



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
May 17, 2020

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

Series: Real Christians in Challenging Times

We're studying the book of 1 Thessalonians. I find the Bible to be beautiful and calming. When you find yourself in a challenging situation at work or you have a stressful day, you come home, there's a safe place in God's word that you can enjoy and you can experience. You see, God has taken His heart and He's translated that so we can understand that because He's put it into words in the Bible. In fact the translation of God's heart into the word is both done through the word of God (the Bible) and the word made flesh (Jesus Christ). So that we can understand who God is and what God is doing in our world. The reason He does that, He shares Himself, His heart in the word of God so that it can come into our hearts. Once we have it, it changes who we are. It changes how we think and it changes how we act and it changes how we feel. So that's why I say there's this calming effect that God's word has on us. That we can come into God's presence and appreciate that and enjoy it.

So today as we look at this passage, we're going to look at a passage where Paul is talking and writing to some new Christians in a church that He visited and started and then had to leave rather quickly. We're going to pick up the story in 1 Thessalonians 4. Let me read the passage first and then we'll take it apart and look at it verse by verse, and look for applications that are important for our own lives.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 says this: *Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

The passage is written to people who are new believers who have just come to know Christ. As they've done that, they're experiencing God in a new way. All these things are coming at them in their lives. They're trying to figure out what does it mean to live the Christian life. So Paul is writing to them and He's going to talk to them. Here's how you live the Christian life. These are the kind of things you do in order to follow God and to follow His principles.

So if we go back to verse 1 now, I want to highlight one word in verse 1. I want to highlight this word *walk*. You can see it's in yellow there. The word *walk* is a description of how we are to live

in our Christian life. We can call it the Christian life, we can call it being Christ-followers, we can call it following the faith. What we mean by that is we conduct ourselves in a special way. That word *walk*, I would circle that and then draw a line over to the part on the other side where you can write *peripateo*. To walk. And this word *walk* is used throughout the Bible to describe our conduct as Christians or as believers. Even in the Old Testament non-Christians are just believers in the Old Testament. The word *walk* is used there. So it's used to describe our conduct.

When I think about walking I'm just reminded about my son who graduated from the Marines. But before that, let's go a little further. Because when he was in high school he gave us a lot of trouble. He was a difficult kid for us. So in his summer after high school he announced to us he was going to join the Marines and hoped we weren't angry with him. I said, "That sounds like a great idea." I felt like he needed something and the Marines seemed like a great solution for him. So he joined the Marines and went through thirteen weeks of gruesome training. That's the best way I can describe the work they do in the Marines in bootcamp.

We went down to visit him when he graduated from bootcamp and we were now seeing a changed man. This young man who was rebellious and so on was now a different kind of a guy. He described it this way. He said, "I had to learn everything all over again. I had to learn how to dress, and I had to learn how to eat, and I had to learn how to greet people with respect, and I had to learn how to walk, and I had to learn how to stand." He talked about this whole different way he learned how to live as a Marine.

I think that we, to a certain extent, are learning differently. When you become a Christian you might not go through a bootcamp experience. Some people do. But there's this sense of I need to live differently because I am somebody different. God helps us understand our value and moves us into this place where He's using us in a very special way. So we now are living differently. We're walking differently.

So when I look at that word *walk*, I think about that experience with Ben, but I'm also reminded about our own Rich DeLisi. Rich two years ago...I guess I could describe it this way. His legs looked like this. He was bow-legged. That was just creating problems for him walking and so on. His hip came out of place and so they had to fix that. I was talking to him this week about that whole experience, just reminding myself of all he has gone through. Because he said a number of times, "I'm learning how to walk." Those were his words. So then he had to get knee surgery on both of his knees so that his legs now are straight. But that has created problems for his feet. He had to get new shoes because they were worn out on the sides. That wasn't good. He had to get new shoes and how he's working with orthotics and other things to deal with his feet. He is learning how to walk again.

That's what's happening with the Thessalonians. They're learning how to walk. So Paul is using that term to describe us in our own faith and our own relationship with God. You have a walk of faith. God is training you and using you and working with you.

I want to elaborate on that word *walk* because I think as we do, we'll understand a little bit more about what that walk looks like. Because he says there's a way that we ought to walk. There's a

right way and a wrong way. If you look down in verse 5 it says we do not live *like the Gentiles who do not know God*. There's this sense that there's a way that we ought to walk and there's this right way to walk that God would have us to walk. So understanding that there's a right way to walk gives us this sense of mission. We need to find out what that right way is.

How do I know what the right way is to walk? How I ought to walk? But he elaborates. Let's just expand that a little bit more and go to how you ought to walk because it is very practical. What God calls us to do helps us know how to walk. So if you're a new believer, you want to know this. Because what this does is it helps you to know exactly what you are to do. And how are we going to know how to walk? We're going to read God's word, we're going to listen to that. In fact let's go back to the verse again because the verse expands it and says the words *you received from us*, that's how you're going to know *how you ought to walk*.

God has given us His word and His word provides us with the information. We can get that directly by going to the Bible. Our children can get that by going directly to the Bible and they can receive that from God's word themselves. We each can do that. Sometimes we hear that taught to us and we appreciate the way that it's taught. But we're receiving it. So Paul says I taught you guys about God and you are now walking in that way. This is very important. When God took the people out of Egypt and took them Mount Sinai, He gave them all the words to teach them how they ought to walk and they received the Ten Commandments and they received the Law.

If we expand those highlighted words a little bit more we see that Paul is affirming them and say *just as you are doing*. Because when you become a Christian and you make that choice to serve God then you start walking the walk, you start following God, you start trusting Him. So Paul is saying you're already doing this, guys. But let's not stop there. You're doing this and you need to do so more and more. Every one of us can appreciate those words. Because the Christian life is a growing experience. It's one of those things that we're continuing to develop. There's always something more for us, more and more, that we can be doing to follow the Lord and walk in His path and to appreciate Him. That's what we want.

Now when you get this idea of walking, it's the idea of movement. We're not just standing around. We're moving. We're going in a direction. Where are we going? Well if we look back at the verse, the verse is going to give us a goal. It's going to tell us what direction we're moving in. In the same way that this same idea is described in Hebrews 12:1-4, it says that *we are running* (not walking) *with our goal set on Jesus Christ, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus*. That is the illustration used there. But here in our passage it's walking. There's an intentional walking in a direction.

Let me show you what that direction is. Because what it says is that our direction is *to please God*. To please God. What does that mean? Those words *to please God* are used throughout the Bible as well. So I want to talk to you about what it means to please God for a moment. I think it will be helpful for us to understand that. So I want to take some of the words at other places in the Bible and just expand that a little bit so that you can understand what it means particularly for you to please God.

Let's look at this example. What does it mean to please God? Well Hebrews 11:6 says we have faith, but *without faith it is impossible to please him*. So faith is going to be this ingredient, this thing that we're going to embrace in our lives to believe in God and to trust Him. If you've come to Christ and you recognize that God is there, He exists, then you've already started this. But let's continue and let me just read the rest of this verse. It says – *But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is (or that He exists) and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

You see when we are pleasing God, when we recognize that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him, there's this sense of yes, I'm going to follow God. That idea of seeking is like our idea of walking. I'm going to embrace God and I'm going to move in that direction. That's what God wants for us. Faith is an important ingredient in that process.

Let's go a second ingredient and that's pleasing God and that's to be spiritually minded. Look at the last part of the verse. *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* When he says in the flesh he's referring to being carnally minded. Now he's not talking about nonbelievers versus believers; he's talking about Christians. Christians can either be carnal or fleshly. That's where we get our word *carne* from. It's meat or flesh. So we can be thinking in the flesh or we can be thinking in the spirit. So being in the spirit is important.

Let me read the verse to you. It says – *For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those are in the flesh cannot please God.* So there's this pleasing of God that takes place when we're spiritually minded.

Let me explain to you what that means in practical terms. When you go to work, you're working on the things that need to take place on an earthly level. But if you go there recognizing there are spiritual things happening at work, you are thinking spiritually minded. You're recognizing God is working in that person and that person. So you are thinking beyond just the earthly kind of things that are going on. In your home, there's not just the earthly things that are taking place, but there are spiritual things going on. When you come in contact with anyone or even what God is doing in your own life, when you look at the challenges that you're experiencing right now and you recognize there are these challenges, but there is something spiritual going on, then you're being spiritually minded and that is pleasing to God. We want to help ourselves move up to that level of being spiritually minded, and that's going to help us as we're trying to understand what it means to please God.

A third one is to fear God. In Psalm 147 it says – *The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him.* When we talk about fearing God, we're not talking about running away from Him because we are afraid of Him. It has a bigger context here. It means that we respect Him. There's this awesome respect that we know we are in God's presence and we appreciate being in His presence and enjoying Him. We appreciate the awesome task that we have to walk in this manner along the path. That we're walking, we're connecting. I like the picture of the gears here because it has the idea of us connecting with God. When we get in sync with Him, we're pleasing Him and walking with Him. Fearing God and understanding what all that is about is

very important. So this idea of fearing God becomes part of this pleasure of God and pleasing Him.

Let's go to another one. Following Christ's example. Now this comes from the story of the transfiguration in Matthew 17 when Peter and John were with Jesus and He became white and transfigured, and this voice came from heaven and said these words: *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear Him!* These same words were used at the baptism of Jesus. *This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.* Obviously the Father is well pleased with the Son, but the idea here is that when we follow Christ's example, we learn from Him. We listen to His teachings and we apply those, then we too can be pleasing to God by following those examples. That's a beautiful picture of what it means to please God.

It's pleasing or taking delight or having pleasure that God has. So we're feeding into that. It's not as if God is just pleased or not pleased, but those words are used to describe for us what God is like. He uses words that physically describe Him, like His hands. Does God really have hands? No, He doesn't. But we talk about the hand of God so that we can understand Him. Here we're talking about the desires or the emotions of God to understand Him better.

In this passage in the next one, let me show you this one about the story of Saul who decided in the Old Testament to do something for God, but it was in disobedience of God. So the prophet comes to Saul and says these words: *Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifices.* So God delights in obedience. It's pleasing to Him when we obey. What does that mean? Well look at the words there. It says – *as in obeying the voice of the Lord.* When you listen and you're sensitive, you can hear God's voice telling you, hey, you need to go do this, or you better think about this, or spend some time away from me, or whatever he says. And when you obey Him in that, you're listening to God's voice and you're obeying Him. It's just a beautiful thing that we experience with God when we take time to interact and understand and listen to His voice. When you listen to His voice and obey Him, then that's pleasing to God.

One more about pleasing God to help us in our walk as we're moving forward is that we give sacrifices that He wants. Now there are some who say, and rightly so, that the sacrifices are gone. The Old Testament sacrifices have been replaced by Jesus Christ who died once for all on the cross for us. However, sacrifices don't end, as we see in Hebrews 13 and other places that there are more sacrifices, they're just a different kind. There are four mentioned here that please God. *Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

So one of the ways that we please God is through these four kinds of sacrifices. Now if we think of sacrifices from the Old Testament you'll see that those sacrifices were sometimes done out of ritual. We just do them because we are Jewish people and we offer these sacrifices to God. They had meaning, but they were done religiously, if I could say that. I think some of the things we do are ritualistic. They represent something very meaningful. We just do them because we're part of the faith. You know we're sharing or we're doing good, these things that are mentioned here.

There are others, though, in the Old Testament that were spontaneous sacrifices. With spontaneous sacrifices what would happen was that people would have a harvest or they would have something good happen and they would offer a sacrifice. Those seem to be the ones like in the New Testament here that we'd have a sacrifice of praise or thanksgiving from our lips that he's talking about. Now when we do those things, all those things are pleasing to God. When we say they're pleasing to God, what we mean is that God is experiencing something or He's receiving something from us and we can enter into that pleasure that He has.

Well that verse right there is so powerful. You can take that one verse and put it on a plaque in your house, and it would describe for you what it means to be a Christ follower, to live the Christian life. I love that verse. I want to take some of the parts in the middle, but let's first jump to the end and stay on this same topic for a moment. Notice he says – *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

Now I think some people look at that word *holiness* and they're put off by that, or they don't understand it, or they go, "I can't be holy." Let's talk about that for a moment. If you think about holiness as just an antiseptic kind of holiness or perfection, well, that's important because when Christ died on the cross, in one fell swoop He took away all of our sins. So when we trust Christ, in that moment we are holy and we have this experience before God of holiness. We call that our standing to be contrasted with the word *walking*. Our standing before God is holiness. If we've trusted Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we have a standing before God that is perfect. It is pure, it is clean. There is no virus of sin involved at all. However, our walk is different because we are moving toward holiness. God is moving us in a direction.

That word *holiness*... You're going to want to write this down. Circle the word *holiness* there, draw a line over to the other side in your book and write the word *hagios*. It's a word you're going to want to know about because you see it continually through the Bible. In fact the word 'saints' is the word *hagios*, people who are holy. That's what we're called. We're called the saints. So we'll see that word used over and over in the Bible. What it means is to be separate, to be set apart, to be different. Within that meaning we understand a little bit more about our own definition of holiness and what it means for us.

You see if you're a Marine, you are different than other people. Or if you like a particular sports team, then you are different than other people who like other sports teams. You might buy particular clothes to wear that represent that sports team. You might rearrange your schedule differently so that you can participate in those sports activities that your team represents. When we become Christians, we are set apart, we are separate. That's what holiness means. That means we adjust our schedules, we adjust the way we look, the way we interact, the way we handle life situations. We are different. We are moving toward holiness, which is this target which God has for us, and we know what it looks like. That's why we're walking. So that's how all this ties together.

Notice in the passage there in verse 7 it says – *God has called us*. It's part of our mission. This is our calling. Our vision for life is that we are moving toward holiness. Now you might say it's God's will. In fact look at the next part of the verse above. It says this is *the will of God*. If

you're wondering what the will of God is, I'm going to show you right now, it tells you right in the next words *your sanctification*.

The word *sanctification* you're going to want to circle that, draw a line to the other side. It is the word *hagiosune*. It comes from the word *hagios*, to be holy or to becoming holy in our lives. Sanctification is a description of what happens in each one of our lives as we're moving and walking along in our Christian life toward this goal of pleasing God. Sanctification is taking place. That means change. You see, when sanctification takes place and you're listening to the voice of God, He will often put His finger on some area of your life and He'll say, "You know you really want to work on this, or you need to focus on this." And when He does that, you have some choices. You can ignore Him, and if you ignore Him you become fleshly or carnal. But if you listen to Him and pay attention to Him, then He will empower you to do what's right. You will be walking along in this process and growing in your sanctification. So God would have us to be able to grow in that sanctification, to understand what that looks like. That's what it means to move toward holiness or to be part of this Christ-following group or just in our own hearts to trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

If you never made that commitment to trust Christ, then I invite you to do that. It means you start on a path. You're walking in a direction to follow Jesus Christ.

Now Paul as He's writing to these people in Thessalonica chooses to take this idea of sanctification and apply it to one specific area of their lives, sexual purity. So as he does that, he wants them to know that even in this area of sexuality you must understand that God wants to be holy in that area of your life. He wants you to be moving toward holiness in that area of life.

Let's read the verses there that describe this. It says about sanctification *that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.*

First of all, when it says abstain from sexual immorality what that means is staying away from things that are wrong when it comes to this area of sexuality. Pornography would fit into that category. But even sexual joking. Stay away from those kinds of things.

The next verse says that *each one of you should know how to control his own body*. The word is vessel. Control your vessel is what he's saying. In two words – *holiness and honor*. You can circle the word *holiness* there because holiness is the same word toward the end, *hagios*, and it describes this we are different. He goes on in the verse to say we're not like the Gentiles who just go after the passions because they don't know God. We are different.

You see, we live in a world where sexuality is of not much value. It's considered a biological function and therefore you can do whatever you want. But in God's kingdom it's very different. He uses two words to describe in this passage what we are to do. One is *holiness* and the other is *honor*. That we're to be different and we're to value this particular area of life. That we treat it special. We reserve it for marriage. And we treat this area of sexual purity with a holiness and

honor. We are pleasing God. We are moving in our sanctification. It's a very important area where God wants to work and move us toward holiness in our lives.

Now let's ask the question why. Why are we doing this? And why are we moving toward sanctification? Why are we moving to please God? Because I think there's another piece of this that we have to understand.

Do you remember when the Israelites came to Mount Sinai and God's whole point at that time was that you guys are special. You are the chosen people, you Jewish people. You're not like the other nations. I'm going to give you instructions about what you are to do. Now He gives all those instructions in the book of Exodus, but they are repeated in Deuteronomy before they go into the land. Deuteronomy is the word is *deuteron* which means second and *nomos*, law. So He repeats the law a second time and He gives us some important information as He's doing this as to why He's giving these rules. These rules are not just set up there so that we please God because He's got his agenda and it has nothing to do with us and we're trying to fit into His agenda. What it is is that God has designed the whole world to be much more complex than that. So when we choose to obey God and please Him, it does something as well for us that we need to be aware of.

Let me show you what he says in Deuteronomy 10:12-13 as part of this giving of the law. He says – *And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?* It's that interesting. That God has made this so complex for us to understand. It's bigger than we can understand.

But when He gives us the rules and guidelines and the instructions for walking, that we realize it's not just to please God for God's sake, although that's a very valid reason to obey God. But God has built it in such a way that it blesses us as well. It is for our own good and we appreciate what God is doing and how He's working in our lives. We recognize that this is for me. So as you're walking along in your walk with God, you might trip. And if you trip, you want to be back in course with God, back in sync with the gears so that you can be pleasing to God. You're walking with God. You might be out of step. You know when they're marching out of the road and you're out of step, you don't fit in. So you're going to want to make an adjustment so that your walk is in line with what God has for you. It's for your own good that you do this.

This is so big because now we go back and look at our lives and we ask is there something I need to do in my walk? Let me show you these words that use the word *hagios* again in various forms. Because these are the words described that are going to give us an understanding of what our walk looks like. The word *sanctification* is *hagiosune*. The word *holiness*, *hagios*. And then down in the bottom he talks about the *Holy* Spirit. It's the same word again.

What God has done is He's given us the Holy Spirit. So you need to know this. When we think about walk we think about what we do because we are walking. But we're walking under the energy and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It's like we have headphones on listening to the beat.

It's like we have the energy inside of us that provides the ability to take the steps. That's provided by the Holy Spirit. The *Holy Spirit*.

Paul is using these words to describe God is the Holy Spirit here because it is so important for us to understand this idea of the Holy Spirit. When Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6 he says about sexual purity too – *Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?* So we live in an honorable way because God is living inside of us. He is empowering us. That is what it means to be a Christian and to enjoy Him and to experience Him.

I trust that as you are walking in your faith walk that God will speak to you with His Holy Spirit, that you'll listen to His voice. He'll put His finger on an area that you need to grow in. That you'll rise to that spiritually minded thinking so that you can walk in a path that's pleasing to God. You are different. You hold your head up high. You are moving forward. God has many things planned for you and for me, and He wants us to know what this life is like. So Paul is writing this. He's writing back to the Thessalonians and just expanding their understanding as he does for us as well.

I am really grateful for God's word and how it expands our understanding of who God is and how we are to live. I want to encourage you to ask God that question. How should I live today differently? What does it mean to walk with Him? Sometimes that walk is very gentle and calming. Other times it's on a mission. Sometimes it's rather challenging. But it all means that we're following the Lord and we're pleasing Him. God has it designed for our good. All these ideas come together to understand what it means to follow God and to serve Him with all of our hearts.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for giving us direction so that our walk is not aimless. Lord, I know that we all experience this pandemic in different ways. There's a unique experience we all have with this and we wrestle with things inside of our hearts as well as our work that we do, our experience. So Lord, I'm asking that you would teach us how to walk through the midst of the challenges that we're experiencing right now. Show us what it means to follow you and to love you and to be listening to your voice. Lord, we ask that you would equip us to walk faithfully toward you and for you this week. In Jesus' name, amen.