

The Books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 7: The Day of the Lord: Awake and Sober

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

What is doctrinally at stake in this passage is the right understanding of the day of the Lord and the believer's posture toward it. Paul teaches that the day comes suddenly and certainly, "like a thief in the night," and that the proper response is readiness and sobriety, not the calculation of dates or seasons. This guards a treasured conviction in our churches: that Christ's return is certain and its timing unknown, so that speculation and date-setting are out of place, and watchful, holy living is the only fitting response. The passage also grounds the believer's assurance in God's gracious purpose and in the substitutionary death of Christ, while its very call to stay awake shows that this assurance belongs to those who keep watching and believing, not to the presumptuous.

At the same time, this passage is deeply formational. It searches whether we are spiritually awake or asleep, alert or numbed by the world, and it arms us with faith, love, and hope. It comforts us with the assurance that whether we are alive or have died when Christ comes, we will live with Him. The aim is to wake students from spiritual drowsiness, to clothe them in the armor of faith, love, and hope, and to steady them in the assurance of Christ's finished work.

So aim at both targets. Ground students in the certainty of Christ's coming and the futility of date-setting, and stir them toward watchful, sober, hopeful living. Hold assurance and vigilance together, exactly as Paul does, and send students out to encourage and build up one another.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," arriving suddenly when people say "peace and security" (vv. 2-3). What does this teach about the certainty and the hidden timing of that day, and why does it make date-setting and prediction miss Paul's whole point?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the thief image and let it do its work. A thief's whole strategy depends on surprise; he comes when no one expects him. By comparing the day of the Lord to a thief, Paul teaches two things at once: the day is certain (the thief really comes) and its timing is hidden (no one knows the night). Help students hold both truths together.

Address the phrase “peace and security.” This is the slogan of a world that has dismissed the thought of judgment, lulled into believing that life will simply continue as it always has. For such people, the day comes as “sudden destruction,” inescapable as labor pains. The false peace of the world is precisely what makes the day so devastating when it arrives.

Now draw the conclusion Paul draws, and that our churches hold firmly: because the timing is deliberately hidden, date-setting and prediction miss the entire point. Paul says they have no need for anyone to write about “times and seasons.” Every attempt to calculate the day contradicts the very nature of the day as Jesus taught it (Matthew 24:36, 44). The point is not to know when, but to be ready always.

Apply it. Help students see that the energy some spend trying to predict the end is energy Scripture redirects toward readiness. We cannot know the day; we can be found awake. That is the whole burden of the passage.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The certainty of Christ’s coming joined to the hidden timing of it (Matthew 24:36)
- The day of the Lord as sudden and inescapable for the unprepared (2 Peter 3:10)
- The futility and error of date-setting and prediction
- “Peace and security” as the false confidence of a world ignoring judgment
- Readiness, not calculation, as the fitting response to Christ’s return (Matthew 24:44)

Discussion Prompts

- What two things does the thief image teach about the day of the Lord?
- Why does date-setting contradict the very nature of that day?
- What is the difference between predicting the day and being ready for it?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where are you tempted to settle into a comfortable “peace and security,” living as though this world is all there is? What would it look like to live with the reality of the Lord’s coming honestly in view?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the slogan “peace and security” into the student’s own life. The temptation is not only for unbelievers; Christians too can drift into a practical materialism that lives as though this world were all there is, the coming of Christ a distant abstraction.

Help students notice the symptoms: lives so absorbed in comfort, career, and entertainment that eternity rarely crosses the mind; decisions made with no reference to the Lord’s return; a

faith that functions on Sundays but does not shape Monday. This is the believer's version of "peace and security."

Encourage a concrete reorientation. Living with Christ's coming in view does not mean anxiety or withdrawal from ordinary life; it means doing ordinary life in light of eternity, holding things loosely, keeping accounts short, and investing in what lasts. Invite students to name one way they could live more wakefully.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of practical materialism that ignores eternity
- Living ordinary life in light of Christ's certain return (Colossians 3:1-4)
- Holding the things of this world loosely
- Watchfulness without anxiety or withdrawal

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to live as though this world is all there is?
- What would living with Christ's coming honestly in view look like for you?
- How can watchfulness avoid becoming either anxiety or withdrawal?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul tells the believers, "you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day" (vv. 4-5). What does this teach about the believer's identity, and why need that day not catch God's people off guard?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus this question on the believer's identity. Paul shifts decisively: "But you are not in darkness... you are all children of light, children of the day." The reason the day need not surprise believers is not that they have inside information about timing, but that they belong to a different realm altogether. They are people of the day, so the day cannot ambush them.

Help students grasp this identity language. To be a "child of light" or "of the day" is to belong to God's realm of truth and righteousness, in contrast to the darkness of a world asleep in sin. This is who believers are by grace, and it carries an implied call to live accordingly.

Make the connection Paul makes: because of who we are, we live awake. Identity grounds behavior. We do not stay alert in order to become children of light; we stay alert because we already are. The indicative (you are light) grounds the imperative (so walk as light).

Apply it. The day of the Lord is terror for those in darkness but homecoming for the children of light. Believers can face the coming of Christ not with dread but with the readiness of those who belong to Him. Help students rest in and live out this identity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer's identity as a child of light, belonging to God's realm (Ephesians 5:8)
- Identity grounding behavior: we live as light because we are light
- The day of the Lord as homecoming for believers, not terror
- The contrast between the realm of light and the darkness of a sleeping world

Discussion Prompts

- Why need the day of the Lord not surprise God's people?
- How does belonging to the day shape how we live now?
- What is the difference between facing Christ's coming as dread and as homecoming?

Question 4

Student Question:

What does it mean for you, practically, to live as a "child of light" in your home, your workplace, and your private moments? Where does that identity most need to shape your behavior?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question translates the identity of "child of light" into concrete behavior in specific settings. The aim is to keep identity from staying abstract by anchoring it in real life.

Help students examine the three arenas the question names. At home, does our light shine in patience and love, or do we save our best selves for outsiders? At work, do we shine in integrity and diligence? In private, when no one is watching, do we still walk as children of light, or does the darkness creep back in?

Encourage honesty about the gap between our identity and our practice, and one step to close it. Living as light is not perfection but a consistent direction, letting who we are in Christ govern every room of our lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living out our identity as light in every sphere of life
- Consistency between public and private conduct
- Integrity when no one is watching
- Letting identity in Christ govern ordinary behavior

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your identity as a child of light most need to shape your behavior?
- Is there a gap between who you are in Christ and how you live in private?
- What is one step toward greater consistency this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul urges believers to “keep awake and be sober,” putting on “the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” (vv. 6–8). What do spiritual alertness and sobriety look like, and how do faith, love, and hope actually protect us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus this question on the twin commands to “keep awake and be sober” and on the armor Paul prescribes. Spiritual wakefulness is alertness to spiritual realities, to God, to temptation, to the coming of Christ, in contrast to the world’s spiritual sleep. Sobriety is clear-headedness and self-control, in contrast to the world’s intoxication with sin and distraction.

Unpack the armor. Paul gives the believer a breastplate of faith and love and a helmet that is the hope of salvation. These are the same three graces that opened the letter (faith, love, hope). They are not decorations but protection. Faith guards the heart by trusting God; love guards it by binding us to others in self-giving; hope guards the mind by keeping our eyes on the salvation to come.

Help students see how these protect against spiritual sleep. A heart full of faith and love and a mind anchored in hope is not easily lulled into the world’s drowsiness or ambushed by despair. The armor keeps us awake and standing. Connect this to the fuller armor of Ephesians 6.

Apply it. Spiritual alertness is not constant intensity but a steady, clothed readiness, faith trusting, love serving, hope expecting. Encourage students to see these graces as daily protection to be deliberately put on.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual wakefulness and sobriety versus the world’s spiritual sleep and intoxication (Romans 13:11–14)
- Faith, love, and hope as protective armor for the believer (Ephesians 6:13–17)
- The recurring triad of faith, hope, and love as the shape of Christian life
- Daily, deliberate readiness rather than constant intensity or anxiety

Discussion Prompts

- What do spiritual wakefulness and sobriety look like in practice?
- How do faith, love, and hope actually protect us?
- How is staying alert different from living in constant anxiety?

Question 6

Student Question:

Which piece of the armor, faith, love, or hope, feels weakest in you right now, and how might its weakness be leaving you spiritually exposed? What would strengthening it look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to assess which of the three graces is weakest in them and where that weakness leaves them exposed. The aim is practical self-knowledge that leads to growth.

Help students diagnose honestly. A weak faith leaves the heart vulnerable to fear and doubt. A weak love leaves it vulnerable to selfishness and isolation. A weak hope leaves the mind vulnerable to discouragement and the world's despair. Each gap is a chink in the armor.

Then move to strengthening. Faith grows through the word and remembering God's faithfulness; love grows through deliberate service; hope grows through fixing the mind on Christ's coming and the salvation to come. Encourage one concrete practice to reinforce the weakest piece.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest self-assessment of faith, love, and hope
- Recognizing where spiritual weakness leaves us exposed
- Practical means of strengthening each grace
- Cooperating with God to put on the armor daily

Discussion Prompts

- Which piece of the armor feels weakest in you right now?
- How might that weakness be leaving you spiritually exposed?
- What is one practice that would strengthen it this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 9). What does this teach about God's gracious purpose for His people and about the true basis of a believer's assurance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question opens one of the most assuring statements in the letter, and it must be handled with care to keep both its comfort and its context. Paul says, "God has not destined us for

wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Help students hear the comfort: God’s gracious purpose for His people is not condemnation but salvation. Those who belong to Christ need not dread the coming day as a day of wrath.

Be clear about the basis of this assurance: it is “through our Lord Jesus Christ,” not through our own merit. Our confidence rests on what Christ has done, His death for us (which Paul states in the next verse), not on our performance. This is genuine, solid assurance grounded in the gospel.

At the same time, guard against two distortions. This verse does not teach an unconditional decree that saves some regardless of their response, nor does it teach that a believer is secure no matter how they live. Notice that this very passage is one long call to stay awake, be sober, and put on the armor. The assurance of salvation belongs to those who are in Christ and who keep watching and believing. God’s gracious purpose and our continued faith are not in competition; the same God who appointed us to salvation calls us to live as people of the day. Assurance fuels vigilance; it does not replace it.

Apply it pastorally. Help students rest in God’s gracious purpose without presuming on it. We can have real confidence, because our salvation rests on Christ, and we keep that confidence by continuing in faith, love, and hope. This is the healthy middle between anxious doubt and careless presumption.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s gracious purpose for His people: salvation, not wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9)
- Assurance grounded in Christ’s work, not our merit (Romans 5:9)
- A caution against reading this as an unconditional decree that bypasses our response
- Assurance held together with the call to keep watching and believing, not careless presumption
- The healthy middle between anxious doubt and presumption

Discussion Prompts

- On what does Paul base the believer’s assurance in this verse?
- How does this assurance avoid both anxious doubt and careless presumption?
- Why is it significant that this assurance sits inside a call to stay awake?

Question 8

Student Question:

How does the assurance that God has appointed His people for salvation, not wrath, give you confidence without making you careless? How do you hold genuine assurance and genuine watchfulness together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the tension that runs through the passage: how to hold assurance and watchfulness together. Many believers swing to one extreme, either anxious uncertainty about their standing, or a careless presumption that takes grace for granted.

Help students see that Paul holds both. He gives strong assurance (not destined for wrath) and strong exhortation (stay awake) in the same breath, with no sense of contradiction. The assurance that we belong to Christ is exactly what frees us to live alert and holy, not anxious or lazy.

Encourage students to identify which way they tend to lean and how the balance of this passage corrects them. Those prone to anxiety can rest more in Christ's finished work; those prone to presumption can take more seriously the call to stay awake. The goal is confident, watchful faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding genuine assurance and genuine watchfulness together
- Resting in Christ's work while taking the call to holiness seriously
- Recognizing our tendency toward either anxiety or presumption
- Confident, alert faith as the healthy posture

Discussion Prompts

- Do you lean more toward anxious doubt or careless presumption?
- How does this passage correct your particular tendency?
- What would confident, watchful faith look like for you?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says Christ “died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him” (v. 10). What does this verse teach about what Christ’s death secures for us, and how does it fuel both our readiness now and our comfort in the face of death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal climax of the lesson, and it brings us to the heart of the gospel: Christ “died for us.” Help students dwell on the substitutionary love in these words. The reason God has not destined us for wrath is that Christ bore it in our place. Our readiness and our assurance both flow from His cross.

Unpack the purpose clause: He died for us “so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” In this context, awake and asleep most likely mean alive and dead. Paul is saying

that whether Christ returns while we are still living or after we have died, the outcome is the same: we will live with Him. The cross secures our life with Christ on either side of the grave.

Connect this back to chapter 4. The grieving Thessalonians feared death would cost their loved ones the promise. Paul again assures them: Christ's death guarantees that death cannot separate His people from Him. Whether awake or asleep when He comes, we live with Him. This is the deep comfort beneath the call to readiness.

Show how this fuels both readiness and comfort. Because Christ died to make us His, we live awake and ready now, not to earn His love but in response to it. And because His death secures our life with Him beyond the grave, we face death itself without fear. The cross is the engine of both vigilance and peace.

Bring it home. Everything in this passage, the warning, the identity, the armor, the assurance, rests finally on a Savior who died for us. Help students fix their confidence there and let it produce in them both wakeful holiness and settled comfort.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The substitutionary death of Christ as the ground of our salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:10; Romans 5:8)
- Christ's death securing life with Him for believers whether living or dead when He returns
- The cross as the basis of both our readiness now and our comfort in death
- Union with Christ that death cannot break (Romans 8:38–39)
- Obedient watchfulness as a response to grace, not a means of earning it

Discussion Prompts

- What does Christ's death secure for us according to this verse?
- How does the cross fuel both readiness now and comfort in the face of death?
- Why can believers face death without fear of separation from Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Paul ends, "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up" (v. 11). Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to wake up spiritually, to rest in His finished work, or to build up another believer, and what your first step will be.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone returns to Paul's application: "encourage one another and build one another up." The truths of this passage are meant to be shared, used to wake, steady, and strengthen the body. Help students choose one concrete response.

Steer them toward specifics: a area of spiritual drowsiness to wake from, a settled resting in Christ's finished work, or a deliberate act of building up another believer. The passage moves from doctrine to mutual encouragement, and so should the students.

Close the lesson where Paul closes his thought, in the building up of the body. Send students out awake, armored in faith, love, and hope, assured by the cross, and ready to strengthen one another as they await the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Truth applied to mutual encouragement and edification (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Waking from spiritual drowsiness in specific areas
- Resting in Christ's finished work
- Building up other believers as a shared calling

Discussion Prompts

- How is the Spirit calling you to wake up or to rest in Christ's work?
- Who could you build up this week, and how?
- What is your first step of response?