

Pursuing God—A Seeker's Guide

Chapter Six *A Thief in the Night*

1. Before we read this chapter, list quickly several words or phrases that could substitute for the word, “sudden.”
2. I used to travel in the former Eastern European countries when they were under the control of Communist dictators. Some of my Christian friends had spent time in prison for their faith. Their stories were similar. All of a sudden armed police would appear at their door and then whisk them away to a mock trial and prison sentence. Without any preparation, everything in their life changed, that is, everything but their relationship with Christ. Some of your friends, or even you yourself, may have had a “sudden” change enter into your life. If so, please tell the group about it. What kind of emotion does the word, “suddenly,” stir up in you? Why do you find it easy or hard to deal with sudden reversals?
3. Please read chapter six aloud.
4. The apostle Paul told his disciples that Christ would come again. Here is just one place he talked about that unusual future event.

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

What do you think is the point of using the term “twinkling of an eye”? Who do you think he is specifically talking about when he says that the dead will be raised and all of us will be changed?

5. The coming of the Lord will not be such a positive thing for those who are not believers in Christ. Read what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3.

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

Perhaps you live with a sense of peace and safety. That is, you feel comfortable and safe, with little conflict or trouble in your life at present. It is at just such a time that Christ will come. And if a person is not right with God, the “sudden destruction” will enter in right at this point. You will not escape. Do you think this is fair in the case of people you know? Explain your answers.

6. There may be several truths that Paul wishes to make known by using the words, "thief in the night." Please name some.

7. How should a believer think about all of this? Would that believer have any regrets if he or she were suddenly taken away to be with Christ? Name any regrets, and also name as many benefits as you can.

8. Have you ever thought that you will be able to change things in your relationship with Christ just before you die or Christ comes? Forget it. It probably won't happen. There are two reasons. First, if you are headed in the wrong direction, loving your independence from Christ and pursuing your own desires, then most likely you will have less real desire to become a Christian *then* than you do *now*. Secondly, it is reasonable to think that you may well not have any time at all for considering a change in your life. Death may be sudden or slow, granted. In the later case, you may have some time to think, it is true. But you may be addled because of medicine, or so concerned with the next breath that you cannot think. If a fatal calamity comes, or if the second coming of Christ happens first, you have zero time to think things over. When it happens, it happens.

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being "totally sure,") how ready are you for Christ to come back, and why do you feel that way? Please be honest. *[Leader, unless the group is very small you may wish to have the persons in the group answer this one with only one other person. Stress honesty.]*

9. Finally, let's hear from the leader of the group, or your mentor, about how he or she feels about the suddenness of Christ's future coming.

For next week: please read chapter seven.