



Small Groups

Sermon-Based Group Discussion Guide

The Simplicity of Faithfulness: This Could Be the Day

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Part 6 in a study of 1 Thessalonians

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Many have read Viktor Frankl's bestseller *Man's Search for Meaning*, written in 1945 after the Austrian-born Frankl survived three years in four different concentration camps during World War II, losing his wife, brother, and mother to the camps. Before WWII, Frankl, a medical doctor who specialized in psychotherapy, had worked with suicidal patients. In the camps, Frankl used his skills to help others survive the seemingly hopeless and terrifying ordeal, realizing quickly that the only hope of helping a prisoner survive was by "giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward." Though our circumstances do not compare to the devastating evil and tragedies of war, we all face difficult challenges that test our faith. In this study, we will look at how our ultimate hope in Jesus' return can and should impact our lives and ministry.

Opening Question: Can you describe a funeral you attended that manifested the powerful hope of eternal life we have in Jesus Christ?

I. Hope in the Resurrection

1 Corinthians 15:20-22 (NLT) "But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life."

1 Peter 3:15a (NIV) But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 (NIV) "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For 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. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep."

- 1. According to the American poet Emily Dickinson, "That it will never come again is what makes life so sweet."**
 - a. When was the last time you heard someone remark on the fleeing, transient nature of life? When did you most recently think about that reality?**
 - b. Do you think Christians think about death or experience grief in the same way as nonbelievers in our culture? Explain why or why not.**

- c. What impact does Christ's resurrection have on our perspective of life on earth and the hope we can that sustains us even in the midst of grief and loss?
2. What comforts you the most when you think of death—reuniting with loved ones, the beauty and joy of heaven, the release from earthly struggles, meeting Jesus face to face, living in a *Bachelor*-style mansion? You can choose more than one. 😊

II. Hope in Christ's Return

John 14:2-4 (NIV) “[Jesus says,] My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV) “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 (NIV) “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. 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. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, printed above. Do you ever spend time envisioning what Jesus’ return might look and feel like? If so, what emotions are stirred by your contemplation?
2. The ultimate hope of Christianity is that Jesus will return for His church and reunite all believers in heaven.
 - a. Do you think it is worthwhile for Christians to spend time thinking about heaven and Jesus’ return? Why or why not?
 - b. How do you think your daily life and/or priorities would change if Jesus’ return was continually in the forefront of your mind?
3. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul remarks, “And so we will be with the Lord forever.” What a strikingly ordinary, composed way to express the inconceivable, indescribable, heart-stopping reality that is the ultimate hope of our entire lives: we will live in perfect, unbroken, intimate fellowship with God for eternity!
 - a. Sometimes people joke that heaven will be “boring.” Has that thought ever occurred to you and what might cause us to think that?
 - b. What do you think we can do *now* in our relationships with God that will stir our longing for heaven and make a difference in how we live today?
 - c. This week, take some time to meditate on heaven. Listen to the song, “I can Only Imagine” and think about the lyrics and how you might respond when you see Jesus. Take note of your emotions, your thoughts, and the impressions the Holy Spirit speaks to your heart.