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**Sunday 21 May 2023 to Sunday 28 May 2023**

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Sunday 21 May 2023

**This is eternal life**

by Carolyn Erhlich

***This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).***

Read John 17:1–11

Jesus was with his disciples after supper and at a time when his betrayal and arrest were imminent. After declaring to his disciples, ‘In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world’ (John 16:33), the disciples were likely feeling helpless, vulnerable, and uncertain.

At this time, although Jesus was acutely aware of what was about to happen to him, his priority was to pray. He prayed for himself and the success of his mission (John 17:1–13), for the protection of his disciples as they fulfilled their purpose (John 17:13–19), and for the generations of believers who would follow him because of his disciples' ministry (John 17:20–26).

But here, I turn specifically to verse three, where Jesus prays and teaches. He gives us hope and tells us precisely what eternal life is … to know the only true God and Jesus Christ. He prays that we are in relationship with him. This means that eternal life is available here and now, and Jesus’ prayer is that we know a personal relationship with him and our Father.

For those who anticipate that eternal life is something to be granted after our resurrection, knowing that it is available now will be unexpected good news. For some, the question might be how to be in relationship with God here and now. Talk and listen. Talk to Jesus about what you are experiencing. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God the Father wants you to know. Talk to Jesus about who you are (even though he is all-knowing). Talk to him about how you are feeling. Talk to him when things are going well. Talk to him when things are not going well. Just as you would talk with your loved ones on earth, talk to Jesus. Say good morning to him. Talk to him about your day. In this way, you will know him – and by knowing him, your eternal life starts now.

For those who already know eternal life and relationship, share your experience with others. Show them what you have experienced. Show them that although they might be lonely, they are never alone. Show them that when they desire deep and meaningful relationships, access to this depth and meaning is available now in relationship with the only true God and Jesus Christ. Show them by your words and actions that eternal life is available to all who accept Jesus as their personal Saviour.

***Father God, thank you that eternal life is a life that is lived in an intimate personal relationship with you. Jesus, thank you for understanding all the thoughts, feelings, anguishes and challenges that come from my humanness because you were simultaneously fully man and fully God. Thank you that I can have a personal relationship with you. To you be the glory, great things you have done. In Jesus' awesome name, I pray. Amen.***

Carolyn Ehrlich lives in retirement with her husband Wayne in Ipswich, Queensland. Before retirement, Carolyn was an academic, working as a researcher in the fields of disability and rehabilitation. Carolyn had also previously worked clinically as a registered nurse. Today, Carolyn keeps busy with hobbies such as patchwork and quilting, supporting the Ipswich Lutheran Parish in various leadership roles, and supporting her family.

Monday 22 May 2023

**Walk in a manner worthy of God**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***Walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12b).***

Read [1 Thessalonians 2:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+2%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE)

Paul was a leader who ministered to the Gentiles. In this part of his first letter to the people of Thessalonica, Paul shows us how he ministered. He outlines for us fundamental guidelines for leadership and ministry that worked then and are necessary today:

* Boldly declare our God amid conflict (verse 2).
* Act with integrity. Paul wasn’t coercive or deceptive. Instead, he was completely sincere; he had a simple heart and a pure mind (verse 3).
* Please God alone (verses 4 and 5). Paul wasn’t a people-pleaser. He didn’t engage in insincere flattery. Paul didn’t manipulate his principles to convert someone. He didn’t soften his message to avoid rejection.
* Do not be motivated by greed (verse 5). Paul did not seek limelight and glory. He did not nurture greed to get numbers at Sunday services or for power, influence or fame.
* Serve with humility (verse 6). Paul was handpicked by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform astonishing miracles. Other churches acknowledged him as an authority. But he did not seek prestige or glory from people.
* Be sensitive and gentle (verse 7) – cradle and nurture infant believers.
* Love people with strong brotherly and sisterly love (verse 8). Get close to people. Do not guard personal spaces or cling to strictly professional relationships. Provide for people spiritually and physically.
* Model transparency and authenticity (verses 8 to 10). Paul lived out the gospel in everyday life. Only leaders whose actions match their message have the power to motivate others.
* Exhibit enthusiastic affirmation (verse 11). Paul and his team were an avid cheer squad for the newest members of the church. Encourage new members, and coach them – even when they feel downtrodden and defeated.

Then, in verse 12, Paul tells us why it is important that leaders do these things – so that we are encouraged and led towards an ultimate goal of ‘walking in a manner worthy of God’. We (you and me) are called to walk in a manner worthy of God. That is a high bar. We need leaders to encourage, direct, motivate and help us. We each need to be a leader who encourages, directs, motivates and helps. This is not an easy task. So, we also need to diligently pray for our leaders everywhere.

***Heavenly Father, I cannot walk in a manner worthy of you without support, encouragement, direction and motivation. Thank you for the leaders you have placed in my life who show me your ways. Keep them strong in you. Protect them from the evil one. And, Father, show me how to lead, encourage, motivate, nurture and care for others. Give me the courage to boldly declare you in the middle of the conflict of this world. In Jesus' awesome name, I pray, Amen.***

Tuesday 23 May 2023

**A grateful follower**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God … you accepted it … as it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13).***

Read [1 Thessalonians 2:13–20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+2%3A13-20&version=NRSVUE)

Yesterday, we looked at the characteristics of a good leader, which were many but had one purpose – so that we walk in a manner worthy of God (verse 12). Today, we see that we also need to be grateful followers of Jesus. If the Thessalonians had not chosen to follow Paul’s leadership, his leadership and ministry would have counted for nothing. No matter how great, humble, selfless, gentle, caring, engaging, motivating and encouraging Paul was, his leadership qualities would have been empty gestures in the air if people had not followed him. So, are you a good follower of Jesus?

A grateful follower believes God’s word, embraces it, lives it out and endures in it. The Thessalonians welcomed Paul’s preaching, not as mere words of people but as God’s word. The gospel’s work of faith, love and hope transformed the lives of believers, even amid suffering. Because they accepted his word, God transformed lives.

Walking in a manner that is worthy of God is not easy. It can – and does – occur amid conflict and suffering. But as a grateful and devoted follower, it can be joyful. There are days when I just need to put one foot in front of the other and step through what God wants me to do today. I can resist, complain, procrastinate, become stubborn or anxious, and I can protest and argue. Or I can accept, submit, trust, follow and obey. That choice is always mine. Irrespective of which choice I make, I still need to do what it is that he wants me to do. My choice only influences my experience – it doesn’t change God’s will. So, what I choose impacts whether I experience joy or misery. Unsurprisingly, whether I am joyful or miserable also impacts the experience of people around me.

The Thessalonians proved their devotion to Jesus by receiving God’s word and living it. What will we (you and I) do to live God’s word? First, we will obey God’s commands even when we don’t want to. It is easy to follow God when we believe he is asking us to do things we want to do. It is so much more challenging and much more telling about our commitment to God when we do the things that God is asking us to do, even if they are unpalatable to us. Second, we will accept the path God will have us walk by his strength even when we experience suffering, pain, opposition and other difficulties. Third, we will express appreciation, love and joy for the people we love.

***Heavenly Father, your way is narrow, but your plan is perfect. Thank you that your word shows me your ways. I repent of my resistance and disobedience. Help me submit to – and obey – you in all you ask me to do today. Help me to be an accepting and grateful follower of Jesus. Remind me to daily show the people I love that I joyfully appreciate and love them. In Jesus' precious name, I pray. Amen.***

Wednesday 24 May 2023

**Increasing and abounding love for all**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).***

Read [1 Thessalonians 3:1–13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+3%3A1-13&version=NRSVUE)

Can you imagine? What must it feel like to know that someone is praying that the Lord makes you increase and abound in love? But can you also imagine what life would be like if we weren't being prayed for like this? Paul is not praying that the Christians in Thessalonica fall ‘in love’ with each other or with things the world says might make them happy. He is praying for *agape* love – the authentic type of love that Jesus has for us and has commanded us to have for one another (John 13:34,35). What is this kind of love? It is a love that is unconditional in expression, unselfish in motive, and unlimited in benefit. It is intricately dependent on our action. One person expressed the importance of putting love into action like this:

A bell isn’t a bell till it’s rung,
A song isn’t a song till it’s sung,
Love isn’t put in your heart to stay,
Love isn’t love till it’s given away.
(Attributed to Oscar Hammerstein)

We are to pray for one another that the Lord will make each of us increase and abound in love for one another and for all – those we know and those we do not know, those we have an easy rapport with, those who we find more challenging to deal with. I don’t know about you, but I don’t find it particularly easy to love everyone unconditionally, authentically and unselfishly. Some people hurt, they are prickly, and they do not see things the way I see them – they are human. I do not find it easy to give my love to some people. I would not say that my love increases and abounds for these people – and yet I can see why I would want to pray that my love for them does increase and abound. And I expect that not everyone I know finds me easy to love unconditionally, authentically and unselfishly. Perhaps I have hurt them. Perhaps I am prickly. Perhaps I don’t see things the way they do. But would I want someone to be praying that their love for me increases and abounds? Absolutely.

Why is it important for us to pray this prayer of increasing and abounding love for one another and for all? In verse 14, Paul tells us, ‘so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints’. Pray with me, for the sake of people everywhere and for our holiness before God.

***Father God, thank you that we can love because you first loved us. Thank you for all the people who diligently pray that you make our love for one other and all people increase and abound. Today, we pray for your people everywhere. Lord, in your name, we pray that you will make us grow and abound in love for one another and for all. Amen.***

Thursday 25 May 2023

**Walking properly before outsiders**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12a).***

Read [1 Thessalonians 4:1–12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+4%3A1-12&version=NRSVUE)

We are called to be witnesses for Jesus. Which of the following approaches will do more for spreading the gospel: (a) letting go of our duties while we try and convince sceptics they will have better lives or be better people if they believe in Jesus, or (b) being dependable, hardworking, and honest as we go about our lives?

One of our most favoured ways of doing this is through words – telling people about our life with Jesus and the good news message of the gospels. Is this wrong? No. But it doesn’t really matter what we say or that we are forgiven; the world will judge Christians by what they see us doing. They will interpret our actions and behaviours against a standard of perfection. And we will fall short of this lofty ideal every single time. We are human, and although reborn into the body of Christ through baptism, we are the seed of Adam. We fail. We sin. And we are forgiven.

In our reading today, Paul tells us how to behave properly before outsiders. First, he tells us to live a quiet life, have a quiet disposition, and channel our enthusiasm for Jesus into living an ordinary life. Ordinary, not extraordinary. Quiet, not loud, bombastic and overbearing. Second, he tells us to mind our own business. Work on the things that God has assigned us to do in this life—not looking over the fence and attending to the business of others. This means being personally diligent, steady and faithful. Being a reliable and honest employee or employer. Third, Paul tells us to work with our hands. He instructs us to earn our own wages while we can. We need to work with our hands so that we provide for our own and share extra with others.

When we accept Jesus as our Saviour and King, unbelievers watch and wonder about what we do, so it is important that we conduct ourselves wisely. It is important that we speak with grace because unbelievers are listening and learning. And we need to respond to people with dignity and sensitivity. Today, walk with wisdom and speak with grace.

***Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me your word as a perfect instruction manual for how I am to live. Every day I fall short of your standard. Forgive me, Lord. Today, with the help of your Holy Spirit, lead me in your ways so that I conduct myself wisely. Teach me how to speak with grace. Soften my words. Make me attentive to people and interact with them genuinely. Teach me how to quietly go about living in a way that is a true witness for you in the community in which I live, work and play. Help me to be diligent, honest, steady and faithful as I go about the work that you have planned for me this day. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.***

Friday 26 May 2023

**Supernatural power**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18).***

Read [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+4%3A13-18&version=NRSVUE)

In our reading for today, Paul outlines an order of things to the Thessalonians. It seems the new Christians in Thessalonica were concerned about death and resurrection. The same is true today, although perhaps not in exactly the same way as in the first century AD. Today, some people get caught up in extremes. Some become attached to end-time exuberance, obsessing with end-time teaching, setting dates and labelling political figures as the anti-Christ; others appear ignorant, uninterested in the world to come, lacking passion for the lost, and living in fear of future events. And yet, here, Paul asks us to draw comfort from what he has written about what is to come.

So, what are the words that we should comfort one another with? First, Paul tells us that those that are ‘asleep’ in Jesus will rise again. How do we know this? Because Jesus died and rose again. It is in his resurrection that we have hope and can be comforted that our loved ones who are ‘asleep’ will rise again. The death of a loved one is unbelievably sad, but it is not hopeless. Second, Paul tells us that those who are still alive when Jesus returns will be miraculously transformed. Third, he tells us that at the Second Coming, there will be an order: Christ himself will descend; then there will be a shout, the voice of the archangel, and a trumpet; then those who have died in Jesus will be raised; then the living believers will join the resurrected saints and meet the Lord in the air.

So, as always, God is consistent. He keeps his promises and maintains his order. At any time we are concerned, anxious or worried, we can rely on our faithful God.

***Father God, thank you for being consistent, faithful and never changing. Thank you that we can draw comfort from your words. Today, I lean into your faithfulness and draw comfort from the assurance that your plan is perfect and that I am yours. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.***

Saturday 27 May 2023

**Rejoice in the Lord**

by Carolyn Ehrlich

***Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord! (Psalm 104:35b)***

Read [Psalm 104:24–34;35b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+104%3A24-34%3B35b&version=NRSVUE)

How God loves to be praised. What better way to express our love for our Creator than to praise him? Today, exuberantly, enthusiastically and prayerfully rejoice in our Lord and Creator. It feels like a bit of a ‘cop-out’ on my part as I write this devotion. I read this psalm, and I don’t feel like there is anything to add. Meditate on what it says. Meditate on God’s vastness – his power, perfection, sovereignty and wisdom. Take small parts of this psalm and ponder them, for they are good.

I remember the day when I realised God’s immenseness in a tangible way. I was driving in the country and enjoying the scenery. It was green, and the pastures were lush. There were hills in the distance. The day was glorious. As I was reflecting, I thought about the fact that I like to do patchwork and quilting. I know how much time it takes me to make one quilt. My one quilt would fit a queen-sized bed at most. It takes me hours, days, weeks and months – and it is far from perfect. And yet, I could see a vast landscape on the small section of road I was driving on. And I realised that the one quilt I had spent so much time and effort to create would cover such an insignificant part of that landscape. In fact, it would be invisible in the landscape. God is so immense, so wonderful, so powerful, so wise, so colourful, so creative, and so perfect. I wonder if you can relate.

The psalmist gives us a great guide for the many things for which we can rejoice and praise God:

* God has wisely made all things.
* The earth is full of his creatures.
* Meditate on the vastness of the sea and the number of creatures, both small and great.
* God gives food to his people in due season.
* God's people gather up what he has given them.
* When God opens his hand, his people receive good things.
* We rely on God for breath; otherwise, we die.
* When God sends forth his Spirit, the earth is renewed.

Praise God. Every day and always. Rejoice in the Lord.

***Heavenly Father, you are wise beyond understanding. You have made the earth, which is vast and full of your creatures. There is a season for everything in your world. You give us life. You renew the face of the ground. The earth trembles when you look at it. Mountains smoke when you touch them. I praise and worship you today and always. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.***

Sunday 28 May 2023

**Am I dehydrated?**

by Pastor Greg Fowler

***Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them (John 7:37b,38).***

Read [John 7:37–39](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+7%3A37-39&version=NRSVUE)

I find it easy to become dehydrated, especially when I am exercising or drinking too much coffee during the day. I need to intentionally and regularly drink water to avoid the symptoms of dehydration, such as headache, dizziness, fatigue or just a feeling of malaise. I now make sure I hydrate, even if I don’t feel thirsty.

When our ‘stores’ of God’s Holy Spirit are low, we also experience unpleasant symptoms. Left to live our calling in our own strength, we can feel disoriented and overwhelmed. We can become fatigued and even anxious. Our Lord knows that we need his Spirit, so he encourages us to return regularly to him as the source of spiritual hydration. When Jesus declared that ‘living water will flow’, he wasn’t using a metaphor or allegory. Indeed, he made it clear that the person of the Holy Spirit would be part of our lives and, what’s more, would flow through us to others.

It’s easy for us to be spiritually dehydrated too. This Bible verse reminds us that regular, intentional top-ups are part of the Christian life. There are many ways for us to come to Jesus for spiritual hydration. God’s Spirit flows to us as we read and meditate on Scripture. We also experience a boost when we gather as believers and testify to the work of God in our lives. We can ask someone to pray for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and, of course, we receive the Holy Spirit in Holy Communion. One of the ways I get recharged by the Spirit is to exercise the spiritual gifts he has given me. God promises to empower us for service with his gifts.

***Dear Jesus, fill us this day with your Holy Spirit. Touch those parts of our lives that are dry and need renewal. Show us those who need your Spirit so that we can be vessels through which your Spirit flows. Amen.***

*Pastor Greg lives in Adelaide and serves as pastor of Golden Grove Lutheran Church and School. He is blessed to be able to spend lots of time with his grandchildren, Teddy and Olivia. His spare time is taken up with golf, Formula 1 and going out with his beautiful wife.*