

SLEEPWALKING
BIG IDEA: Christians are to be awake and alert when Jesus returns.
DATE: Wednesday, October 28 and Sunday, November 1, 2026
SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (CSB)

OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever experienced sleepwalking? Or know someone who did? What was it like? What happened?

There are some funny stories of people sleepwalking – from cooking meals, to vacuuming the whole house (with an unplugged vacuum), to driving to the convenience store in pajamas and purchasing weird items!

Paul likens the unbelievers to those who are in essence sleepwalking through life. They are spiritually indifferent. Believers, on the other hand, were to be alert and active, not docile and passive.

SETTING THE STAGE

1 Thessalonians 5 continues Paul's teaching on Christ's return. Whereas 4:13–18 deal with the fate of deceased Christians at Christ's return, these verses deal with the fate of living Christians at the same end-time event. Paul reminds them that the day of the Lord will be as unexpected as that of a thief in the night, yet believers need not fear, because the ultimate destiny of the Thessalonian believers rests not in their own work but in God's. His aim in discussing the end times is not to *predict* but to *pastor* since the proper preparation for the coming day of the Lord is *service* rather than *speculation*.

Jesus Christ both unites and divides. Those who have trusted Him as Savior are united in Christ as God's children. When Jesus Christ returns in the air, we shall be "caught up together" (1 Thess. 4:17) never to be separated again. But Christ is also a divider. Faith in Jesus Christ not only unites us to other believers, it also separates us spiritually from the rest of the world. There is a difference between believers who are looking for the Lord's return and the people of the world; it is this theme that Paul developed in this section. His purpose was to encourage believers to live holy lives in the midst of their pagan surroundings. He did this by pointing out the contrasts between believers and unbelievers. And he wanted to be sure the believers were awake and alert.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (CSB)

About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. [2]For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. [3]When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. [4]But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief. [5]For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. [6]So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. [7]For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. [8]But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. [9]For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10]who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. [11]Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

DISCUSSION

KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE
READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

From the Commentary: Three phrases from these verses need careful consideration.
"Times and seasons." This phrase is found only three times in the Bible and refers primarily to God's plans for Israel. God has a definite plan for the nations of the world and Israel is the key nation. God has ordained times and seasons for the nations on earth, particularly Israel, and all of this will culminate in a terrible time called "the day of the Lord."

"The day of the Lord." In the Bible, the word day can refer to a twenty-four-hour period or to a longer time during which God accomplishes some special purpose. The *day of the Lord* is that time when God will judge the world and punish the nations. At the same time, God will prepare Israel for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom.

"Thief in the night." Our Lord used this image in His own teaching. It describes the suddenness and the surprise involved in the coming of the day of the Lord. In Revelation 3:3; 16:15, He used this image to warn believers not to be caught napping. Since we do not know when the Lord will return for His people, we must live in a constant attitude of watching and waiting, while we are busy working and witnessing.

Have you ever had someone break into your home or car? How did that affect you? Why did Jesus and Paul pick this very specific image to describe the day of the Lord?

Now we can put these three concepts together and discover what Paul wanted to teach his troubled friends in Thessalonica. He had already told them about the coming of Christ for the church, the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. He had told them that there would be a period of intense suffering and tribulation on the earth following this rapture of the church. These "times and seasons" that relate to Israel and the nations do not apply to the church or affect the

truth of the Lord's coming for the church. He many come at any time, and this will usher in the day of the Lord. Paul explained more about the day of the Lord in his second letter. His emphasis here was simply that the believers were "in the know," while the unbelievers were living in ignorance of God's plan. The suddenness of these events will reveal to the world its ignorance of divine truth.

ASK: What do the phrases *times and seasons, the day of the Lord* and *thief in the night* reveal about the Thessalonian church's challenges and obstacles? How is each of these phrases important to us today?

EXPECTANCY AND SURPRISE
READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:3-5

From the Commentary: The unsaved world will be enjoying a time of false peace and security just before these cataclysmic events occur. Note carefully the contrast between "they" and "you" (or "us") throughout this entire section, "they" referring to the unsaved. *They* will say, "Peace and security!" but *we* will say, "Jesus is coming, and judgement is coming!"

The world is caught by surprise because men will not hear God's Word or heed God's warning. God warned that the flood was coming, yet only eight people believed and were saved. Lot warned his family that the city would be destroyed, but they would not listen. Jesus warned His generation that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and this warning enabled believers to escape; but many others perished in the siege.

What is significant about the world being "caught by surprise" in these events, and in the end-time to come? How does this truth speak to those who have tried to predict specific events of the end-time? Why is it so important to our faith that we don't know the day and time of future events? (How does that grow our faith?)

There is a difference between being ready to go to heaven and being ready to meet the Lord. Anyone who has sincerely trusted Christ for salvation is ready to go to heaven. Christ's sacrifice on the cross has taken care of that. But to be ready to meet the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ is quite another matter. Scripture indicates that some believers will not be happy to see Jesus Christ! Note: the judgment seat of Christ must not be confused with the white throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15. You may contrast these two important events as follows:

Judgment Seat of Christ	White Throne Judgment
Only believers	Only unbelievers
Immediately after the rapture	After the thousand-year kingdom
Determines rewards for service	Determines amount of judgment

What's the difference between being ready for Heaven vs. being ready for the judgment seat of Christ?

How does living in expectation of Jesus' return make life better for believers? What are the practical results of living expectantly?

SOBERNESS AND DRUNKENNESS
READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

When you think of living soberly what comes to mind?

To be sober minded means to be alert, to live with your eyes open, to be sane and steady. To make the contrast more vivid, Paul pictured two groups of people: One group was drunk and asleep, while the other group was awake and alert. Danger was coming, but the drunken sleepers were unaware of it. The alert crowd was ready and unafraid.

Write DAY and NIGHT on the board. **ASK**: *What are some things you can only do in the light of the day? What are some things you only do in the dark?*

According to these verses what are characteristics of people of the day vs. people of the night? Record them on the board. Answers may include:

DAY	NIGHT
light	darkness
awake	asleep
sober	drunk
self-controlled	impure
alert	complacent
salvation	wrath
in the know	ignorant
believers	unbelievers

Since we are "sons of the day," we should not live as those who belong to the darkness. *"The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires."* (Romans 13:12-13 CSB).

In other words, because "the day" is approaching, it is time to wake up, clean up, and dress up. And when we dress up, we had better put on "the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8). Only the "armor of light" will adequately protect us in these last days before our Lord returns.

The sober-minded believer has a calm, sane outlook on life. He is not complacent, but neither is he frustrated and afraid. He hears the tragic news of the day, yet he does not lose heart. He experiences the difficulties of life, but he does not give up. He knows his future is secure in God's hands, so he lives each day creatively, calmly, and obediently.

Do you agree that outlook determines outcome? How does it apply to this message from Paul? What does it mean to be a "sober-minded believer"? Where does passion for faith come into that mind-set?

SALVATION AND JUDGMENT

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

From the Commentary: Believers do not have to fear future judgment because it is not part of God's appointed plan for us. Will Christians go through the day of the Lord, that awful period of judgment that God will end on the earth? Verses like 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9 seem to support they will not. Christians have always gone through tribulation, since this is a part of dedicated Christian living. But it seems they will not go through *the* tribulation that is appointed for the

godless world. Either way, committed Christians have taken both sides of the issue. Most scholars believe not.

What are the implications for believers if the church is raptured to heaven prior to the tribulation period? What are the implications if the tribulation occurs first?

What are the privileges of being "in the know" with God's plans for the end of the world as we know them? What are the responsibilities?

ASK: How does Paul sum up the point he is making (and this lesson)? (v. 11).

(In the end, whether Jesus returns before or after the tribulation, the main point is we are to be ready and stay ready. Don't be caught sleepwalking through life. Be awake and alert and ready for the second coming. *How do we do that?* We press on together and encourage one another. Build each other up – don't tear each other down. Being in Christian community is so important.)

How are you actively encouraging and building up other Christians? *(Could be asked rhetorically.)*

GOING FORWARD

Don't be caught sleepwalking through life. Be awake and alert and ready for the second coming.
PRAY: Close by praying 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 over your group:

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And may your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will do it." (1 Thess. 5:23-24)

Wiersbe, Warren. *Be Ready: Living in Light of Christ's Return.* David C. Cook, ©1979
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