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WHEN THE LORD DESCENDS FROM HEAVEN

In the 1940s, Nobel Prize-winning Irish author Samuel Beckett wrote a drama called *Waiting for Godot*, about two hapless, homeless men waiting on the side of the road for someone named Godot, who was supposed to come and save them from the meaningless and pathetic absurdity of life.

“His name is Godot?” Estragon asks.

“I think so,” Vladimir answers.

As Vladimir and Estragon stand, suckled by the dehydrated hope that Godot will come, a procession of human suffering, missteps, goose steps, limps, and hobbles stomps past them. Bored, not so much by all the pain of life but by its uselessness, they seek diversion in doing good, such as lifting a blind man who has stumbled.

“Come, let us get to work!” Vladimir says. “In an instant all will vanish, and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!” But as Vladimir reaches, he falls and can’t get up.

Despite more promises that Godot will come, life seems so miserable in the meantime that they decide to hang themselves. But having no rope, Estragon takes off the cord that holds up his pants, which collapse around his ankles. Testing the cord’s strength, the two men pull; it breaks, and they almost fall. They decide to find a better rope and try again later.

“We’ll hang ourselves tomorrow,” Vladimir says. “Unless Godot comes.”

“And if he comes?” Estragon asks.

“We’ll be saved.”

This mysterious Godot never comes, which means they’re not saved. They weren’t, of course, supposed to be. Beckett’s whole point with the drama is to show the absurdity and hopelessness of life.

What a contrast to the view of life presented in the Bible. In particular, what a contrast to the view presented in this quarter’s lessons, that deals with the apostle Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians.

Like Beckett’s two characters, the Thessalonians faced stresses, strains, struggles, even outright persecution. In other words, life for them, as for all of us, has its hard moments. How easy and understandable it would have been for them to fall into the futility, nihilism, and pessimism that Beckett expressed in his drama. Instead, the Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming (which Beckett was mocking, as well). Though Paul had chided the Thessalonians, as they had behavioral, as well as theological issues in the church (sound familiar?), it was to them, and to us, that Paul wrote some of the most incredible, uplifting, and hopeful words in all inspiration.

The Thessalonians had a sure hope, a hope based on what Christ had done for them, a hope that pointed to the greatest promise of all—the Second Coming.

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16–18).

It doesn’t get any more hopeful or glorious than that, does it?

This quarter, through Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, we’ll get a glimpse into the life of an early Christian church—an urban church, really—and see some of the struggles and challenges that it faced, including the difficulties that arose from the fact that Christ had not yet returned. Fascinating, too, is that however different their circumstances from our own, so often the principles reflected in Paul’s words to the Thessalonians deal with the issues and challenges that we, too, confront as we await, not some mysterious Godot but the Lord Jesus, whose death on the cross at the first coming guarantees His return in glory at the Second.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.