



September 20 — Hope in Grief

Weekly Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1–5

Life Group Passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Main Point

Because Jesus died, rose, and will return, Christians can face death with real grief and certain hope.

Key Verse

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

1 Thessalonians 4:14

Life Group — The Flow

- 15 minutes — Conversation and relationship-building
- 5 minutes — Looking Back
- 5 minutes — Introduction, Background, and Christ Connection
- 30 minutes — Study and Apply
- 5–7 minutes — Application Exercise
- 10 minutes — Pray Through the Passage and Prayer Requests
- 5 minutes — Conclusion

If Time Is Limited...

Focus on:

- Main Point and Key Verse
- Background and Christ Connection
- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14
- Passage 1 questions 1 and 3
- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18
- Passage 2 questions 1 and 4

- Application Exercise
- Pray Through the Passage
- Final Takeaway

Looking Back — 5 Minutes

Last week we saw that Christ is above all things and that believers remain grounded in the gospel. This week that gospel hope meets one of life's deepest pains: the death of someone we love.

Discuss one or more:

- Where did you intentionally put Christ back at the center this week?
- What truth about Christ's supremacy gave you steadiness in a difficult moment?
- Did you notice any area where your hope was tempted to shift away from the gospel?

Transition to Introduction

"Being grounded in Christ matters most when life gives us something we cannot control or undo. Few moments expose what we believe about hope more clearly than death."

Introduction — 5 Minutes

Ask

When someone is grieving, what kinds of responses are genuinely comforting—and what kinds usually are not?

Do not ask people to recount a recent loss unless they choose to. Keep the opening focused on how we care for grieving people.

Follow-Up

Why do you think people sometimes feel pressure to minimize grief when they are trying to sound hopeful?

Say

Death is a universal reality in a fallen world, and Christians are not exempt from the pain it brings. The Bible never asks us to pretend that death does not hurt.

Paul writes to believers who were grieving and confused about Christians who had died before Jesus returned. His answer is not, “Stop grieving.” His answer is that Christian grief is fundamentally different because it is held inside a larger certainty: Jesus died, Jesus rose, and Jesus will return.

Transition to Background

“The Thessalonians’ questions make more sense when we remember how young this church was and how central Christ’s return was to Paul’s teaching.”

Background

The church in Thessalonica was young and had experienced opposition almost immediately. Paul had been forced to leave the city sooner than he wanted, so his letter encouraged believers who were learning to follow Christ under pressure. One of their concerns involved fellow Christians who had died. Because Paul had taught them to expect Jesus’ return, some apparently feared that believers who died beforehand would somehow miss the blessings of that day.

Paul writes so they will not be uninformed. His purpose is pastoral before it is chronological. He gives enough detail to establish certainty, but the passage ends with the command to “encourage one another with these words.”

Christians have differed on details surrounding the timing and sequence of end-times events. This passage should not be forced to answer every question. Its central assurances are clear: Christ will return, believers who have died will be raised, living believers will be gathered with them, and all God’s people will be with the Lord forever.

Transition to Christ Connection

“Every promise in this passage stands on one event that has already happened: Jesus went into death and came out victorious.”

Christ Connection

Christian hope is not merely optimism about the future. It is confidence rooted in the historical death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus truly died. He entered the grave and bore the judgment of sin. He truly rose. Death could not hold Him, and His resurrection became the guarantee that death will not have the final word over those who belong to Him.

That means our hope for deceased believers does not rest on sentiment, memory, or a vague idea that they are “in a better place.” It rests on Christ. The One who rose will return, raise His people, gather them together, and bring them into unbroken fellowship with Himself.

The gospel therefore gives Christians permission to grieve honestly while refusing despair. Tears and hope can occupy the same heart because resurrection is true.

Transition to Study and Apply

“Paul begins by correcting not the Thessalonians’ tears, but the hopelessness that can swallow grief when resurrection is forgotten.”

Study and Apply — 30 Minutes

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says and how we can apply it in our lives this week.

Passage 1 — 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

Grief with Hope

Read the Passage – Have a volunteer read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14.

The Coming of the Lord

[13] But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

[14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (ESV)

Commentary

Use the following commentary to prepare ahead of time. As you lead, summarize the key insights rather than reading everything word-for-word.

Verse 13 begins with Paul’s desire that the church not be uninformed about “those who are asleep.” Sleep is a common biblical picture for the death of believers. It does not mean death is unreal or that the person is merely unconscious in every sense. The image emphasizes that, for the Christian, death is temporary and resurrection lies ahead.

Paul's concern is that they not grieve "like the rest, who have no hope." He does not say, "Do not grieve." Jesus Himself wept at Lazarus's tomb. Grief is a fitting response to separation, loss, and the wrongness of death.

The difference is the kind of grief. Without Christ, death appears to be a final wall. In Christ, death remains an enemy, but it is a defeated enemy. Christian grief looks at the grave through the resurrection.

Verse 14 gives the foundation: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again..." Paul treats the death and resurrection of Jesus as settled gospel truth. Because Christ rose, God will also bring with Jesus those who have died in Him.

Notice that Paul does not ask grieving Christians to manufacture hope from within themselves. Hope comes from something God has done outside us in history. The resurrection of Jesus becomes the solid ground beneath a grieving heart.

Guide Discussion

You do not need to cover every question. Use those that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** What does Paul say should be different about the way Christians grieve?
2. **Discuss.** Why is "grieve with hope" more faithful to this passage than either "do not grieve" or "grief is all there is"?
3. **Deeper Dive.** How does the physical resurrection of Jesus change the way Christians understand death?
4. **Reflective — Index Card.** When you think about death, loss, or your own mortality, where do you most need the resurrection of Jesus to reshape your fears?

Teaching Insight

Say

"Christian hope does not cancel grief. It gives grief a horizon. We can name death as painful and wrong while trusting that the risen Christ has already guaranteed a different ending."

Transition to Passage 2

"Paul now describes that ending—not to satisfy every curiosity, but to reassure the church that no believer will be forgotten when Christ returns."

Passage 2 — 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18

Together with the Lord

Read the Passage – Have a volunteer read 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18.

[15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

[16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

[17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words. (ESV)

Commentary

Verse 15 reassures the Thessalonians that believers alive at Christ's return will not have an advantage over those who have died. The dead in Christ are not second-class participants in His return.

Verse 16 presents the return of Jesus as public, powerful, and unmistakable. The Lord Himself descends from heaven. The imagery of command, archangel, and trumpet emphasizes royal authority and divine action. The central promise is that “the dead in Christ will rise first.”

Verse 17 says living believers will then be caught up together with them to meet the Lord. Paul's emphasis falls heavily on togetherness: believers who feared permanent separation are told that God will gather His people.

The final phrase is the climax: “and so we will always be with the Lord.” The greatest hope of the Christian future is not simply reunion with people we love, as precious as that is. It is permanent fellowship with Jesus.

Verse 18 gives the purpose of the teaching: “Therefore encourage one another with these words.” Eschatology is meant to strengthen the church. Truth about Christ's return should make us steadier, more hopeful, and better able to sit with people in grief.

Consider This — A Goodbye with a Destination

Think about saying goodbye to someone at an airport when you know exactly where that person is going and when you expect to see each other again. The separation can still hurt. You may still cry. Knowing the destination does not make the goodbye meaningless. But the certainty of reunion changes the character of the goodbye. It places separation inside a larger story.

Christian grief is still grief, but resurrection means separation is not the final chapter for those who are in Christ.

Guide Discussion

1. **Good for Students.** What assurances in verses 15–18 would have directly answered the Thessalonians’ fear about believers who had died?
2. **Discuss.** Why do you think Paul makes “we will always be with the Lord” the climax of the passage?
3. **Deeper Dive.** How can Christians discuss Christ’s return faithfully without allowing disagreements over timelines to overshadow the certainties Paul emphasizes here?
4. **Reflective — Index Card.** Who might need encouragement from the hope of this passage—not a quick answer, but a faithful reminder that Christ has defeated death?

Teaching Insight

Say

“The center of Christian hope is not a chart but a Person. Jesus will return, raise His people, gather them, and keep them with Himself forever.”

Transition to Application Exercise

“Paul tells the church to encourage one another with these words. Let’s practice turning this truth into a way of responding to grief and fear.”

Application Exercise — 5–7 Minutes

Grieve • Remember • Encourage

Supplies: Index cards and pens

Write privately unless you choose to share. If grief is fresh, do not force yourself to make it tidy. The goal is to place real sorrow beside real gospel hope.

1. Grieve

What loss, fear, or reality about death do you need permission to acknowledge honestly before God?

2. Remember

Which certainty in this passage do you most need to hold onto?

- Jesus died and rose
- Christ will return
- The dead in Christ will rise
- God will gather His people
- We will always be with the Lord

3. Encourage

Who could you gently encourage with one truth from this passage this week? What would compassionate encouragement sound like?

Say

“Hope is not pretending the pain is small. It is remembering that Jesus is bigger than the grave.”

Transition to Pray Through the Passage

“We can bring both grief and hope into the same prayer because the risen Christ meets us in both.”

Pray Through the Passage — 10 Minutes

Led by the Prayer Champion

Read each verse and prayer prompt aloud. Allow a few moments between prompts for personal reflection and prayer.

If time is limited, use one or two prompts rather than all four. The goal is meaningful prayer through the passage, not completing every prompt.

Prompt 1 — Adoration (Who God Is)

God is powerful over death and faithful to His people.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 — “Jesus died and rose again.”

Praise God that death is not beyond His power and that the resurrection of Jesus proves His victory.

Prompt 2 — Confession (Where We Need Him)

We are tempted to live as though death has the final word.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 — “So that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.”

Confess where fear, despair, or unbelief has crowded out the hope Christ gives.

Prompt 3 — Gratitude (What He Has Done)

Christ promises permanent fellowship with Himself.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 — “And so we will always be with the Lord.”

Thank Jesus that the future of every believer is ultimately to be with Him forever.

Prompt 4 — Response / Obedience (How We Will Obey)

Use truth to strengthen others.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 — “Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Ask God to make you a patient, compassionate encourager to someone who is grieving or afraid.

Prayer Requests, Praises, and Follow-Up

- Ask the group for updates from the previous week’s prayer requests and celebrate answered prayers.
- Invite members to share honestly at whatever level they are comfortable so the group can support one another through prayer and practical care.
- Make room for grief-related prayer requests without pressuring anyone to share details. Pray especially for those facing loss, serious illness, or fear about death.
- Record requests and praises, share them with the group during the week, and follow up at the next gathering.

Transition to Conclusion

“Paul does not leave the church staring at death. He leaves them looking toward the risen and returning Jesus—and then toward one another.”

Conclusion — 5 Minutes

Final Takeaway

Christians grieve because death hurts, but we grieve with hope because Jesus rose and will return. The final future of everyone in Christ is resurrection, reunion, and life with the Lord forever.

This Week's Challenge

Respond — *What Will I Do?*

Use the three words from the application exercise as your rhythm this week.

- Grieve honestly instead of hiding pain.
- Remember one certainty from the passage when fear rises.
- Encourage one person with hope rather than a cliché.

Reflect — *What Is God Showing Me?*

Consider:

- Do I confuse Christian hope with pretending not to hurt?
- What does Jesus' resurrection guarantee for those who belong to Him?
- Which future promise in this passage brings me the most comfort?
- How can I become safer and more compassionate around people who are grieving?

Review — *How Will I Keep God's Word Before Me?*

Review 1 Thessalonians 4:14 throughout the week:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”

When grief or fear feels final, repeat the passage's deepest promise: We will always be with the Lord.

Read — *How Will I Prepare for Next Week?*

Continue with the church's Year of Prayer New Testament Reading Plan.

Next Week's Reading: 2 Thessalonians 1–3; 1 Timothy 1–2

As you read, notice how prayer, perseverance, sound doctrine, and the mission of the gospel shape the church.

Closing Prayer

“Risen Lord Jesus, thank You that You entered death and conquered it. Teach us to grieve honestly without surrendering hope. Comfort those who carry fresh loss, steady those who fear death, and fix our confidence on Your resurrection and return. Help us encourage one another with truth, tenderness, and patience until the day when all Your people are gathered and we are with You forever. Amen.”