

# Guiding the Superintendent

From Nostradamus to the Mayan calendar to the daily horoscopes to the latest Bible prophecy teacher, people are very curious about the future and are looking for as many details as possible. Because much biblical prophecy deals with the disasters of the end times, it seems that just about every time a disaster strikes, some people immediately think that the end is coming.

Our lessons this quarter will deal with what really lies beyond the present time. The Bible very definitely tells us about the future. However, it does not tell about the future so that we can know all the details about it but rather so that we can learn how to live in the present. This will be the focus of the lessons for the next several weeks.

We start at the point on which all prophecies of Scripture focus—that is, on the reign of Jesus.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. The courts are convened (Dan. 7:9-10).** The text here presents a very venerable figure (in contrast to the fearsome beasts of verses 1-8). The Prophet Daniel very quickly identifies this Person as “the Ancient of days.” Who could this possibly be other than God the Father? This awesome description of God the Father is very figurative, but it gets the point across. God the Father is pictured as elderly (sign of respect), clothed in white (sign of purity), and sitting on a fiery throne (sign of judgment). Multitudes surround Him. All this resembles the scene in Revelation 4 and 5.

God the Father is seated as Judge. The court is convened, and the books are opened before Him. This or a similar judgment is described in Revelation

20:12, where the books are opened and mankind’s stewardship is reviewed.

**2. Evil leaders are judged (Dan. 7:11-12).** Chapter 2 of Daniel describes in graphic detail the rise and fall of three glorious and fearsome world empires. Each one succeeds the one before it. The focus here is on the four beasts/kingdoms. The first three are stripped of their (military) power. The fourth is directly destroyed by God. All this divine action paves the way for the reign of Jesus Christ.

**3. Jesus Christ is worshipped (Dan. 7:13-14).** The vision of Daniel continued as he saw the Son of Man come and be ushered into the presence of the Ancient of Days. This individual can be identified only as Jesus Christ. He was led into the presence of God the Father and given authority to reign for eternity. As a result, all are called to worship Him. Thus, we are introduced to God’s purpose for creation and all of time—to worship Jesus Christ. A proper understanding of prophecy should lead us to fall down on our knees in worship of Jesus Christ.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** For the most part, children have little interest in the distant future. However, they are never too young to be interested in Jesus Christ. This lesson will provide a very good description of who Jesus is.

**Youths:** Teens love to worship. But is their worship nothing more than singing songs? This lesson shows that true worship is about Jesus Christ.

**Adults:** Adults should discuss what God is doing in the world today, where it all is heading, and where they fit in.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

The study of prophecy and God's future kingdom should lead one to a new light. In Daniel 9 we find that the prophet had been reading in the book of Jeremiah and realized that God was about to bring about the deliverance of His people from their captivity in Babylon. Before that happened, Daniel found it necessary to offer a great prayer of confession of Israel's past sin.

The focus of this lesson is on three key aspects of a prayer of confession.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. Start with God (Dan. 9:4).** Confession of sin must always start with a focus on God and not oneself. Daniel began by acknowledging the great fact that God is a God of love. Any prayer that one might offer must start here—with God's love. It should never focus on one's own efforts (cf. Deut. 7:7-11).

**2. Confess sin (Dan. 9:5-10).** When the focus turns to us, it must center on our sin. God knows our hearts better than we do. There should never be any attempt to justify ourselves. The word Daniel used for sin is the one that means missing the mark. Daniel's greatness is seen in his sensitivity to sin.

Daniel went on to confess that his people were shamed. He further explained that this was the result of being disobedient to God (Dan. 9:10). Confession must focus specifically on the sin of disobedience.

**3. Acknowledge God's holiness (Dan. 9:11-14).** There is nothing sinners can stand on before God. The only thing they can do is plead for mercy.

This part of Daniel's confession reviews the basic fact that all the people (and not just himself) had sinned against God. Daniel recognized that the present captivity of Israel in Babylon was the direct result of the people fail-

ing to obey God's laws. As mentioned above, a person must first sincerely own his disobedience to God before he can really make confession to God.

We must acknowledge not only our disobedience but also God's holiness. God's holiness demands that sin be punished. We suffer as a result of our sins even in this life. There are always consequences of sin, and we need to recognize that God is entirely righteous in bringing these consequences upon us. In fact, He is merciful in doing so, for the hardships we face because of our sin are designed to drive us to Him, confessing our sin and seeking His mercy.

The prayer of confession begins and ends with a focus on God. In the end, Daniel was more concerned about God and His reputation than with anything else. God would be honored by bringing His people back to their land but also by His people returning to Him in faith.

This is one of the great prayers recorded in the Bible. It more than accomplished its purpose. As a result of the prayer, God would reveal to Daniel His plans for Israel's future kingdom.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Most children are familiar with the basic concept of sin. This lesson will help them realize the importance of confessing sin not only to people they have hurt but also to the God who loves them.

**Youths:** Teens need to hear that sin has consequences. If sin is not dealt with, terrible things can and will happen. Young people need to learn to be quick to confess their sins.

**Adults:** Adults need to be encouraged to set an example with honest confession of sin before God as well as toward those they have offended.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

Two major types of prophecy can be found in the Bible. In fact, many times they are found side by side. It is important to understand both. One type of prophecy deals with direct fulfillment, that is, a prophecy that will be fulfilled once. Prophecies that have more than one future fulfillment are called double-fulfillment prophecies. Many times one fulfillment will foreshadow the other. A major example is found in this lesson, mentioning the “king of fierce countenance” (Dan. 8:23).

Our passage consists of a conversation that the Angel Gabriel had with Daniel about future events. There is a note of absolute certainty in the angel’s voice. At the beginning of his talk, he told Daniel, “At the time appointed the end shall be” (Dan. 8:19). There was no hesitation here. Then at the end of the passage, he told Daniel that what he had said was true (vs. 26).

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

### 1. Direct fulfillment (Dan. 8:19-22).

The book of Daniel is filled with dreams and visions about the future. Several of these visions, including Daniel’s vision in verses 1-12, are presented in the form of unusual animals.

In his vision, Daniel saw a two-horned ram being attacked by a rough (or shaggy-haired) goat with a single horn between its eyes. Gabriel identified these animals as kings future to Daniel’s time. The two-horned ram represented the kings of Media and Persia. He was attacked by the one-horned goat, who was the Greek king Alexander the Great, the great conqueror of the world in the fourth century B.C.

The vision went on to picture a time when the single horn was broken off and replaced by four other horns. While this was future to Daniel, it is all

ancient history to us today. The vision foretold the four kings who divided Alexander’s empire when he died rather young and unexpectedly.

### 2. Double fulfillment (Dan. 8:23-26).

Gabriel went on to tell Daniel about a “king of fierce countenance” who would arise in the future. The angel went on to describe a multitude of actions carried out by this king. He would be very intelligent and persuasive. He would achieve great power by subduing others and by promising false security. He would subjugate the nation of Israel, but his rule would be terminated by divine judgment.

This prophecy has a double fulfillment. The first fulfillment is found in history. The king described by Gabriel was actually Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was a ruthless successor to Alexander who ruled in Palestine in the middle of the second century B.C. Because of his extremely cruel treatment of Jews, Antiochus is considered one of the Jews’ worst enemies of all time.

However, the prophecy does not stop there. It will also find fulfillment in the future antichrist, who will arise in the end times to torment the world. We can be assured that all this will happen because of what has already been fulfilled.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Children will enjoy seeing or drawing pictures of the animals. Use the animals to help them understand prophecy and the truth that God always keeps His word.

**Youths:** This lesson speaks well to those teens who might be skeptical about the truthfulness of Scripture.

**Adults:** Adults often enjoy the study of prophecy. This lesson should remind them of God’s faithfulness and give them insight into interpreting prophecy.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

Jesus Christ came in great humility and offered the kingdom to the Jewish nation. After examining Him and His claims for several years, the Jewish people as a whole decided they did not want His version of the kingdom. So they made plans to kill Him. The Cross is now part of history.

Early on the last night before He went to the cross, Jesus met with His disciples and promised them that the kingdom would eventually come. They were not to lose hope. He instituted the Lord's Supper as a reminder that one day He would set up His kingdom on earth.

During the Last Supper, Jesus Christ was talking with His disciples not only about His upcoming death but also about the promised kingdom. The implication is very clear. He would not be able to inaugurate the promised kingdom without His death and resurrection.

In our lesson this week, Jesus Christ gave us two important reasons for celebrating the Lord's Supper.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. We celebrate the Lord's Supper in anticipation of the kingdom (Luke 22:14-20).** As the disciples were gathered around for the Passover meal, Jesus announced that He would neither eat the Passover meal nor drink the Passover drink again until the kingdom comes. While the kingdom would be postponed, it was not canceled. Each time they partook of the communion elements, they were to remember that one day the kingdom will come.

**2. We celebrate the Lord's Supper as a sign of our service to others (Luke 22:21-30).** The Gospel of John (13:1-17) tells the story of Jesus taking a towel and a basin of water and washing the disciples' feet as a lesson in

serving others. This becomes the second reason for celebrating the Lord's Supper. It is a lesson on servanthood.

Suddenly Jesus announced that one of those present would soon betray Him. Then, no sooner was He done with this announcement than He went into a long discussion on the subject of greatness.

What we have here is first a negative lesson—what service is not. Telling about the betrayer shows what service is not. Then Jesus explained what service is all about. It is not being the greatest but being the lowest.

Jesus' teaching during the Last Supper was typical Jesus. He stood all conventional wisdom on its head. The greatest in the kingdom are not those who are served but those who serve others.

Jesus closed this talk by reminding the disciples that this was to be their way of life until the kingdom comes.

Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we remember that until the kingdom comes, we have the great privilege of serving others.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** The whole idea of communion (or the Lord's Supper) can be very new and mysterious for children. This lesson can be used to help them understand the true meaning of the service.

**Youths:** This is a good lesson to help the teens learn from Jesus Himself about what true greatness really is.

**Adults:** Many adult believers have sat through a multitude of communion services. Encourage them to remember the lesson about serving others the next time they participate in a communion service.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

Easter is the story of both shattered dreams and restored hope. Who has not experienced a situation in which it appeared that all one's plans were working out perfectly, only to have everything come crashing down through a bizarre turn of events?

Your dreams of the future have all been shattered. Your closest friend suddenly dies. Your boss tells you that you are fired and to immediately clean out your desk. Your dearest friend turns on you.

If something like this describes you, you can very easily identify with Cleopas and his friend in our lesson this week.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. The journey with the stranger (Luke 24:13-16).** How long the ride home seems after a major defeat. As our text opens, we join two dear friends who were walking home on the Sunday after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They were engaged in a deep and disheartened discussion of the events of the past few days when suddenly a stranger joined them on the road. The stranger was none other than Jesus Himself. God temporarily blinded these disciples to the stranger's identity until they could grasp more clearly the truth of the resurrection.

**2. The conversation with the stranger (Luke 24:17-21).** During His earthly ministry, Jesus loved to ask questions to get people thinking with Him. This time was no exception. He asked what the two were talking about and why they were so sad.

Because He appeared to be so unaware of recent events in Jerusalem, they asked Him whether He was the only person who did not know what had happened.

"What things?" (Luke 24:19), He responded. Out poured the sordid details of the events surrounding the betrayal,

trial, and death of Jesus Christ. They had thought He was the true hope for Israel, but He had died three days ago. Easter is truly the story of shattered dreams.

**3. The revelation of the stranger (Luke 24:28-35).** The friends and the stranger continued their conversation until they arrived at their destination—the village of Emmaus. Because it was late, the two invited their fellow traveler to join them for a meal.

Then it happened. As the Stranger broke bread for the meal, their eyes were opened, and they recognized the identity of their traveling Companion.

Just as quickly, Jesus disappeared from their sight. No time was wasted. The two men returned to Jerusalem with the great news—Jesus is alive! He is not dead! The seven miles to Jerusalem melted away rapidly. Finding the Eleven, the Emmaus travelers were greeted with the good news that Jesus was alive and had appeared to Peter. To this news was joined their joy of breaking bread with Jesus. Easter is the story of restored hope.

What made the difference? What brought these men out of their despair? The only cure for their despair was seeing Jesus alive. How quickly the clouds disperse when Jesus comes into focus!

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Use the events of Easter to remind the children that Jesus is alive, so there is never a reason to despair.

**Youths:** For those teens who might be discouraged or in despair, use this lesson to teach them that there is always hope.

**Adults:** Remind the adults that one of the great lessons of Easter is the restoration of hope and the assurance of eternal hope.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

From the time of the Apostle Paul on to the present day, Christians have insisted that belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ must be central to one's faith (I Cor. 15:3-8). We have just come off another celebration of this great event.

So why is it so important? During His earthly life, Jesus Christ made many promises. If there had been no resurrection, all those promises would have been worthless. Because He did rise from the grave after three days, all those promises are promises kept. Our lesson this week looks at five of the key promises the resurrected Lord made to His original followers and to all who claim Him as Saviour.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. I bring peace (Luke 24:36-37).** We only have to pick up a current newspaper to see that the world we live in is not at peace. Many politicians and many religious leaders promise peace, but none can deliver. Jesus Christ is different. Just as the grave could not stop Jesus, so nothing today can stop Him from bringing peace.

**2. I am alive (Luke 24:38-43).** When the postresurrection Jesus first appeared to His disciples, they thought He was a ghost. They were very frightened. He had them examine His body, His feet, His hands, and His wounds. He also ate a meal with them to prove His claim.

This turned their fears to joy. Christians do not worship a dead carpenter. They worship the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

**3. I fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies (Luke 24:44-46).** His death and resurrection were part of God's eternal plan that was revealed in the Old Testament. Not only did Jesus keep the promises He made during His three years of ministry, but by His res-

urrection He also was able to fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament that pertain to His suffering and resurrection. If there had been no resurrection, believers today would not have a reliable Bible to follow, for the Bible would be filled with lies.

**4. I have a task for you (Luke 24:47-48).** Christians should not be idle people. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives all of us a great responsibility. That task is telling the world about Jesus and what happened on the cross and in the grave. The message He left is that people need to repent of their sins and accept God's forgiveness.

**5. I will be with you (Luke 24:49-53).** The fifth promise from Jesus Christ was very specific. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to equip His followers with power.

In the tradition of the high priests, Jesus lifted His hands and pronounced a blessing on the people. The disciples, in turn, worshipped Him. In essence, this is the great promise found throughout the Scriptures (for example, in Exodus 3:12)—the promise of God's presence.

When Jesus makes a promise, be assured that it will be carried out. His resurrection is the guarantee.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** What a great lesson this is to help children understand the importance of keeping one's promises!

**Youths:** This lesson can be used to help teens understand and appreciate the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the grave and is alive and active today.

**Adults:** This lesson encourages adults to respond to Jesus Christ as the early disciples did: by worshipping Him.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's demonstration of His great, awesome power; yet God's power is far greater than *just* the resurrection. For example, Paul prayed that he might "know him, and the power of his resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). In other words, the resurrection did not exhaust God's power. There is much more available for the believer. Our lesson this week will examine another aspect of this power that is available for all believers.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. The new power (Acts 2:1-4).** The disciples wanted Jesus to stay with them, but He told them He had to leave; otherwise they would not receive this new power. He told His astonished disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you" (John 16:7).

Fifty days after the resurrection and about ten days after Jesus' ascension, the disciples were gathered together on the Day of Pentecost. Suddenly, the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them all. Old Testament believers had never fully experienced this. It was the power of the resurrection that filled the disciples.

The Holy Spirit came on all assembled, and all started to speak in various tongues, or languages. The original Feast of Pentecost was a great harvest festival for Israel. As a result of the Spirit's coming, the new Pentecost would be a great harvest of souls.

Those present heard the Holy Spirit come with the sound of a great wind. They saw visible evidence of His coming in the form of fire that rested on each person. They also heard Him

speak through the disciples in a multitude of languages. All these evidenced the new power coming on the church.

**2. To proclaim the truth (Acts 2:5-13).** A new power had now come on the church to proclaim the new truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

It was the custom for Jews from around the world to gather in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks. In fact, it was required of adult males (Deut. 16:16). To their surprise, this vast international group heard about Jesus and the resurrection in their own languages.

These people came from all over the world of that day. They came from all the nations around Judea, from Asia Minor, from North Africa, and even from faraway Europe. This was truly a great reversal of Babel. It is generally assumed that the crowd that was evangelized that day went home and spread the gospel message. This would account for church groups that sprung up around the empire.

The power of the resurrection was truly on the march. Nothing would stop it. Far beyond anyone's wildest imagination, the resurrection of Jesus was reaching out to vast groups of people with a great new power and hope.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** This lesson can be used to encourage children to rely on the power of Jesus in their lives.

**Youths:** Christian teens need to hear about the effect of the resurrection power in their lives.

**Adults:** This study is a helpful reminder to adults of the importance of promoting and supporting missionary outreach to all people.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

One of the great attractions of Christianity has always been the hope that the resurrection offers to the person who believes in Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

The lesson this week is based on a great passage in the New Testament that deals with the hope a believer has beyond the grave. Writing about this hope, the Apostle Paul twice told his readers to comfort or encourage one another (I Thess. 4:18) and themselves (5:11).

The average believer is encouraged to live with this hope for two reasons.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. Death is never the end (I Thess. 4:13-18).** A problem had developed in the Thessalonian church concerning those believers who had died before Jesus Christ's return.

Death is always traumatic for those who are left behind, but Paul reassured his readers that there is hope. He counseled believers to use the hope of the resurrection as a means of encouraging others.

By divine revelation, Paul assured us that those who have died in Christ will return with Him in the future (I Thess. 4:13-15). This assurance is built on the promise of God.

Paul assured us that those who are alive at the return of Christ will not "precede" (I Thess. 4:15), or precede, those who are dead. The dead in Christ will be raised first to join Him. There will be a unique announcement of His coming with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet blast of God (vs. 16).

This will be followed by the joining of Christ with resurrected and living believers in the air. Many theologians call this event the rapture. So all believers

past and present will be joined together with the Lord. The text tells us to encourage one another with this truth. Death does not end all (I Thess. 4:18).

**2. Wrath is not for the believer (I Thess. 5:1-11).** The believer's hope continues. It seems another problem had developed with Paul's readers with regard to the future. Paul had taught that during the end times, God's wrath will be poured out on the world. He had taught that this day of wrath will come unexpectedly (like a thief) and will be tumultuous (like birth pangs). The believer, however, must not be worried.

Believers are not in darkness, so they should not be surprised when this time comes (I Thess. 5:4-7). Because "God hath not appointed us to wrath" (vs. 9) but to salvation (deliverance), each believer should live for God and not fear. This fact was also intended to comfort, or encourage, the believers.

What a great hope we have as believers! Even if we die before the Lord returns, we can rest assured we are part of God's great future plans. In addition, we can rest assured that we will have no part in God's wrath upon this earth.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Eventually, most children will wonder what would happen to them if they died. This lesson will offer them great comfort.

**Youths:** Teens are curious about what will happen in the future. While the Bible does not give all the details, it does tell us what will happen to believers.

**Adults:** "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thess. 4:18). This advice is still as good today as it was in Paul's day, and adults need to be reminded to practice it.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.



# Guiding the Superintendent

During his visit with the believers in Thessalonica, Paul had taught them many great truths about the Day of the Lord. “The day of the Lord is the period of history mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament during which God will bring judgment and blessing on the people of the earth in a more direct, dramatic, and drastic way than ever before (cf. Isa. 13:6, 9; Zeph. 1:14-16)” (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

The believers had been experiencing strong persecution. Now they were confused. Were they in the Day of the Lord now? Paul wrote to deal with this confusion and to exhort them to maintain their hope in Christ’s return.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. Correction of present error (II Thess. 2:1-3, 9-12).** Believers should not be confused. The Day of the Lord will not come before the “man of sin” is revealed.

Paul pleaded for calm. Somehow the believers had received some bad information. Paul was clear: the Day of the Lord had not come. Paul exhorted them to let no one deceive them. That day will not happen until two things occur: the great falling away from the faith and the revealing of the man of sin (II Thess. 2:3).

So that there was no confusion, Paul went on to give a rather complete description of this man of sin in II Thessalonians 2:9-12. He will be empowered directly by Satan and will attempt to deceive many by his counterfeit miracles and power.

Sadly, this individual will be very effective. He will deceive many and lead them away from the truth. These people will not have a love for the truth and thus will be easily led away by Satan.

**2. Exhortation for the present (II Thess. 2:13-17).** At this point, Paul burst out with a note of thanksgiving. He was thankful his readers were not part of this group that will be deceived by Satan and the man of sin. He was thankful they had been chosen for salvation and sanctification. They had been called to the gospel and glory of Jesus Christ.

Paul now brought the subject of hope into his exhortation. He encouraged the Thessalonians to stand fast in that which he had taught them. Despite the fact that they were experiencing some great troubles, they were not in the Day of the Lord. As he had taught them earlier, they would be spared from the coming judgment of God.

Instead, they should think about the love that both the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father had for them. In the place of confusion (II Thess. 2:1-2) and deception (vs. 3), Paul wanted them to be comforted in their hearts and strengthened to do good works.

Teachings about the return of the Lord should not confuse believers. Rather, they should encourage them to do good works.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** This lesson can help children understand that teachings about the future should encourage them in the present—even a gloomy present.

**Youths:** Many teens today are besieged by false teachings about the return of the Lord. This lesson should help straighten them out on the subject.

**Adults:** This lesson should help adults understand the broad outline of prophetic events and how they are designed to bring comfort to believers and glory to God.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

The Bible presents much information about the future so that believers will know how to live in the present. Because we know that God is sovereign, that God is in control, that God has it all planned out, we can be confident in the present. This is what is called hope.

The word “salvation” is found three times in this week’s passage (I Pet. 1:5, 9, 10). Peter described our salvation from the perspective of each Member of the Trinity’s part in salvation. When we understand that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all have an active part in our salvation, we begin to understand that our hope is more than just wishful thinking about the future. It is a hope that is alive in the present.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. The Father will perfect our salvation in the future (I Pet. 1:3-5).** Our hope is not dead. It is not based on some futile ideas or philosophies. It is not based on what we do. It all is based on what God has done. It is based on His mercy. It is based on God’s great gift to us, called the new birth. As it was with our natural birth, so it is with our spiritual birth; it all depends on God.

Our salvation hope is assured by the resurrection, Christ’s resurrection. Peter compared our salvation to an inheritance in heaven that cannot be taken away (I Pet. 1:4). We are kept by God’s power (vs. 5) until our inheritance is fully revealed in the future. Our hope is living because it is based on God’s work and power, not our own efforts.

**2. The Son gives us courage for the present (I Pet. 1:6-9).** Suffering is a part of our lives. It is not a disaster for believers but a part of God’s plan.

Our text says we can “rejoice” in suffering because we know God uses the trials of life to define our lives and make us ready to meet Him. Life is like a school that is preparing us for eternity, when our salvation is brought to completion. Our hope is living when we can view suffering as part of God’s plan for us.

**3. The Spirit perfected our salvation in the past (I Pet. 1:10-12).** Most believers do not realize that they are at the end of a long line of people who looked forward to what they have now experienced in Christ. Peter talked about the prophets of old who looked forward to the coming of Jesus and yet did not fully understand it. Still, they faithfully looked forward to our present day, for the Spirit was driving them.

The Christian’s hope is a living hope because of the Trinity: the Father is perfecting our salvation, the Son enables us to face the difficulties of the present, and the Spirit carries our salvation from the past to the present to the future.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Understanding the Trinity is always difficult for children. This lesson will help them see how all Three are involved in their lives.

**Youths:** Teens usually have trouble understanding why God allows suffering in their lives. This lesson will give them some insight into God’s purpose for suffering and give them hope that endures.

**Adults:** This lesson will help adults see what place hope should have in their Christian experience.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

When God gives something, He never skimps on the amount. Over the centuries many believers have experienced the full amount of grace and love that only God can give. God does not just squeak by when it comes to our salvation. The lesson this week will focus on godliness and the means God gives us to be godly. Peter put it this way: “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (II Pet. 1:3).

There are always two sides to godliness.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. God’s side of godliness (II Pet. 1:3-4).** When an individual becomes a believer, he receives all that he might need to develop a life of godliness. He is especially given the needed divine power. Nothing that a person has is his own. It is all the result of God’s gracious gift.

As part of the process, every believer has been given a special destiny. We have been called to “glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3). We are recipients of all the “precious promises” (vs. 4) in the Bible, so we can live lives of godliness free from the corruption of the world.

**2. Man’s side of godliness (II Pet. 1:5-7).** It is always important to remember that there must be a balance between the divine and the human side of spiritual growth (godliness). Spiritual diligence is never automatic. Spiritual diligence and discipline are required.

Visible growth should be obvious in the life of a true believer. Peter exhorted believers to give “all diligence” (II Pet. 1:5) to add to their lives several key qualities that build on each other: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (love).

This is quite a list, but it indicates that as God is working in us, we must respond by working out these qualities in our lives.

**3. Results of godliness (II Pet. 1:8-14).** As we allow God to work and as we are working on these qualities ourselves, certain results will follow. These results become further affirmations that God is truly in our lives.

The text suggests three key signs that spiritual growth is taking place. First, there will be fruit, or progress (II Pet. 1:8). Second, there will be vision (vs. 9). We will start to see the world as God sees it. Third, there will be a sense of assurance about our salvation (vss. 10-11) and especially about our eternal rewards. If we are growing in the Lord, we will have a sense of divine presence in our lives and look forward to a relationship with God hereafter: an abundant entrance into heaven.

The text goes on to show how God’s Word is an integral part of our spiritual growth. The author Peter told his readers that he had written this material down to remind them of the truth.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** The lesson this week covers several Christian virtues. Perhaps it would be wise to concentrate on just one of them.

**Youths:** This lesson should encourage young people to pursue the hard work of spiritual growth, knowing that God has provided the means and the power for a successful pursuit.

**Adults:** Many adult believers tend to focus on only the human side of the Christian experience. This lesson will bring a proper balance and a new appreciation for God’s work.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

Peter said it all: “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (I Pet. 4:7). At times it seems that life will just go on forever. However, we know better. The Bible is very clear: an end will come.

This week’s passage calls on believers to adjust their lifestyles to line up with the fact that Jesus Christ will return. Peter gave two specific pieces of advice on living in light of the coming end.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. Keep Christ the center of your focus (I Pet. 4:1-6).** The text reminds us that the Christian life is not a bed of ease. Because Christ suffered, His followers should expect the same treatment.

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Macmillan). God uses suffering to purify the believer of sin (I Pet. 4:1). When a believer is suffering, he is not thinking about sinning.

God also can use suffering to help us center our affections on the things that are important (I Pet. 4:2). God’s will becomes clear when a person is struggling. It is amazing, but when a person is experiencing difficulties, the doors to empty living are closed (vs. 3). Suffering in this life is a great aid to keeping one’s attention on one’s ultimate destination (vss. 4-6).

When Jesus Christ is the center of our attention, difficulties in this life take on a very different color. We are reminded that life here on this earth is only temporary. The best is yet to come.

**2. Serve others (I Pet. 4:7-11).** The fact that the end is approaching should spur believers to live their lives here on

earth thoughtfully and carefully. The text spells out five things that should serve as priorities in our lives.

First, there is prayer (I Pet. 4:7). In light of Christ’s return, we should take prayer very seriously. Our minds need to be very clear.

The second area of great concern for present living is developing a love life that controls all of our relationships (I Pet. 4:8). Perhaps the greatest way this is accomplished is by consciously forgiving those around us every day.

Next in line is the believer’s homelife (I Pet. 4:9). This is the practical side of Christian love—a home that is open for all.

This all leads next to genuine service (I Pet. 4:10-11). Peter encouraged believers to use their speaking or serving gifts for God’s glory. These gifts are not to be used for selfish purposes. The admonition to speak and to minister while waiting for Jesus Christ to come ends with a strong reminder that we are to continually be engaged in praise to God.

The end is near. Remember that suffering is God’s tool to prepare us for eternity. Do not forget to serve those around you in the meantime.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Most children have trouble processing the idea of time ending. The emphasis should be on the priorities that are for this present life.

**Youths:** This lesson reminds teens they are not to live for the moment but to have God’s perspective on life and live for Him.

**Adults:** Adults need to be reminded that their acts and words reflect their priorities in life and set an example, good or bad, for younger Christians.

—Martin R. Dahlquist.

# Guiding the Superintendent

One of the biggest challenges to hope is delay. The Christian faith is built on the hope that Jesus will return to earth one day to right all wrongs. As one day slips into another and one decade passes into another and Christ does not return, our hope can take a beating.

Peter understood this phenomenon and addressed it directly in the last chapter of his second epistle. He taught that delay should not discourage hope; in fact, it should encourage us to hope more.

## DEVOTIONAL OUTLINE

**1. Delay does not mean nonintervention (II Pet. 3:3-7).** There were many folks in Peter's day (as there will continue to be) who scoffed at the idea of Christ's return. Their argument was simple: because the promise had been so long delayed, it was safe to assume that Christ would never return. The world has always been as it is; nothing has ever changed, and nothing will ever change.

The text hits this argument head-on: such thinking reflects willful ignorance. Peter reminded his readers that God has intervened in the past, especially when He judged sin in the Flood of Noah's day (II Pet. 3:6). Those who mock God's promises simply refuse to believe.

Not only did God interrupt the world order with a flood, but there will also come a time when God will judge the world with fire (II Pet. 3:7). His apparent delay in doing this, however, is not based on any lack of ability to intervene in human history.

**2. Delay gives God more time to save people (II Pet. 3:8-9).** The text gives a very specific reason for God's delay. It is not based on God's impotence. It is based on God's grace. God is not unfaithful to His promises; He is very patient.

God's deepest desire is that all will be saved. He wants to give as many people as possible as much time as they need to repent. Delay is based on repentance, not unwillingness.

**3. Delay will one day come to an end (II Pet. 3:10).** The end definitely will come one day. Much like a thief, Christ's return will be both sudden and unexpected. However, He will return, and the day of God's judgment will come. Delay will not be forever.

**4. Delay gives us more time to mature (II Pet. 3:11-15a).** Because we know that God's delay will one day end and that He will come to judge the universe, believers are called on to be holy and godly people.

The text is very practical. In light of God's future actions, we are to be people who are marked by personal holiness. "Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Pet. 3:14).

The delay in Christ's coming should encourage our hope. God is delaying so that unbelievers can come to salvation and we can develop greater maturity as Christians.

## AGE-GROUP EMPHASES

**Children:** Children need to be assured that while judgment is coming, Christ's return is a great blessing that His followers can look forward to with joy.

**Youths:** Every day teens may face scoffers who question the existence of God based on the argument that everything has always been the same. This lesson will help them face these scoffers.

**Adults:** Here is a good question for every adult in light of this lesson: What would you do if you knew that Christ would be coming this week?

—Martin R. Dahlquist.