

THROUGH THE BIBLE

1 THESSALONIANS 4-5

Some people *strut*...

Some people *slide*...

Some people *pound the ground*...

Some people *sashay*...

Some people *waddle*...

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...*

1 Thessalonians 4 describes “*how (we) ought to walk...*” But Paul’s concern isn’t our **primary movement pattern** – *whether we strut or shuffle*. He’s talking about our

lifestyle - our conduct. When Paul speaks of our *“walk”* he means *how we live and order our lives*.

Recall, Paul had been in Thessalonica just three short weeks, before he was bullied out of town. During his stay he conveyed vital truths. He writes this letter to reaffirm what he'd taught. And he stresses our lifestyle.

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.”*

Paul is about to tell them what He's told them before.

Realize it's not always new info we need, often we need encouragement to apply what we already know.

Our problem isn't *knowledge*, it's *execution*.

As we approach a New Year, and hope for a better life we should remember the old adage, *“If you always do what you've always done, you'll always be what you've always been.”* Change doesn't just happen.

We get out of our lives what we put into them.

This is why Paul is going to “urge and exhort” these believers to watch how they walk and live their lives.

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 met a Christian who didn’t desperately desire to know the will of God for their life. We’re constantly trying to decipher God’s will – *what job should I take? or girl should I date? or where should I serve the Lord? or where should my family live?*

But the will of God is not a great enigma. It’s really quite straightforward. Paul sums it up as “*your sanctification.*” And “*sanctification*” means “purity.”

If we were floating down the Chattahoochee River at the 285 bridge and you were thirsty, and wanted to take a drink from the river, I’d caution you against it!

No way! That far downstream the river is polluted.

But if we were high up in the Appalachians where the river begins, the water would be clean enough to drink.

The closer to the source the purer the water.

Well, God wants our lives clean enough for the world to drink from and not get sick. He wants us free from *lustful thoughts, selfish desires, disingenuous motives, deceitful communication, compromising activities...*

But the way to achieve this purity is living close to the source. A sanctified life is a life set apart to Jesus.

Make a tighter commitment to Jesus your top priority and *what job you take, what girl you date, where you give and where you live* - will all grow clearer.

As one author puts it, “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 preoccupied our attitudes and character.

Specifically, Paul says in verse 3, that God’s will for your life is to “*abstain from sexual immorality.*”

And he 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 its nothing more than a physical act – like brushing your teeth, or eating pizza. People treat it as a form of relaxation - a harmless pastime - an exercise routine, *of little more consequence than riding a stationary bike.*

But this attitude doesn't explain the damage it does to our psyche, and the callousness it causes our soul.

I'll never forget a beer commercial that ran a few years ago. It tried to be funny, but was heart-breaking.

The camera is outside a sleazy hotel, the site of a one-night hook-up. You only hear the voices inside...

The woman asks, "so you have nothing to say?" She obviously wants to believe she means something to this fellow. He replies curtly, "no." She begs for the slightest affirmation, "you have nothing to say to me?"

With a smirky tone, he says, "sorry." She snaps back, "fine." She doesn't want to be, but she's hurt.

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's used to gratify his desires. Like a paper towel, he's washed his hands of her, and is throwing her away. Paul calls this *"taking advantage of... and defrauding."*

Sex outside a 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 its not true. Your own heart tells you so. When the sex is over you long to be loved for who you are. It's *degrading* to just be *discarded*.

Your sexuality is the most immediate expression of who you are as a person. Allow yourself to be used, without insisting on the highest commitment in return, and its effect on your psyche is damaging, demeaning.

You might be able to justify an immoral lifestyle mentally, but you can't escape the 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 its too strong of a statement to make, "But 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 already known for the love they showed their neighboring churches, but “*brotherly love*” is something that increases. The love of Christ causes our love to grow more and more.

And Paul urges the Thessalonians in 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 that we can pummel and feel righteous in doing

so. We boycott certain social evils and picket secular causes, instead of seeking our own purity.

When it comes to the outside world, Paul tells us to seek *“a quiet life... mind your own business... work...”*

Keep a low profile. Pay your bills. Work hard. Be kind... Rather than always fighting, we should be known for *what we’re for*, not just *what we’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 to decompose.

Realize when Jesus and Paul use the term *“sleep”* they do so metaphorically. They’re not performing an autopsy. In light of our body’s future resurrection death

doesn't end the body's viability, it merely suspends our life. Our bodies will function again. Today, they sleep.

And that's just the body. 2 Corinthians 5:8, "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.

It's the Christian's hope that one day our sleeping, decaying bodies will wake up. They'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 proof 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... **woo-hoo!**

Then an archangel pipes 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 empty and the effects of death are reversed. Corpses will be resurrected, and made new.

People ask, “*why do the dead in Christ rise first?*” And 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" which means "to snatch up."

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 God-made bod, just like Jesus!

Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth Wuest, says the word “**harpazo**” has five different meanings in the Greek.

It can mean, “*to catch away speedily,*” “*to seize by force,*” “*to claim for one’s own self,*” “*to 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 that the Lord is coming back. *Hang in, hold on, hunker down* – the cavalry’s coming – it’s all 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.

Recently, the Lord told me the exact time of His return. That’s right. It’s a fact the Lord is coming back at 2:00 in the morning... *I’m certain somewhere in the world it’ll be 2:00 AM when Jesus raptures His Church.*

Actually, Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:36, “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, but here we do know “*the times and seasons.*”

God has given us signs, and indicators, to let us know when we’re getting close to the Jesus’ return to 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 run of the planet. God is letting man have his way, and get his say. But the day is coming when God is going to shut us up - put man out of business. God will intervene in human affairs *and have His say!*

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 its 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 rapture will surprise the unrighteous.

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

For the world Jesus is coming as a thief in the night, but for believers we should be watching... 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... Stay on the edge of your seat!

Did you hear about the little boy who got tongue-tied? Rather than pray his normal prayer, “If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take...”

He prayed, “If I should wake before I die.”

That's what some Christians ought to be praying - they need to wake up before they die spiritually.

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, a graduate student no less, but 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 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 expression, "Nothing good happens after midnight." 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.

"But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." We should be just the opposite.

We should run to the light - and live in the light of God's Word. Let's be pure-hearted and sober-minded.

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 some 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, “*Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*” Because they were faithful they’ll be kept from the hour of trial that tests the world.

In contrast, Jesus says to the church of Thyatira, “I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds.” Her punishment is the Great Tribulation that’s never intended for faithful churches.

In addition Revelation 13:7 says that during the Tribulation the Antichrist will be granted power “to make war with the saints and to overcome them.” Yet in Matthew 18 Jesus makes it clear that the gates of hell will never prevail against or overcome His Church. Thus the Church can’t be around in the Tribulation.

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

There’re 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 could return at any time... Yet if you believe the rapture occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation, or even at the midpoint - you destroy this doctrine of imminency.

Daniel 9 tells us when the Great Tribulation starts and finishes, and what happens in the middle. Thus, if the rapture occurs at any of those points we have signposts to predict its timing. And this would nullify the doctrine of imminency. It’s only when the rapture occurs beforehand that it can truly occur unexpected.

And 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. Others verses tell us He will come in the midst of an enormous battle...

Some prophecies tell 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 where I'm going... look at the various references yo the return of Christ, and you realize they could never fit one scenario. They're actually two second comings. Jesus comes back to establish His kingdom at the end of the Great 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! Show him some love.

Recognize him what he does for you and the load he carries. Drop him a note of appreciation. He'll read it and he might even keep it. And read it over and over...

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 word was applied to a soldier who refused to follow rank.

He insisted on marching to his own drumbeat. And there are too many folks like this in the Body of Christ.

Here’s a person who 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, umpire, employer...

They aren’t content unless they get their own way.

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 them to trust the pastor and elders. Warn them. Remind them they don’t have all the information.

Encourage them to go to the leadership with their questions. Insist they either straighten-up or move on.

And we’re not only suppose to warn the unruly, but also “comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” The church isn’t a country club for saints – it’s a

hospital for sinners. Every person who walks in our door has problems. We all have problems!

We need to love folks just as they are, and right where they're at. Help them unpack their problems. **We need three things: patience, patience, and patience!**

Then Paul 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 Christians 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 open-ended conversation with God. Just never say **"Amen."**

Keep the line open! When you get a free moment pop up a prayer. Just continue an ongoing dialogue.

Verse 18, **"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."** Paul doesn't say **"for everything give thanks."** That would be impossible.

Lots of bad stuff happens for which I'm 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 taxes?

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 will take all things, even the bad things that occur in my life, and work them all together to bring about a 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.*

To quench the Spirit is to *not do what He commands.* When we fail to step out in faith, and cooperate with God's will we quench the fire of the Spirit in our lives.

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 the gifts.

Whereas the Thessalonians were the Baptists. They downplayed the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Neither Corinth or Thessalonica had acted biblically.

Thessalonica was only 150 miles from Corinth. Perhaps they'd heard of the abuses and went to the opposite extreme. And those extremes still exist 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 approaches quench the Spirit. We need all the spiritual gifts – and we need to exercise them properly.

Verse 21, **“Test all things; hold fast what is good.”** Here's the balance when it comes to spiritual gifts.

Don't discourage speaking in prophecy, but don't believe everything you hear either. Use discernment.

Just because someone prefaces a comment, **“Thus saith the Lord”**, doesn't mean it's really of the Lord.

The problem with prophecy is that its subject to human error. In prophecy people become the channel.

God speaks through the human 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 – if not, then reject it.

Finally, in verse 22 Paul commands, “**Abstain from every form of evil.**” Evil comes in different shapes, sizes, varieties. Stay away from anything 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.**”

I love this verse. Paul is saying that we should dedicate ourselves to God because He's dedicated Himself to us. Give'm all you've got - “***your whole spirit, soul, and body***” - and He'll give you all He's got!

He'll preserve you until the coming of Christ.

And 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 doesn’t leave a lot of unfinished projects laying around.

And He’s not going to start with you. He “*sanctifies*” us and makes us His own. Then 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.”