

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NIV

“What kind of sleep will you have?”

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ⁽¹⁴⁾ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

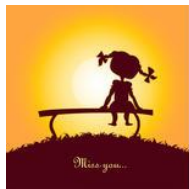
⁽¹⁵⁾ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ⁽¹⁶⁾ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

⁽¹⁷⁾ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

In “The Ancient Mariner” Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote:

*Oh sleep! It is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole . . .*

*After a hard day’s work, restful sleep
refreshes us, doesn’t it?*



When I was a teen, I usually did my best resting about 11 AM.

I usually hadn’t worked hard the day before.
Now when I’m older, sleep beckons me by 9 PM whether I work, rest, or play.

God designed our bodies to recharge and restore in sleep.

This usually takes about eight hours.

I say “about” because individual needs vary.
I read that Thomas Edison didn’t follow a 24 hour pattern; he slept in three hour segments and then got up to work.

Mystery man Alfred Hitchcock didn’t imitate Edison.

“At a party where Alfred Hitchcock had been asleep for nearly four hours, his wife awakened him to go home. ‘But it’s only one o’clock,’ Hitchcock, who habitually fell asleep at parties, protested. ‘The hosts may get the impression that we aren’t enjoying ourselves!’”¹

Whether we slumber in a chair,
in our own bed at night, or in church,
we are familiar with this kind of sleep.

¹ Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1889-1980), British film director
From the *Ultimate Reference \Book*

The Bible mentions two other kinds of sleep.

One of those types our text mentions three times.

Of the three kinds of sleep, no one sleeps more than two types.

It’s vital that we know the three kinds.

1. The first type is the sleep our bodies need.

The Apostle Peter could easily doze that way.

Authorities arrested Peter for preaching God’s Good News.

They earlier warned him about preaching Jesus.

King Herod planned to execute Peter.

“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.”²

If I were in solitary confinement tonight and scheduled for a firing squad tomorrow, I doubt I’d sleep much tonight.

Peter slept so hard an angel had to hit him in the side to awaken him.

Faith in Christ helped him sleep soundly.

In our 1 Thessalonians text, Paul referred to a different type of sleep.



Most folks need more information about this other kind of sleep.

Here’s what the Bible says:

Forty days after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, he ascended to heaven.

The Apostles watched Jesus ascend from the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem.

They stood awestruck and dumfounded.

Imagine standing and talking with a loved one.

After he says “goodbye,” he begins rising.

There’s no sound of a motor.

No wings; no flapping.

He silently ascends and disappears into a cloud.

Would you be wondering,

“Will he come down? Will he drop somewhere?”

When the prophet Elijah ascended, fifty of his disciples looked for his body (See 2 Kings 2).

Elijah’s understudy Elisha kept telling those men they were wasting their time.

They hunted three days anyhow.

I think Elisha enjoyed telling them,

“I told you so.”

Elisha was a prophet, but he could be grumpy.

² Acts 12:6 NIV

When Jesus ascended, the Apostles watched him disappear into a cloud, their mouths agape.

Two men in white clothes—angels—said:

“Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”³

From that moment many of Jesus’ followers thought he might return any day.

Christians of most eras have thought that they’d see Jesus’ return.

That idea dominated just after Jesus ascended.

Folks assumed they’d see it happen any moment.

Jesus taught nothing that led to that belief.

In *Matthew 24*, Jesus predicted that there would be long periods of persecution.

People pay slight attention to those parts of Jesus’ teaching.

As you know, expectations and assumptions vary from person to person.

When Norma asks me to do something, her time expectations tend to be shorter than mine.

Do most guys act immediately to a wife’s request to take out the trash or clean the garage?



Many people thought that Jesus would come immediately and take believers to heaven.

He’d come out of the clouds, and they’d rise to meet him just like he ascended from Mt. Olive.

Fast forward to about 15 years after Jesus’ ascension.

People in Thessalonica heard the message about Jesus, believed it, and looked forward to his immediate return.

As happens in any large group of people, years went by and some of the folks died.

The Christians in Thessalonica lived with the expectation that they and their loved ones would never die—Jesus would take them to heaven.

Over time, they became disappointed and depressed.

- **“We thought we’d join Jesus en masse.”**
- **“Some loved ones have died of diseases.”**

The Thessalonica folks sent messages to Paul: “What about our loved ones who’ve already died? When Jesus returns, will they miss heaven?”

That’s why Paul wrote in our text:

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

Death is a horrible, awesome enemy.

³ Acts 1:11 NIV

**Life ends, we’re put in graves; our bodies decay.
In a few years, we’re dust.
Gravestones crack, tip over, and become
unreadable.
We’re gone and forgotten.**

That’s not true when believers die.

**They’ll be raised when Jesus returns, and they’ll
celebrate in heaven.**

**Believers die, but they’ll be reawakened to
eternity—to immortality.**

That’s why Paul said they’re asleep:

**“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so
we believe that God will bring with Jesus those
who have fallen asleep in him.”**

**Recall the incident with Lazarus in
John 11?**

Jesus’ good friend Lazarus died.

**Jesus and his disciples were several
miles north at the time.**

**Jesus told the disciples, “Our friend Lazarus has
fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.”**

**Lazarus was dead and decaying, but Jesus
raised him to life four days later.**

**Here’s the great news about loved ones
who’ve already died.**



**When Jesus returns, those who are alive won’t
take off and leave their loved ones in the cemetery
to molder in their graves.**

**Instead, believers in the cemetery will rise
first to greet Jesus in the air.**

**Here’s a piece of trivia you might want to
remember and use to impress your friends
tomorrow at coffee.**

**The Greek word Paul used for sleep is *koimaomai*
(pronounced *koi-má-o-my*). **Sounds like a
Hawaiian fish and rice dish, doesn’t it?****

**The Greeks applied a variation of that word
for an inn (hotel).**

**An inn (resting place or sleeping place) was
called a *koimeterion*.**

**Christian Greeks used that same word,
koiméterion, as a name for the burial
places for their loved ones.**

**Convert the first Greek letter, kappa, to a
“c” in English and alter the first two
vowels, “o” and “i” to an “e.”**

**You end up with our word cemetery,
which is derived from *koiméterion*.**

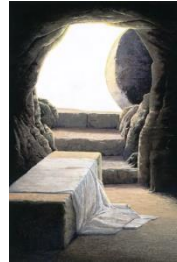
**A cemetery is literally “a resting or
sleeping place.”**

**Christians are asleep in Jesus until he
returns to draw them from their graves.**

So we've seen two types of sleep.

First is the sleep we need every 24 hours to rest and restore our minds and bodies.

Second is sleep in the metaphorical sense that Christians do in their graves as they await the return of Jesus.



The third type of sleep applies to the way some spend their lives.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter five, Paul echoed what Jesus taught.

Jesus will come like a thief in the night.

Thieves do not send advance notice.

They come when folks feel confident and secure:

"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled, (1 Thess. 5:6 NIV).

Being asleep is a metaphor for not being alert.

Someone being "asleep at the wheel," doesn't always apply to person's driving.

It describes a lax and non-responsive person.

The Bible uses "asleep" for people not mindful of the fact that God holds everyone accountable.

Hypocrites, selfish, and defiant folks will all stand before God in the judgment.

So "asleep" also describes folks who think God won't hold them accountable for their immorality.

"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," *1 Thessalonians 5:3 NIV.*

Those asleep in ungodliness face destruction.

Those "asleep" in Jesus will enjoy eternity.

If we expect to sleep in our graves anticipating Jesus' return, we can't be asleep now.

A little retired school teacher had saved her money for years to go to Europe. She joined a tour and traveled to places she had only dreamed of. She took her camera, her guidebook, her notebook, and planned on missing nothing. She asked a lot of questions and received a lot of information. In one magnificent cathedral, the guide droned on, pointing out the history, the architecture, the wonders of that beautiful structure. The little lady raised her hand, "Excuse me," she said, "but I have a question.

Has anybody been saved here lately?" From Emphasis

Have you been saved and live for Jesus?

When you die, will you be in sleep from which Jesus will awaken you, and take you to heaven?

If not, you are asleep at your life's wheel.

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