

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

September 25, 2022



INTRODUCTION

What is the best team you've ever been on (athletic team, theater cast, musical group, academic team, service group, etc.)?

What made it so great?

Have you ever been part of a team that didn't work together so well? Why was that group ineffective?

Do you think of Christianity as a team event? Why or why not?

What are some reasons why we might not partner together with other believers to do what God is calling us to do?

We live in a culture that is focused on individualism. And there is definitely an aspect of that in the Christian life—we each make an individual decision to follow Christ or reject Him. But once we make that decision, we join with all the rest of the people in the world who follow Christ. God has made it so that, together, we make up one body. Individual members of the body of Christ work together for the health of the whole. If we don't do that, we miss out on the bigger picture of what God has for us.

DISCUSSION

>>>ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-7.

If you are a Christian, you are different than the people Paul wrote about in verse 3 who will be swept away in judgment at Jesus's return. The timing of Jesus's coming might be surprising, but it won't be like a thief breaking into your house in the middle of the night.

What will be different for believers when Jesus comes?

What are the day and night activities described in these verses?

What does sleep represent in this passage?

What has made us children of the light (v. 5)? How should that affect the way we live?

**How can you know if you're "awake"?
If you don't think you are, what can you do to wake up?**

It shouldn't be a surprise to any of us that people who are not Christians sin in various ways. We should be awake to that fact and awake to our own need to steer clear of the sinful temptations we face. We should be different, not only in our eternal destination, but also in our earthly thoughts, words, and behavior. That's because we belong to Jesus and we're preparing for His return. Our actions should reflect spiritual alertness, not spiritual laziness.

>>>ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:8-11.

Roman soldiers were instantly recognized by their breastplates and helmets.

What traits did Paul say should make a follower of Christ instantly recognizable?

**Who do you know whose faith in Christ is like that—instantly recognizable?
What makes that the case?**

How does that make you feel: encouraged, confused, overwhelmed, hopeless, happy for them, or something else? Why?

How do we prepare for the spiritual battle of light versus darkness?

One of the main reasons we need to be part of a group is to encourage one another in our faith. We all face temptations, and we're all in this together to walk faithfully with Christ.

What is one of the goals of encouragement, based on 1 Thessalonians 5:11?

What does the opposite of that look like?

It's common for teenagers to tear each other down. Honestly, that feels more natural to most of us than saying kind things. But one of the privileges we have as Christians is to invest in each other's lives and add to them. We get to help each other act in godly ways. Paul said the Thessalonians were already doing this; he just didn't want them to give up.

How are your close relationships encouraging to you?

How do you like to receive encouragement—through words or actions?

How do you like to give encouragement?

Encouragement doesn't always come naturally. We tend to be selfish—focused on our own needs and problems instead of the needs of others. We break out of this pattern by regularly considering others and seeking to encourage them.

GOING DEEPER

>>>READ EPHESIANS 4:29.

What does this verse teach you about your spiritual “team”?

Why are words so important?

>>>READ HEBREWS 10:24-25.

What do these verses teach you to do to encourage other believers?

Why is showing up and participating together so important?

APPLICATION

Which is easier or more natural for you—be a part of a team related to interests like athletics or music, or be a part of the team of believers here at Summit? Why?

As a group, how are we doing at being an effective team and encouraging each other? How can we do better?

One way we “stay awake” spiritually is through relationships where there is accountability.

Do you have people who hold you accountable to follow Jesus well? If so, how is that going? If not, who might be someone you can have that type of relationship with?

PRAYER

Thank God for putting you on His team. Ask Him to help you encourage other believers and receive encouragement, too. Invite Him to use those relationships to help make you someone others see as an obvious follower of Jesus.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians:

October 2, 2022 --- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

COMMENTARY

1 Thessalonians 5:4. Paul then began to discuss the implications of Christ's return for the believer before His great coming. To the unbeliever, Jesus will come like a thief in the night, but for the believer, His return will come as no surprise, nor will He come like a robber who destroys the owner's possessions. Those who believe are not in darkness. In the Bible, darkness typically refers to moral or spiritual blindness, disobedience, or separation. This sphere of darkness is where the unbelieving world lives. Paul's contrast is sharp: you (the Thessalonians and all believers) are not living in unbelief, spiritual darkness, moral confusion: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13). For believers, Christ's coming is nothing to fear.

5:5. Christians are all sons of the light ... sons of the day. Having just said what Christians are not, Paul asserted what they are. The contrast is bold and unmistakable. Unlike an unbeliever, a Christian is in relationship with the light, with God and Christ. Not only that, but the Christian lives in moral and spiritual enlightenment. His life and understanding are affected by his faith in Christ. To draw the contrast with bold strokes, Paul again stated, we do not belong to the night or to the darkness. There can be no confusion. The Christian is different in life and destiny from the unbeliever.

5:6. Now the reasonable conclusion: Being in the light, having been rescued from the darkness, looking to a future with God, not being subject to his wrath—these should make a difference in how we live. Paul urged them to not be like others, who are asleep. The comparison is most likely to the unbeliever. Falling asleep is a picture of what can happen to us spiritually, ethically, or morally if we are not watchful. We simply drift off. Drowsiness begins, we become comfortable, our hearts become insensitive. Spiritual drowsiness slowly paralyzes the spirit. The person who was once vibrant and wide awake in following Christ can become lethargic and lazy about issues of the spirit.

As you drive down the road and your eyelids become heavy, it is best to open a window, turn up the radio, or pull over for a rest. Spiritually, at the first sign of sleepiness, when church becomes a bit boring, or prayer drops off a bit and you do not seem to care as much—make some corrections. At the very least, ask God to renew your heart, open your spirit to His renewing work, and find

accountability with another believer. Falling asleep at the wheel can have disastrous results; so can falling asleep spiritually. We are to be alert and self-controlled. To be alert is the opposite of being asleep. An alert person is aware, sensitive to life around him, and morally and spiritually awake.

5:7. Paul reflected back to his analogy of night and day. He had already defined those outside of Christ as being of the night, and those whose faith is in Christ as being of the day (v. 5). Remembering that Christians are of the day, he emphasized the need for readiness and alertness by reminding the readers that sleepiness and drunkenness belong to habits of the night. These behaviors should not characterize those of us who are of the day.

5:8. Paul then turned to one of his favorite metaphors—armor (Eph. 6:13-17)—to describe the readiness, seriousness, and combatant qualities of a Christian. We are to have on the breastplate of faith and love. These two virtues, like the breastplate, protect the heart. Faith guards it within, keeping us in close relationship with Christ. Love guards our hearts in our outward behavior toward others, keeping us pure and expressive of the spiritual vitality within. Along with this, we are to keep on the helmet of the hope of salvation. Our head is the control center of our life; it processes our thoughts and emotions; it analyzes life. The certainty of our salvation, when Christ comes for us (as described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:14-17), protects our thinking from being overwhelmed by the evil around us. Hope is certainty, not wishful thinking. Christ will come and we shall live with him forever. This reality guards us in times of persecution, temptation, weariness, and all other dangers that come from living in a hostile environment.

5:9. God has appointed us to salvation, not wrath. This is a continuation in thought from verse 8. Our salvation is certain; there can be no wavering on the issue. God appointed, or destined, us to gain salvation. He has offered us the means to grace, and we must exercise determined and persevering faith to see salvation realized in fullness when Christ appears. In the same way, God did not appoint, or destined, us to suffer His wrath. Wrath is the judgment of God upon unbelief. For the Christian, there is no fear of Christ's appearing: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

5:10. According to Paul, the life of the believer is secure, determined, safe in the hands of God. Christ died so that whether "awake or asleep, we may live together with Him." Paul's use of the "asleep" metaphor goes back to its usage in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, referring to death, not moral failure as in 5:6-7. Christians who die, "sleep" in the sense that it is not the end. One day the trumpet of God will arouse the dead to bodily transformation.

5:11. This assurance of salvation, of transformation into the image of Christ, should encourage us. As we are encouraged, we must continually talk about it

and remind one another of our future, so that we do not grow weary or lose heart in the spiritual battles that rage. Every Christian has a responsibility to encourage others in the faith. In an age that is prone to criticism and fault-finding, the same fault-finding attitude can creep into the church. It can become natural to talk about others or critique their performance instead of examining our own hearts or encouraging others toward godliness. While encouragement inspires us to keep on track spiritually, building each other up deals with investing in others. We should add to other people in such a way that they will be spiritually stronger. In this way, we encourage maturity and fortification of character. We need to look upon all persons as those for whom Christ died. They are eternal soul-spirits just as valuable as we are. We have a responsibility to encourage them to remain faithful and growing until the end.