

SESSION 7

# self-controlled alertness

## Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Paul knew God would begin to pour out His judgment at the dawning of the Day of the Lord and that unbelievers would be taken by surprise. He gave important instructions to the Thessalonians about this future event.
- ☐ Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11. Some believers may not think too much about God’s judgment on the world during the Tribulation. After all, believers will be in Heaven enjoying God’s presence instead of on earth enduring His wrath. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians not to be apathetic about God’s coming wrath. Believers must not “sleep.” They must be watchful, expecting Christ’s return and pointing others to the gospel so that they, too, can be safe in Heaven.
- ☐ Use this session to increase your students’ awareness about the coming Day of the Lord and God’s accompanying wrath. Help them see their responsibilities to warn the lost and encourage their fellow believers to live for God.

## Session Summary

The Day of the Lord will come suddenly and unannounced. It will begin with the Rapture of believers and will include God’s wrath on unbelievers over a period of seven years. As believers, we must be faithful to shine the gospel light and alert unbelievers to God’s coming judgment on their sin. To maintain a strong testimony, we must practice self-control under the Holy Spirit’s power. Furthermore, we must put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation to guard against Satan’s attempts to render us useless. Finally, we must encourage each other as fellow believers and build each other up in the faith.

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thess. 5:1–11

### BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God expects believers to live with spiritual alertness in anticipation of the coming Day of the Lord.

### MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will determine what spiritual alertness means for their lives.

### MEMORY VERSE

“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober”  
(1 Thess. 5:5, 6).



# Session Starters

## Option 1—Staying Awake

### Steps

1. Invite students to share personal experiences of times they overslept, resulting in negative consequences.
2. Discuss the importance of being alert and awake.

**ASK:** In what situations would it be dangerous to be drowsy? (Q1) *While operating a piece of equipment, during a natural disaster, watching/caring for a child.*

**ASK:** What do you think it means to be spiritually drowsy? (Q2)

3. Transition to the Bible study.

Falling asleep can be disastrous. Being spiritually asleep is even more dangerous. Paul used sleep and wakefulness to talk about the importance of spiritual awareness. He reminded the Thessalonians that unbelievers around them were spiritually unaware of the coming judgment and destruction they faced. In contrast, believers should stay spiritually alert. This session will help challenge us to live in awareness and expectation of the coming Day of the Lord.

## Option 2—Warning Signs

### Gather

- Markers.
- Paper.

### Steps

1. Give students paper and markers. Students make warning signs they have heeded or would heed if they came across them.
2. Students display their signs and share why they have heeded or would heed the warning.
3. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians about the coming Day of the Lord. He encouraged them to be warning signs to the lost about God's coming judgment. Since the Rapture starts the Day of the Lord, warning unbelievers about the day after it starts won't be an option for believers. This session will encourage us to alert unbelievers to God's judgment on their sin.

# Bible Study

## Gather

- End-Time Events poster.

After describing the events that make up Christ's return, Paul turned his attention to getting the Thessalonians ready for the coming Day of the Lord. He began with an explanation.

## I. Explanation of the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1, 2)

### A. The day's timing (5:1, 2)

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1.

"Times" refer to specific events in God's plan for the end times, and "seasons" refer to larger periods in God's plan. Paul explained that he didn't need to write to the Thessalonians about end-time events, not because the events weren't important, but because Paul had already taught the Thessalonians about what to expect.

All believers must learn about the coming "times" and "seasons" and live in response to them. We should be familiar with the events and their purposes. God intends for the events to shape our lives today.

**ASK:** How do you think Paul would respond to the current trend of ignoring specifics about end-time events in favor of harmony within different evangelical groups? (Q3) *Paul taught about specific end-time events and made clear the order in which they will happen. Paul never downplayed the importance of end-time events for the sake of unity.*

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

In verse 2, "day" refers to an extended time rather than one twenty-four-hour day. The future Day of the Lord will begin with the Rapture of the church and will continue to the beginning of God's eternal rule on the new earth. So, the Day of the Lord includes all the "times and seasons" that make up the end times.



**DISPLAY:** End-time Events poster. Remind your students of all that is included in the Day of the Lord.

Paul noted that the Thessalonians were perfectly aware that the Day of the Lord would begin to unfold after God raptured all believers from the earth. That the Day of the Lord begins with the Rapture is good news for us as believers. We don't want to be on earth as the events of the Tribulation begin to unfold.

**ASK:** Why do you think Paul compared the arrival of the Day of

the Lord to a thief in the night? (Q4) *They are both unannounced, unexpected, and life-changing.*

The unknown timing of Christ's return should motivate us to be busy serving the Lord before our time is gone. We should expect Jesus to arrive yet today.

## **B. God's judgment (5:3)**

**ASK:** How might the removal of every believer from earth change the world? (Q5) *The remaining unbelievers will be frightened and looking for security; economies will be devastated; nations and leaders will align and mobilize to control the world.*

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

After the world begins to recover from the shock of the Rapture, there will be a false sense of security and recovery. People and nations, including Israel, will think "peace and safety" will rule the day. Then, as suddenly as labor pains take over a pregnant woman, the world will be rocked by God's waves of painful judgment. God will judge sinners and Israel with disasters, disease, and war. And no one will be able to stop or escape God's wrath. The world will lose any sense of safety and well-being.

**READ:** Revelation 6:8; 8:7–11. **ASK:** How would you describe the tribulation pains based on this sampling of prophecies? (Q6)

God will bring destruction both to punish the world for their sin and to confront them with their need to turn to Christ for salvation. His plan will work. Many people, including some from every nation, will turn to God and trust in Christ as their Savior. Some of those new believers will be martyred for their faith as the world tries to stamp out the believers' witness. Yet, a multitude of Christians will survive the Tribulation to enter Jesus' earthly Kingdom (Matt. 25:31–34; Rev. 7).

Sometimes when we think of people suffering in the Tribulation, we imagine nameless, faceless strangers. But our lost neighbors, friends, and family members will be part of the Tribulation if Christ returns in our lifetimes.

**ASK:** What should the coming Tribulation judgments motivate you to do? (Q7)

We can't help but think of our unsaved friends and family members when we study the end times. We also can't help but think about our testimony and witness, or lack thereof. The same was true for the Thessalonian believers. So, Paul moved on to talking about their responsibilities as believers in the world.

## **II. Responses to the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:4–8)**

### **A. Shine your light (5:4, 5)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5.

Believers do not live in spiritual darkness as unbelievers do. Unbelievers reject the light of the gospel and are still in their sin and under God's wrath. They will be surprised when Jesus comes like a thief in the night at the Rapture and removes every believer from earth. Believers, by contrast, will rejoice to see the beginning of the Day of the Lord because they will be in Heaven with Christ.

**READ:** 2 Corinthians 4:4. **ASK:** Why is it right to describe unbelievers as living in the darkness? (Q8) *Satan has blinded their minds so that they reject the light of the gospel. They don't recognize their sin or their need for a Savior.*

"Darkness" represents sin, Satan, and unbelievers while "light" represents Christ, the gospel, and the believer. Unbelievers are living in their sin, under Satan's sway, and under God's wrath. All those who die in their spiritual darkness will suffer forever for their sin. The gospel of Christ, the unbeliever's only hope, lights the way to God the Father (John 8:12).

Believers are children of light and of the day in that they understand and accept the truth concerning sin and salvation. Believers will not face the Tribulation judgments or destruction that are part of the Day of the Lord.

**ASK:** What does God expect believers to do with the light of the gospel? (Q9) *To share it with the lost so they might trust in Christ as Savior and be free from the darkness of sin and wrath of God.*

What believers say with their lips must be backed by how they live their lives. Paul went on to make that clear to the Thessalonians.

## **B. Alert the lost (5:6)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

Paul used "sleep" to illustrate a believer's potential lack of concern for God's judgment on the lost during the coming Day of the Lord. A person who is physically sleeping doesn't communicate with people and doesn't influence or persuade them. Believers who are spiritually sleeping won't warn the lost about the serious consequences of their sin. God expects believers to be spiritually alert to the trouble unbelievers will face during the coming Day of the Lord and to the torment that awaits them if they die in their sin.

**ASK:** How might you increase your alertness to God's coming judgment on the lost? (Q10)

## **C. Practice self-control (5:6, 7)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

Believers must not only stay alert to the spiritual needs of the lost but also be “sober.” To be “sober” means to be self-controlled. A believer practices self-control by the Holy Spirit’s power. Paul told the Ephesians to be filled with (controlled by) the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Elsewhere Paul listed self-control as evidence (fruit) that believers are submitting to the Holy Spirit’s presence in their lives (Gal. 5:22, 23). Paul’s point to the Thessalonians is that believers need to live under the power and influence of the Holy Spirit in them.

**ASK:** How will the Holy Spirit help a believer’s witness? (Q11) *He will help the believer live obedient to God and thereby maintain a strong testimony; He will empower the believer to share the gospel boldly.*

Believers who live like the lost and rarely speak of the gospel are not self-controlled. They lack evidence of the Holy Spirit’s power in their lives. They are spiritually sleepwalking through life.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:7.

Paul emphasized the need for the Thessalonians to be self-controlled by reminding them that unbelievers can’t help themselves spiritually. The lost live in the night, a state of spiritual darkness. They are always spiritually asleep and always spiritually drunk, meaning they are controlled by sin and by Satan. They are helpless and will remain that way if believers act as if they too are spiritually asleep and spiritually drunk. The lost don’t need another friend to join them in their darkness; they need a friend to be their light to point them to Christ. That is what Paul wanted the Thessalonians—and us—to grasp.

**ASK:** What kind of friend are you to the lost? Are you acting as if you too are asleep and under sin’s influence? Or are you alert and self-controlled, living obediently by the Holy Spirit’s power? (Q12)

#### **D. Put on God’s armor (5:8–10)**

Paul described two pieces of spiritual armor believers need in living under the Spirit’s control.

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Believers must put on the breastplate of faith and love, which will protect their heart from Satan’s attacks. Satan wants believers to doubt God. He wants them to think living for God isn’t worth the sacrifice or that they can’t do anything significant for God. Believers put on the breastplate of faith when they choose to live by the Spirit and according to God’s truth.

**ASK:** What activities build your faith in God? (Q13)

The breastplate also protects the believer from loving him- or herself more than God and others. Loving God and others means making sacrifices. For the Thessalonians, it potentially meant physical pain, financial hardship, and even death. Satan wanted the Thessalonian

believers to think that sacrificing themselves by living for God and sharing the gospel wasn't worth it. The breastplate would protect the Thessalonians from loving themselves more than God and others.

**ASK:** What does sacrificial love for others look like in your life? (Q14)

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:8–10.

The helmet represented the hope of salvation. The Thessalonians understood they had been saved from God's wrath, but they still battled against sin and Satan. They hadn't realized their full salvation yet. But they could look forward to their full salvation at the coming of Christ. And if they died before Christ returned, they knew they would be with Christ at His return. This confident hope of full salvation should motivate all believers to please the Lord.

Faith, love, and hope form the defensive armor that guards our hearts and minds and makes possible a self-controlled life but only as believers are part of a church and encouraging one another.

### **E. Encourage fellow believers (5:11)**

**READ:** 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to comfort each other concerning believers who had died. They were also to "edify," or build up each other, with the teaching Paul had just given (5:1–10).

Believers need each other because God works in and through them to encourage and build them up. We need each other as a class and as a local church, and we are responsible for encouraging each other to grow in the Lord. We must keep each other spiritually awake and aglow for Christ.

**ASK:** What behaviors would keep our class from helping each other grow in the Lord? (Q15)

God valued you enough to send His Son to die for you. We don't often forget that fact. But God also valued your classmates enough to die for them. And He has brought this class together so we might build each other up spiritually.

## **Session Application**

### **Gather**

- Notecards and pens.

### **Steps**

1. Organize the class into two groups. Students in group one take turns listing on the board signs that might show a person



is spiritually drowsy (e.g., distracted by the world, giving in to temptations, lack of faith, lack of concern for others). (Q16) Students in group two list signs that show a person is spiritually alert (e.g., practices self-control, demonstrates Christlike attitudes and behavior, tells others about Christ). (Q17) Discuss the lists.

2. Distribute notecards and pens. Challenge your students to stay alert to spiritual things.

Choose one thing you will do each day this week to be more spiritually alert. (Q19) Write your ideas on a notecard or make a note on your cellphone. Set a daily alarm on your cellphone as a reminder to stay spiritually awake.

3. Close in prayer. Thank God for being spiritually awake and seeing the light of Christ. Pray your class will be faithful to shine the gospel light to those still living in spiritual darkness.

## SESSION 8

# peace-filled hearts

### SCRIPTURE FOCUS

1 Thess. 5:12–28

### BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God enables believers to have peace with each other and in their hearts.

### MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The student will determine ways to promote peace with others and with God.

### MEMORY VERSE

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

## Teacher Preparation

- ❑ Which relationships in your life could use a little more peace? Paul’s final instructions in his first letter to the Thessalonians consisted almost entirely of commands related to peaceful relationships. Clearly, he considered keeping peace an important element of living for Christ while waiting for His return.
- ❑ As you read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–28, note each specific command Paul gave and pause to consider how that command would promote peace in your own relationships with others (5:12–15) and in your heart (5:16–22). Notice that the key to true peace is found in submitting ourselves to God, the source of peace (5:23).
- ❑ Everyone faces conflicts with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. And everyone struggles to find peace within. This session emphasizes that God is the giver of true relational and personal peace.

## Session Summary

Interpersonal peace begins with love and respect for spiritual leaders. It is strengthened through loving and patient ministry to fellow believers, including the unruly and the spiritually weak. Paul commanded the Thessalonian believers to do good to all people, even to those who mistreated them. Personal peace comes as believers trust God’s leading and Word. Paul warned the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit’s influence but to listen to God’s Word and test everything else against it. Personal peace also comes as believers trust God’s sanctifying power in their lives and learn to love God’s people. Paul closed by underscoring the importance of reading God’s Word.