



I THESSALONIANS

YOU MUST BE PREPARED

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-28

MAIN IDEA

Jesus's return will come quickly, so believers should live in a state of readiness. We do this by holding on to what is good, as we pursue God's will in our lives.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

There are good gift givers and there are great gift givers. You probably have some of each in your life. Think about one of the best gifts you've received. Often when you receive something special, you want to give in return, even if it can't measure up to what you received. Today, we are studying a passage in a letter from Paul where he told believers to keep giving to others because we have been given salvation through Jesus. When we build up others in the faith, it encourages us also. It's the gift that keeps on giving!

- **What is one of your favorite gifts you've received?**
- **How did you feel and respond when you received the gift?**

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8.

Paul had taught the Thessalonian Christians well regarding prophetic things and the second coming. Here he reinforced the suddenness of Jesus's return and likened it to a thief in the night or labor pains. Although you might prepare for or protect against these events, they occur without warning and can catch you off guard.

- **What does Paul's imagery teach you about the return of Jesus?**

The day of the Lord to the second coming that will happen in God's time not man's. Those who have rejected the things of Christ will experience a devastating wake-up call on that day. The world lulls people into a false sense of security as they go about their lives, ignoring spiritual matters. Paul reminded of the urgency of being prepared and aware of Christ's return.

- **What are some ways people ignore the urgency of spiritual realities today? How are we tempted to do this?**

At Jesus's return, no peace and safety will be found in things of the world. But for His followers, the day Jesus comes back will be a day of peace and safety. His return will mark His ultimate victory that will be impossible to resist or deny.

- **What are ways we can live now to prepare for Jesus's future return?**

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to live up to who God made them to be. He used light and darkness to emphasize the difference between living as a child of God and living as the world. Calling someone a “son” of something means that person is characterized by that thing. We are to live our lives characterized by faith in Jesus. We are children of the day and when we live in God’s light, we will be ready for the return of Jesus.

- **What are some ways we seek to live in God’s light each day?**

Continuing his encouragement to be ready for the second coming, Paul elaborated on what they could do in the waiting. He said to stay awake and be self-controlled. This alertness pertains to spiritual matters and is not a stance against physical rest. The reason “sleep” is to be avoided is because it is tied to things like ignorance and inactivity in spiritual matters.

- **What do you need to be more alert or self-controlled about?**

Spiritual alertness and spiritual sleep are opposites, just as being drunk or sober are. We are challenged to equip ourselves like soldiers so that we can be victorious in the battles that come against us. The imagery Paul used of spiritual armor is like the passage in Ephesians 6. We are equipped by God so we can live in faith.

- **What are some ways we seek to be equipped with God’s “armor” each day?**
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> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11.

Because of the cross, believers no longer face the wrath of God but instead receive salvation through Jesus. God has obtained for us what we don't deserve by doing what we could not do for ourselves.

- **How does the transforming power of the gospel “wake us up” to a new way of living each day with God?**

Once you trust Jesus as Savior, you can't be separated from Him and will live with Him forever. The Thessalonians faced a lot of suffering, struggles, and persecution. Paul gave them hope and encouraged them to continue in faith as they looked to the coming of Jesus. We are given the same charge and encouragement today.

- **How does this message provide hope and encouragement for you in hardship?**

Paul sought to lift up and encourage these believers and encouraged his readers to do the same. The Thessalonian believers were doing this well, and Paul exhorted them to continue. Through this ongoing mutual encouragement in Christ, we stay ready as we watch and wait for Jesus to return.

- **How can you encourage others in the faith? How have you experienced this encouragement from others?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.

First Thessalonians closes with instructions for all Christians. Every person must recognize the responsibility he or she has to exercise and display his or her faith as opportunities arise. When we obey God's Word and seek to live in a way that pleases Him, we will see and experience a difference in daily life.

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- **Why do we need instructions for living in a spiritually healthy manner?**

All of us are to honor and respect leaders in the body of believers. These verses describe leaders in three ways. Those who labor with you are leaders who stand out by their service. They get things done and lead by example in serving. Some leaders are “over” you in the Lord. Leaders in the church have a responsibility like a shepherd with his sheep. Other times leaders can be identified by their ability to and willingness to admonish the body. To admonish means to caution or reprove gently. We all need those who love us enough to point out where we can easily go wrong or places we need to adjust. All these actions are done in love and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the good of the body of Christ.

- **Who stands out to you as a leader in the ways Paul shared in these verses?**

Scripture is clear that we should honor godly leaders because of their service for the Lord. Paul also described things that all people in the church should be doing to minister to others. The result of this type of humble mutual service is peace. Peace within the body of Christ is crucial to the effectiveness of the ministry. How you minister to someone depends on the need of the moment, but patience and forgiveness are always important. When we love and esteem our leaders while putting away arguments and discord with others, we show the difference Christ makes in and through us.

- **How have you seen the impact peace within the church can make in its effectiveness in the world?**

Paul continued to exhort the church. We are told to rejoice always. This may seem impossible but it isn't. True joy is not rooted in circumstances but in God. Our circumstances will

change but our God never does. We are also encouraged to pray continually. We should live our days with an ongoing conversation flowing with God. This does not mean we continually operate with our heads bowed and eyes closed but that we have a heart posture in which we remain aware of God and seek to listen to and live for Him.

- **What are some ways you might pray continually in the normal patterns of your day?**

We are also told to give thanks in all circumstances. We can give thanks even when our situation is difficult because we can trust God even when we don't understand what is happening. When we live in alignment with God's will, we are better equipped to live in obedience.

- **Which is most challenge for you: rejoicing always, praying continually, or giving thanks in everything?**
- **How might you seek growth in this area?**

We quench the Spirit at work in us when we act, think, talk, and believe in ways that go against God's Word and will. We also grieve the Spirit of God when we resist Him, listen to the world, show halfhearted devotion, give into our flesh nature, seek glory for ourselves, or anything else that is not in sync with the Lord. We are to resist worldliness and love God's Word so that we can cling to what is good and recognize what is not from God.

- **If these are examples of grieving the Holy Spirit. What are the ways we live in cooperation with the Holy Spirit?**

As he wrapped up, Paul asked the believers in Thessalonica to pray for him. He also sent his greetings to the other Christians. In essence Paul reminded them they were his partners in ministry and an important part of all God was doing both in Thessalonica and everywhere the gospel advanced.

- **How is it encouraging to remember you are connected to ministry beyond your specific time and space?**
- **Who can you pray for and encourage in their ministry efforts this week?**

APPLICATION

- **Who can you tell about the promised return of Jesus?**
- **How can you encourage the leaders in your church this week?**
- **How can we be intentional about encouraging other believers around us?**

PRAY

Praise the Lord for the people He has placed in your life who encourage you. Thank Him for giving you ways to be prepared for the day of the Lord and live in the light of Christ.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS

Paul spent a very short time in the city of Thessalonica, but he was able to establish a church during his stay. He may have had little time to instruct the new converts, so it is not surprising that Paul wrote a letter to address some questions.

Author

No serious objections have been made to dispute that Paul was the author of 1 Thessalonians (1:1). The greeting also mentions Silvanus and Timothy. Sometimes Paul wrote from the team perspective, but he was the primary author (2:18; 3:2).

Background

About AD 50 the missionary team led by Paul and Silas (“Silvanus”) left Philippi and traveled westward on the Roman road known as the Via Egnatia. They proceeded toward Thessalonica—the strategic capital city of the Roman Province of Macedonia. Thessalonica was a large port city on the Aegean Sea in modern-day Greece, with a population of about two hundred thousand. The city was filled with pagan worshipers of idols, the full pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, and was well known for its emperor worship. Thessalonica was loyal to Caesar, who had granted its citizens many privileges.

Message and Purpose

Timothy reported to Paul that although the church at Thessalonica was suffering affliction, they were holding fast to the faith. And though they had some doctrinal misunderstandings, they were laboring for the Lord out of love and patiently hoping for the return of Christ. Paul wrote to encourage the church in their faith, to remind them that sanctification was God’s will for them, and to correct misunderstandings about end-time events.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-28

5:1 Times and seasons mentioned together refers to the end times (Ac 1:7).

Notes:

5:2 The phrase day of the Lord often signifies a time of God's wrath and judgment poured out in an uncommon way. Here the day of the Lord refers specifically to the end-time period of God's judgment on the unbelieving world known as the great tribulation (Mal 4:5; Ac 2:20; 2Th 2:2; 2Pt 3:10). The description of the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night emphasizes that it will come unexpectedly (5:4; 2Pt 3:10).

5:3 Just before the day of the Lord when people think they have peace and are secure, sudden destruction will come upon them. The comparison of this destruction to the labor pains of a pregnant woman speaks of the increasing intensity of God's judgment and the certainty of its coming (Mt 24:8).

5:4–6 Paul contrasted brothers and sisters in the faith who are children of light and day with the rest of the world who are of the night and darkness. Physical sleeping and drunkenness normally occur at night while it is dark, so Paul issued an encouragement for Christians as sons of light to be awake, meaning alert and morally ready. One's readiness is described with the military analogy of a soldier who prepares himself for war.

5:6–7 The Greek word for sleep in these verses (see also v. 10) is different than that in 4:13–15. In 5:6–7, "sleep" refers to moral lethargy. Some interpreters take "sleep" in v. 10 as a euphemism for death, but a good case can be made that the same Greek word in this context refers to moral lethargy as well. Thus Paul is saying in v. 10 that whether believers are alert or not for the day of the Lord, we will still "live together" with the Lord.

5:8 Although Christians belong to the day, we live in a world of darkness and must be prepared for battle.

Notes:

5:9 Paul reminded the Thessalonians that as Christians they were not appointed to God's wrath but to salvation. The day of the Lord will be a great outpouring of God's wrath from the very start (Rv 6:17), and Christians will be kept out of this worldwide hour of testing (Rv 3:10).

5:12–13 To give recognition means respect for the authority and work of church leaders.

5:14 Brothers and sisters elsewhere in the letter refers to the whole church. So it likely does not refer only to the leaders here. All Christians are to warn ... comfort ... help and be patient.

5:15 Not to repay evil for evil but to pursue what is good reflects back on Jesus's teaching not to follow a retaliatory "eye for an eye" ethic but to give a blessing instead (Mt 5:38–42).

5:16 Verses 16–22 deal with religious duties as opposed to interpersonal behavior. Rejoicing has its source in God. This verse is parallel to Gl 5:22; Php 4:4; Jms 1:2. "To rejoice always is to see the hand of God in whatever is happening and to remain certain of God's future salvation. Without such conviction joy would not be possible in the face of affliction, suffering, and death" (Charles A. Wanamaker).

5:17 To pray constantly does not mean continuous, uninterrupted prayer but humble submission to God in the details of life.

5:18 This verse is closely related to 5:16 (cp. Col 3:17).

5:19 One can stifle (lit "quench") the Spirit by not submitting to the Holy Spirit's leading or by com-

mitting other sins that would grieve the Spirit. In this context Paul may have had in mind listening to or allowing for prophecies (v. 20) that were not Spirit-given.

Notes:

5:20–21a Test all things probably refers to the content of the prophecies that had to be evaluated with God’s known truth as expressed by the OT, Jesus, and the apostles (1Jn 4:1–3).

5:21b–22 These two commands are two sides of the same coin.

5:23 The prayer for spirit, soul, and body to be kept sound and blameless teaches that God sees the whole person as important in living a life pleasing to God.

5:24 What God will do is not specified. But the context is his sanctifying and his keeping (v. 23).

5:25 Paul’s request for prayer is striking. It’s a model for every believer.

5:26 Greeting one another with a holy kiss, probably on the cheek, was a common first-century greeting that expressed love (Rm 16:16). This ancient custom is still widely practiced in the Middle East.

5:27 Paul usually ended his letters in his own hand (2Th 3:17). He was insistent that all the brothers and sisters needed to hear the contents of the letter, even if it entailed reading it several times in different places.

5:28 Paul’s closing benediction is almost identical to Rm 16:20 and 1Co 16:23.