

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Romans 13:8-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

With more prayer, more Bible study and reading Christian books,
as a teenager, my faith-commitment became more serious & real.
One of those books was "The Late Great Planet Earth" by Hal Lindsey,
which was a very popular book and best seller in the early 1970's.

His book described how current events and the world's situation
matched perfectly the warnings and descriptions in Scripture
of unsettling world events proceeding the 2nd Coming of Christ,
which as Lindsey explained, was just about to happen,
which I'm pretty sure was wrong, since we are all still here.

"The Late Great Planet Earth" presents a theology of fear and despair
that envisions the end-times tribulation, troubles and turmoil,
and facing final judgment before an angry and wrathful God,
that makes the 2nd Coming sound something like Rambo's Revenge,
or as if humanity were bugs with **the divine windshield** headed our way.

When the disciples asked Jesus about the end times at his ascension,
the very last thing Jesus said while on still here earth, Acts 1:7-8,

"It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth."

Both the Romans passage and the 1st Thessalonians passage
have to do with the 2nd Coming, about what to do in the meantime,
and Paul's purpose was to proclaim reassurance & hope to them.

1st Thes, the oldest book in the NT, Paul addresses it this way, vs. 1-2

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

You already know what you need to know, it's been revealed to you.
There's nothing more that needs to be said to you,
there's nothing more than needs to be written to you.

Jesus has said all that we need in order to be faithful disciples
and to face the future with purpose, confidence, joy and hope.

You don't need to know the when, or the how or all the details.
You already know enough to do what I've commanded you to do,
and your job is to make disciples, **not to worry and wonder.**

The second coming of Christ, the end will come unexpectedly.
It's not a riddle for making TV preachers famous and wealthy,
or for 'prophecy experts' and biblical scholars to work out.
It's not some hidden Bible-code or a puzzle to be solved,
nor is it something terrible to fear, to dread & seek to escape.

The point is that the best way to prepare is by always being ready,
and not to be **so caught up in values, ways & desires of this world,**
that we are not ready for it, when the end finally arrives.
We don't know when, and speculation accomplishes nothing beneficial.

God is powerful and loves us, so there is no need for fear or panic.
I don't think the 2nd coming will be that bad at all, in fact,
I won't have fill out tax forms or pay taxes that year,
and I probably won't need to write a sermon that week.

Seriously, my confidence, my joy and my hope and anticipation
are not based on knowing any details about the when or the how,
but simply because **I do know Jesus**, and I have always experienced
God's love along my walk of faith and by what I read in God's word.

If there is anything worthy that I have learned so far in this life,
it's that I can surely trust God to always provide as in, Psalm 27:1,
The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be
afraid?

Or as Paul explains to the Thessalonian Christians, vs. 4-5
But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and
children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.

We're not given the details, but neither are we left lost in the dark.
*To be in the darkness, is to live focused on and seeking
the false and temporary peace and security of this world,
*while to be in the light,
is to find our peace and security in the hope and promises of God.

*To be in the night,
is to be unaware and miss seeing what God is doing in our world,
*and to be in the day, is to live in trust, assurance & faith,
and sensitive to God's presence in human lives & affairs.

Paul offers pairs of contrasts help to describe how we are to live,
how we're to live as **children of light & children of the day**, vs. 6-8,
So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night,
and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and **put on the breastplate of
faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.**

Asleep is to be apathetic, complacent and uninvolved in the world,
a fatalistic resignation afraid to impact & influence our world.
which is not the way Jesus calls his followers to be.

Drunk is to be so drugged by this world's things and pleasures
that we are unaware and oblivious to human suffering around us.

Drunk is to be so distracted by unworthy goals and worldly glitter
that we waste and misuse our precious one and only mortal life
in the materialistic self-involvement of a selfish stupor
and that's not how Jesus calls us to care for his world.

Our call is not to live in fearful dread by calculating the last days
but to let our future hope sculpt for us, a meaningful present.

**We are to live lives that serve, that are productive & useful,
and for our lives to make a real difference for having lived.**

Paul's concern here is not some future time when Jesus returns,
but now, today, the present time, that we use it well and wisely
knowing that today is passing, it will be gone forever,
and the opportunities it holds will be lost forever.

We're supposed to be ready for the end, by living lives that matter,
by serving usefully in accomplishing God's will and purpose,
which is to reflect God's love, mercy, justice and grace,
to show God's compassion & righteousness out in the world.

We are not to waste or squander our one and only life **in fear
or worried** about how it may or may not work out in the end.

Rather, we are free to take on audacious adventure and challenge,
because in the end we will be just fine, as Paul wrote, vs. 9-11

For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so
that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. **Therefore encourage one another and build up each other...**

That is our true hope and promise, yet we can slip into complacency.

Now I believe that we all have a natural and innate desire for better,
for the quality and effectiveness of our lives to make a difference.

I don't think that anybody **intends** for their faith to fade & grow dim,
but somehow it happens quietly & gradually, almost without notice,
as we slip a bit, grow weary, our faith & discipleship **complacent**.

Sometimes we slide into a comfortable rut of the routine and mundane,
and fall into a downward spiral of spiritual surrender and apathy,
rather than the gracious good & purpose that God intends for us.

Today is an excellent opportunity for us to reexamine and reassess
any such destructive or **soul-defeating downward spiral of faith**
toward complacent compromise or apathy in our spiritual lives,
and perhaps look for any obstacles to God's work in our lives,
which I compare to scraping the barnacles off the hull of a sailboat.

Though not a real popular sport here in Las Cruces,
but if you have ever been involved with sailboat racing,
then you know about the necessary unpleasantness and difficulty
of scraping off barnacles that accumulate along the boat's hull,
which will gradually build-up and create additional drag.

Barnacles have to be scraped and removed every year in dry-dock
with a putty knife, sandpaper and knuckle-bleeding hard labor.

In our spiritual life, barnacles of our world and culture can form,
from the compromises we make to get what we want and desire,
as a complacency & materialism that can build up over time,
and can gradually weaken our walk of faith with the Lord.

So sometimes, we just need to stop and pause so to reflect and pray,
to step back from our life's demands, stress and pressure,
to stop and pause to refocus, and listen for a God-message,
toward the feeding & deepening, nurturing & growth of our souls...

**...for the direction we're looking will influence the direction we go,
by concentrating on God's will for our walk & work in this world,
by being faithful in whatever situation we have been placed.**

This is an intentional shift toward a more hopeful perspective

by considering our present in the context of God's promises,
a critical message we need to hear and let flow through our days.

We can get so frantic, distressed, overwhelmed and caught up
in the world of trouble and the stuff we see surrounding us
that we forget about God's promises to stand with us,
and God's promises to bring the story to a good ending.

It is choosing to listen, to let God speak and transform our lives.

It's being faithful in whatever circumstance we have been given.

What I am describing is an important and hopeful truth ---
that God knows us and loves each one of us in particular,
and is fully aware of what we most truly and urgently need.

Healing begins with an open, thankful and receptive heart,
ready and attentive to the grace and blessings and call...

... to live in renewed awareness of what's going on in us spiritually,
which was Paul's message to Christians living in Rome, vs 8, 10, 11

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, **love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and **put on the armor of light.**

Our hope is the assurance that surely Jesus will indeed come again.

So obviously salvation, the promised vision of the Kingdom of God,
is nearer now than it was before, so awaken and remain alert,
since we can and often do slack-off in our Christian journey,
& drowse into worldly allure toward spiritual slothfulness.

Therefore, Paul urges Christians in Rome to awaken, and to live well
as becomes a believer awaiting the coming of Lord Jesus, vs. 13-14

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and **put on the armor of light**; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Paul's message is to shake off any compromise or complacency,
and awaken toward and into a discipleship that fulfills God's will
into the promise and hope of God's Kingdom, **by putting on Christ**,
so to walk in the true light of the world, our Lord Jesus,
who overcomes the darkness of despair, fear and defeat.

Both of our texts today urge us to re-focus on our hope in the Lord,
for the direction we're looking will influence the direction we go.

We're to respond to the grace & blessings of God, to hope and promise,
so how can we not be excited and eager to share that Good News?

And if we are attentive, if we will look and listen with our hearts,
then we will recognize events & places where God and God's grace
are visibly at work, **if we're not too distracted to notice.**

We do this by awakening anew, and putting on **our Lord Jesus Christ**,
by concentrating on God's will for our walk & work in this world,
by being faithful in whatever situation we have been placed,

as empowered afresh and renewed to **put on the armor of light**.

It's something like turning on a halogen light in the darkness,
for Jesus, the One who loves and heals us, Jesus is the Light,
the Light of the Lord this is real and with us,
and that cannot be snuffed out.

As Jesus said,

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness shall not overcome it.