

BRIAN BILL



# Ready or Not

PREPARING  
FOR THE  
RETURN  
OF CHRIST



# Ready or Not

BRIAN BILL

PREPARING FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST

Are you ready ... or not?

One night many years ago, when we lived in central Illinois, my wife had to leave our house for a meeting at church. As our four daughters and I watched her get ready, we noticed she was leaving with two delicious desserts. When we couldn't get her to give us some, we pleaded with her to bring some home after the meeting. She promised she would.

As the night went on, the girls repeatedly asked me, "Dad, when's Mom coming home?" Later that evening, the questions crescendoed. I told them I wasn't sure, but I knew she was going to come, so we needed to be ready. At about 8:30 p.m., the troops became very restless, so we went outside to wait for her. No one had shoes on, and some of us were in our pajamas. (You can tell I was in charge that night.)

At first, we sat on the front porch, eagerly watching the street for signs of her coming. Then, the girls started doing cartwheels in the grass. Eventually, one of them got out her pogo stick and we all tried jumping on it. The girls laughed hard when I attempted to hop around. The later it got, the more distracted we became. They were so focused on having fun, they stopped asking about Mom.

When our youngest started yawning and rubbing her eyes, I put her to bed. (I did this so I could eat her portion of the dessert.) About an hour later, Beth rolled into the driveway. She looked startled to see us outside in our pajamas, and we were delighted to finally get our dessert.

The second coming of Jesus is like this. He's coming, but we don't know when. While many of us are filled with eager expectation for His return, others are distracted by diversions, and some of us have fallen asleep.

I pray God will shake us out of our spiritual slumber so we're ready for the coming of Christ, which will be sudden and unexpected.

Let's consider 1 John 2:28: **"And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming."** There are four forceful imperatives in this verse.

**1. An urgent appeal to be alert.** In context, this text urges believers to be alert for antichrists during the end times. Let's consider the first two words: **"And now ..."** While the word **"and"** connects us to what came before, the word **"now"** emphatically calls us to the present, to the here and now. That's why in most of our translations, this verse introduces a new paragraph. The Apostle John is saying something like this: *At this critical and crucial time, here's what you need to do right now.*

The aim of prophecy is always pastoral and practical. While we may want to know the answers to the *when* and *what* questions, in Luke 18:8 Jesus doesn't give us that. Instead, He focuses on *who* we need to be and *"how"* we should live in light of His return: **"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"**

*Prophecy is not designed to satisfy our curiosity but to sanctify our character.* The question is not *when* Jesus will return, but what will we do before He gets here? A focus on the future must fortify our faith today. Said another way, let's focus on being faithful and let God handle the end of the world.

Recently, I saw a meme from *The Andy Griffith Show* where Opie is talking to Andy while they're both sitting on a log.

Opie has a serious look on his face and asks, "Pa, when is Jesus coming back?"

Sheriff Andy thinks for a moment and answers, “I don’t rightly know, Opie. Ya see, we’re not on the planning committee. We’re on the welcoming committee.”

Are you ready to welcome Jesus?

*The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.*

Are you ready ... or not?

**2. An affectionate call to abide.** Notice how tenderly John addresses his readers by calling them, “**little children.**” This is a term of pastoral and parental affection, addressing believers of every stage and age. Some translations use, “**My dear children.**”

With earnest tenderness, we’re urged to “**abide in Him.**” This is one of the Apostle John’s favorite terms, used some twenty-four times in his first letter. “**Abide**” is an old English word that means, “to remain” or “stay.” A few translations use the word “continue.” Abiding in Jesus is not meant to be passive, but to be an active purifying of our lives as we pursue holiness. It’s the idea of constantly remaining in a deep and intimate relationship with God, or as one commentator says, “to be permanently at home with the Lord and for the Lord to be at home with you.”

The Book of 1 John teaches us we abide by obeying. We do that by believing the truth, living like Jesus, and loving like Jesus. One who abides is comfortable with Christ while maintaining a clear conscience by quickly confessing and turning from sin.

*The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.*

Are you ready ... or not?

**3. An intense readiness for His appearing.** 1 John 2:28 says we’re to abide “**so that when He appears ...**” The phrase “**so that**” means *for the purpose of or to the end that*. The reason we abide is so we’re ready for His appearing! In addition, our abiding results from our readiness for His return.

Notice the word “**when.**” It’s not a matter of might, maybe, or if, but “**when**” Jesus appears. The idea behind “**appears**” is that He will show Himself openly and in great glory for all to see, as we read in Revelation

1:7: **“Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him. Even so. Amen.”**

Are you aware that for every one verse in the Bible that speaks about Jesus’ first coming, there are eight more verses describing His second coming? The Bible teaches the coming of Christ is imminent, which is a word from Latin, meaning, “to hang over us.” Imminent refers to something always hanging overhead, a certainty that something is going to happen very soon, at any moment.

In Matthew 25:13, Jesus tells us we must be constantly ready: **“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”** In Luke 12:43, we’re told to work while we wait: **“Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.”**

1 Thessalonians 5:2 says, **“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”** In 1 John 2:18, this sense of urgency is underlined: **“Children, it is the last hour ...”** The Bible closes with a reminder in Revelation 22:20 that Christ is coming quickly: **“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”**

The late J. Vernon McGee, the preacher for *Thru the Bible*, once asked this question,

Why has He not revealed to us the time of His coming? A Christian ought to live in the light of the imminent coming of Christ. If you tell me today that He is not coming for another ten years, then I do not need to worry about today, and I can be a little careless in my living ... but there are times when I get behind a driver who won’t let me around to pass him, and I tell him what I think of him. If the Lord were to come at that moment, I might be ashamed at His appearing. So, you and I need to be living all the time in the light of His imminent return.

*The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.*

Are you ready ... or not?

**4. An invitation of assurance.** The last part of 1 John 2:28 says the one who abides **“... may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in**

**shame at His coming.”** Notice how John includes himself by using the pronoun “**we.**” He’s not above anyone but because he is also abiding, He has confidence that he will be ready for Christ’s return. Abiding brings with it the wonderful companion of assurance.

The word “**confidence**” refers to *cheerful courage and boldness of speech*, especially in the presence of persons of high rank, like when a child speaks to a parent boldly without any filter or fear.

As adults, we tend to hold back what we really want to say, while children will say whatever, especially when they know their parents love them. One of my grandchildren is growing in confidence, as evidenced by these recent expressions of angst:

“Okay mama, no!”

“I won’t obey.”

“It’s hard for me to obey.”

“Why isn’t it up to me?”

We struggle with the same things, don’t we?

At its root, the idea of “**not shrinking from Him in shame**” speaks of disfigurement, disgrace, and humiliation. To be “unashamed” means to have nothing to hide and nothing to shrink away from. The word “**coming**” was used to announce the visit of a king or an emperor. It literally means, *to be beside* a dignitary.

This passage lays out only two possible reactions for a Christian when Jesus returns: you will either be confident ... or ashamed. You will run to Him with rejoicing ... or recoil from Him with regret. Boldness is the by-product of abiding.

The commentator William Barclay adds:

By far the best way to be ready for the coming of Christ is to live with Him every day. If we do that, His coming will be no shock to us but simply the entry into the nearer presence of One with whom we have lived for that long.

Let me share one of the dumber things I did during my high school years. My parents went out of town one weekend and left me and one of my sisters at home. It didn’t take long for me to figure out this was

a perfect opportunity to throw a party. Even though there were no cell phones, texting, or social media back then, we knew how to get the word out. A ton of people showed up, including many I didn't even know. I remember being very nervous and worried my parents would come home unexpectedly, and I would be in huge trouble.

Things went downhill quickly. On top of the neighbors and the police being involved, my face gave it away as soon as my parents came home, not to mention some party remains I had forgotten to clean up. The worst part of this experience was the shame I felt because I knew I had disappointed my mom and dad.

Was I ready for their return? I was not.

Recently, I asked a group of women from our church if they were ready for the return of Christ.

One immediately smiled and said, "Absolutely, I'm ready."

Another quickly said, "I can't wait!"

One responded on Facebook with: "I'm confident in Him because His power is perfected in my weakness. I'm unashamed and bold because He tells me not to be ashamed of the gospel."

Can you respond with that same kind of confidence, or will you shrink away in shame at His appearing?

In Genesis 3:8, after Adam and Eve sinned, the first couple shrank away in shame when God pursued them in the Garden: **"And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."**

Revelation 6:16-17 describes unbelievers who will shrink away in shame when the Lamb appears: **"Calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'"**

Let me be quick to add that for a believer, any shame will be momentary because we will be quickly transformed according to 1 John 3:2: **"Beloved, we are God's children now and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is."**

Someone has summarized the story of God's glory in our lives like this:

I'm not what I should be.

I'm not what I'm going to be.

But thank God I'm not what I used to be.

Any brief regret for the believer will be something like, *If only I had not been so self-centered and served Him more fully! I wish my motives had been better!* 1 Corinthians 3:15 says, **"If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."**

2 Corinthians 5:10: **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."** Will your deeds be acceptable, or will you be ashamed? All believers will be accepted, but not all our deeds will be acceptable.

Read 1 John 2:28 again: **"And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him in shame at His coming."** Ask yourself this question when you're doing something you shouldn't: *Do I want to be found doing this when Christ returns?*

## A Personal Assessment

At the church I pastor, we strive to equip and mobilize everyone to live on mission by holding up four biblical values – *gathering, growing, giving, and going* with the gospel, all for the glory of God. Recently, I was struck by how a focus on the future return of Christ will help us be more faithful today. If we want to be bold and not blush when He returns, we need to give ourselves to these four areas.

1. **We will gather with God's people for worship.** Notice how Hebrews 10:23-25 links the importance of gathering with the nearness of the return of Christ: **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."** Brothers and sisters, as we approach the return of Christ, we need to gather



regularly so we can stir one another up to love and good deeds. If you've been drifting from your commitment to gather in person with God's people, it's time to get back in the saddle.

2. **We will grow in our relationship with Christ.** Because Christ could return at any moment, we must live every moment for Him. Titus 2:11-14: **“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”** We could say it like this: *If you want to be prepared for Jesus' second coming, then live like His first coming mattered!*
3. **We will give what God has given to us.** Being confident Christ could return at any moment will motivate us to manage the resources God has entrusted to us. In the Parable of the 10 Minas, Jesus described a nobleman who gave three months' wages to his servants to invest. One translation captures the importance of giving to God's work in Luke 19:13: **“Put this money to work until I come back.”** Are you giving of your time, your talents, and your treasures for kingdom purposes, knowing you will give an account when He returns?
4. **We will go with the gospel to our neighbors and the nations.** Don't get so caught up in prophecy you forget to point people to Christ. Knowing people are lost in their sins and will be left behind should motivate us to go with the gospel. In Acts 1:6, the disciples wanted a timeline for the end times: **“So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’”** Jesus redirected them in verse 7: **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority.”** Verse 8 calls us not to be focused on date setting, but to be Spirit-empowered witnesses: **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

# Action Steps

The late theologian George Eldon Ladd once said: “The main purpose of prophecy is not to answer all our questions about the future but to enable God’s people to live in the present in light of the future.”

Here are seven practical ways to live in light of the future.

1. **Grow in purity.** As we anticipate Christ’s appearing, we should aspire to purity in our lives. Ponder 1 John 3:3: **“And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”** The study of God’s prophetic program is always meant to have a purifying effect on His people.

2. **Make peace with others.** If Jesus were to come back right now, would He find you at peace? This word originally referred to the binding or joining together of a broken or divided object, or relationship. It literally means, *to set at one again*. It is the opposite of being at war.

James 5:9: **“Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”**

Do you want Him to come back while you’re nursing that grudge? Do you want Him to return when a lack of forgiveness is tearing your relationships apart?

3. **Put Christ and His kingdom first.** The evangelist D.L. Moody once said: “I have been working three times as hard since I came to understand that my Lord is coming again.” Luke 21:28 says: **“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

When Jesus returns, do you want to be found being lazy? Do you want to be out of the habit of regular worship with God’s people? Do you want Him to appear when you’re being selfish with your financial resources and not giving to expand His kingdom? Would you be okay if He had returned when you were involved in that secret sin this week?

It’s time to be completely committed, fully engaged, and passionately involved in kingdom living. This is no time to play it safe or sit on the fence.

4. **Encourage others by speaking of the Lord's return.** After describing end-time events, Paul concludes in 1 Thessalonians 4:18: **“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”** To **“encourage”** means to come alongside to give whatever help or comfort is needed. We need a reminder to be ready, for His return will encourage those around us.

5. **Live as if today is the day.** The one who is ready for *that day* is ready for *any day*. Jesus said it like this in Luke 12:40: **“You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”**

Dr. Horatius Bonar, a Scottish hymn writer from the 1800s, had a custom every night and every morning. When he'd close his curtains before going to bed, he'd say, “Perhaps tonight, Lord!” And in the morning, he'd open the curtains, look up, and say, “Perhaps today, Lord!” This is a practice that would be good for us to imitate.

6. **Cultivate a Maranatha mindset.** The Greek word **“Maranatha”** is the last prayer of the Bible and is found in Revelation 22:20. It means, *“Come, Lord Jesus.”* Perhaps you could begin inserting “Maranatha” into your prayers, conversations, social media, emails, and texts. 1 Peter 4:7: **“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.”**

7. **Prepare for His return the next time you celebrate communion.** The Lord's Supper is a time to remember His first coming and to recalibrate our lives so we're ready for His second coming. 1 Corinthians 11:26: **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”**

Here's something Ray Pritchard, president of Keep Believing Ministries, said about always being ready:

I believe the coming of the Lord must be near. Many Christians before me have said the same thing. I'm taking my stand with them. I'd rather expect Jesus to come in my lifetime and be wrong than to be so in love with the world that I'm not ready to see Him when He comes.

# Conclusion

Friend, Jesus is coming back.

Are you ready ... or not?

You certainly don't want Jesus to come back before you've repented of your sins and received Him as your Savior.

I'm reminded of the old Larry Norman song:

Two men walking up a hill,  
One disappears and one's left standing still.  
I wish we'd all been ready.  
There's no time to change your mind,  
The Son has come, and you've been left behind.

If you have never turned your life over to Christ and received His salvation, it's time to be reconciled to God before it's too late! According to 2 Peter 3:9-10, God's patience is on a divine timer: **"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."**

I won't beat around the bush. The consequences are too staggering, and the stakes are way too high. Let me say it as clearly as I can. If you have never repented and received Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, *you will be in deep trouble when Jesus comes back*. If you don't know Jesus, you have an appointment with judgment, and it will be *certain, swift, and severe*.

Do you want to face ruin, or do you want to be rescued? Do you want to go to Heaven or to Hell? Do you want deliverance or destruction? I'm not sure He's bringing dessert, but He will bring your just desserts if you are not saved.

Don't be left behind. Right now, Jesus is seeking a relationship with you. Respond to Him before it's too late.

If you're ready to repent and receive Christ right now, you could pray this prayer.

Lord, I confess I'm a sinner and I fall way short of Your standards. Thank you for paying the price for my sins and for dying on the cross as my substitute. I believe You rose again on the third day, and I affirm that You will return one day. I want to be ready for that, so now I repent from the way that I've been living and receive You into my life. Please forgive me for all my sins and make me into the person you want me to be. As best as I know how, I surrender all I am and all I have to You. If there's anything in my life You don't like, please get rid of it, and help me to live for You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus IS coming again.

Are you ready ... or not?

# Going Deeper

1. If Christ were to come back right now, would you rejoice or want to run and hide?
2. What's the name of an unsaved person you will pray for on a regular basis?
3. Will you determine to go through each day seeking the prompting of the Holy Spirit to enable you to share the gospel with someone?
4. What would you do differently right now if you knew for certain Jesus was returning at 8:00 tonight?

If you were encouraged by this booklet,  
please email our office at [info@keepbelieving.com](mailto:info@keepbelieving.com)  
and ask how you can receive additional copies.

This booklet is a gift to you from  
Keep Believing Ministries.

We serve local churches  
and the body of Christ worldwide  
by providing free biblical resources  
to equip pastors, train the next  
generation, win the lost, and  
encourage Christians  
to keep believing in Jesus.

We would love to hear from you.

Please let us know how we can  
pray for you and your family.

You can contact us at:  
Keep Believing Ministries  
P. O. Box 257  
Elmhurst, IL 60126

Email:  
[info@keepbelieving.com](mailto:info@keepbelieving.com)

You can find us on the Internet at:  
[www.KeepBelieving.com](http://www.KeepBelieving.com).



P.O. Box 257  
Elmhurst, Illinois 60126