

Opening Prayer: God of grace and glory, we enter this service of worship with reverence and awe. We have set aside this time and place as sacred space in which to encounter your Spirit, listen for your voice and be transformed by the reality of your presence. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts so that we may experience you in unexpected and remarkable ways. Shine your light into the recesses of our lives, exposing to us that which holds us back from living abundant, free and joyful lives of discipleship. Give to us your word of truth, justice, mercy and forgiveness that we need to receive in order to be lifelines of hope to a world floundering in fear and despair. Amen.

“Non-Drowsy Discipleship”

1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11

1 Now concerning how and when all this will happen, dear brothers and sisters, we don't really need to write you. 2 For you know quite well that the day of the Lord's return will come unexpectedly, like a thief in the night. 3 When people are saying, "Everything is peaceful and secure," then disaster will fall on them as suddenly as a pregnant woman's labor pains begin. And there will be no escape.

4 But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief. 5 For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. 6 So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. 7 Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. 8 But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out His anger on us. 10 Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when He returns, we can live with Him forever. 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Recent studies have shown that taking a good 30-minute drool-in-the-pillow nap in the afternoon at least three times a week can not only energize you for that late-afternoon or evening meeting, but can also lower your risk of heart-related death by 37 percent. Regular napping lowers stress levels, which may be why countries where siestas are not only common but encouraged seem to be a whole lot more easygoing than our own. So, go ahead — it's perfectly okay to crash and catch a few Z's there before you tackle the next week. But not right now?" I meant this afternoon!

The thing is, though, that there's also a downside to napping that has everything to do with timing. Racking out in a recliner is one thing, but dozing off while driving down the interstate is not generally considered to be good for one's health. Nod off for just *one second while traveling at 60 mph, for example, and you'll travel 88 feet* without knowing it. It's okay to crash once in a while, but veering off the highway at a high rate of speed or smashing into someone or something else without

At least once a week, more than one-quarter (28 percent) of high-school students fall asleep in school, 22 percent fall asleep doing homework, and 14 percent arrive late or miss school because they oversleep.

Adolescents who get insufficient amounts of sleep are more likely than their peers to get lower grades, while 80 percent of adolescents who get an optimal amount of sleep say they're achieving A's and B's in school.

More than one-half (51 percent) of adolescent drivers have driven drowsy during the past year. In fact, 15 percent of drivers in 10th to 12th grades drive drowsy at least once a week.

Among those adolescents who report being unhappy, tense and nervous, 73 percent feel they don't get enough sleep at night and 59 percent are excessively sleepy during the day. More than one-quarter (28 percent) of adolescents say they're too tired to exercise. —“America's sleep-deprived teens nodding off at school, behind the wheel,” March 28, 2006, sleepfoundation.org/site/c.hulXKjM0lxF/b.2428023/k.8425/Americas_SleepDeprived_Teens_Nodding_Off_at_School_Behind_the_Wheel.htm. Retrieved June 1, 2008.

One company, however, is trying to tackle the problem head-on with a device called the No Nap. It's a device that fits over your left ear and looks a little like a Bluetooth. The No Nap detects the movement of your head, so if you happen to nod off while driving it senses it and sends a piercing beep into your ear that's loud enough for both you and your passengers to hear. Call it a technological slap in the face. The No Nap is marketed as a useful device designed not only for car, bus and truck drivers but also for those who work in other job settings. Security guards, heavy equipment operators, folks who monitor computers or communication networks at night and even students cramming for a final exam can benefit from an electronic wake-up call.

Fact is that we need to be aware of those times when our bodies are in need of a serious jolt in order to avoid the dangers inherent in taking a nap at the wrong time. The apostle Paul reminds us *that the same is true for our sleepy spirits*. Falling asleep spiritually can be hazardous to our eternal health. [NOTE 1]

Paul seems to be giving a clinical treatise on sleep in his first letter to the Thessalonians. In 4:13-14, he talks about “those who have died” (NRSV) while the NIV renders Paul's euphemism more precisely as “those who have fallen asleep” (*koimaomai*). Sleep is a common biblical metaphor for death and resurrection as the ultimate wake-up call. Daniel 12:2, for example, describes the day of resurrection like this: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Jesus himself referred to his dead friend Lazarus as having fallen asleep (John 11:11-14) and told the crowd grieving over Jairus' daughter that she wasn't dead, “but sleeping” (Luke 8:49-56). In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, Paul thus describes the day of Christ's return and the general resurrection. Using apocalyptic symbolism, Paul writes that “God's trumpet” will sound like a piercing heavenly No Nap device, calling the dead to wake up and rise. The image of resurrected believers being “caught up in the clouds” to “meet the

knowing, is the wrong kind of crashing.

Legislators and law enforcement are beginning to realize that drowsy driving is as dangerous as driving drunk. According to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), accidents caused by drowsy driving have largely been underreported, so the organization undertook a “Drowsy Driving Prevention Week” program (November 10-16 last year) as a way of raising public awareness about the dangers of falling asleep at the wheel. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that drowsy driving causes 100,000 police-reported crashes each year and 1,550 fatalities. New Jersey is the only state that currently has a law on the books listing drowsy driving as recklessness under vehicular homicide statutes. Other states are beginning to follow. The NSF is lobbying for stricter laws while reaching out to universities, high schools, youth organizations, parents and others with a message about staying alert while driving.

It’s all a matter of common sense, really. If you’re feeling sleepy at the wheel, your best option is to pull over and catch a quick nap or take an extended break. Rolling down the window, blasting the radio, sucking down a 32-oz. coffee or energy drink and slapping yourself in the face are common, yet less effective (and, if someone is passing you, more embarrassing), techniques for trying to stay awake. The hum of the interstate and the constant zipping of those broken white lane markers have a hypnotic effect that’s hard to overcome, setting up the potential for a trip to a permanent dreamland.

Last June, reports surfaced that an Air India flight from Dubai overshot its Mumbai destination by about 300 miles or more. The reason: The pilots had nodded off!

Air traffic controllers were able to wake them up, or the jet with more than 100 passengers might still be cruising at 37,000 feet. Once alerted, the pilots took the plane off its autopilot system and turned the plane around, descended and landed safely.

Most kids are back to school now. Many of the nation’s adolescents are falling asleep in class, arriving late to school, feeling down and driving drowsy because of a lack of sleep that gets worse as they get older, according to a poll released by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF).

In a national survey on the sleep patterns of adolescents (ages 11-17), NSF’s 2006 *Sleep in America* poll finds that only 20 percent of adolescents get the recommended nine hours of sleep on school nights, and nearly one-half (45 percent) sleep less than eight hours on school nights.

What’s more, the poll finds that parents are mostly in the dark about their adolescents’ sleep. While most students know they’re not getting the sleep they need, 90 percent of parents polled believe that their adolescent is getting enough sleep at least a few nights during the school week.

The poll indicates that the consequences of insufficient sleep affect nearly every aspect of teenage life. Among the most important findings:

Lord in the air” suggests the image of local dignitaries coming out of a city to meet a ruler and escort him back into the city. The arrival of Jesus will be the dawn of a new day of eternal light and life.

[NOTE 2] With that image of “the day of the Lord” in mind, Paul goes on to address a more immediate napping problem. Since we don’t know when that resurrection day is coming and how it will find us, we are not to be drowsily careening through life unaware of what’s happening around us. Instead, we are to be awake and alert to the signs of Christ’s in-breaking kingdom which will come with the stealth and suddenness of a “thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The deep sleep of physical death is unavoidable, but being asleep at the wheel of our spiritual lives is not. In light of the resurrection wake-up call on the horizon, Paul urges the Thessalonians, and us, to stop dozing in the darkness of this world and, instead, become heads-up and eyes-open to the work of Christ, the resurrection life that he seeks to work in us and through us in the present.

[NOTE 3] The contrast between “darkness” and “light” is another common biblical image and Paul employs it here to make a statement about awareness. “Night” represents unawareness, the condition of those who have no idea what’s ahead of them. We know, for example, that most traffic accidents happen at night when visibility is low and fatigue more prevalent. Paul seems to have intuitively understood the old adage that “nothing good happens after midnight,” recognizing that “those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night” (v. 7). Being spiritually drowsy and complacent in the midst of a culture beset by the darkness of self-serving individual and systemic sin is as dangerous as driving our lives while drunk on the pleasures of this world. While we could all use a good night’s sleep for our bodies, our souls can’t afford the potential pain of pulling an all-nighter. **[NOTE 4]**

What are the signs of spiritual sleepiness? John Wesley once wrote that it is “that deep sleep of the soul” inherent in our sinful nature. It’s not so much the activity of sin itself as it is that “supineness, indolence and stupidity, that insensibility of [the sleeper’s] real condition, wherein every man comes into the world, and continues until the voice of God awakens him.” The spiritual sleeper “abides in death, though he knows it not.”

It’s a condition of utter cluelessness that overtakes us when we believe there’s nothing wrong with our current condition or with the world around us. Spiritual sleepers can view sin in their lives as being a mere character fault rather than a willful act of disobedience to God. They can look at the problems of injustice and violence in the world around them and turn the newspaper page with a yawn. Spiritual sleepiness can characterize believers as well as unbelievers, making us comfortable with the status quo and content to leave our inner lives unexamined and unimproved.

This kind of sleepiness ultimately leads to a crash of character and crumbling under crisis. Paul calls the Thessalonians to snap out of it — to “keep awake” to the

most important purpose of our lives: a *transformational relationship with God through Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Truth is, there are a lot of churches that are populated by spiritually sleepy people. What we need is a spiritual “no nap” device and in verse 8 Paul builds us one. Rather than wallow in snoozy sinfulness, Paul urges the Thessalonians to instead equip themselves with the kinds of spiritual devices that are always aimed at keeping people focused and faithful. Switching to military metaphors, Paul talks about putting on the “breastplate of faith and love” and the “helmet” of “the hope of salvation” (v. 8). While a No Nap device only triggers when there’s a head bob, these devices are to be always active in the life of the believer, energizing each of us with the example of Christ, “who died for us, so that whether we are awake [in the present] or asleep [in death] we may live with him” (v. 10). Death and darkness should be of little concern for those who are fully awake in the light cast upon us by the saving work of Christ.

Waking people up to the reality of resurrection and their future in Christ is a key focus of the Christian life. It’s a great time to talk about the disciplines that keep us focused on the big picture of Christ’s kingdom and the ways in which we are to live it out every day. We are not to simply shout louder and complain longer when people snooze their way through worship or team meetings. Slapping them in their proverbial faces has only a short-term effect (and can really tick them off when they’re not expecting it). **[NOTE 6]**

Instead, Paul urges the church to “encourage one another and build up each other” (v. 11). When we get tired, distracted or otherwise lulled into a false sense of complacency, that’s when we need spiritual leaders to wake up and step up to a renewed vision of Christ’s resurrection power.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul again reminds the church to “not be weary in doing what is right.” The Christian church has often been referred to as a “sleeping giant” that is slumbering peacefully while the world around it slides further into darkness. Time for a wake-up call! Are the world leaders wrong? I think we need a wake-up call! Put Jesus first! Do something! Please write something down that you will do today, this week, to break through the wall of complacency and put Jesus first. Write something you will do today to tap into the resurrection power of Jesus.

Sermon Notes for “Non-Drowsy Discipleship”
based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 given September 27, 2026
at Doster Community Church

- I. Falling asleep spiritually can be hazardous to our eternal health. Sleep is a common biblical metaphor for death as resurrection is the ultimate wake-up call!
- II. Jesus’ coming back again will be the dawn of a new day of eternal light and life. Since we don’t know when that day is coming we are not to be drowsy but be awake and alert to the signs. Not asleep at the wheel of our spiritual life!
- III. Paul uses the contrast between darkness and light to make a statement about awareness. Night = unaware. Being spiritually drowsy and complacent amidst the darkness of our culture, the self-serving individualism and systemic sin is dangerous.
- IV. The signs of spiritual sleepiness: cluelessness when we believe there’s nothing wrong with our current condition. Sin isn’t just a character flaw. Sin is a willful act of disobedience to God. This sleepiness leads to a crash of character and crumbling under crisis.
- V. We need a spiritual “no nap” device and in verse 8, Paul builds one. The spiritual “no nap” device is wearing the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation. Focus on the example of Jesus.
- VI. We are to encourage one another and build up each other. Let’s help one another to not lose sight of the renewed vision of Christ’s resurrection power. We cannot be weary and get complacent!
- VII. What are you going to do about it? Write something down.