

For the
Time
is Near

By Courtney Silberman

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

-1 Thessalonians 4:18

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Encouraging Women for Christ

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To all my family in Christ who are looking forward to seeing Jesus in the air very soon.

*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; **for the time is near.***

-Revelation 1:1-3

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Chapter One: Jesus Has Taken Care of Everything

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last."

-Revelation 1:17

Ever since I was saved at the age of thirty, God placed a supernatural love in my heart for the Word of God. I say it's supernatural because it can only come from God by His grace. Only God can take a person who was caught up in the ways of the world and get her caught up in studying the Bible instead. God knew, way better than I did, what was truly going to set me free.

Over fifteen years later, I rejoice in learning and teaching God's truth to others who have a desire to know more about Jesus. Through the platform of Encouraging Women for Christ, God has provided a way to use my gift to encourage the church. Nothing delights me more than opening the Bible with other believers and digging into the Scriptures. We get to experience Jesus together, and it's amazing! Our faith grows as an anchor to help us in the ups and downs of life, and to look forward to the hope we have in Christ for all eternity. We get to see together how big our God really is.

When we step back and think about it, do we realize how big God is? Do we realize that no matter what evil

thing happens, God has the power to turn it around for good? Do we realize that life, the way it is now, is not going to continue like this but there is a time appointed by God when He will change the world in the twinkling of an eye? We live in challenging times in many ways, and as followers of Jesus Christ all around the world, we can see how rapidly the world is changing. We see the culture declining quickly. We see good being called evil and evil being called good. We see an increase in lawlessness and the love of many growing cold. Despite all this, God is still on the throne. And He has a plan—a truly awesome one!

As time goes by, I'm experiencing more and more how powerful God is by simply resting in His perfect, revealed will. I'm seeing more and more how He's worked everything out precisely, from beginning to end, and no plan of His can be thwarted. If God decrees it, it will happen. If God says so in His word, it will come to pass. And there's nothing Satan can do to stop it. It's just a matter of time before everything written in the Bible goes from faith to sight. And it will—exactly the way it says. Exactly how it reads, like if a seven-year-old child read it and interpreted it to us.

The closer we get to God, the more we realize the simplicity of His will—He just wants a personal relationship with His children. He wants us to know Him so we can be in a position to understand His future plans for us. One day, we will see Him, and it will be greater than we've imagined. And yet, it will be exactly as we were told in His word. When we see Jesus face-

to-face, He will be as familiar as He's ever been to us, while at the same time, more glorious than we ever thought. That's Jesus. He was, is, and will always be the perfect God-Man. As glorious as God and as familiar as man.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

-Hebrews 13:8

He's Jesus—our perfect Savior in every way. Our friend. Our comforter. And our God. And He's coming to receive us to Himself very soon—the fulfillment of His plan since the beginning of all creation.

Chapter Two: God is Always Moving Forward

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

-Matthew 5:14-16

We who have a personal relationship with Jesus have something very special. And it's not just for us. God is the Great Sharer of all that is good. He doesn't just pour out encouragement, love, knowledge, wisdom and truth so we can keep it to ourselves. He pours out so that each of us can take what we've been given and share it with others. The church, after all, is His Body. If the eye sees something wonderful, the whole body dances for joy! If the ear hears something beautiful, the whole body sings along! The church is Jesus' joy and every single person in the Body is a special and unique creation of His. He knows each of us by name. He knows the purpose for which He created us. We are One in Him, and at the same time, we are individual members who have a unique purpose that He created us for.

You and I are still on this earth (as opposed to being in heaven) because we are to bring glory to His name through being a light in this dark world. We can all probably agree that the culture is quickly changing and

the truth of God's Word is being cast aside. We see this happening even in the church. Now more than ever it is important that we study and meditate on the truths in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, so that we don't fall into the trap of believing the lies of the enemy. He is a master deceiver and comes only to steal, kill, and to destroy. The way we overcome the deception is to stick close to the Word of God and to other believers who want to live holy, godly lives in accordance to what the Word of God teaches us.

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jesus, John 10:10).

The Bible clearly teaches that God has a plan for the ages, and He is always moving forward with that plan. The next big event on His agenda is called the rapture of the church. We'll dig into that more closely in the coming chapters, but for now, it is when all born-again believers from the time of Pentecost in Acts 2 to the moment of the rapture are taken to heaven supernaturally, in a moment, to be with Jesus. Jesus tells us in His Word that He is the Bridegroom, and that He has taken a bride for Himself from the church. Jesus wants to be with His bride! When it is the appointed time, He will not waste another moment bringing us to heaven to be with Him. He's been waiting since the day He was lifted up to heaven and His disciples watched Him go.

When you stop to think about it, we live in remarkable times. According to what Jesus taught His disciples in

Matthew 24, we are the last generation. The time of this age is going to end, and a new age is coming which has been the hope of all believers of all time. It is the coming of Jesus Christ back to the earth to rule and reign as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, over all the creation that rightly belongs to Him.

“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (From Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:32-35).

After studying the Bible for a few years, the door opened to me to focus on studying Bible prophecy and eschatology (the study of end times). I was hooked from the beginning! Never had the Bible come together in real life excitement, hope, and anticipation of what’s to come than when I dove into understanding the full counsel of the Word of God from beginning to end. I realized more deeply that all we are going through is temporary compared to the glorious eternity we have with Jesus. God indeed changes the times and the seasons. Just as summer moves to fall and fall moves to winter and winter to spring, God changes things. Why is that? The answer is because God is always moving things forward—He is always moving His plan for the ages along on its perfect, decreed path.

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding”
(Daniel 2:20-21).*

I think about the conversations Jesus had with the people around Him when He walked on this earth during His first coming. He was always pointing them forward. He told them to follow Him and to not look back, because he who put his hand to the plow and looked back is not fit for the kingdom of God (see Luke 9:62). He did this for a very specific reason—He wanted His people to know that the best is yet to come!

God chose to come to this earth in the form of a Man because He wanted to demonstrate the importance of personal relationships. Jesus traveled, ate, drank, slept and taught with His disciples right by His side. He shared His life with them and they shared their lives with Him. That’s exactly the nature and character of God. That’s how God began His relationship with Adam and his wife in the garden at the beginning of creation—walking with them, fellowshiping with them, in the cool of the day.

Jesus wants us to know He’s real. He wants us to know that He’s true, and that every word of the Bible is true, because they are His spoken word! He wants us to

know how much He loves us and that He has a glorious plan for His creation. He's going to do everything He says. And one day, we will see and understand all He spoke about in His word perfectly because we will see it with our own eyes.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10:

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

We will see every true work done on the foundation of Jesus Christ shine brightly. We will also see everything done in opposition to Him cut down. We will see who truly belonged to Him and those who never did but only believed in pretense. We will also see those who spitefully rejected Him receive the just penalty for their rebellion.

God operates in ways that are so special and awesome that the only way we can see His ways is through the power of the Holy Spirit. For example, He chooses ordinary people the world overlooks to make Himself known in the world. He chose Abraham and Sarah in their old age to bring forth a nation of people called Israel who are set apart for Himself. He chose Moses to lead those people out of bondage in Egypt and give them laws that would show that they are God's people, different from the pagan nations around them. He chose David to be the king and shepherd of Israel and

lead them by demonstrating a deep love for God. These examples show that God can choose anyone He wants because He is the Creator. And as the Creator, He knows exactly what He purposed for each of us. He is not looking for someone because they are intelligent or physically strong or wealthy, as the world defines these things. He is simply looking for someone who will say “yes” and surrender their life to Him.

Another way God operates is through a process. This has been His way since the first day of creation and will continue until the New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem (Revelation 21 & 22). As God, He could have done everything at once. But working in a process and cultivating relationships go hand-in-hand. Even in the life of His Son Jesus, the Father was with Him as He increased in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and and with men (see Luke 2:52). Jesus the boy had to grow into Jesus the Man. And Jesus the Man, being fully God, had to go through a process to the cross. In living on this earth the way all mankind has to live on this earth, the Father demonstrated through His Son that relationships, experience, and personal growth all provide the opportunity to surrender one’s life to the will of our Creator. God provides a process to make that choice.

As we come to the end of the church age, we see the importance of paying attention to God take deeper priority in our lives. While we still have time, we can choose on a daily basis to take the things of God more seriously. But we need each other to make this happen.

We can encourage one another to spend more time reading our Bibles and less time looking for ways to be entertained by the world. We can build up one another by offering our gifts and passions to serve the Body of Christ instead of wasting precious time on the things the world says we should be doing. We can allow God to use our physical locations and positions in the world to reach others with the light of Christ. As long as we are still here, it's never too late to surrender our lives and follow our Good Shepherd.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (Jesus, John 10:27-30).

God is always moving forward, and in reality, He's not waiting for anyone. I used to think that He is waiting for that last person to be saved to take us to heaven in the rapture, but that's not what the Bible teaches. His appointed time for the rapture will not change for you or me or anyone else. Jesus is coming at the exact moment the Father has already determined since before the foundation of the world. It is up to us to get on board with His plans, not the other way around. He is the Creator, and we are His creation. He loves us and wants us to join Him in His perfect work before He comes. We need to understand there is a sense of urgency. There's no better time than today to get on

board with Jesus' plan for you. And I can promise that you won't regret it both now and forever in eternity.

Chapter Three: Great Things Lie Ahead

*"But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing,
And her people a joy."*

-Isaiah 65:18

One of the big misconceptions even in the church is that we are off to heaven and that is the end of the story. But the Bible teaches us very specifically there is much more that lies ahead for the believer in Christ! There are a several periods to go ahead of this church age we are currently living in, and followers of Christ will be there for each one. Don't we want to know what's going to happen after we're taken home to heaven at the blessed hope?

The kick start of everything ahead of us is the rapture of the church. Every authentic believer living on the earth today is part of the church. We are called a few different names in Scripture—the Body of Christ and members of the household of God, for starters. We are a make-up of individuals, but corporately, represent Christ's physical presence here on earth until He returns to the earth. We who are indwelled with the Holy Spirit have the power of God living in us and through us to carry out His will in the world. We are here for the Great Commission—to go into all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching each one to obey Jesus' commands, with a promise that He is with us always, to

the end of the age. While we are waiting for His any moment appearing, we are to occupy until He comes. We are to be about our Father's business. We are to use the gifts, talents, time, experience, and resources we've been given to share Jesus with others who need Him too. Time is running short. Every day is another day closer to the rapture of the church. We want to be found working when He comes, and the best way to do this is to obey His command in the Great Commission.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

-Matthew 28:18-20

One day very soon, we will hear a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and we will be instantly caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In a moment, in the blink of an eye, we will be changed. Our salvation will become sight in the full glorification of our bodies. And we will be standing before the throne room of God with angels surrounding the throne, signing in triumphal chorus. And it will happen that quickly. In a moment, in the blink of an eye. And our time here will be complete, never again to return to this fallen world as it is now in this mortal body.

Scripture tells us that we are not children of the darkness but children of the day.

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. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 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. 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, we should live together with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-10

God's plan is a plan of rescue—to take His church off the earth before He pours out His judgment upon an unbelieving world. According to the Bible, we are taken up to be with Jesus in Revelation chapter 4. We will see the Lamb take the scroll in Revelation chapter 5. The judgment of God will be poured out in Revelation chapters 6-18, and Jesus returns to the earth with us behind Him in Revelation 19.

We know we are living in the last days because of all the prophetic activity happening around us. Plus, the Bible tells us we are in the last days according to Hebrews 1:1-2:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

First, Israel is back in the land after a little less than 1,900 years. Remarkable! Second, the Jews have Jerusalem in their possession. These two events alone, occurring in 1948 and 1967, respectively, should be reason enough for us to look up for Jesus' command in the clouds. But we can add more—the cry for a one-world governing body and even more so after the global pandemic, a global currency, the invention of technology to track us wherever we are, the great apostasy of the church, the rise of anti-Semitism, the mind-blowing decay of moral values in society, and I could go on! I also want to add, on the positive end, the massive outpouring of the availability of the Bible to anyone who wants to read it, in almost any language spoken throughout the world. God is telling us something. He is getting us ready for what's ahead. He's made the Bible available to nearly everyone who wants to read it, in translations that are accurate to the original languages. We've never had anything like this in human history—ever! Only a loving, perfect God would do all this to make sure His children know He is coming for them soon. Only a loving, merciful God would give people an opportunity to repent before the coming wrath poured out on this Christ-rejecting world. Only a loving God would do all this for the world He so loved.

None of what we are going through is an accident. There is no such thing as a coincidence. God has everything perfectly timed and perfectly planned. And He did it all before resting on the seventh day. We are just living it out in time here on earth. It's already been

planned and prepared. We are simply walking in it now.

If you have been living with your mind firmly fixed in your own world, it's time to wake up and look up! There is no better time than today to get your life right with God. If you are already a follower of Jesus Christ and have found yourself in a slump in your relationship with Him, you can get back to Him right now. Repent and turn back to Him, for your loving Father is watching expectantly for you to come down that road so He can throw His arms around you, kiss you, and welcome you home.

If you've never made the personal choice to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, there is no better time. He knows you, He loves you. He went to the cross to die for your sins. He rose from the dead to give you a new life in Him. Believe that He died for your sins and rose from the dead. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. If you do this, you will know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that you made a personal choice to receive Jesus as your Savior. You will have your life right with God and are guaranteed to go home to Him at the rapture of the church. But do not wait. Time is short. You do not want to be here after the church has been removed from the earth. The seven years before Jesus returns to the earth will be the most terrible times the world has ever seen. Secure your life now by surrendering to Jesus. It's not too late. Don't put it off. Do it, and you will be so grateful you did.

After the church is removed from the earth, God will pour out His judgment for a period of seven years. At the end of the seven years, Jesus will return to rule and reign as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords for 1,000 years (Revelation 20). After the 1,000 years are complete, God will create a New heavens and New earth, where the New Jerusalem will be, taking us back to the way God had designed His creation to be all along before the fall (Revelation 21-22). God will walk again with man and woman as He did in the Garden of Eden. And that's the final state of our eternity, walking face-to-face, with our Creator God. We will be perfect and complete, enjoying fellowship with God and each other, for all eternity.

It's so exciting that we have so much more ahead of us with God. After the church has been removed from the earth, we will be in heaven for a period of at least seven years. After the seven years are complete, we will return to the earth behind Jesus. And He will set up His millennial kingdom with the center of the world being Jerusalem. He will rule from His millennial temple, and all the nations will come to worship Him on His throne in Jerusalem. His church will rule and reign with Him all over the earth. And righteousness and peace will be established everywhere.

For the earth will be filled

With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,

As the waters cover the sea.

-Habakkuk 2:14

Satan will be bound in the great abyss for a thousand years. The peaceful earth and righteous government that we've been longing for but could never create on our own will be a physical reality. All followers of Christ in our glorified bodies will worship Him. We will all love Him and serve Him with our whole heart, in the full and perfect gifting we've been created to have. We will be able to fully submit to Him and never have to fall into the trap of sin again. It's going to be more wonderful than we can imagine. And it's coming for all who call upon His name today.

Look up, follower of Christ, your redemption draws near!

Chapter Four: Jesus and His Beloved Bride

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

-Revelation 21:9

For a follower of Christ, these are difficult times. As the apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

In a nutshell, the enemy knows his time is running short. He knows the end is coming, when Jesus returns to the earth to set up His glorious millennial kingdom. Satan himself will be bound in for 1,000 years. But before this happens, we see all sorts of birth pangs indicating the tribulation is around the corner. We see the Middle East with all sorts of wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters all over the world, and the corruption of all things holy and sacred to God, including marriage between one man and one woman. The latter one, in particular, may be Satan's favorite target, because the bond of marriage is so important

to Jesus. The enemy loves to distort the image of Christ and His unconditional love for His bride, shown through His sacrifice on the cross, His resurrection to give us new life, and His union with believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Satan has a pattern—whatever God does, Satan counterfeits. If God has instituted something as holy and righteous, Satan twists it into something evil and wicked. For example, take a look at the beautiful promise of God to Noah that was presented visibly in the sky with a rainbow after the flood:

And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth" (Genesis 9:12-17).

Tragically, look at what that image stands for in modern day. Something of beauty and purity distorted into something unholy and unrighteous, all the while claiming how wonderful it is for all to celebrate their love for one another, even if that love is the complete mocking of what God has blessed and instituted since

Genesis 1 & 2. That's what Satan does. And if we don't know the Word of God, we will fall victim to it too. Know your Bible, Dear friend. Strive to know every word God speaks, because Satan is working overtime to call good evil and evil good. If you know the truth, you will never receive what contradicts God in His Word. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

I want to get back to Jesus and the church. The church is very special indeed. Though Jesus came from the Jews and salvation is from the Jews, Israel has temporarily rejected their Messiah. For nearly 2,000 years, the church has flourished in the most impossible of circumstances throughout history. Jesus promised that He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it. No matter what, Jesus' church would endure. And Jesus promised to be with the church until the end of the age.

But the church age (the time from Pentecost in Acts 2 to the rapture in Revelation 4:1) has a definite end date. At any moment, at the appointed time the Father has already set but is unknown to the church, Jesus will come like a thief in the night and receive the church to Himself. Jesus is the Bridegroom who went away after entering into a covenant to marry His bride. He promises to come back to get her and take her to the place He prepared for her.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

At that place in heaven, He will marry her and the consummation of all the ages will take place in heaven. All will rejoice at the marriage of the Lamb!

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:6-8).

I’ve cultivated a wonderful habit that I highly recommend to every follower to Christ. I’ve found great peace in the morning hours before beginning the day with a hot cup of coffee and God’s Word. I make sure I get to bed at a decent hour so I can get up early, because I don’t want to begin my day without a quiet time in the morning with Jesus. I’ve learned so much over the past decade or more that I’ve been up early with Him, and I have not missed sleeping in. God has shown me some beautiful things in His word—things that encourage me and strengthen me and keep me going forward for another day. I know His grace covers me and His mercies are new every morning.

One morning over ten years ago, after spending almost two years studying of the book of Revelation, I had a beautiful picture come to my mind. I saw Jesus dancing with His bride. His love for her was so deep.

The grace He extended to her was so moving. He was smiling down at her, and she was smiling at him. Her long, flowing gown was covered with small, precious jewels that were clear and sparkled in a rainbow of colors. She was glorious because He made her glorious. It was His glory in her that made her shine the way she did.

After envisioning them, I realized the depth of my sin and the stain of sin upon me in a whole new way. I felt so unholy and ruined because my sin covers me from head to toe! Theirs is perfect and complete in sinless perfection. I had no right to be able to see their love for one another in my current, sinful state. They had a righteousness and a union that I could never have in my current body, filled with sin as it is.

And then I realized the depth of God's grace for us who have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit but still have to live in these mortal bodies. What we will be has not yet been realized, but through the Holy Spirit, we are washed clean by Jesus' atoning work on the cross for our sins. We are declared righteous and holy by no work of our own, only by God's grace through faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. His blood is indeed a perfect blood, covering all our sins from head to toe. So perfect, that the Father no longer sees us in our sinful state, but sees His perfect Son Jesus in us, just as the Father sees His perfect Son Jesus in His bride, which is why she is so glorious. His glory covers her and makes her perfect and beautiful.

We can never begin to be perfected in this current body, which is why God's grace is so overflowing to us. Even as believers who've been saved by grace, we sometimes still fall into the trap of believing our good works will perfect us. But as we are saved by grace, we are also sanctified by grace. And our current state and Jesus' sinless, perfect state are light years apart, which is why this flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of heaven as we are now. We must either die and leave this body, or we must be changed into our perfected bodies so that we can meet Jesus in heaven. Thankfully, the Word tells us that's exactly what will happen at the rapture.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

*"O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?"*

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

That picture of Jesus and His bride changed me in many ways. It's made me realize I need to live in the depth of God's grace that much more. Grace for myself, grace for other believers. None of us have arrived here. But Jesus' grace carries us each and every day until we are face-to-face with Him. Jesus—full of grace and truth. Oh Lord, let me be filled with it too.

Chapter Five: Endure

*If we endure,
We shall also reign with Him.*

-2 Timothy 2:12

“Endure.” These words stood out like bold print as I began a recent study of Second Timothy. I’m still challenged by the words. No doubt, it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to endure. Some days certainly feel more exhausting than others. Evil has a way of wearing us down. But the gentle voice of the Lord continues to press us forward, supernaturally. I could never, ever do this by myself. And that’s the point. You and I were never meant to live the Christian life by ourselves but to take up the gentle yoke of our Lord Jesus.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

I think of God’s promises in His Word, and I can rejoice with the psalmist when he says he knows that the Lord delights in him:

*By this I know that You are well pleased with me,
Because my enemy does not triumph over me
(Psalm 41:11).*

I can't help but think about Jesus and His road to the cross. Many years ago, my children and I did a chapter-by-chapter Bible study on the Gospel of John during the year I homeschooled both of them together. We could feel the heat of the battle growing more and more intense as the time of Jesus' crucifixion approached. Then it peaked at its climactic point when He was up on the cross. Satan fought tooth and nail all the way to the end, thinking he triumphed as he saw the Son of Man bow His head and give up His spirit. Satan never gave up. He took every chance he got and seemingly brought every demon with him to attempt to overcome God. We need to know this. We need to see that he's not going to give up in these last days either. But we stand upon the truth that Jesus has already triumphed over evil.

As we continue to walk with Jesus and gain a deeper understanding of our calling, we will see Satan prowling even closer as a roaring lion, seeking anyone he can devour. I've also noticed that when God is about to break through, Satan and his demons go that much more berserk. I'm both amazed and frustrated they keep it up, knowing God will ultimately bring the victory every time. However, a better approach is to anticipate Satan will continue to carry out His schemes. That's his character, and he will not change.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).

It has been no different living in the last days of the church age right before Jesus takes us to heaven.

Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

Why do people act like this? Scripture once again gives us the answer:

Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

According to the Bible, evil men and imposters do not believe that Jesus is actually coming back. They walk according to their own lusts. They do not think God will literally hold people accountable for their actions and judge the world and its wickedness in our lifetime, or even at all!

But God will use all of this for His glory. As Satan continues to scheme against God's people, we press in that much more to our God. Amazingly, our victory lies in our weakness. The more we allow ourselves to be carried by the Lord through the trials, the more God's power can reign through our lives and circumstances. The more we depend on God by resting in His abiding presence to carry us forward, the more we will experience His peace and His strength within us.

*"This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel:
'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'
Says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).*

What Satan tries to do to harm us, God uses for good. Jesus is truly amazing, and His grace overflows like a river.

We can endure because we know our days here are numbered. We are either going home to be with Jesus by death or the rapture. One will come, guaranteed. Jesus knows that we have limited strength in these imperishable bodies. He knows we have limited strength in any valley we travel through. One day, the valley will lead to the mountain, and we will stand in triumph over the battle we faced. Alternatively, one day, when the Father declares the time has come, Jesus will come back and rescue us out of the valley Himself. We will instantly be out of the valley and looking at Him face-to-face. Our tired, weary bodies will instantly be refreshed and made new. All of a sudden, we will be transformed into beautiful, heavenly bodies.

If you spend enough time reading First Corinthians 15, your faith in the resurrection and the rapture will grow that much deeper. And on those days when your weariness drains you beyond what you think you can endure, pull up those verses and meditate on God's amazing transforming power. It is remarkable what this does to keep us encouraged. And thank God we have easy access to the Bible whenever we need it! It is indeed God's gift of grace in the times in which we live.

It was always God's intention that the passages on the rapture bring us the kind of encouragement we need to keep pressing on. Why us, and why now? Because

Scripture tells us we are the generation that will experience the rapture. Read through the book of Revelation. Read Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and read what Jesus says in Luke 21. If you truly come humbly before the Lord, seeking God for the truth of the times we live in now, you will come to understand this is the truth. Then you be open to experience His promise and comfort of the soon rapture of the church.

"Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

This promise will anchor your soul to live triumphantly in Christ today like no other promise in the Bible. You will be able to endure, and you will experience the joy of knowing that if we endure, we will also reign with Him in the end.

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21).

Chapter Six: Our Very Great Reward

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

-Genesis 15:1

I would like to take a moment to point out an example of the importance of reading through the Bible verse-by-verse in its full context. Take a look at 1 Corinthians 2:9-10a:

But as it is written:

*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.

I see 1 Corinthians 2:9 quoted in a lot of different places, like on Christian greeting cards or Bible cases. But they usually omit the beginning of verse ten. Read above again. If we take the Bible at face-value, as we all should, I'm hearing God has revealed to us through His Spirit what He has prepared for those who love Him. And what has God ultimately prepared for those who love Him? The answer goes all the way back to God's word to Abram in Genesis 15:1:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

The “word of the Lord” in Genesis 15:1 is no other than Jesus Himself in the Old Testament. This is one of His many appearances in His pre-incarnate form. The fancy word is “Christophany.” When it is all said and done, our very great reward is the Person of Jesus Christ. It’s not necessarily heaven, although that is a part of it. And it’s not necessarily our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, although that’s a part of it too. Ultimately, our very great reward is the seeing Jesus Himself in person.

The only Person who can and ever will fill the holes in our lives is Jesus. Our longings, our desires, our disappointments, and our trials, can only be healed when we see Jesus face-to-face. Seeing other loved ones who have fallen asleep (died in Christ) will not heal our brokenness. It’s going to be Jesus Himself. He will heal our broken hearts and make all things new. That’s the way it was always meant to be.

I understand that we long to go to heaven to see loved ones who’ve gone before us. But, Dear friend, we need to long to go to heaven to see Jesus. If we don’t long for Him above everyone else, we’ve risked putting others before Him for healing and hope, and that’s idolatry. We’ve all suffered great loss here in the death of beloved family and friends—heart-breaking loss. I don’t want to minimize that. But we need to realize that Jesus is the Only One who can make us complete. And when we are one with Him, as He prayed for us to be in John 17, then and only then are we complete and whole. And that will take place only at the rapture

when we receive our resurrected bodies and are fully glorified in Him.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

God has prepared His Son Jesus for those who love Him. Jesus is our very great reward. And death apart from the rapture is not the completed state. The rapture, where we receive our resurrected and glorified bodies, for both those who have already died and those who are still alive, is the reward, because then the body of Christ and the bride are One with her Bridegroom.

Travel with me to Ephesians 5:25-32. In this passage, we see the description of Jesus loving the church and giving Himself up for her:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of

His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

Jesus went to the cross because He obeyed the Father and loved the church. He sacrificed Himself for our sins because He wanted to be one with us in order to fulfill the law and the prophets—His very own plan of redemption through His creation. He gave up everything for us. And the Father gave up His One and Only Son so that Jesus could be one with His bride. With all this in mind, is Jesus not longing for the church's oneness with Him to be completed more than we can possibly imagine? He's been waiting, so to speak, longing, to bring His bride home to Him. That's why the apostle Paul, through the Holy Spirit, relates marriage to Jesus' love for His bride.

Paul calls this a profound mystery—referring to Christ and the church. And indeed it is. We won't fully understand all this until we're in heaven. But what we can relate to is Jesus' longing for the consummation of His marriage to His bride. What bridegroom doesn't?

Interestingly, let me give you the different English translations of the Greek word *harpazo*, which is the New Testament word used to describe the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The words are: to seize, carry off by force; to seize on, claim for one's self eagerly; to snatch out or away.

Greek: harpazo

- I. To seize, carry off by force
- II. To seize on, claim for one's self eagerly
- III. To snatch out or away

Knowing this, let's look at the entire passage together in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

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. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in 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. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

I keep going back to Paul's statement, "And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words." How could we as the church possibly encourage one another with these words if they didn't reveal the greatest hope to us? In fact, Paul calls the rapture "the blessed hope" in Titus 2:13. We are to be encouraged because Jesus is

encouraging us with the promise of the blessed hope of Him, our very great reward. The Bridegroom has prepared the place for His bride.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:1-4).

He’s coming to get us. He’s coming to get His bride. And her understanding of His longing for her is growing with each passing day. He’s just waiting for the appointed time. The only thing that separates us from seeing Jesus face-to-face is time. But time is always passing by. At the exact appointed moment, Jesus will descend from heaven with a shout, and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And then, we will always be with the Lord.

So in being obedient with what the Scripture says, I’m going to follow God’s command and choose to encourage you, Dear friend, with these words. They are truth. Jesus is coming to get us. And He is coming very soon.

Chapter Seven: Stay Encouraged and Be Ready

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

-Galatians 6:9

The question now becomes: How do we live out our last days here on earth?

First, we keep working until He comes. Paul encourages and admonishes the church with these words in 2 Thessalonians 3:5-15, his conclusion to both letters written to the church in Thessaloniki after reminding them of his teachings on the rapture and Jesus' second coming to the earth:

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command

and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

We are to live one day at a time, following the lead of the Holy Spirit to do the good works He's called us to do. We are to rest in Him and work, all the while keeping our eyes on the eternal picture of why we are doing what we do.

Second, we need to read and study the Bible more often than we do. How can we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit if we don't know what He's saying to us through the Word of God? Spending daily quiet time in the Word will strengthen you and equip you for every new day until the rapture. Not only will you feel the warmth of Jesus' encouragement and guidance for your life, but you will also be preparing your heart for the day ahead and your time with Jesus for all eternity. The Word is powerful for transforming your mind and your heart. Keep it close and pull it out several times a day.

Third, we are to *"strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men"* (Acts 24:16). When God convicts our hearts of sin, we are to confess and repent without delay. If we have wronged someone, we are to apologize as quickly as possible. If someone has wronged us, we are to forgive him or her from our heart. This is how we are to keep a clear conscience and continue to stay close to the Holy Spirit in the work God has called us to do.

Fourth, we are to exercise our gifting by serving the church and reaching out to the lost. God has given each one of us special gifts to use for His purposes and glory. When we are walking in our gifts, we experience the joy of walking in the purpose for which God created us. The apostle Peter writes:

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Fifth, we are to endure patiently. Jesus is with us and will not let us go. A great place to find solace in the challenges of today's world is 2 Timothy. It's a practical letter to understand the times in which we live and to encourage us to keep moving forward in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sixth, we are to pray without ceasing. Just like Jesus encouraged us to keep praying and not give up when He told the story of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8, we need to not lose heart and know our prayers are heard in heaven. In the tensest and most difficult moments of the day, we need to recognize it's an invitation to pray. It will comfort us, encourage us, and strengthen us to keep going forward.

Finally, we are to keep encouraging one another in the church by praying for one another and reaching out to one another. Let's work to bring someone back if

they've fallen away. Let's share Scripture with one another that's encouraging and filled with God's hope and promises. We hold a lot of power together when we stay close to the Scriptures and submit to one another in love. You are not alone. Stick close to your church home and don't give up meeting together. We need each other now more than ever. As the writer of Hebrews says:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

Dear friend, Jesus loves you so much. He's coming to get us. Don't lose hope. Keep moving forward in what God has called you to do. Keep standing firm in the truth of His Word. Live your life in a way that people are drawn to understand more about the hope you have so you can share it with them. Love your brothers and sisters in Christ. And do not give up. This will all be over so quickly. Live every moment with no regrets and make every moment count. We can do this together with Jesus by our side. And one day soon, we will be by His in perfect glory. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen
(Revelation 22:20-21).*

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