



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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PREPARING FOR HIS RETURN

The hope of every believer is the return of Jesus Christ. The Word of God says, “For our conversation is in heaven, from where also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (**Philippians 3:20**). Isn’t that amazing? Believers are to “look” for the Savior, Jesus Christ! He is coming back! There may be debates about the details but God’s Word stresses that Christ will return. It is so certain that the Word tells us to look for it – to expect it, to long for it, to be certain that it will take place. Every believer has the sure and certain hope that Christ will come back.

The call to look for Jesus’ coming is a call to preparation. It is not enough to believe that Christ will return. We must also prepare for that return. Jesus Himself says, “Watch therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord does come” (**Matthew 24:42**). Watching for His coming means preparing for it.

Christ’s return is imminent; it can happen at any time. None of us knows when Christ will come back. Again, listen to the words of Jesus, “But of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only” (**Matthew 24:36**).

Jesus is clear in this text – we don’t know when He will come. Yet, Jesus says that there is a day and an hour when He will come back. Don’t miss that! Jesus Himself says that there is a day and an hour when He will come.

Even though we don’t know when, the Father has already planned the when. It is fixed and certain. It is going to happen; the Father has set the day and the hour, the precise moment, when His Son will come back. Because Christ can return at any moment, we must prepare for it.

How do we prepare for the return of Jesus? We must look to God’s Word for the answer. I believe that we can learn how to prepare for Jesus’ return by looking at **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**. This text shows us that Jesus will come back for His people. It reveals that Christ will fulfill His promise to come for us.

In this text, we see four main truths about His coming. These truths give us insight into how to get ready for this fixed, coming event. These truths are summed up in four words – rest, return, resurrection, and reunion.

Rest

Have you ever noticed what is said at the funerals of believers? You will hear things like *departed*, *gone ahead*, or *passed on*. What happens to believers who die before Christ returns? Apparently, the church in Thessalonica was asking such questions. The Thessalonian church had buried her share of loved ones. Paul wanted to assure these

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believers of the security of their believing loved ones who had died.

Paul did not want them to be ignorant of their condition (4:13). He wanted to clear away the false teaching they had heard and provide them with peace. For this reason, he teaches them about what has happened to their loved ones. He states that they are “asleep” (4:13). He goes on to say that they “sleep in Jesus” (4:14). He continues to emphasize this by saying once more that these believers “sleep” (4:15). Paul says the same thing in **1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6; 18:20**. Seven different times in two letters, Paul states that these believers “sleep.”

By using the word “sleep,” Paul teaches that these believers rest. They rest from their labors for the Lord. They rest from their earthly struggles. They rest from all their pain and suffering. In the presence of God, they experience blessed rest, ceasing from struggling and suffering, experiencing perfect peace and joy.

Have you ever had a hard day? At the end of that hard day, you got to lie down in your bed and pull the covers up. Do you remember how good that feels? When a believer dies, he rests in the presence of God. The long hard struggle of life is over; now it is peace and joy with no mixture of sorrow or pain. They rest in God’s presence until Christ comes (4:14-15).

How can this help us prepare for Christ’s return for His people?

- *Remember that now is the time to work.* We will rest one day, whether we die before His coming or remain until it. We will one day have perfect rest, peace, and joy. Yet, until then, we must labor! We must serve Christ and others. We must bless and minister to others. We must expend ourselves for Christ and His kingdom. Rest is coming; don’t waste time now. Give yourself completely to Christ and His will.
- *Realize that struggling and suffering will not last forever.* Are you suffering? Are you struggling? One day you will have perfect rest. One day, there will be no more struggling, no more suffering. God will take

it all away. You will rest from all of it one day.

- *Grieve but don’t despair over your believing loved ones who have died.* They have no pain there. They have no struggles there. At this moment, they are at perfect rest in God’s presence. It’s okay to grieve, but don’t despair!
- *An unbeliever has no rest in death.* The believer sleeps in Jesus. However, the unbeliever has nothing but unrest. Those who do not trust Christ will experience nothing but agony and pain. It will be a forever of unrest, suffering and struggling apart from the love and mercy of God. If you are lost, turn to Christ. Surrender to Him in faith. Confess Him as your Lord and Savior. Only by doing this can you have the hope of an eternity of rest, peace, and joy.

Return

In this text, Paul says that Jesus will personally return. This text stirs my heart; it thrills my soul. The Bible says, “the Lord Himself shall descend” (4:16). The Lord Himself! Jesus Himself is coming back for His people.

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in bodily form. Luke gives us an account of the ascension of our Lord Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. Jesus was taken up into heaven before the eyes of His apostles and hidden from their sight by a cloud. Two “men” dressed in white appeared and spoke to the apostles in this way, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (**Acts 1:11**).

The clear teaching is this – our Lord Jesus ascended bodily into heaven. One day He will come back bodily, descending from heaven. Moreover, we will see Him! It will happen just as the angel said. He will return like He ascended and we will see it. What a glorious sight that will be!

We will actually see Jesus, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but, we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for **we shall see him as he is**” (1 John 3:2). **1 Thessalonians 4:16** says that the Lord Himself will descend. **1 John 3:2** says that Jesus will appear – He will be manifested – revealed in bodily form and we will see Him as He is.

In that day, faith will become sight. What we have only seen in our thoughts, we will see with our eyes. What we’ve struggled to imagine, we will be free to behold. What we’ve seen in a glimpse, we will then see in full view. This is why Paul says that He will be “admired in all them that believe” (**2 Thessalonians 1:10**). All His people will behold Him and we will all be amazed!

There will be many things to amaze us when Christ returns. The angels. Heaven. Our mansions. Our new bodies. Our loved ones. Yet, the most amazing vision will be that of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will see Him as He is. We will behold Him no longer by faith but by physical sight.

In Luke’s Gospel, he tells us about a man named Simeon. This godly man desired to see the Messiah, the Son of God. He faithfully and patiently waited. Then, Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to the Temple. Simeon sees Jesus and knows that this is the Messiah, the Son of God, God in human flesh. The Bible says, “Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word” (**Luke 2:28-29**). One look in the face of Jesus and Simeon knew that it was time to go home.

The same will be true for us. One look at Jesus and it will all be worth it. One look at Jesus and we’ll know it’s over. One look at Jesus and we’ll know its time to go home.

How can this truth help us prepare from Christ’s return?

- *Grow in your amazement of and love for Jesus now.* We will see Him as He is. Yet, the more you’re amazed by Him now, the greater your amazement when you see Him

with physical eyes. Ask the Father to reveal Jesus to you. Search the Scriptures about Jesus. Glory in Jesus; revel in Him, His words, and His works. Let your heart and soul be captivated by Him now.

- *Pursue a holy life.* Our vision of Jesus will transform us – we will be like Him (**1 John 3:2**). Yet, the Bible requires something of those who have this hope of seeing Jesus, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (**1 John 3:3**). If you have the hope of seeing Jesus in the future, you labor now to purify yourself. In other words, you must strive to live a holy life. This involves continual confession and repentance. It consists of hating sin and pursuing obedience to God. Those who have the hope of Christ’s return in their hearts strive to live a life of purity before God and men. Pray that you will pursue purity as one who has the hope of Christ’s return in your heart.
- *Rejoice in the fact that Jesus is coming back as the victorious King.* When Jesus came the first time, He came as the humble, lowly Savior. When He returns for His people, He will come as the victorious King. As His people, we will share in that victory. We will have victory over every enemy of our soul. What an encouragement in the daily battles of life! Jesus is coming back! Victory is certain! This is why we should have great expectation for His return. Those who went unknown on earth will be known in heaven. Those who never heard the cheers of men will hear the cheers of angels. Those who missed the blessing of an earthly father will hear the blessing of their heavenly Father. The small will be great. The despised and persecuted will be exalted and honored. The forgotten will be remembered and the faithful will be crowned.

Resurrection

The apostle Paul began this section by revealing that the Thessalonian believers who

had died were secure – they sleep in Jesus. Yet, Paul also teaches that they will experience a glorious resurrection, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (**1 Thessalonians 4:14**).

When Christ returns, He will raise His people from the dead. When believers die, their souls are made perfect in holiness and immediately pass into glory in the presence of God (**Philippians 1:21-23**). At the same time, their bodies rest in the grave, still being united to Christ. The casket is not a box to hide the body, but a cocoon in which the body is kept until God sets it free to fly. When Christ returns, their bodies and souls shall be joined together in a glorious resurrection body. They will be completely transformed.

Paul also says that those who remain until the coming of the Lord will be transformed, “Behold, I shew 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 trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (**1 Corinthians 15:51-52**).

When Christ returns, all His people will be transformed. We will be completely changed. We will put off corruption and put on that which is incorruptible. We will put off what is mortal and put on what is immortal. We will be totally redeemed and transformed, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby, he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (**Philippians 3:20**).

Why is this going to happen? The key is in **1 Thessalonians 4:14**. Notice the phrase, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again.” That is the reason! Because Christ rose from the dead, we will also be resurrected. We will experience complete transformation because Christ died for us and then rose again for us. Jesus’ resurrection guarantees ours! Because He lives, we will be transformed! Just as surely as Jesus rose from the dead, we too will rise and experience total transformation.

How does this truth help us to prepare for Christ’s return?

- *Rest in the fact that you will live forever.* This text is clear – you will live forever. Death is not the final word. There is an eternity awaiting you. This life is not all there is. You have much more waiting in eternity than you have in this life. This life is short and fleeting; eternity is forever and permanent.
- *Regularly reflect on the truth that you will be transformed.* Your body will be changed. You will not receive a different body but a renewed body. Just as God can make an oak out of a kernel or a tulip out of bulbs, He makes a “new” body out of the old one. A body without corruption. A body without weakness. A body without pain. A body just like Jesus. What is now crooked will be straightened out. What is now diseased will be healed. What is now faulty will be fixed.
- *God has a high regard for your body; so should we.* You will live forever in the body you have. It will be renewed and transformed but it will be the same body. Respect your body, but don’t worship it. Be careful what you put into it. Maintain it; feed it. Be careful how you use it. You wouldn’t want anybody trashing your home; God doesn’t want anybody trashing His (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**).

Reunion

In this text, Paul declares that when Christ returns, there will be a reunion, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (**1 Thessalonians 4:17-18**).

Who is the “them” in **4:17**? This refers to those who died in Christ before He returns. They will be coming with Jesus. He will reunite us with our loved ones who have died in the

Lord. We will be joined together with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Then Paul

states “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” What a glorious day! We will be with Jesus and our brothers and sisters through Him. Not for just a day or a week or a year but for all eternity. Those who we have said “Good-bye” to in this life, we will spend eternity with in heaven in the presence of our Savior.

How should this truth prepare us for Christ’s return?

- *God transforms our hopeless grief into hope-filled grief.* While we may grieve the death of loved ones, we have the hope of seeing them again. Because of faith in Christ, we can know that we will one day be joined with them for eternity. As believers, we have hope even though we stand or will stand on the soft dirt of an open grave. There is hope in Christ; you will see your loved ones again. If you will celebrate a wedding anniversary alone this year, there is hope. If your child made it to heaven before making it to kindergarten, there is hope. If you have learned more about cancer than you ever wanted to know, there is hope. If your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket, there is hope. Christ will one day reunite you with those that you love and miss so desperately.
- *Strive to lead your family to Christ.* The promise of reunion is only to those who know Christ. If we are in Christ, we have this hope. Outside of Christ, there is no hope. This should stir and motivate us to pray and minister to our family.
- *God will reunite us with those that we have had spiritual impact in their lives.* **1 Thessalonians 2:19** has always amazed me. This verse states, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” Paul loved this church. He says that they are his hope, joy, and crown when Jesus comes back. Paul looks forward to the day when he sees these believers transformed and

in heaven. It will be an encounter between the freed and the one who led them to

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freedom. It will be a moment when those who are saved can meet the one who led them to salvation. When Christ returns, He will reunite us with our loved ones. Yet, He will also reunite us with those that we had spiritual impact in their lives. We will encounter the ones in which we made a difference for Jesus’ sake. You will be encircled by a collection of souls that you’ve touched. Some you will know; some you won’t know. You will feel what Paul talks about in **1 Thessalonians 2:19**. You will take pride in the lives you’ve touched. However, it will not be a haughty, “look at what I’ve done” pride. It will be a humble, awe-struck joy that the Lord Jesus Christ has used you to make such a difference in the lives of people. This is why every sacrifice for Jesus’ sake is worth it. When Christ returns, you won’t regret any sacrifice or commitment you’ve made for Jesus Christ. All the prayers. All the hours of service. All the money you gave. Everything you’ve done for Jesus’ sake. You won’t regret any of it. One look into the faces of those you touched will make it all worth it.

One of the best ways to prepare for Christ’s return is to pray. Based on this passage, we can develop prayers to prepare for His return and to keep His coming firmly fixed in our minds. You can use these or develop your own from them. I would encourage you to pray about this on a regular basis. In the hectic, frantic pace of life, it’s easy to forget about Christ’s return. However, by regular prayer about this, it will help you keep it at the forefront in your heart and mind.

Come, Lord Jesus; deepen my amazement with You more and more until I actually see You as You are.

Come, Lord Jesus; set me free from the worldliness that hinders my expectation of Your return.

Come, Lord Jesus; empower me to share my faith and lead others to faith in You.

Come, Lord Jesus; grant me spiritual influence in the lives of countless people.

Come, Lord Jesus; prepare my friends and family for Your return by Your Word and Your Spirit.

Come, Lord Jesus, empower me to live a pure life as I wait for Your coming.

Come, Lord Jesus; fill me with the hope and peace of Your return as I struggle and suffer in this world.

Come, Lord Jesus; take away my grief by reuniting me with my loved ones.

Come, Lord Jesus; usher me into the heavenly rest You purchased on the Cross and by Your resurrection.

Come, Lord Jesus: I long to see You and to be transformed by You that I might be just like You.

Releasing God's Power On The Streets

Overcoming The Big Breakthrough Syndrome In Prayerwalking

Prayerwalking is a powerful tool for reaching out and blessing others. Yet, I'm afraid sometimes that prayerwalks are often overloaded with expectation. People feel that they can prayerwalk and have a big breakthrough in their area or community.

For instance, a church decides to have a prayerwalk. The church hits the streets and prays. Yet, it appears that nothing happens. Disappointment abounds. Then you begin to hear people say that prayerwalking doesn't "work." This is especially true of those who do not believe in prayerwalking or see no merit to it.

What do you do to avoid the "big breakthrough syndrome?" I'd suggest the following things for you to consider:

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- (1) **Remember that prayerwalking is a step of preparation in sharing the gospel.** God calls us to the prolonged work of declaring and demonstrating the good news of Jesus. Prayerwalking is one part of that. Don't view prayerwalking as the end all strategy of reaching out. It is powerful and significant but not the only thing that God has called us to do. It is part of the whole plan of reaching and blessing our cities and communities.
- (2) **Prayerwalking paves the way for the work of God.** There are times when you will see powerful works of the Spirit during prayerwalking. God can and does this sometimes. Yet, you may not see this. Prayerwalking is about seeking God and His work in a place among a people. Our goal is cry out to God, covering people and places in prayer. Our task is to pray faithfully for others. It is His work and His timing; we are simply the instruments.
- (3) **Prayerwalking leads to opportunities.** One of the great benefits of prayerwalking is that it opens doors for ministry. It helps you develop a vision for your area. It opens your eyes to ministries that you need to develop. It opens up homes and lives to the good news of Jesus. It gives us opportunities to pray for the needs of people. Prayerwalking is not about what "works;" it's about praying to God and being obedient to His leading.
- (4) **Prayerwalk for the long haul (Galatians 6:9).** There will be times when you will have to prayerwalk a route numerous times before you see any results. You will have to exercise faith and patience as you cover your city, your town, or your area. You may see immediate results and answers from your prayerwalking. Sometimes you will see the walls fall only after repeated prayerwalks. You may never see the results. Yet, be assured that God is faithful. He will bless and honor your prayerwalking in faith and patience. The crucial issue is prayerwalking with faith and patience over

the long haul (1 **Corinthians 15:58**). You must trust God even when your

circumstances and situations say otherwise.

Ask God to grant your church or group the faith and patience to prayerwalk over the long haul. Plead that you will be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in prayer for your city, town, or area. By faith, claim that He is working even though you may not see it. Praise Him and thank Him for the blessings that He is granting through your prayerwalking.

Maturing In Confession Of Sin

Let's face it – confession of sin is the toughest part of prayer. It's hard to honestly come clean before God. It's easy to fall into using well-worn clichés and phrases to get us through that part of our praying – that part of our relationship with God.

Yet, a growing Christian needs regular confession of sin. A powerful prayer life is built on confessing and repenting of sin. For this reason, we must strive to grow in our confession of sin. We need to mature in how to practice confession before God.

I'd like to share an outline that I'm working on to help me in this area. The outline comes from the General Confession of Sin in *The Book of Common Prayer*. This outline helps me avoid shallowness on one hand and keeps me focused on God's mercy and goodness on the other.

Who am I talking with?

Almighty and merciful Father.

I begin by addressing my Father, reminding myself that He is all-powerful and most merciful. At this point, I take a moment to meditate on His mercy. You can use a concordance to help you find verses that speak of God's mercy and forgiveness through Christ. I remind myself that I'm talking to Someone who is listening. I thank Him that His mercies are deeper than what I have done or failed to do.

What have I done?

I have erred and strayed from your ways like a lost sheep.

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At this point, you can fill in the ways that you have strayed from God's ways. Because His is almighty and most merciful, you can be completely honest.

How did I justify my sin?

I have followed too much the devices of my own heart.

You can confess to God all the excuses and "reasons" that you used to convince yourself that it was okay to do something evil in His sight.

How did I defy God's will?

I have offended against Your holy law.

Which laws of God have you ignored (1 **John 3:4**)? Examine God's law; what commandments have you broken in your sin? Take notice of what God wanted you to – what God willed for you. For instance if you lied, reflect on the fact that He does not want you to bear false witness, that His will is for you to be truthful and transparent.

Why did I do this?

I have left undone those things which I ought to have done, and I have done those things which I ought not have done. And there is no health in me.

At this point, you remind yourself how serious your sin is. Reflect on the fact that it's not just simply the sin; it's a reflection of your heart – a heart that needs change by the grace of God. Be deeply honest with God; acknowledge that your sin flowed from a heart that wanted to do evil – "and there is no health in me."

What can I ask of God?

But you, O Lord, have mercy upon me, miserable offender. Spare me, O God, I who confess my faults. Restore me when I turn to you according to your promises that you have declared to me in Christ Jesus my Lord.

The beauty of the gospel is that our confession is always linked with the promise of God's mercy. When you confess your sins, think about the promises of God's mercy. Remind

Him of these promises. You might consider promises like **Deuteronomy 31:6-8; Numbers 6:24-26, Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 25:11, and 2 Corinthians 1:20.**

How do I need to change?

Grant, O most merciful Father, for Jesus' sake, that I may hereafter live a godly and righteous and sober life to the glory of your holy name.

When you confess sin, you not only ask God for forgiveness; you honestly ask God to change your life. Confession without pleading for change is useless and incomplete. Ask Him to make you a different kind of person. Pray for this, reminding Him of His promises like **Hebrews 4:16, 2 Corinthians 5:15, and Philippians 1:6.**

How do I finish my confession of sin?

He pardons and absolves all those who truly repent.

To pardon means to truly forgive. To absolve means to release you, to set you free. If you will seek God, turning from your sin, He will forgive you and free you. I finish my time of confession with praise for His forgiveness and His freedom.

True confession then means keeping the following in mind:

- (1) Who I am confessing my sin to;
- (2) What I have done;
- (3) My excuses for sin;
- (4) My breaking of God's commands;
- (5) Looking deeper to see that I need true heart change;
- (6) Asking for mercy and cleansing
- (7) Pleading with God for true change.

I offer this outline to help you keep in mind the basics of confession. You might consider familiarizing yourself with it. You don't have to rigorously follow this. Let it be a simple guide to help you honestly come clean before God, to do business with God concerning your personal sin. That's the whole point! God wants us to be totally honest, thoroughly transparent, with Him. He also longs to change us. Honest confession confronts sin and seeks for personal change.



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