

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 THESSALONIANS 4-5

Some people sneak...
Some people stomp...
Some people strut...
Some people skulk...
Some people swagger...
Some people skip...
Some people sashay...
Some people stride...
Some people scurry...
Some people stumble...
Some people shuffle...
Some people slide...

How do you step? How do you walk?

Walking is the physical activity people participate in more than any other. Psychologists say every person has their own **PMP** or “primary movement pattern.”

The way you walk reveals a great deal about you.

A **stride** means self-confidence. A **shuffle** belongs to a timid person. A **swagger** indicates a big ego... Your *walking style* reveals your personality. Apparently, our *gait* is a *gateway* to our soul - ***and Paul would agree...***

Chapter 4 describes “*how (we) ought to walk...*”

But Paul’s concern isn’t our **PMP** - *whether we strut or shuffle*. He’s talking about our lifestyle. When Paul speaks of our “*walk*” he means *how we live our lives*.

He's saying to Christians... "This is how we roll!"

Verse 1, "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us **how you ought to walk** and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus."

Recall, the believers in Thessalonica were wartime babies. They were born in the midst of persecution.

Paul had spoken of the lifestyle these believers should be living, but now in tough times, he wanted to encourage them to continue in what they'd learned...

Former boxer Mike Tyson once said, "Everybody has a plan until they get punched." This is true for us. It's easy to walk with Jesus in a supportive climate, *but what happens when we get punched - when allegiance becomes costly?* This is why Paul "**urges and exhorts**" the Thessalonians to continue in God's commands.

Verse 3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor..."

I've never known a Christian who didn't desperately desire to know God's will for their life. We're constantly trying to decipher the will of God - *where should I go to college... who should I marry... what job should I take... where should I live... what church should I attend?...*

But the will of God is not some great enigma. It's really quite straightforward. Paul sums it up as *“your sanctification”* - in other words, *a life reserved for God*.

It's been said, *“God is more concerned about who you are than what you do, and He is more concerned about what you do, than where you do it.”* God's will is more about our character and the choices we make.

Author C.S. Lewis once wrote, *“Every time you make a choice you turn the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you slowly turn this central thing either into a heavenly or hellish creature - either a creature in harmony with God, and with other creatures, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures.*

To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us is progressing to one state or the other.” Here's what Lewis is saying, whether you end up in heaven or hell - wherever you end up - you'll belong there. For all along the way, you were preparing yourself by the choices you make now.

In a sense, you get to heaven or hell before you get there by either becoming more heavenly or hellish.

And *“sanctification”* is the process of becoming more heavenly - by making Christian choices. *And this is God's will for you!* Rather than please the world, God wants you and I to please Jesus. It's how we roll...

And sanctification doesn't just involve what we do at church, or at work, or in the market - in public venues.

It also involves what happens in the bedroom - in the private, intimate issues of life. It's not just what we do *on the street*, but it's what we do *between the sheets*.

Specifically, Paul says in verse 3, God's will for your life is to **"abstain from sexual immorality."** The Greek word is "pornea" - from which we get our word "porn."

It's a blanket term that covered all forms of illicit sexual activity - *hooking up, shacking up, friends with benefits, booty calls, all polyamorous arrangements, pornography, strip clubs, etc., etc.* Any sexual activity outside of marriage is "pornea" or **"sexual immorality."**

The buzz word in today's society is **safe sex - if it's safe sex it's okay** - but God's Word tells us to **save sex**. God has designed sex for a husband and a wife.

And Paul elaborates in verse 5, **"not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness."**

The contemporary attitude towards sex is that it's nothing more than a physical act - like brushing your teeth, or eating pizza. People treat sex as a form of relaxation - a harmless pastime - an exercise routine, *of no more consequence than riding a stationary bike.*

But this attitude doesn't explain the impact it has on our psyche and the callousness it creates in our soul.

I'll never forget the commercial that ran a few years ago. It was heart-breaking. The camera is outside a sleazy hotel - the site of a one-night, hook-up..

You only hear the voices... The woman asks, "so you have nothing to say?" She obviously wants to believe she means something to the man with whom she's just been intimate. He replies curtly, "no." She begs for the slightest affirmation, "you have nothing to say to me?" With a smirk he says, "sorry." She snaps back, "fine."

The guy in the commercial doesn't value this woman, or care for her as a person. She's just an object - a toy he has used to gratify his selfishness. Like a paper towel, he's washed his hands of her - he's thrown her away.

Paul calls this "*taking advantage of... defrauding.*"

Sex apart from the lifelong commitment called marriage devalues and diminishes a person's self-worth.

Contemporary wisdom might say sex is nothing more than a physical act, **but it's not true.** *Your own heart tells you so.* When the sex is over you long to be loved for who you are as a person. Allow yourself to be used sexually, without insisting on the highest commitment in return, and its effect on your psyche is demeaning.

You might be able to justify an immoral lifestyle mentally, but you can't escape its emotional damage.

Paul adds verse 8, “Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.” Don’t say, “Ah, that’s Sandy’s opinion.”

Paul says reject the decree to “*abstain from sexual immorality,*” and you’re directly violating the will of God.

“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another...” I don’t think it’s too strong of a statement to make, **If love is not the instinctive response of your heart, then you’re not a Christian.**

Rabbits don’t take hopping classes.

Birds don’t go to flight school.

Fish don’t need swimming lessons - *even though they do travel in schools.* My point is, some things come natural, and so it is with the Christian and love.

The *Spirit of God* births within us the *love of God*. A Christian doesn’t have to be taught to love; it comes naturally - we simply remain in God’s love for us.

And speaking of love, verse 10, “and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more...” The Thessalonians were known for the love they showed neighboring churches, *but love can enlarge.* This was Paul’s desire for the Thessalonians.

And he urges them with practical advise, verse 11, “that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”

There are Christians and churches today who are always picking a fight. Their's is a militant Christianity.

And let me say, the Christian life is full of battles.

The problem though is we don't always identify the real enemy. Often it's the lust in our own heart. We set up straw men we can pummel and feel righteous in doing so. We boycott certain corporate evils and picket secular causes instead of seeking our own purity.

When it comes to the outside world, Paul tells us to live “*a quiet life... mind your own business... go to work...*” In other words, keep a low profile. Pay your bills. Work hard. Be kind... Rather than always fight, be known for *what you're for*, not just *what you're against*.

This is the Christianity the world needs to see.

Sadly, “*a quiet Christian*” is an oxymoron in some circles. We need to realize *pushy Christians* generally *push people away*. A better approach is graciousness.

In verse 13, Paul changes the subject from *our walk in the world* to *our exit from the world...* “*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*” Paul refers to deceased believers - not as *dead* - but as “*those who have fallen asleep.*”

Jesus used this same idiom for death in reference to Lazarus. In John 11:11 He told His disciples, “*Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I make wake him up.*” We know from the text that

Lazarus had been dead for four days. The ole boy's body had already started decomposing.

When Jesus and Paul use the term "sleep", they do so metaphorically. We're promised our bodies will inevitably be resurrected. Thus, in a sense they're still viable. Our life has merely been suspended. Jesus will see that this body functions again. Thus, they just sleep.

But that's the body. 2 Corinthians 5:8 tells us, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

When our body dies it *goes to sleep*, but our spirit *goes to be with Jesus*. The idea of "soul sleep" isn't biblical. The spirit of a Christian who dies immediately enters the wonderful, conscious presence of Jesus.

It's our bodies that snooze, not our spirits.

And it's the Christian's hope that one day our sleeping, decaying body will awake. It'll be resurrected.

The Greek idea of immortal bliss was for the spirit to rid itself of the body. But Christianity promised better.

God has more in mind for us than bodiless spirits.

The Lord intends to redeem everything that sin has spoiled - which includes these mortal bodies.

Paul continues in verse 14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." The resurrection of Jesus is our guarantee of eternal life. Since Jesus rose again, we know we'll be with Him when He returns.

And in verse 15, Paul describes the return of Jesus...

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

Here, Paul speaks of an event yet future. We call it **the rapture**. The Lord will descend from heaven. *And Paul gives us the play-by-play of how it'll happen...*

First, He'll let out a holler... **ye-haw!**

Then an archangel will pipe in. Maybe he hollers too.

Next you'll hear a trumpet blast.

And then a miracle... The bodies of all believers over all the ages - some nothing but ashes - some nothing but scattered ashes - will rise. A metamorphosis takes place. Graves will empty and the effects of death will be reversed. Corpses are resurrected, and made new.

People ask, *“Why do the dead in Christ rise first?”* The answer... **“They've got six feet further to go.”**

But that's not all... Verse 17, **“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”** This is where we get the term **“rapture.”** It's Latin for **“caught up.”** The Greek word is **“harpazo”** - it means **“to snatch away.”**

Like a yo-yo hesitating at the end of a string, suddenly the Lord pops His wrist, and up we go!

One moment we're spinning around, on the ground. The next moment we'll land firmly in the palm of God.

On two occasions in Scripture God got in a little rapture practice. Remember Enoch. Genesis 5 tells us, "Enoch walked with God; and was not, for God took Him." He vanished. God snatched him from the Earth.

Recall too when Philip baptized the Ethiopian. Acts 8:39, "when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more... but Philip was found at Azotus." Philip vanished and then reappeared some 35 miles away.

Enoch and Philip are examples of what'll happen to an entire generation of Christians. God snatches us up.

And in the process of the *transportation*, also expect a *transformation*. 1 Corinthians 15:53 tells us that at the rapture, "this corruptible (body) must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

God will beam us up, and in the process, rearrange our molecular structure so that when we appear with the Lord, will have a refashioned body, just like Jesus!

Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth Wuest, says the Greek term "harpazo" has five different meanings...

It can mean, "to catch away speedily," or "seize by force," or "claim for one's own self," or "move to a new place," and "to rescue from danger" - and with the rapture of the Church all five meanings definitely apply.

Jesus snatches us up in a twinkle of an eye - faster than a blink... He strips us from the tight clutches of this world... He'll receive us as His Bride... And relocate us to a new home... And finally, He'll rescue us from the wrath to come - the final judgments God has ordained for the Earth. The rapture is our great escape.

And here's the most thrilling promise of all, **"And thus we shall always be with the Lord."** We'll be with Jesus!

Isn't this the fulfillment of all our hopes and dreams - to finally be with Jesus and never leave His side.

Paul adds, **"Therefore comfort one another with these words."** Here's the encouragement we need.

Let's always remind each other, *the Lord is coming back*. **Hang in, hold on, hunker down** - the cavalry's coming - it'll all be good when we're with Jesus!

Chapter 5, **"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.** Apparently, the Thessalonians were well-informed as to the indicators of the Lord's return.

Recall in Matthew 24:36 Jesus said, **"Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."** No one knows the day or hour of His return, but we can know ***"the times and seasons."***

God has given us signs or indicators to let us know when we're getting close to the return of Jesus to the Earth. He doesn't want us caught off-guard. And one of the signs of the end times is given to us in verse 2...

“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”

First, let's define a term, “*the day of the Lord.*”

Currently, we live in the day of man. Mankind is *having his say* and *getting his way*. But the day is coming when God will shut him up. God will intervene in human affairs. He'll *have His say* and *get His way!*

The Day of the Lord begins with the full-scale, global evacuation of Christians known as the rapture.

Then God punishes the rebel planet once and for all!

God will send His creation into labor. The natural order will cramp up. Incredible catastrophes will upset the eco-system. The Earth gets hit with contractions.

Mother nature eventually gives birth to the glorious Kingdom of God. Jesus will reign and rule, but to get there the ole girl will go through a painful *L and D*.

And here's the clue that starts it all. When you hear, “*Peace and safety!*” then *sudden destruction.*”

The Day of the Lord is preceded by a false peace, a *pseudo Shalom*. There's a calm before the storm.

It always bothers me that Bible-believing Christians got excited whenever a new war breaks out in the Middle East. We see it as a sure signal the end is near.

But it's not a war we should be anticipating - it's a peace. **A sinister shalom** will precede the Day of the Lord. When the

nations believe that danger has past that's when sudden destruction breaks out in earnest.

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.”

The world will be shocked and rocked by the sudden disappearance of millions of believers. I'm sure it'll cause many folks to remember our warnings.

For the world, Jesus is coming as a thief in the night, but believers should be watching... we're on constant stake out - aware of the signs - looking for Jesus!

Verse 6, “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” Don't doze off spiritually. Be alert. Live life on the edge of your seat!

Once, I had some chest pains that scared me and sent me to the doctor. It turned out to be a bad case of indigestion, but I'll never forget what the doc told me.

And this was a college-educated doctor, the man had degrees, yet here's what he said to me, “It's good that you came in. A lot of people ignore the signs, and the next day wake up dead.” “Wake up dead?”

Well, in a spiritual sense, everyone will *wake up after they die*. When you pass into eternity, you get 20-20 insight. You'll see it all clearly. But by then, it's too late. The idea is to wake up before you die, not afterwards.

Verse 7, “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” I'm sure you've heard the

phrase, “Nothing good happens after midnight.” I’ve said it to my kids a thousand times.

But that’s Paul’s point here. Folks with evil intent don’t like to operate in the light of God - they seek the cover of darkness. They hide from God’s light.

We should be the opposite. “But let us who are of the day be sober...” We should run to the light of God and His Word. Let’s be *pure-hearted* and *sober-minded*.

Verse 8, “Putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Here we’re told to strap on our protective gear - our armor. *The breastplate guards the heart. The helmet shields the mind.* And here are two areas where we need to seek spiritual protection... Choose wisely *the things you desire*, and *the thoughts that you think*.

“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, (literally, whether we live or die) we should live together with Him.”

Passages like verse 9 convince me that Jesus will return for His Church not after the Great Tribulation, or at its midpoint, but prior to the Lord’s coming judgment.

“*For God did not appoint us to wrath.*” Paul made a similar statement in Chapter 1:10 where he introduced Jesus as He “*who delivers us from the wrath to come.*”

Here, it might be helpful to give you three basic reasons why I hold to a pre-tribulational rapture. *The Church will go up before God's judgment comes down!*

Here's the first big reason - **a pre-tribulational rapture is compatible with God's promises to His Church.**

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus promises the church of Philadelphia, **"I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world..."** Because they were faithful they'll be kept from *the hour of trial*.

The world will be judged, not Christ's faithful church.

In addition, Revelation 13:7 says in the Great Tribulation Antichrist will be granted power **"to make war with the saints and to overcome them."** Yet in Matthew 18, Jesus says the gates of hell will never prevail against (or overcome) His Church. Thus, the true Church can't be around in the Great Tribulation.

The second reason I believe in a pre-trib rapture is that its compatible with the doctrine of eminency.

There are scores of Bible passages that encourage the Church to be like a brand of batteries... **ever ready.**

No man knows the day or the hour - Jesus can return at any time... Yet if you believe the rapture occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation, or even at its midpoint - you undermine the concept of eminency.

Daniel 9 tells us when the Great Tribulation starts and finishes and what happens in the middle. Thus, if the rapture occurs at any point on that timeline we have signposts to predict its placement. This would nullify the idea of

eminence. Only when the rapture occurs beforehand that it can truly happen at any time.

And then the third reason I believe in a pre-tribulational rapture is that its compatible with the biblical characteristics of Christ's return to the Earth.

There are passages in Scripture that promise Jesus will return during a time of peace. Other verses tell us He will come in the midst of an enormous battle...

Here in Thessalonians, it tells us He comes suddenly, unexpectedly - *as a thief in the night*. While Revelation 19 pictures Him returning to a world mobilized against Him. The nations are ready to fight and resist the Lord.

Here's what I'm saying... in looking at the various references to the return of the Messiah, you realize they all can't fit a single scenario. There are actually two second comings. Jesus comes back to establish His kingdom at the end of the Tribulation, but He comes to rapture His Church before it begins - *pre-trib*.

Chapter 5 continues, *Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.*

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." Here's one of my favorite verses!

Be nice to your pastor! Recognize what he does for you and the load he carries. Don't assume he gets a lot of thanks. Trust me, *he'll appreciate your appreciation.*

And *"Be at peace among yourselves."* Here's how to really

bless your pastor. Get along with your fellow church members. Cooperate and serve one another.

Verse 14, “**Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly...**” or “**insubordinate.**” The Greek term is applied to a soldier who refuses to follow rank - who insists on marching to his own drumbeat. And too many folks in the Body of Christ have a similar attitude.

An “**unruly**” person has a hard time submitting to leadership - *and the problem isn't the pastor* - it's their own stubborn resistance to any and all authority - *the law, police, government, parents, employer, umpire...*

They aren't content unless they're in charge.

And if we keep this in the context of helping our pastor, when you see an unruly person, don't give them *a listening ear* or *a sympathetic shoulder* to cry on.

That's like throwing gasoline on a brushfire.

Exhort the unruly man to trust the pastor and elders.

Warn them. Remind them they don't have all the info. Encourage them to go to the leadership with their questions. Insist they either straighten-up or move on.

And we're not only supposed to warn the unruly, but “**comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.**” There should be no tolerance among us for insubordination, *but weakness is another matter.*

We all have our problems, and we need to patiently help each other unpack them and resolve them.

Paul also gives us great advice in verse 15, “**See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.**”

A Christian should learn to fight evil by doing good.

Now comes the machine gun commands - short bursts - rapid fire... Verse 16, “**Rejoice always...**” Keep your eyes on Jesus and take your joy from Him alone.

“**Pray without ceasing...**” Maintain a continual, open-ended conversation with God. Just never say “**Amen.**”

Verse 18, “**In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**” Lots of bad stuff happens in our lives for which we’re not thankful. I’m not thankful for the death of a loved one, or for a serious auto accident, or for a fire, or for income tax?

But Paul doesn’t say, “**for everything give thanks,**” he says, “**in everything give thanks.**” I can be thankful God still loves me regardless of who else rejects me... I can be thankful that I have spiritual blessings that can’t be stolen... I can be thankful that God takes all things, even bad things, and works them together for good.

This is God’s will... “**In everything give thanks...**”

Paul continues his rapid-fire instruction...

Verse 19, “**Do not quench the Spirit.**” There are various sins you can commit against the Holy Spirit...

You can grieve the Spirit, *or do what He forbids.*

But to quench the Spirit is to *not do what He commands*. When we fail to step out in faith, and cooperate with His will we quench the fire of His Spirit.

And one way to quench the Spirit is to prohibit or neglect His gifts. Paul says, verse 20, **“Do not despise prophecies.”** Prophecy is a special gift of the Spirit.

God’s usual method of corresponding with His people is through His Word, but there are times when the Spirit speaks spontaneously to a specific need.

He speaks through ecstatic utterance, or prophecy.

It seems the Corinthians were the Pentecostals of the NT. They over-emphasized and misused spiritual gifts. Whereas, the Thessalonians were the Baptists. They downplayed the supernatural gifts of the Spirit.

And neither approach was biblical. Thessalonica was 150 miles from Corinth. Perhaps they heard of the Corinthians abuses and went to the opposite extreme.

But both approaches quenched the Spirit.

Even today, it’s hard to find a church with a balanced approach to spiritual gifts. Either they’re swinging from chandeliers or they’ve thrown the baby out with the bath water. Both attitudes quench the Spirit. We need all the spiritual gifts, and we need to use them properly.

Verse 21, **“Test all things; hold fast what is good.”**

Here’s the balance - don’t discourage prophecy, but neither should you believe all that you hear. Use discernment. Just

because someone says, “Thus says the Lord,” doesn’t mean what follows is from Him.

The problem with prophecy is its subject to human error. In prophecy people become God’s mouthpiece, and when humans are involved there can be errors.

The answer is to check it out! *Is the message in harmony with God’s Word? Is it in keeping with the nature of Jesus? Has it been confirmed by the council of other wise Christians?* If so, then take it to heart and act on it as the Lord leads you - if not, then reject it.

Finally, in verse 22 Paul commands, “Abstain from every form of evil.” Evil comes in different shapes and styles. Stay away from anything that’s remotely evil.

And He closes with a benediction, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Verse 24, “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” Did you hear about the guy who walked into the fancy restaurant? He wasn’t wearing a necktie so the maître d’ refused to seat him. The man was livid.

He stomped out to his car, and draped his jumper cables around his neck. He re-entered the restaurant and shouted at the maître d’, “*Is this good enough?*” He said, “*Yea, but you better not start anything!*”

Understand, what God starts in you, He finishes! He saves us, He “sanctifies” us, and He keeps us “blameless...” There are no limits to God’s forgiveness!

“Brethren, pray for us. Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. The Philips paraphrase puts it, “Give a handshake all around among the brotherhood.” Paul’s point is to greet one another warmly and sincerely.

Verse 27 closes the letter, “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”