is as sure as his resurrection. Paul said the *Lord himself will come from heaven*. He will not send someone else in his place. Christ's return will be attended by three things: a *loud command* (like the shout of soldiers in battle); the *voice of the archangel* (highest angel); and the *trumpet call of God* (trumpets were used to announce things like festivals and battles).

When the Lord returns, believers who have already died will be resurrected first. Their spirits, which had gone to be with the Lord upon their deaths (2 Corinthians 5:6), will be reunited with their bodies, and they will rise to help usher in his processional (like an ancient king returning home). Then those alive when Christ returns will *be caught up* (seized or robbed) *together* to meet Jesus as he descends on the clouds to earth. Both the dead in Christ and those alive at his coming will *be with the Lord forever*. At that time, Christ will judge the world (Revelation 19–20), purify it with fire (2 Peter 3), and create the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21–22).

The Suddenness of Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

We need not be frantic about Jesus' return. In fact, Christians should encourage each other regarding the second

coming (mentioned twice in our lesson text—4:18 and 5:11). That said, there will be a surprising suddenness to Christ's return. Paul used two examples to underline this suddenness. First, he said the Lord will come *like a thief* (mentioned in vv. 2 and 4). Thieves do not usually announce their coming. Instead, they operate in stealth under a cloak of darkness. Second, Paul said it will occur as *labor pains on a pregnant woman*. Pregnant women can have false labor and even contractions for days. But when it is time for the baby to come, the baby comes.

The Moral Purity That Attends Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

As Francis Schaeffer said years ago (and the apostle said in 2 Peter 3:11), *How Should We Then Live?* Which influences us more, the past or the future? Maybe the future is a more powerful shaping force in our lives than our past. Paul seemed to think so.

Paul used contrasting, morally driven comparisons to make his point—darkness and light (night and day); asleep or awake; sober or drunk. Believers (called *children of the light* or *day*) should not participate in the fruitless deeds of darkness (Ephesians 5:11). Christians live this calling to moral purity due to three things: the armor of God (v. 8); the recipients of salvation (v. 9); and the Christian community (v. 10)—we live *together*.

The Body Life in Light of Christ's Return

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18

Paul addressed both leaders and followers in this text with a host of “machine-gun” imperatives. For effective body life in the church, members need to treat their leaders (those who *work hard* and *care for you*) with respect (*highest regard*). Likewise, leaders are solid people helpers—they warn, encourage, and help folks, while being *patient with everyone*. They must see that people strive *to do what is good* and that they don't retaliate.

In addition to this division of responsibilities, all believers must *rejoice, pray, and give thanks*. The rub for these imperatives comes when we read *always, continually, and in all circumstances*. This kind of body life will have an attraction all its own. **L**

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APPLICATION

SO WHAT?

BY DAVID FAUST

Our brains are bombarded with data. Americans now take in five times more information every day than we did in the 1980s. According to a research study conducted at the University of California San Diego, an estimated 105,000 words daily flood our eyes and ears through phones, e-mail, TV, radio, social media, music, and ordinary conversation. Our five senses send 11 million bits of information per second to our brains, yet our conscious minds can process only 50 bits per second. No wonder we're tired!

A FastCompany.com article explains, "Every status update you read on Facebook, every tweet or text message you get from a friend, is competing for resources in your brain with important things like whether to put your savings in stocks or bonds, where you left your passport, or how best to reconcile with a close friend you just had an argument with."

The Disconnect

It's hard to separate the trivial from the important. Overwhelmed with information, we struggle to answer a fundamental question: "So what?" Which ideas determine how we live?

Ask Christians if they believe in Jesus' second coming, and most will say yes. But how does our belief affect our actions? According to the New Testament, the Lord will return to raise the dead, judge the world, and end this current world order. Jesus himself promised the second coming (Matthew 16:27; John 14:1-3). Angels foretold it (Acts 1:9-11) and the apostles predicted it (Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:8-12; 1 John 3:2). Although Bible believers hold various opinions about the details, we agree that Christ came the first time "to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time" (Hebrews 9:28).

But if we believe in the return of Christ, we must dare to ask, "So what?"

Practical Implications

The second coming deserves more than a passing nod. In practical terms, how does our expectation of Christ's return shape our lives?

Think about it. We shouldn't be end-time sensationalists pushing weird theories, but neither should we relegate the second coming of Christ to the doctrinal dustbin. Even if we struggle to understand all its implications, let's not ignore this rewarding and relevant part of biblical teaching.

Prepare for it. We should respect the Bible's solemn warnings about coming judgment and make sure that by God's grace "we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming" (1 John 2:28). Jesus said, "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back" (Mark 13:35). James urged, "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near" (James 5:8). By sharing the gospel, we help others prepare for his coming, too.

Look forward to it. Christ's return is a source of great encouragement. We will see the risen Lord someday, so our labor is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). We "do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope"; instead, we look forward to being "with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 17).

Corrie ten Boom said it well: "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

When the Lord returns, let's be among those "who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Let's "live holy and godly lives" as we "look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (2 Peter 3:11-12).

Personal Challenge: What do you personally believe about the return of Christ? How does the certainty of his return shape your perspective and your priorities? **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. Have you ever had anything stolen? What was it? How did it happen? What was the result?
2. At what important time in your life did someone encourage you? Why did you need it? What changed because of it?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Thessalonians 4:16—5:18** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions.

Without rereading the passage, what key ideas or phrases stood out to you.

3. Verses 4:18 and 5:11 explicitly tell us to encourage each other. Several other verses imply it. And this passage, taken as a whole, acts as an encouragement to the church in Thessalonica. With the last two weeks' studies in mind, why did this church so badly need encouragement?
4. Why did Paul talk about the Lord's return in this passage?
5. A lot of conjecture surrounds how Jesus will return. Taking only information from this passage, what can you definitively say?
6. What does it mean to "belong to the night" versus "belong to the day" (verses 5, 8)? Is that the same thing or different from "awake" or "asleep" (verses 6, 10)?
7. What can we learn about God from this week's passage?
8. What can we learn about ourselves?
9. Where do you need encouragement this week?
10. Whom do you need to encourage this week?
11. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **2 Thessalonians 1:1-12**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. **1**