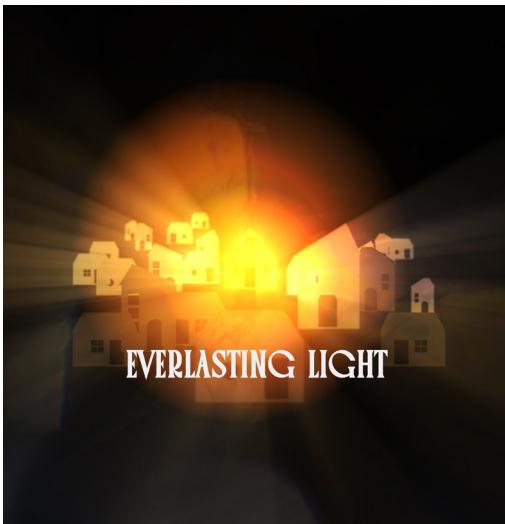


Sermon Growth Guide

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We Belong to the Day | 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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Key Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:5 - "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness."

Big Idea: A new year invites us to live as children of the light: awake, alert, and confident in the hope we have in our salvation.

Foundations

"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the Everlasting Light." We began this series with a prophecy in Isaiah 9. His words speak of people walking in darkness who are promised to receive a sign. The sign comes in the form of a child that would not just shine, but bring to earth justice, peace, and righteousness forevermore.

As we move from Advent through Christmastide, we look toward Epiphany, knowing that Christ's Everlasting Light continues to lead us. Both Isaiah and John proclaim a light brighter than any fading light of this world, a light that exposes sin and still breaks into our darkness with love. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he echoes these claims, assuring us that this same light is ours as we await the Day of the Lord.

When we hear "the Day of the Lord," we tend to picture billboards, flames, or end-times films that cause us to fear the future. Paul's words serve as a reminder that we already know our secure salvation in Christ because we know Him personally. As children of the light, we display our present, active Lord and we will not be surprised or asleep when that day comes. We are to live with confidence in our salvation—awake, equipped, and encouraged while encouraging each other as we share Christ's hope with those who still walk in darkness.

Understanding God's Word

Read together 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

This passage continues the discussion from the previous chapter where Paul comforts the Thessalonians with hope for both the living and the dead at Christ's return. He now contrasts light and darkness, urging them to remain watchful and self-controlled. His tone resembles that of ancient teachers who affirmed that students already knew what they needed. Now a generation after the ascension, Christ's delayed return may have dulled their enthusiasm, tempting them toward complacency. So, he encourages them to stay the course with renewed zeal, calling them to live faithfully now while looking toward the Day of the Lord.

Applying God's Word

Living as children of the light is not a call to fear or frantic activity. Instead, Paul teaches us to be encouraged and to encourage one another because our salvation is secure. How might God be inviting you to encourage another believer today?

Witnessing God's Word

The hope and peace we have in Christ frees us not only to tend to our own discipleship, but also to notice those still walking in darkness. Who needs to experience the light of Christ through you this year? What simple step could you take to reflect peace or share hope with them in your words or actions?

With a new year comes new year's resolutions. Is yours to reach 10,000 steps a day? Be on time or read 26 books in 2026? Whatever your New Year's resolutions may be, just consider our culture annually pushes us to be productive by making a promise to achieve, improve, or change, as though the future rests on our ability to manage it well.

But what if I told you this year was going to bring big changes for you? Would you be excited or anxious? Would you approach 2026 with less excitement? Or would you shrug your shoulders and say, "that's life." Greek Philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus is known for declaring, "The only constant in life is change." And today's Scripture reminds us that not all change is ours to control.

Paul writes to the Thessalonian church, reminding them that there is nothing we can do to determine the timing of the Day of the Lord. Christ's return will come suddenly. It will not occur according to our human calendars or predictions. While knowing that truth may provoke fear or even indifference, Paul calls believers to change their actions and attitudes as they wait for Christ's return. And he does this with the intention of teaching and encouraging us to rejoice in the fact that we are not in control. First Thessalonians celebrates what happens when we identify ourselves as followers of our only constant, God's only Son, Jesus. We are no longer children of the night, driven by fear or caught off guard by uncertainty. Our identities as children of the day mean we live as those who are sustained by the promises of God, continually sanctified, changed through the power of the Holy Spirit; and we are shaped into a people marked by faithful awareness as we wait with confidence Christ to come again.

Throughout this sermon series, we have focused on Jesus Christ, the EVERLASTING LIGHT, the Word made flesh who was born into a dark, sin-sick world. Through the words of the apostle John and the prophet Isaiah, we have been reminded that Christ's light is unlike any other: it never fades or fails. This everlasting light does not expose us to shame, it draws us to forgiveness, healing, and life. We know the promise that one day, darkness will be gone forever, and His light will be all we know. Hallelujah.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul teaches about living faithfully in Christ, specifically as we await Christ's second coming. He continues the conversation he began in Chapter 4, writing in response to

Timothy's update, which included questions that were being raised by the young believers in Thessalonica. As he provides guidance and wisdom, Paul specifically urges believers to live as those who are awake, equipped, and encouraged. At this point in time, many believers had lost friends and family, some through persecution and martyrdom. That grief brought uncertainty -- questions about what happens to those who have died and if they will miss out on Christ's return.

So, Paul assures the believers that both the living and the dead belong to Christ. Those who have died are not lost or forgotten. He writes these words of hope: "And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17b)

These early believers had faith that was young and suffering that was real. They were understandably a bit worn down, and they didn't have the teaching to anchor them. With that in mind, Paul writes: "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief." (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4)

At first glance, these words don't sound very comforting, do they? But phrases like "thief in the night," "destruction," and "suddenly" aren't being used to frighten the followers. Paul is providing truth and therefore, hope. First, he exposes the hollow promise behind the Roman slogan of "peace and security." Rome enforced peace through violence and maintained security in having an Emperor. The peace and security the Thessalonians had come to know was different. It was freely given, found in a heavenly King, Jesus, who promised to come again and reign forever.

Second, Paul says: expect the unexpected. It's actually okay that we cannot precisely predict or schedule the Day of the Lord. Though Paul doesn't explicitly refer to Jesus' parable of the ten virgins, he takes the same posture. He reminds believers to stay awake and attentive, living with expectation of the Bridegroom's return. We need to hear these words today, too. The phrase "the Day of the Lord" troubles many of us, mostly because it has been shaped by images of earthquakes, fire, and destruction. You pass a billboard that asks, "Is This the End?" or a car pulls in front of you with a bumper sticker that says "Jesus is coming... look busy."

These words echo in our hearts because we too can be lured into a false sense of peace and security. We get tired. We doubt God's promises. We desire peace provided by elected leaders, and security found in a fence or a financial portfolio. But setting up contingency plans or appearing productive will not get us ready for what lies ahead. When suffering comes; when things don't turn out the way we predicted; when we are forced to face our own mortality, the things of this earth we seek to control quickly collapse and fizzle out. Ultimately, this passage is about understanding and trusting God's plan for salvation. Theologian John Cole notes how Paul urges these followers trust God's timing, because He has already given us the everlasting light we need. Cole writes, "While the 'signs of the time' might challenge us to rededicate our commitment to discipleship, hardship in life does not threaten our assurance of salvation. In a sense, it is as though the day of the Lord has already arrived for those who have received the gift of faith." (John E. Cole, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 4) The future is not something that hangs in the air as a threat; the future is something that is secure. The weary world doesn't just rejoice at Christmas because we have a reason to rejoice every day.

But let's admit it. It can be hard to have faith as we live in what many call "the already and not yet." Staying in the dark can often be the easier choice. Even as we know the light of the World, we are constantly tempted to be distracted and disillusioned as the darkness does its dirty work. It's hard to get up and exercise when depression tells you to hit snooze. Why not just take another sip instead of face your addiction? In those darkest moments - when a loved one dies, another civilian is killed, when you're unjustly fired, or you find out the painful truth about your friend; those are the times when we need the light the most. When our trust in God is what breaks through the darkness, and when we most need this message that we are His children, a new creation.

When you accept Christ into your heart and surrender to Him as your Savior, you are saved and you are changed. You receive a new identity. Let's read our key verse which is all about our who we are: "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness." (1 Thessalonians 5:5). What a promise.

There are countless examples from my own life and the lives of people I know when choosing the

light was a struggle because it was a surrender. Trusting God by getting on my knees instead of rushing out the door - turning on worship music instead of Netflix when you feel alone - opening God's Word with your coffee vs scrolling social media first thing in the morning..these may seem like little things, but choosing to live in the light happens minute by minute, day by day, year after year. When we choose the light, we choose the day and we choose to live as those who trust the Light of the World.

Paul continues using comparisons as he does throughout the chapter: "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night." (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

As we have heard throughout this sermon series, light symbolizes knowledge, awareness, and goodness; darkness represents ignorance, evil, and despair; daytime symbolizes awakening and newness, while nighttime leaves us vulnerable to foolishness and uncertainty. Throughout the day, how much time do you spend thinking about the light - the good, the joy? We live in a time when we are bombarded with bad news. And the darkness wants to be first. It wants to preoccupy our minds and define our values. You know, I got my degree in communication in college, and for one semester my sophomore year, I wanted to pursue a career in tv news. I got to be an anchor on our local station, WHEI TV10, broadcasting weekdays at 5:00pm. One of the first lessons we learned in media journalism was: If it bleeds, it leads.

Which is why we need to be awake. We need to see the light and share the light. I remember in March of 2020 when John Krasinski launched a YouTube series called Some Good News. It immediately went viral because, well, we were tired of a virus. The stories about the good people were doing, the laughter, the generosity - this series fought against the darkness of a pandemic that was wreaking havoc around the world.

When darkness surrounds us, and seems to be winning, we can get weaker. Even the disciples experienced this. In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the dark night of his arrest, Jesus found his disciples sleeping after asking them to keep watch. In Matthew Chapter 26, we read, "Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with

me for one hour?' he asked Peter. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' " (Matthew 26:40-41) One way to combat that darkness is, as Jesus suggests, by praying. Both Jesus and Paul challenge believers to "watch and pray." In Dick Eastman's book, *The Hour that Changes the World*, he teaches the practice of being watchful in prayer. Referring to the Psalms, he teaches us to be like the watchmen who guard, and endure through the night. We are less likely to drift into spiritual sleep when we pray with hopeful expectation and confidence that God is at work even before the dawn breaks.

So, Paul's call in 1 Thessalonians 5 to stay awake and sober is an invitation to prayerful, hopeful awareness as those who already belong to the day.

Living as children of the light also means being equipped for the world as it truly is. When Paul writes, "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (1 Thessalonians 5:7), he is teaching about the armor of God. When teaching about this armor in Ephesians 6, he reminds us where our battle lies – in the spiritual realm. He uses the Greek word for principalities, archas, which translates as "beginning." It's the same word John uses in his gospel, referring to creation. How does the "beginning" relate to these dark forces at work? Because these evil forces want us to believe that we don't belong to the Creator...that our identity is not in Him. As the book *Attack Lambs* teaches, the darkness at work is a counterfeit force that confuses our identity, making us believe we are less than all Jesus died for.

And so, arming ourselves daily lets the Holy Spirit guard our hearts and minds against deception, despair, and false peace, preparing us to stand firm as children of the light. Paul continues: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." (1 Thessalonians 5: 9-11) Here, Paul is aiming to strengthen God's work among them. We too can be encouraged, knowing that wrath is not our destiny, salvation and eternal life is.

As those who belong to the day, we know this same peace. But that peace can't blind us to the

darkness that exists in our broken world. Back in November, I was driving at night, running some errands, and a car pulled in front of me. On the car were 3 bumper stickers: One was a pentacle, which symbolizes witchcraft or paganism; Another read, "Protected by Witchcraft"; and the third sticker was centered on the back window...and it said "Satan Loves Me." My heart sank as I was suddenly awakened to the truth: that there are still so many people living in darkness. For about a mile, I prayed for that person as I dealt with an unsettling reminder that darkness doesn't always hide itself. Sometimes it advertises openly.

Scripture is clear that there are real consequences for those who continue to walk in darkness. Judgment will come to those who do not heed the warnings of the prophets or the words of Jesus himself. There is a cost to turning away from God's light. But those warnings are never spoken apart from grace. Even for those who proclaim their relationship with the darkness – there is still hope.

As His return approaches every day, be at peace and cling to the hope. Trust in God's timing and plan. This year, as days go by when darkness is all you see in the news, or when you get that frightening test result – when you encounter a person who thinks your faith is a joke – or when you just want to ask God why a circumstance had to change....Rest in the assurance that He is a living God who has given us a future and a hope, a new identity that equips us to fight against the darkness of our weary world.

Because the darkness will be there until the Everlasting Light breaks through – until the Alpha and the Omega sits on the throne, the glory of the Lord shines His light for the nations, and Eden is restored. So, as we wait, may we pray with watchful anticipation for a constant change of people's hearts and lives – for more and more of those who have walked in darkness to be awakened, equipped, and encouraged, as we are today.

For our hope does not rest in what we think we can control or how we try to prepare for change. The light of Christ shines through when we choose to rejoice with resolve, living as those who confidently and joyfully anticipate that great day. We may not know when that day may be, and we may not know what 2026 has in store for us, but we can trust in the fact that Jesus does.

To God be the Glory.