Overview

**Biblical Passage**
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

**Supporting Passage**
Philippians 1:20–24; 2 Corinthians 5:6–8

**Memory Verse**
Philippians 1:21

**Biblical Truth**
Jesus will rescue His church out of this world and unite all believers together forever.

While in Corinth, Paul seemed to have heard about a problem that had arisen in the church at Thessalonica. Apparently, the Thessalonian Christians were wondering whether their dead Christian friends and loved ones would be left behind at the return of Christ. Paul wrote to them from Corinth to assure them that their dead will be raised first, and that all the saints will be gathered together to meet Christ in the air. The Bible teaches that this rescue can take place at any time. Although Christians are expected to mourn when loved ones die, they are not to grieve as those who have no hope. In the midst of sorrow, there must be the testimony of the living hope in Christ. First Thessalonians was the first New Testament letter Paul wrote to deal with problems in the churches he had started.

**Context**

**Learning Goals**
• Students will understand the future of Christ’s Church.
• Students will begin to value the return of Christ and the glorification of His Church.

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.
• Pray that your students will know the hope in God’s plan for His Church.

**Prayer Suggestion**
• Pray that your students will take comfort in knowing that there is a future for them beyond this life.
• Pray that your students will realize the urgency in sharing Christ with others who do not know Him.
Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Paul taught that Jesus was coming back soon (2 Thessalonians 2:1–5). The Thessalonian Christians had readily accepted this teaching. But now they had a problem. By “soon” they had understood “in the next few years.” They thought that Christ would return before they died. The problem was that now some of them had died. They faced a crisis of faith. Should they continue to believe that Christ was coming back soon? Should they continue to believe in Christ? Paul wrote this letter to answer this very question.

Paul started the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1–10). This happened only shortly after he had brought Christianity to Europe. Paul was probably only in Thessalonica about a month before his Jewish opponents chased him out of town.

Importance

This lesson teaches the Essential Truth The Future is in God's Hands. As Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth. Both the saved and unsaved will be resurrected physically to be judged by Christ in righteousness. This is the message of hope Paul was relaying to the Thessalonians and a message that is readily applicable to us today. No matter what trials befall you, the knowledge that you will dwell in eternity with Jesus should bolster and reassure you.

This lesson also teaches Jesus is God and Savior and Salvation is by Faith Alone.

Interpretation

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul was adamant about the importance of what happens after death. He began this verse with the negative. Literally, it says, “Not we wish you to be ignorant.” It’s imperative for us to understand this teaching. God loves us and doesn’t want us to be ignorant. He is concerned about us.

The verb tense of the phrase “about those who fall asleep” indicates very clearly that some of the Christians were dying. Just as “pass away” is a euphemism for death today, in both the Jewish and Gentile culture, “fall asleep” was a euphemism for death.

There should always be differences between Christians and non-Christians. Because we have hope in the resurrection, we as Christians should be different. Non-Christians have no expectation of life after death or of heaven. Therefore, they have no hope. Paul doesn’t tell us not to grieve. Rather, he tells us our grieving should be markedly different. It should be filled with hope of our being reunited with our Christian loved ones.
**1 Thessalonians 4:14** In most of his letters, Paul summarizes the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3ff; 2 Cor. 4:14; 2 Tim. 2:8). This is the message that Paul always preached, and it is the message that he had preached in Thessalonica (Acts 17:3–4).

This message of the death and resurrection of Christ is connected to our future resurrection—the very topic about which Paul wrote. It is because Jesus died and rose again that we have a hope for our own resurrection. Without Christ’s work on the cross and His subsequent resurrection, we would have no cause to hope. However, since He has completed His work, to have no hope is to reject the work of Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 4:15** Paul used the phrase “according to the Lord’s own word” to distinguish between his opinion and a direct word from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:6, 8a, 10a). Here, his message comes from God. We do not know whether Paul had some special revelation or whether he knew of some teachings of Christ with which we are not familiar. First Thessalonians 5:4 seems to be a reference to Luke 12:35–40 (see also Matt. 24:30–31). Paul could simply have been expounding on the teaching of Christ that we find in the gospels.

“We who are still alive” does not necessarily indicate that Paul thought he would be alive when Christ returned. (But Paul almost assuredly considered this a real possibility. Likewise, we should be continually aware that Christ might return at any moment. This is not just a theoretical possibility. It is a real possibility!) This verse applies to whomever is alive at the return of Christ.

“The coming of the Lord” is the New Testament phrase that underlies the concept of the Second Coming. This is the third time Paul used this phrase in this letter (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13). Most scholars date Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians among the earliest of New Testament writings, making these references to the Second Coming some of the earliest in the New Testament. We have reassurance that those Christians who die before Christ’s return will not be at a disadvantage. This was the very question of the Thessalonians: Will our brothers and sisters who have died miss the resurrection of believers? The answer is a resounding “No!” Instead, they will be with Christ first.

**1 Thessalonians 4:16** This may be the fullest description of the Second Coming in the New Testament. Jesus is not going to send an ambassador. He will not send an angel or even an archangel. The Lord Himself will come! Three simultaneous signs will mark the coming of the Lord: a loud command, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet call. The trumpet call is repeatedly given as accompanying the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 1:10).

In case verse 15 was not clear, verse 16 clarifies it. Those who have already died will rise to be with Christ first. They are not at a disadvantage; they do not miss anything. They also gain no advantage over those who are still living when Christ returns.

**1 Thessalonians 4:17** The dead “rise.” Those who are alive “are caught up.” Those who are alive are not at any disadvantage. Rather they are caught up together with those who have died. This is a joyous event, and it ushers in our eternal stay in heaven. There is no more returning to earth; we are with God. We are also with our believing loved ones.

**1 Thessalonians 4:18** Remember, the Thessalonian Christians were facing a crisis of faith. Some of them had died, and Christ had not yet returned. Paul was urging them not to lose faith but to instead be comforted! Paul’s words to the Thessalonians ring true to us today . . . all believers will be together with our Lord one day!
Implications

We need to recover the expectancy of the return of Christ! How often do you really stop to consider that Christ could return today before you even get a chance to teach this lesson? We must not be so consumed with His return that we cannot accomplish anything (see 2 Thess. 3:6–15). However, we must be aware of the possibility. Does the return of Christ give you hope? Or does the return of Christ make you concerned that He’ll come back and find you not living the kind of life you should be living? You may have some young people in your class who have recently lost a family member or a friend. Or, you may have some who are concerned about what will happen to them when they die. This is a great opportunity to discuss real issues of life and death. Before you can give them hope, you have to come to terms with death yourself. Do you find hope as a Christian? When you grieve, are you able to grieve as one who has hope? Do you grieve differently than non-Christians?
Teaching Plan

Connect Activity

Review Questions: Singing in Jail
(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)
Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)
Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

Drama: Corn Maze Craze
(5–10 minutes, moderate set-up)
Students will watch a drama about losing friends.

(5–10 minutes, moderate set-up)
Download the drama script. Prior to the session, enlist two students and/or adults to enact the drama. The drama can be as elaborate or simple as you choose. Print copies of the script. Give each cast member a copy ahead of time and ask the cast to be ready to perform it.

Lead actors to perform the drama. Then, say: This skit is a parallel to how we sometimes feel when we lose a loved one. If you have ever experienced it, you know that you can feel confused and left behind. In today’s lesson, we’ll learn that Paul had some pretty specific words about this topic.

Especially for Younger Students: Unity Relay
(10 minutes, moderate set-up)
Students will play a game in which they exemplify the unified Church.

(10 minutes, moderate set-up)
For each group, provide one hula-hoop, a few pieces of blank paper, and one necktie. Set up a different station for each type of object. Provide candy for the winner.

Divide your class into teams of three to four. (Groups of four are ideal.) Instruct them that they will be playing a relay race in which they will compete against other teams. The first stage of the relay is the hula-hoop pass. Students will be required to join hands in a line and pass a hula-hoop from the front of the line to the back without unclasping their hands. The second stage is for two members to work
together making a paper airplane, each member using only one hand. (*The paper airplane must “fly” to be considered successful.*) The final challenge is for two students to work together to tie a necktie on another student. Again, each student can use only one hand. If the students understand the directions, start the activity. Award the winning group candy or some other prize.

When you have finished, say: You may not know it, but, in this game, you just demonstrated a pretty important Christian principle: the unified Church! Each of you were united, working together to achieve a common purpose. In today’s lesson, we will look at this concept, but with a little twist. We will examine what it looks like when the Church is ultimately united when Christ comes again.

Especially for Older Students: Deadly Words

*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

Students will be reminded of the sadness and hopelessness found in most conversations about death.

*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

Put a very large piece of butcher paper or 6–8 pieces of poster board on one wall of the classroom. A large dry erase board will work, also. Write in large letters across the paper the phrase *Deadly Words*. Have plenty of markers available.

Say: It’s been said rather cynically that the only two things in life that are certain are death and taxes. Now, I know very few of you think about taxes all that much, but how many of you ever think about death? In your life as a teenager, how prevalent is the thought of death? Explain your answer. *(Allow students to respond.)* Why is death so hard to discuss? *(Allow answers.)* When students have finished responding, tell them that people have a lot of different words and emotions that come to mind whenever someone talks about death. Have students stand up, go to the paper (or board) and write as many words as they can think of that are associated with death. Allow one minute or so for the written responses. Hopefully words such as funeral, cry, autopsy, and casket will appear.

When students are finished, ask one student to take a black marker to the paper (or board) and circle every word that has a negative connotation. Ask the other students to help by pointing them out. Hopefully, your paper will be full of black circles.

Say: Just as most of the words regarding death had negative connotations, the people at the church in Thessalonica were struggling with hopelessness regarding the deaths of some of the people in their church. We are going to discuss today why it is so important to grieve with hope rather than hopelessness when a believer dies.

Explore Activity
Key Study: Hope for the Future

(10-15 minutes, easy set up)
Students will examine 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 through a guided discussion.

(10-15 minutes, easy set up)

Download the Student Worksheet. Print one for each of your students.

Using the Biblical Context section of the lesson overview, briefly give the background on the biblical passage before starting the activity. Then, call on a student to read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. When he or she finishes, instruct students to look at their Student Worksheets under the activity “Hope For The Future.” Instruct students to take a moment to fill in the blanks. When they have finished, take a moment to unpack the passage together.

- What does verse 18 say that Paul’s purpose was for writing to the Thessalonians? (To encourage them.)
- Why did the Thessalonians need encouragement? Look at verse 13. What did Paul tell them not to do? (To grieve like the rest of men) How were they supposed to grieve? (With hope)
- Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to grieve with hope here, and in verse 14 he gave them a solid argument for why we can have hope in the death of a believer. What is our hope based on? (The resurrection of Jesus Christ) Because Christ conquered death, we can grieve with hope.
- Verses 14 and 15 give us two solid reasons why we can trust what Jesus says about all believers being together with Him eventually. What are those two reasons? (Verse 14 reminds us that Jesus was also raised from the dead [and therefore has the power to raise us]. Verse 15 says, “According to his own word . . . “ In other words, Jesus has promised He will raise us. He has declared that He will do it.)

Say: Let’s pull all this together now. Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonians that they should grieve with hope because Jesus conquered death. Christ will gather all believers from all times and all places together with Him. We can trust that He will do it because He has the power and He promised He will!

If your church has purchased the Eight Essential Truths posters or We Believe Bookmarks, lead a student to read the copy under the statement The Future is in God’s Hands. Say: As Christians, we believe that Jesus will return in glory to the earth. Both the saved and unsaved will be resurrected to be judged. This is the message of hope Paul was relaying to the Thessalonians, and it is a message we need to hear today. No matter what happens to us, we can take hope that we will live in eternity, praising Jesus with our fellow believers.

Master Teacher Key Study: Hope in Christ

(10-15 minutes, easy set up)
Students will examine 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and experience the hope of Christ’s return.
Lesson: The Church Expectant

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with students. Download the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Key Study correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: In his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul dealt with Jesus’ return to earth and the fate of Christians who die before Christ’s return. The questions, “What happens at death?” and “What will happen when Christ returns?” are ones most have thought about at one time or another—especially after the loss of a friend or loved one. While there are many questions surrounding the particulars of Jesus’ return, we can be very sure that the end of life on earth will be the beginning of eternity in heaven for the Christian. It will also be the beginning of an eternity of separation from God for the unsaved.

Provide context for the lesson by referencing the “Biblical Context” section of the Lesson Overview.

1. The future is exciting for Christians and the Church.
   - Because Jesus died and rose again, we have an assurance of our own resurrection. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)
   - The return will mark the beginning of our reign with God in heaven for all eternity. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)

2. Christians should never let the trials of this life discourage them.
   - Heaven will be the culmination of everything God has planned for Christians for all eternity.
   - Other Christians who have already died, including our friends and loved ones, will rise to be with Christ first. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:15.)
   - We will all be together in a family reunion with God on that day. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:18.)

Illustration: People have always been preoccupied with end times. In recent years, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jekins’ Left Behindâ series (Colorado Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995–2006), a series of novels about the Second Coming, has sold 55 million copies. In a 1984 presidential debate with Ronald Reagan, a diplomatic correspondent with NBC News broached the question with the president before the nation on live television, saying, “You’ve been quoted as saying that you do believe, deep down, that we are heading for some kind of biblical Armageddon.” From entertainment to politics, people are preoccupied with their fates. But the Bible assures us only God knows the end of time, and He alone determines it.

“Presidential Debate between President Reagan and former Vice President Mondale.” October 28, 1984. League of Women Voters.


3. We should live in hopeful anticipation of the return of Christ.
   - We must realize that no one knows the day or the time of this incredible event (Matt. 24:36).
   - The return of Christ will come with no warning and will happen suddenly. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17.)
• We should live our lives focused on Christ, knowing that any day—even today—could be our last day on earth.

Conclusion: Although there are many things we don’t know about Christ’s Second Coming (and much of what we think we know could be very wrong!), we can be sure of this one thing: Jesus Christ is coming to earth again. And that is all we really need to know! That one foundational truth for Christians should cause us to think differently and live differently, knowing that we could at any moment see Jesus descending from heaven. We should take comfort in the fact that when Jesus comes to take us with Him, all our troubles will disappear, as we begin our eternity worshiping Him.

Especially for Younger Students: Life Saver
(10 minutes, easy set-up)
Students will take a closer glimpse at Paul’s thoughts on death, life, and the afterlife.

(10 minutes, easy set-up)
Download the “Philippians” activity sheet. There are four verse references per sheet. Print enough for your students, cut out the strips, and distribute them. Download the “Life Saver” activity sheet. Print one copy from which to read your students a story.

Say: Paul’s life was full of persecution and near death experiences that he endured because he was a Christian. Death and the reward of eternal life were things Paul must have constantly thought of. Distribute the “Philippians” sheet and instruct your students to follow along as you or a volunteer read the passage aloud. When you have finished, ask if anyone can summarize the dilemma in which Paul found himself (summed up in verses 21–22). Help the students see that the Apostle Paul was torn between whether he should seek to be in heaven with the Lord or remain on earth to help the churches he had planted. Ask: What conclusion did Paul come to in verse 24? (That he must stay.)

What reason did Paul give for staying? (Verse 22: He knew if he stayed, he could continue to be fruitful, which ultimately meant spreading the gospel.)

Stop the discussion and read the short story from the “Life Saver” sheet. When you have finished, say: Paul was in the business of saving lives. He didn’t use a fancy electronic gadget. Instead, he saved lives by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. While Paul wanted to join Christ in eternity, he knew that his work on earth was more important. When life gets hard, when you are sad or overwhelmed, just remember that all Christians will one day spend eternity in heaven. Until then, we are called to be witnesses on this earth. We are called to be fruitful.

Especially for Older Students: Redeem the Time
(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)
Students will gather in groups to discuss several supporting passages.

(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)
Download the Student Worksheet. Print a copy for each of your students.

Divide students into three groups. Direct each group to complete their assigned section under “Redeem the Time” on the Student Worksheet. When the groups are finished, direct a conversation about the
three passages by allowing the groups to share their findings. Guide them in a discussion about how these passages relate to the passage from Thessalonians in the Key Study.

**Transform Activity**

**Deeper Discussion**
*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will participate in a discussion dealing with the lesson’s truths.*

*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

Lead a discussion using the following questions.

- **How mindful are you of Christ’s return?** If this is something you are always aware of, explain why. If you never think about Christ returning, explain why you think this is the case.
- **Have you lost a loved one who was a believer?** How does it make you feel that one day you will be reunited with him or her in heaven?
- **Jesus is returning to finally unify all believers so they can dwell with Him forever.** How does this knowledge affect your life as a Christian?

**Especially for Younger Students: Heaven**
*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will imagine what heaven will one day be like.*

*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Download the “Heaven” activity sheet. Print one copy to read to your class.*

Instruct your students to close their eyes and be completely silent. Read the narrative from the “Heaven” PDF. When you have finished, instruct students to spend a moment in prayer, thanking God for His plan to redeem His children. Encourage them to begin to live in anticipation of Christ’s return.

**Especially for Older Students: Comfort in Christ**
*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will begin to take comfort in the return of Christ and the unification of the Church.*

*(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Download the “Comfort in Christ” activity sheet. Print enough copies of the sheet so that each of your students will receive one card.*
Lead your students in a discussion about what it’s like being a Christian teenager in the 21st century. Ask your students to discuss some sacrifices they make for their faith. (*Examples could be as significant as friends or relationships or as simple as choices for weekend entertainment.*) Ask if any have ever been made fun of or somehow persecuted for their faith. Ask students if they have seen a friendship or relationship fall apart because they refused to compromise their beliefs. Ask: **Does it make a difference to you that we already know how all this is going to end? How does it make you feel that one day Jesus will return and rescue us from this world, reuniting all believers for eternity with Him?** Encourage students to vocalize these feelings.

When you finish, distribute the “cross cards” you have cut out from the “Comfort In Christ” PDF. Ask a volunteer to read the biblical reference on the card. When he or she has finished, say: **Jesus is faithful. And He promised to return to take us to where He is. We are called to be a light in a dark world, and often that makes our lives difficult. But take heart . . . Jesus will one day come to save us from this world. And when that day comes, all believers, the entire Church, will be unified in Christ.**

Encourage your students to keep this card in their wallets, their car, or on their mirror as a reminder to both live for Jesus and have faith in His return.

**Creative Prayer**

*(5–10 minutes, moderate set-up)*

_Students will light candles and pray to receive the hope God promises in death._

*(5–10 minutes, moderate set-up)*

_Set up a table with several votive candles and fireplace matches. Use a CD player and quiet music to set a mood for prayer._

Provide soft lighting. Instruct students to carefully take a fireplace match, strike it, and light one or two candles. Tell them as they do to think of a loved one who has gone on to be with the Lord. Instruct students to silently thank God for these loved ones and how they impacted the students’ lives. Instruct them to thank God that a place has been created for all Christians to spend eternity. Once each student has had the opportunity to light candles, close the prayer by thanking Him that you have the hope and assurance of one day being there with Him and with these loved ones..
Community
Lesson 30, Review Questions

1. Who followed Paul and Silas in Philippi, harassing them about being “servants of the Most High God?”
   a. Judaizers
   b. Roman soldiers
   c. A fortune-telling slave girl
   d. The jailer

2. What did Paul do to the slave girl after she harassed him in Philippi?
   a. He rebuked her.
   b. He sat down and talked with her, leading her to Christ.
   c. He had her arrested.
   d. He commanded the evil spirit to come out of her.

3. What was the reaction of the slave girl’s owner after Paul released her from the evil spirit?
   a. He became a believer.
   b. He was angry and had Paul and Silas arrested.
   c. He released the slave girl.
   d. He ran Paul and Silas out of town.

4. What did Paul and Silas do in prison after being severely beaten in Philippi?
   a. They sang hymns and said prayers.
   b. They wept.
   c. They pleaded to God, asking Him to release them.
   d. They rested from their traumatic experience.

5. What became of the jailer in Philippi who decided it was best to take his own life after the earthquake?
   a. He drew his sword and committed suicide.
   b. He found Paul and Silas and had them beaten again.
   c. He repaired the jail.
   d. He and his entire family were saved.
1. Who followed Paul and Silas in Philippi, harassing them about being “servants of the Most High God?” (Lesson 29)
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   b. Roman soldiers
   c. A fortune-telling slave girl
   d. The jailer

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Community
Lesson 27, Drama

Corn Maze Craze

Creative Note: This sketch illustrates that we will see lost loved ones again.

Characters:
JARED
CAROL

(JARED enters looking very frazzled.)

JARED: No, no, no, no! This can’t be happening again!

(JARED keeps looking around.)

JARED: OK, very funny! Game over, guys! Can we please stop this so we can all get out of here? Where are you guys? This can’t be happening again. First Joe, then Mary, then Jessie. Then what?

(CAROL enters.)

CAROL: What are you doing?

JARED: What?

CAROL: What’s with all the shouting, dude?

JARED: This corn maze is making me crazy, that’s what’s with all the shouting.

CAROL: How is that doing you any good?

JARED: (very sarcastically) I’m sorry. Can I help you with something?

CAROL: No, I’m fine. I just heard all the screaming and shouting and was wondering what all the commotion was about.

JARED: (dramatically) It’s about none-ya!

CAROL: Kind of rude, aren’t you?

JARED: Why are you still here?

CAROL: I thought I heard someone crying out for help.

JARED: I was “crying” out to my friends.

CAROL: Well, they’re gone.

JARED: Clearly.

CAROL: So then why are you calling out to them?

JARED: ’Cause I want to find my way out of here and go home.

CAROL: So go home.

JARED: Not without my friends.

CAROL: But you’re friends are gone.

JARED: Well, I’m not moving until I find them.

CAROL: That’s silly.

JARED: Excuse me?

CAROL: Are you really just gonna sit here, walk around in circles, crying out your friends’ names out like a little girl with a skinned knee? They’re not coming back.

JARED: You don’t know that.

CAROL: They’re already home, my friend.

JARED: They wouldn’t just leave me here.

CAROL: Hey, this ain’t my first corn maze. Sometimes in this place we get separated from the ones we love and we don’t really have a choice in the matter.

JARED: But we were supposed to finish this together.

CAROL: That would be ideal, I know, but things don’t always turn out that way.

JARED: Did you come in with friends?

CAROL: I did.
JARED: And where are they now?

CAROL: I suppose they are on the other side of this maze now, waiting for me.

JARED: How long ago was that?

CAROL: A long time ago.

JARED: And you just continued?

CAROL: What good would it do to just sit around in one place?

JARED: I guess you’re right.

CAROL: I know I’ll finish this thing, but not if I just sit around waiting for my friends, moping over the fact that we got split up.

JARED: So, do you think I could finish this thing?

CAROL: Not if you sit around here, you won’t.

JARED: Would you like to try to finish it with me?

CAROL: I would love to.

JARED: I’m Jared.

CAROL: I’m Carol.

(Both exit.)

(The End)
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE
Take a few moments to fill in the following blanks. Use the verse references to help you.

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 Paul wrote to __________________________ the Thessalonians.

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 He told them not to grieve like __________________________ but to instead grieve with __________________________.

3. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 Our hope is based on the __________________________ of Jesus Christ.

4. 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 15 We can trust Christ to raise us because He was also _____________.
   Plus, Jesus has __________________________ that He will do it!

REDEEM THE TIME
Use the following passages of Scripture to answer the questions below.

GROUP ONE
2 Corinthians 5:6-10
What should our ambition be? (v.9) __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
How do we do that in everyday life? (Be specific) __________________________
   __________________________
___________________________

GROUP TWO
Philippians 1:20-24
What does verse 21 mean? __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
Which does Paul consider better, life or death? Why? __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
How do we do that in everyday life? (Be specific) __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

GROUP THREE
Colossians 4:5-6
How do we make the most of every opportunity that we have with unbelievers? (v.6) __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
How do we do that in everyday life? (Be specific) __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
The Master Teacher Key Study

HOPE IN CHRIST

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with students. Click here to access the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Key Study correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: In his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul dealt with Jesus’ return to earth and the fate of Christians who die before Christ’s return. The questions, “What happens at death?” and “What will happen when Christ returns?” are ones most have thought about at one time or another—especially after the loss of a friend or loved one. While there are many questions surrounding the particulars of Jesus’ return, we can be very sure that the end of life on earth will be the beginning of eternity in heaven for the Christian. It will also be the beginning of an eternity of separation from God for the unsaved.

Provide context for the lesson by referencing the “Biblical Context” section of the Lesson Overview.

1. The future is exciting for Christians and the Church.
   • Because Jesus died and rose again, we have an assurance of our own resurrection. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)
   • The return will mark the beginning of our reign with God in heaven for all eternity. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)

2. Christians should never let the trials of this life discourage them.
   • Heaven will be the culmination of everything God has planned for Christians for all eternity.
   • Other Christians who have already died, including our friends and loved ones, will rise to be with Christ first. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:15.)
   • We will all be together in a family reunion with God on that day. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:18.)

Illustration: People have always been preoccupied with end times. In recent years, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’ Left Behind® series (Colorado Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995–2006), a series of novels about the Second Coming, has sold 55 million copies. In a 1984 presidential debate with Ronald Reagan, a diplomatic correspondent with NBC News broached the question with the president before the nation on live television, saying, “You’ve been quoted as saying that you do believe, deep down, that we are heading for some kind of biblical Armageddon.” From entertainment to politics, people are preoccupied with their fates. But the Bible assures us only God knows the end of time, and He alone determines it.

3. We should live in hopeful anticipation of the return of Christ.
   • We must realize that no one knows the day or the time of this incredible event (Matt. 24:36).
   • The return of Christ will come with no warning and will happen suddenly. (See Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:17.)
   • We should live our lives focused on Christ, knowing that any day—even today—could be our last day on earth.
**Conclusion:** Although there are many things we don't know about Christ's Second Coming (and much of what we think we know could be very wrong!), we can be sure of this one thing: Jesus Christ is coming to earth again. And that is all we really need to know! That one foundational truth for Christians should cause us to think differently and live differently, knowing that we could at any moment see Jesus descending from heaven. We should take comfort in the fact that when Jesus comes to take us with Him, all our troubles will disappear, as we begin our eternity worshiping Him.
STRENGTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT
Fill in the blanks as your teacher presents the lesson to you. Use the space provided to take notes as you go along.

1. The ___________ is exciting for _______________ and the _______________.

2. ________________ should never let the _______________ discourage them.

3. We should live in ________________ of the return of Christ.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

• How mindful are you of Christ’s return? If this is something you are always aware of, explain why. If you never think about Christ returning, explain why you think this is the case.

• Have you lost a loved one who was a believer? How does it make you feel that one day you will be reunited with him or her in Heaven?

• Jesus is returning to finally unify all believers so they can dwell with Him forever. How does this knowledge affect your life as a Christian?
Philippians 1:20–24
Tear or cut along the dotted lines. Distribute one slip to each student.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Phil. 1:20–24).
Life Saver

On Saturday, October 8, 2005, a massive earthquake struck Pakistan. Registering 7.6 on the Richter scale, the damage was unbelievable; nearly 80,000 people died, and almost 70,000 more were injured. Tens of thousands of buildings collapsed into piles of rubble and twisted metal. Entire villages were virtually destroyed. A staggering four million people were believed to be homeless. Landslides and rock falls hampered the search efforts that went on across the country. But even in this harsh environment, there were miraculous stories of people being saved from death’s grasp.

A device called a Trapped Person’s Locator (TPL) can detect a person’s heartbeat through 50 feet of debris. Using this device, rescuers detected a heartbeat nearly three days after the earthquake in a collapsed 19-story building. After digging through the rubble, the rescuers discovered a four-year old boy, barely surviving amid the destruction. The boy was in such a state of shock that he was unable to even give his name to rescuers.

But . . . his life had been saved.
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE
Take a few moments to fill in the following blanks. Use the verse references to help you.

1. *1 Thessalonians 4:18* Paul wrote to ______________ the Thessalonians.

2. *1 Thessalonians 4:13* He told them not to grieve like ____________ but to instead grieve with ____________________.

3. *1 Thessalonians 4:14* Our hope is based on the ________________ of Jesus Christ.

4. *1 Thessalonians 4:14, 15* We can trust Christ to raise us because He was also ___________. Plus, Jesus has ________________ that He will do it!

REDEEM THE TIME
Use the following passages of Scripture to answer the questions below.

**GROUP ONE**
2 Corinthians 5:6-10

What should our ambition be? (v.9)

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

How do we do that in everyday life? (Be specific)

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

**GROUP TWO**
Philippians 1:20-24

What does verse 21 mean? _______

______________________________

______________________________

Which does Paul consider better, life or death? Why?

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

**GROUP THREE**
Colossians 4:5-6

How do we make the most of every opportunity that we have with unbelievers? (v.6) ___________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

How do we do that in everyday life? (Be specific)

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

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Heaven

Imagine the air around you is warm and pleasant. A sweet aroma is in the air. All around you the sound of singing can be heard. You open your eyes. The whole world is saturated in white light, the brightest, cleanest whiteness you have ever seen. But for some reason it doesn’t hurt your eyes. In fact, it is the most pleasant light you have ever seen.

As everything comes into view, you see someone in front of you. You instantly recognize Him to be Jesus. He is majestic and beautiful. His smile is warm, like a trusted friend’s. But at the same time He has a royal air about Him. He reaches out and takes your hand and you begin to walk together. You breathe deeply, and each breath is better than the one before it. As you walk, you begin to look around. Everything is new, yet strangely familiar. To your right is a mountain, lush and green, full of life. Above it are colors streaking across the sky that you have never seen before. To your left is a huge white marble Temple. You step inside. It is enormous—full of a thousand columns. Huge, winged creatures circle the throne crying out “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.”

You fall to your knees as you see the One who is seated there. You have longed for this day, and, now that it is here, you find that you can’t even bring yourself to lift your head to look at Him. As you kneel there, almost paralyzed, you feel the warmth of a hand on your shoulder. It is a much-loved family member. As you look into the familiar face, great memories flood your mind. You are overjoyed. Another hand touches you . . . and then another . . . and then another.

Soon, your whole body is covered, and together they begin to lift you to your feet. As you stand among this great cloud of witnesses, you can’t help but cry out with the creatures, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”
Cut out the cards below. Print enough copies of the PDF so that each of your students gets one card. If possible, print the PDF on cardstock.

John 14:3