

1 THESSALONIANS 4  
1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS



T. M. Moore  
*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians*

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians  
Copyright 2018 T. M. and Susie Moore  
The Fellowship of Ailbe  
[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. All psalms for singing adapted from The Ailbe Psalter. All quotations from Church Fathers from Ancient Christian Commentary Series, General Editor Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press).*

## 1 Thessalonians 4: Introduction

Paul now turns to the hortatory portion of his letter. The Thessalonians have begun well and endured much. But they must be prepared to continue working out their salvation, increasing in holiness, and growing in love for one another and their neighbors.

Paul believed that keeping one eye on the soon return of Jesus would help them to stay the course and pick up the pace of the walk with and work for the Lord. His counsel and instruction to them is important for us today.

Please visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), to discover the many other resources available to serve your needs. The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Visit our website also to subscribe to our thrice-weekly devotional newsletter, *Crosfigell*, or our daily *Voices Together* devotional and prayer guide.

If you find these studies, or any of our other resources, helpful, we hope you will consider making a contribution to help support our work. You can do so by using the donate button at the website or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

## 1 More and More

*Pray Psalm 23:1-3.*

The LORD *is* my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4.1, 2.*

*Reflect.*

1. What does it mean to abound more and more in one's walk with the Lord?
2. Paul uses two different prepositions to describe our relationship with Jesus. What is the significance of each?

*Meditate.*

What does Paul, as a shepherd of the Thessalonians, want for them? Probably more than what they wanted for themselves. Struggling to remain unshaken in the face of persecution, the Thessalonians might have found it difficult to think in terms of “increase and abound” or “abound more and more.” Isn't there a time when our faith in Jesus is simply good enough?

Not according to Paul. His language here is reminiscent of his exhortation to the Ephesians concerning God Who is able to do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3.20). If we're not growing in the Lord, if we're not working our ministry as agents of His grace and truth, if we're not experiencing increasing fullness of joy in Jesus, it's not because the Lord or His Word are not reliable. It's because we don't “ask or think” with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16; Phil. 2.5-11).

If we don't have large aspirations and great expectations for our faith, we're not likely to exert ourselves much for Jesus, or to realize much growth or fruit in Him. Paul's job, as a shepherd in the Lord's flock, was to raise the bar for Jesus' sheep and to encourage and equip them to labor faithfully at getting over it, and to teach them to think in terms of always raising the bar of love.

And Paul was earnest about this: he *urged* and *exhorted* or *encouraged* the Thessalonians to press on in their faith. He did not suggest that abounding more and more in their God-pleasing walk was an option. He expected *every* believer to embrace this outlook on faith. This is what Jesus commands us (cf. Jn. 15.12-17). Paul, *in* the Lord Jesus – in His authority and together with the Thessalonians in His Body – reiterates the instructions he had given the Thessalonians *through* the Lord Jesus – that is, by way of revelation from Him.

Persecution is no excuse for laying low in the faith. And if persecution is no excuse, neither are laziness, inconvenience, busyness, distractedness, or anything else. Jesus commands us to abound more and more in love and every good fruit, and Paul was simply echoing Him. We are walking with God and pleasing Him when this is the manner of our lives *in* Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

*Prepare.*

1. Do terms like “increase and abound” and “abound more and more” describe your outlook on the life of faith? Explain.

2. The goal of a Christian’s walk is to please *God*, not ourselves. How can we know what pleases God? Is what pleases God what you choose to do always? How can it become more so?

3. Paul seems fairly urgent about the Thessalonians continuing to abound in love and a God-pleasing walk. Who in your life fulfills the role Paul did for the Thessalonians? Who in your life needs you to fulfill that role for them?

*... he who is engaged in the service of Christ draws himself out of the turmoil and stormy billows of life and takes his seat upon secure and lofty ground. For what position can be loftier or more secure than that in which a man has only one anxiety, “How he ought to please God”?* John Chrysostom (344-407 AD), *Letters to the Fallen Theodore 2.4*

*Urge and encourage me today, O Lord, that I may walk in a manner pleasing to You, and that I may...*

*Pray Psalm 23.*

Like the Good Shepherd, faithful shepherds provide for their flock, lead and refresh them, help them to know rest and peace, and point them forward to the day of their being united forever with the Lord. For whom will you do these good works today?

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 23** (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire*)

Because the Lord my Shepherd is I shall not want, for I am His!  
He makes me lie in pastures full; I rest in Him by waters still.

My soul He quickens and will bless; He leads in paths of righteousness.  
Though I may walk in death’s dark vale, I shall not fear – He will not fail!

The Lord is ever by my side; His rod and staff with me abide.  
A table rich for me He spreads; with oil my Lord anoints my head.

Goodness and mercy, full and free, shall ever after follow me,  
and in the house of God, my Lord, shall I abide forevermore!

## 2 The Will of God

*Pray Psalm 51.1-4.*

Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.  
For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin *is* always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done *this* evil in Your sight—  
That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4.3-8.*

*Reflect.*

1. What is *sanctification*? Why is this God's will for us?
2. Here Paul focuses the work of sanctification on being sexually pure. Why is this so important to being sanctified?

*Meditate.*

Some people struggle with discovering God's will for their lives.

If that's you, then your struggle is ended. Paul tells us plainly, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (v. 3). Sanctification is that process that finds us being transformed increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As we lay aside the old person we used to be, learn Jesus (Eph. 4.17-24), and become clothed anew in His righteousness, we are sanctified – "set apart" – for God and His will. The goal of sanctification is increasing holiness (v. 7); if we reject the work of sanctification, we are rejecting God Himself (v. 8).

Sanctification means working out your salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12). It requires time in prayer; consistent, deep, and fruitful study of God's Word; and daily obedience in every next step of our lives. To increase in sanctification, we have to overcome obstacles, and a big one in Paul's day had to do with sexual immorality.

Imagine how urgent Paul would be about this in our day. We need to be as circumspect and determined in this matter as Paul expected of the Thessalonians.

The place for sexual relations is within marriage. Outside of that, anything else is sexual immorality and a powerful hindrance to sanctification. We may think a little sexual diversion not harmful, but Paul advises us to think otherwise, and warns us that God stands ready to judge us if we reject His plan for sanctification by following our desires for sexual immorality instead.

Don't let it happen to you. The life of sanctification is more exciting, more thrilling, and more useful in

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

Christ's Kingdom than anything else you can imagine. Make sanctification your goal and your desire, and you'll know and be fully immersed in God's will for your life.

*Prepare.*

1. How would you counsel a new believer to get started on the road of sanctification?
2. How can we tell when we're making progress in sanctification? Are you making progress?
3. Why is sexual immorality such a powerful hindrance to sanctification?

*There are, then, many kinds of lusts for this or that, but when the word is used by itself without specification it suggests to most people the lust for sexual excitement. Such lust does not merely invade the whole body and outward members. It takes such complete and passionate possession of the whole man, both physically and emotionally, that what results is the keenest of all pleasures on the level of sensation. And at the crisis of excitement, it practically paralyzes all power of deliberate thought.*  
Augustine (354-430 AD), *City of God* 14.16

*Keep me focused on Jesus and working out my salvation today, O Lord, and protect from...*

*Pray Psalm 51.1-13.*

Let these words search your soul as you pray, waiting on the Lord to reveal any areas where your sanctification is being hindered by sin. Confess, repent, and seek the Lord's help to move on.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 51.1-13** (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head Now Wounded*)

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!  
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!  
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin;  
Look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean;  
Thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.  
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;  
To wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

In Jesus' blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!  
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.  
Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.  
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!  
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.  
Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;  
Thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

### 3 Grow in Love

*Pray Psalm 128.1.*

Blessed is every one who fears the LORD,  
Who walks in His ways.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4.9-12.*

*Reflect.*

1. Jesus' new commandment is that we should love *one another* (in His Body) as *He loved us* (Jn. 13.34, 35), and Paul says we should increase more and more in *brotherly* love. Does this mean we don't have to love our neighbors who aren't believers?

2. What does it mean to *aspire* to something?

*Meditate.*

Paul understood how easily Christians can be distracted from the things that matter most to those of lesser concern. Jesus said that the world would know we are His followers by the love we bear toward one another. Not by our doctrinal excellence, our many clever programs, our impressive facilities and staff, the amount of our participation in church activity, or our righteous indignation about this or that social or moral issue. All these are *easy* to accomplish, compared to loving one another as Christ loves us. But, as Francis Schaeffer observed, this is *the* mark of the Christian. Thus, it makes sense that we should always be about the business of increasing in brotherly love, beginning with the believers who are in your Personal Mission Field, then in your church and community, then elsewhere, not failing, at the same time, to love all our neighbors as we love ourselves.

The Thessalonians were model Kingdom citizens in this regard, but Paul did not want them to rest on their laurels. He pressed and pushed and urged them to "increase more and more."

He also has some words to guide them in their lives in the world. They should *aspire* – take as a goal – to lead quiet lives, pay attention to their own matters and concerns, be faithful and diligent in their work, and walk in a manner worthy of God toward their unbelieving neighbors (1 Thess. 2.10-12). Our witness before the watching world is first of all a *lived* witness. We must show the reality of Jesus, alive from the dead and reigning at the right hand of God, by our lives, for only then will our words have any credibility.

Christians are not to be boisterous, boasting, or rowdy. They focus primarily on their own lives and work, that these might be as excellent and as worthy of God as possible. They work hard and comport themselves in righteousness, peace, and joy – the hallmarks of their Kingdom citizenship. It seems so simple, but we so easily lose sight of these most important matters. Let us heed Paul's urgent plea to these Thessalonians, and make sure that our priorities, as those who are called to the Kingdom and glory of God, are what they should be.

*Prepare.*

1. How do the people in your Personal Mission Field know that you love them?
2. How should you apply Paul's words in verse 11 to your own life? What do these instructions mean for you?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to "walk properly toward those who are outside"? What promise

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

does Paul attach to this instruction, and what does that mean?

*The Christian should not make a display of dress or shoes, as this is indeed idle ostentation. He should use inexpensive clothing for his bodily needs. He should not spend anything beyond actual necessity or for mere extravagance. This is an abuse. He should not seek honor nor lay claim to the first place. Each one ought to prefer all others to himself. He ought not to be disobedient. He who is idle, although able to work, should not eat. Moreover, he who is occupied with some task which is rightly intended for the glory of Christ ought to limit himself to the pursuit of work within his ability.* Basil the Great (330-379 AD), *Letters* 22

*I know, Lord, that love is the mark of a follower of Jesus. Help me today to love well, especially to love...*

*Pray Psalm 128.*

Let this psalm guide you in praying for your work, your marriage, your family, your neighbors, and the growth of the Lord's people everywhere.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 128** (*Fountain: There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*)

How blest are they who fear You, Lord, who walk within Your ways!

Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!

They prosper all their days, they prosper all their days!

Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!

Their homes with happy children bloom who fear Your holy Name;

Their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!

Declare Your glorious fame, declare Your glorious fame!

Their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!

O Lord, from Zion send Your peace, and prosp'rous make our ways.

Thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon us all our days!

Upon us all our days, upon us all our days:

Thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon all us all our days!

## 4 Those Who Sleep in Jesus

*Pray Psalm 16.7-9.*

I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel;  
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.  
I have set the LORD always before me;  
Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.  
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will rest in hope.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4.13, 14.*

*Reflect.*

1. Why is “sleeping” a good way of thinking about Christians who have died?
2. What is the basis for our confidence in the day of resurrection? Why should that give us hope?

*Meditate.*

Apparently, some members of the believing community in Thessalonica had died since Paul left them. Naturally, this would cause grieving, and grieving is what Christians must do at such times. However, as Paul notes, Christians do not grieve “as others who have no hope.” We grieve the loss of loved ones, but we do not despair. If our loved ones knew the Lord, then they have merely “fallen asleep” in Him, and we will see them again. If they did not know the Lord, then we at least may take comfort in the promise of resurrection for ourselves, and rest our loved ones in the goodness and wisdom of God, Who does all things well.

When we die, our bodies go to the grave. Our soul, however, goes directly to the Lord, to be ultimately disposed to one end or the other, whether to heaven or to hell, in either place, to wait for the day of resurrection and the joining of body and soul for eternity.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee that we who believe in Him will also rise (v. 14). We need to know this and know it *firmly* (v. 13), for this is the Christian’s blessed hope, that one day, because of Jesus and *with* Him (v. 14), we will rise again, be glorified in our bodies, and live in the presence of God’s glory forever.

So while we sorrow at the loss of loved ones, we focus on Jesus, alive from the dead and preparing even now to return and take us as His Bride. Thus we grieve, but we grieve with hope, and rejoice in the Lord and His precious and very great promises. Let us never be ignorant of this great promise, and let us ever cling to this blessed hope.

*Prepare.*

1. How is the grieving of Christians not like the grieving of those who have no hope?
2. Is it a good idea to be as clear as possible about the day of resurrection and life in the new heavens and new earth? Why?
3. Are heaven and the new heavens and new earth the same thing? How are they alike? How are they different?

*Thus when we have to face the hard and cruel necessity of death, we are upheld by this consolation, that we shall shortly see again*

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

*those whose absence we now mourn. For their end is not called death but a slumber and a falling asleep.* Jerome (347-420 AD), *Letters 75.1*

*Give me an ever-clearer vision of Jesus, exalted in glory and coming again, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 16.*

As you pray, count the number of ways the Lord is good to you. Let your mind focus on Jesus, exalted in glory, and thank God for the promised day of resurrection.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 16** (*All to Christ: Jesus Paid it All*)

Preserve me, O my God; I refuge seek in You.

You alone are all my good, my Lord and Savior true!

*Refrain v. 11*

Make me know life's way! Pleasures fill Your hand.

Fill my life with joy each day! Before Your face I stand.

The saints within the earth, majestic in their day,

Delight me with the worth of all they do and say.

*Refrain*

They endless tears shall weep who worship idols vain;

Their ways I will not keep, nor speak their empty names.

*Refrain*

My portion and my cup are You, my Savior dear;

You help and hold me up and ever keep me near.

*Refrain*

I bless Your Name, O Lord; my mind instructs each night;

You teach me by Your Word and guide me in the right.

*Refrain*

You are ever with me, Lord; in You I shall not fall.

But rejoicing in Your Word, I abide within Your call.

*Refrain*

Soon Your glory I shall see, for as Jesus rose again,

You will come to gather me to my home with You in heav'n.

*Refrain*

## 5 The Coming of the Lord

Pray Psalm 24.3-5.

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?  
Or who may stand in His holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,  
Nor sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive blessing from the LORD,  
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.15-17.

Reflect.

1. Why should meditating on the return of the Lord be a source of comfort and encouragement for believers?
2. How should Christians use the coming of the Lord to encourage one another?

Meditate.

Jesus is coming again. We don't and can't know when (Acts 1.7). But *that* He is coming to gather us unto Himself forever is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. We can't know the time or the details of His return, except insofar as the Scriptures reveal them. Paul intended these words to be a source of comfort and encouragement for believers. Naturally, we have used them to create contentions and divisions in the Body of Christ. The problem arises when we try to be more specific than Paul in understanding his words.

So what *precisely* can we know about the Lord's return, from this passage? First, He will *emerge into sight from the heavenly realm* (v. 16; cf. Rev. 19). That descent from heaven will be accompanied by a great shout and a trumpet blast, presumably, a shout and trumpet blast that all the earth will hear (v. 16). No one will *not* know when Jesus returns.

Next, *those who have died in the Lord will rise from the dead* and be glorified in their eternal bodies. They will be immediately followed by *those who are yet alive and in Christ*. Together they will rise to join Jesus as He returns (vv. 16, 17). John carries this forward beyond where Paul stops, to explain that all the redeemed and saved will return with Jesus. You can read about this in Revelation 19.

The word translated *air* (ἀέρας) refers to the spiritual realm, the place inhabited by saints and angels. The coming of Christ introduces us to a new quality of life, which both John and Peter further elaborate to include a spiritual life that is fused with a new creation, of our bodies and of the cosmos (2 Peter 3, Revelation 21). Its primary feature, however, is that it is a *spiritual* domain where *spiritual* beings live, and where those whom Christ gathers to Himself will dwell with Him *always*. The new heavens and new earth, according to Peter and John, will be physical places, such as we are familiar with now, but above all, places where spiritual beings, whatever else they are doing, commune with God and one another always (v. 17).

What an exciting prospect! It behooves us to meditate often on the coming of the Lord, and to be encouraged and comforted by the promise of His coming and all that accompanies it. This life is only *partially* true and real. We should expect hardship, sorrow, and tribulation here. But not there. Not where we dwell in glory with Jesus, Who is coming again for us soon.

Truly, these are words we should use to encourage one another as often as we can.

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

*Prepare.*

1. How do these words encourage you? What do they encourage you to do?
2. How can you make meditating on the return of the Lord a more consistent part of your spiritual disciplines?
3. How can meditating on the return of the Lord help us in preparing for that event?

*And do not marvel that the flesh of the saints is to be changed into such a glorious condition at the resurrection as to be caught up to meet God, suspended in the clouds and borne in the air. Indeed, the same apostle, setting forth the great things which God bestows on them that love him, says, "Who shall change our vile body that it may be made like his glorious body." It is in no way absurd, then, if the bodies of the saints are said to be raised up in the air, seeing that they are said to be renewed after the image of Christ's body, which is seated at God's right hand. Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411 AD), *A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* 46*

*Come quickly, Lord Jesus! And help me to prepare for Your return by...*

*Pray Psalm 24.*

As you pray, let the Lord speak to you about your readiness to meet Him. Open all the "gates" of your soul to receive Him with greater fullness and power.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 24** (*Foundation: How Firm a Foundation*)

The earth is the Lord's, as is all it contains;  
the world and its peoples He daily sustains.  
He founded it fast on the seas long ago,  
and bid gentle rivers throughout it to flow.

Oh, who may ascend to the Lord's holy place?  
And who may appear to His glorious face?  
All they who are clean in their hearts and their hands  
and true in their souls with the Savior shall stand.

A blessing all they from the Lord shall receive  
who seek Him and on His salvation believe.  
For these are His people, the children of grace,  
who earnestly, eagerly seek for His face.

O lift up your heads, all you gates of the soul,  
for the Savior would enter and render you whole!  
The Lord strong and mighty in battle draws nigh;  
He rules in His glory above us on high.

O Who is this King, Who approaches our gate?  
His might is before us, His glory is great!  
This King is the Lord of all glory above,  
Who comes to indwell us in mercy and love!

## 6 Encourage One Another!

Pray Psalm 126.4.

Bring back our captivity, O LORD,  
As the streams in the South.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4.18.

Reflect.

1. What is courage? How is courage related to encouragement?
2. How does encouragement affect you? Does it give you courage you might otherwise lack? For what?

Meditate.

I want to dwell a bit on this verse, and especially on Paul's instruction to *encourage* one another.

The coming of the Lord should be both a *source* of encouragement and a *tool* for encouraging others. But what is encouragement? Why do we need it? To what does it lead?

The NKJV chooses the word *comfort* here, and this is one meaning of the Greek verb παρακαλέω. But whereas *comfort* suggests something like, "There, there, it will be OK, everything's going to be all right," *encourage*, which I think fits the context better, carries the sense of "Take heart! The Lord is coming! Let's press on and get this old world in shape to receive Him!"

I believe encouragement is the most important relational skill any believer can master. And I believe this because I'm persuaded that what believers need most of all in this life is *courage*, the courage that comes from knowing the Lord, resting in Him, and drawing on His strength for seeking His Kingdom and glory.

Courage is that disposition of the heart which enables us to overcome fear, doubt, lack of experience, unbelief, and our natural self-protectiveness to follow Jesus into a Kingdom-and-glory way of life. Think of courage like Peter, stepping out of that boat, his eyes fixed on Jesus, walking obediently *toward* the Lord to walk obediently *with* Him. This is what courage does. This is why God has sent His Holy Spirit – the *Encourager* (Greek: παράκλητος) – to dwell within us. Courage to persevere through trials, setbacks, tribulations, disappointments, hardship, want, and lack of trust comes from the Spirit, Who brings us into the presence of God and His glory, liberates us from whatever is holding us back, and transforms us from the inside-out to be more like Jesus (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

It pleases the Spirit, in His work of *encouragement* – of giving us the heart to follow Jesus obediently – to use us in one another's lives. One tool we have for encouraging one another is the knowledge that Jesus is coming again. Other tools are also available to us, but in our text, Paul is emphasizing just this one. Jesus is coming. We will live with Him forever. All sorrows and disappointments and hurts and pains and fears will cease, dissolving so completely that we won't even remember what these things are. A day of everlasting rest, peace, joy, and being with Jesus is coming!

Encourage one another with these words.

Prepare.

1. Encouragement includes, but is not the same as, *affirmation*. Explain.

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

2. The root of the idea of *encouragement* is to “be called alongside” another person. God has called us to come alongside one another so that we might grow in Jesus, persevere through the trials of this life, and realize more of His Kingdom’s presence, promise, and power. What can you do to improve your skills as an encourager to the people in your Personal Mission Field?

3. Are there areas in your life where you need more *courage* to follow Jesus? How can your fellow Christians *encourage* you in these areas?

*If he is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him; but the condemned await the judge within. And upon the coming of an affectionate father, his children indeed, and those who are worthy to be his children, are taken out in a chariot, that they may see and kiss him; but the housekeepers who have offended him remain within. We are carried upon the chariot of our Father. For he received him up in the clouds, and “we shall be caught up in the clouds.” Do you see how great is the honor? And as he descends, we go forth to meet him, and, what is more blessed than all, so shall we be with him..* John Chrysostom (344-407 AD), *Homilies on 1 Thessalonians 8*

*Give me courage to persevere in obedient faith, O Lord. And today, help me to encourage...*

*Pray Psalm 126.*

As you pray, remember those believers who are sorrowing for one reason or another. Pray that they and you may have the courage to persevere in the midst of trials, and pray that you will continue to sow the Good News of the Kingdom throughout your Personal Mission Fields. Thank God for the joy that awaits us all when the Kingdom of Christ finally and fully comes on earth as it is in heaven, at the return of our Lord Jesus.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 126** (*Truro: Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns!*)

When God restored our fortunes all, we were like those who sweetly dream.  
Our mouths with joy and laughter filled, made Him our constant song and theme.

Then the astonished nations said, “The Lord has done great things for them!”  
Indeed, great things our God has done, Whose Name we praise, Amen, Amen!

Restore our fortunes, Lord our King! Let grace like flowing streams prevail.  
All they with tears of joy shall sing who sow while yet they weep and wail.

They who in tears of sorrow sow and cast their seed on every hand,  
With joy shall reach their heav’nly home, and bring the harvest of their land.

## 7 Stay the Course, Pick Up the Pace

*Pray Psalm 125.1, 2.*

Those who trust in the LORD  
Are like Mount Zion,  
Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.  
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,  
So the LORD surrounds His people  
From this time forth and forever.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4.1-18.*

*Reflect.*

1. What course were the Thessalonians on? What is *sanctification*?
2. What words does Paul use in this chapter to encourage them to “pick up the pace”?

*Meditate.*

The Christian life is a constant struggle to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we do, we increase in love for God and in being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ; and as this occurs, we love our neighbors more consistently and effectively.

So, in spite of whatever obstacles we may encounter in life, we need to press on. That’s Paul’s message to the Thessalonians, and to us as well. Our goal is increasing in holiness, and this for every area of our lives. We need to work hard as Christians, both at all the work of our daily lives as well as the work of becoming more like Jesus.

Jesus is coming again, and our duty and calling is to prepare for that by increasing in Christlikeness (cf. 2 Pet. 3.10-18). The psalms of ascent – like Psalm 125 – were used by the people of God to encourage one another as they journeyed together toward the temple in Jerusalem. We must find ways to encourage one another in our journey of faith toward the coming of our Lord Jesus. Looking forward to that day with hope and joyous anticipation can help to keep us on course and pick up the pace for each step in our journey.

*Prepare.*

1. How can you know if you have begun to stray from the course of sanctification? What should you do then (Ps. 119.59, 60)?
2. What are some areas in your life where you need to “pick up the pace” a bit in following Jesus?
3. How clear is your vision of Jesus, exalted in glory and returning for His own? How often do you meditate on that vision? Or talk about it with other Christians?

*Now the life that is really and truly life is God the Father, the fount of life, who pours out his heavenly gifts upon all his creatures through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, and the blessings of eternal life are faithfully promised even to us men, through his love for us. There must be no incredulity about the possibility of that. For we ought to believe, because our minds should be set on his power, not on our feebleness. For anything is possible with God, and that our eternal life is both possible and to be looked forward to by us is shown when Daniel says, “the understanding ... from among the many righteous shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.” Cyril of Alexandria (315-386 AD) Catechetical Lectures 18.29*

1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

*Father, help me to set Jesus before my vision always (Ps. 16.8), so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 125.*

Pray for the people in your Personal Mission Field, and ask the Lord especially to bless, guard, and encourage those who know Him. How can you fulfill that prayer with the Christians you will see today? Commit your day to the Lord.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 125** (*St. Gertrude: Onward, Christian Soldiers*)

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!  
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!  
Like the hills surrounding safe Jerusalem,  
Christ surrounds His Church and holds her in His mighty Hand!

*Refrain, v. 1*

All who trust in Jesus, strong as Zion stand!  
Naught shall ever move them from their promised land!

Wickedness shall rest not on this holy land;  
Sinfulness shall never come forth from their hand.  
Trusting in the Savior, firm in His caress,  
Ever shall His favor on this holy city rest.

*Refrain*

Lord, do good and care for those upright in heart.  
All who turn to evil shall from You depart.  
Sinful men may increase, on their way to hell!  
Save Your people, let your peace abound in Israel!

*Refrain*

*1 Thessalonians 4  
1 and 2 Thessalonians*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is sanctification and how does it relate to our being saved?
2. Sanctification involves making progress in holiness. What is holiness? Why does it matter?
3. Christians are called to always be increasing in love for God and their neighbors. Suggest some ways we can do that?
4. What is it about Jesus' soon return that is so encouraging? How can we encourage one another with this hope?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this chapter? How are you working to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.