This Day & That Day

Primary Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11
Main Idea: The certainty of Jesus' return should shape how we live today—with self-control, faith, love, hope, and intentional care for others.

Leader Preparation

Paul's burden is not to help believers predict Jesus' return but to prepare them to live faithfully while they wait. The passage holds together a serious warning about judgment and a strong assurance of salvation through Christ. Before leading, ask: Where am I looking to comfort, possessions, or approval for the security only Jesus can give? Let His saving work steady your heart, and ask Him to help you lead with both urgency and tenderness toward those who are struggling or exploring faith.

Suggested Group Flow

- Welcome and connection: 10 minutes
- Read Scripture: 5 minutes
- Read Together: Understanding the Passage: 10–15 minutes
- Discuss: 35–45 minutes
- Pray and identify next steps: 10 minutes

For a 60–75-minute meeting, combine welcome with a brief check-in, keep the read-aloud section near 10 minutes, and treat the two Leader Insight questions as optional follow-ups.

Read Together: Understanding the Passage

Introduction to the Passage

Throughout 1 Thessalonians, Paul connects following Jesus with waiting for His return. Immediately before this passage, he comforts believers concerned about loved ones who have died: those who belong to Christ will not miss out when He comes.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, Paul turns from what happens to believers who die to how believers should live while they wait. Rather than supplying a timetable, he calls the church to spiritual alertness. They cannot know the date of Jesus' return, but they can live ready for it.

Background and Key Insights

An unknown date, a certain return

Paul describes the day of the Lord as coming "like a thief in the night." The point is its unexpected timing, not uncertainty about whether it will happen. His comparison to labor pains reinforces that the coming judgment cannot be avoided. The right response is not prediction or speculation but faithful living today.

A warning and an assurance

Paul distinguishes between those in darkness and those who belong to the light. For those outside Christ, this day brings judgment; for those who belong to Him, it brings salvation. Being comfortable or apparently secure does not make someone ready to meet God. Our confidence rests in Jesus, who died for us—not in our achievements, circumstances, or ability to rescue ourselves.

An identity that shapes our habits

Because believers belong to the day, Paul calls them to stay awake and exercise self-control. This is more than avoiding obvious wrongdoing. It means resisting the quiet drift toward making comfort, status, or personal happiness our highest goal. The armor of faith and love and the helmet of salvation's hope describe a prepared life: trusting God's word, actively seeking others' good, and confidently awaiting what Jesus has promised.

A race we do not run alone

Paul ends with a shared responsibility: encourage one another and build one another up. Readiness is not a private project. We help each other keep following Jesus through discouragement, distraction, and difficulty. That same love should move us toward people outside the church—making room, serving sacrificially, and sharing the hope we have in Christ.

Scriptures to Read Together

- Matthew 24:36, 42–44 — Jesus teaches that no one knows the day of His return and calls His followers to readiness rather than date-setting.
- Acts 1:6–8 — Jesus redirects His disciples from questions about timing toward Spirit-empowered witness.
- Hebrews 10:23–25 — Because God keeps His promises, believers should hold firmly to hope and encourage one another toward love and good works as the Day approaches.

Main Idea

The reality of that day ought to change how we live on this day. Because Jesus is coming back, we can trust His promises, love people actively, and use today's opportunities faithfully.

Reflection Question

If someone looked at how you spent your time, attention, and energy this past week, what would they conclude you were most counting on for a good life?

Discussion Guide

Leader Insight 1: Alertness Without Anxiety

Paul's call to stay awake is not an invitation to panic about the future. He first reminds believers who they are: children of light who belong to the day. Their obedience grows from belonging to Christ, not from trying to earn salvation. Still, spiritual distraction is real. We can slowly begin trusting the same comforts and protections our neighbors trust, even while speaking the language of faith. Help the group notice that drift without shaming anyone. The goal is a concrete return to trusting Jesus and obeying Him in the responsibilities and relationships already in front of us.

Discuss:
Where do you notice a gap between saying you trust Jesus and looking to something else to make you feel secure?

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 2–6, Paul contrasts apparent security with spiritual readiness. What part of your everyday life most easily puts you on spiritual "autopilot," and how do you recognize that it is happening?

2. The sermon described faith as taking God at His word, especially when His word challenges our preferences. What is one area where you know the direction of obedience but find yourself resisting it, and what makes that difficult?

3. Love actively seeks another person's good. Who in your household, workplace, or neighborhood needs that kind of love from you this week, and what specific act of service would meet their need rather than simply fit your convenience?

4. Because Jesus will return, our opportunities to point others toward Him matter. Which friend, neighbor, or coworker could you intentionally move toward this week, and what natural opening might allow you to share your testimony, explain your hope in Jesus, or invite them to church? Leader: Read Acts 1:6–8 for deeper understanding of how Jesus connects waiting with witness.

5. The sermon challenged the church to make room for people who are not there yet. What comfort, schedule preference, or use of your time could you surrender this week to help someone else hear about Jesus or feel welcomed among His people?

Leader Insight 2: Give Courage to Keep Going

Encouragement is more than offering a pleasant comment. It helps another person keep trusting and following Jesus. In the sermon's picture of runners helping one another up, the person offering support in one moment may need support in the next. That is not a failure of faith; it is part of life together. Encourage the group to notice people whose burdens may be easy to miss. A thoughtful conversation, practical help, a reminder of Christ's promises, or a shared prayer can strengthen someone to take their next faithful step. We are not meant to finish the race alone.

Discuss:
Who needs you to come alongside them right now, and what could you say or do this week that would give them courage to keep following Jesus?

Leader: Read Hebrews 10:23–25 for deeper understanding of how shared hope leads to intentional encouragement.

Prayer and Response

- Thank Jesus for dying for us and for the promise of life with Him. Ask Him to help anyone who is uncertain about trusting Him respond honestly in faith.
- Confess the places where comfort, possessions, approval, or control have become substitutes for confidence in God. Ask for self-control expressed through faith, love, and hope.
- Pray by name for people who need to hear the gospel and for believers who need encouragement. Ask for courage to serve, speak, and make room for others.

Invite each person to complete this sentence: "Because Jesus is coming back, this week I will _____ for or with _____ by _____." Choose one specific act of obedience, identify when you will do it, and tell someone in the group who can follow up.

Consider Closing by Splitting Men and women, sharing some needed areas of accountability and praying together.