**Community Group Discussion Guide
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

**Sermon Overview**: This sermon will emphasize what happens at death for Christians and why we should have hope in the return of Christ. We are called upon to encourage one another to live with the hope found in the truths of Jesus coming back.

*Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

*Set the Context…*

**Context**: Due to a misunderstanding of the second coming of Christ, some of the Thessalonian believers had become lazy and idle. Paul had to address this in verses 11-12, calling them to live quietly, mind their own affairs, and work with their hands while they await the return of Christ. Continuing with that theme, verses 13-18 deal with Jesus coming back. The Thessalonians had a great anticipation of this event and were afraid that believers who died before it happened would miss it. He will explain for them the hope of Christ’s return and the rapturing of all believers who have died trusting the gospel and who remain at the time of his coming.

**Commentary:**  Paul heard from Timothy that the Thessalonians were troubled because they did not know how to reconcile their understandings of the return of Jesus with the recent deaths of fellow believers. This caused them to have great sorrow and grief over those who had died before they could see Christ’s triumphant return. Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be “***uninformed, about those who are asleep”*** so that they would not “***grieve as others do who have no hope***.” (v.13) Paul demonstrates why Christians should not be hopeless, in contrast to non-believers. For those who have placed their trust in the person and work of Christ, they have a future that is guaranteed in Christ: “***for since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep***” (v14). Paul takes the Thessalonians back to the Gospel and what God has done through Jesus to give the assurance of life after death. The resurrection of the body is a crucial part of the Gospel that we can neglect sometimes. If there were no resurrection, Christians are most to be pitied (1 Cor 15:19). But the resurrection of Jesus guarantees every believer’s resurrection as well. The Bible often uses the word “sleep” as the indication of death (Mt 9:24; 27:52; Mk 5:39; Jn 11:1-14; Acts 7:60). Paul uses the word “sleep” to emphasize that death is temporal for the believers. In other words, death is not final, but the resurrection is. Furthermore, Paul says that when Jesus comes back, he will “***bring with him those who have fallen asleep***,” which reminds us that when a believer dies their soul goes to be with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6) For this reason, believers are not hopeless in death, but full of hope in Christ. Verse 15 tells us how to exhort one another “***by a word from the Lord***.”

Paul describes what the second coming of Jesus will be like. “***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***” (v.16) Paul’s demonstration resembles Jesus’ teaching on his own return (see Mt 24:29-31). Many are familiar with the term “rapture” which comes from this verse. “***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***” (v.17). The Latin word for “caught up” is rapturo, describing the Lord gathering his people to meet him in the clouds. So at the return of Christ, there will be no disadvantage for the dead Christians, for they will rise first receiving their glorified bodies, and the living Christians likewise will be changed and joined with them to be with Christ forever. In the Bible, the cloud often indicates the glory and the presence of God (Exod 13:21; 33:9-10; Num 12:5; 1 Kgs 8:10-11). Believers look with hope for the day that we are walking with God in perfect resurrected bodies. Paul tells us what we are to do with this end times theology. It is not just so we have correct information, but that it would lead us to “***encourage one another with these words***.” (v.18)

*Share main truths of the passage along with verses that teach them* and discuss how to apply to our daily lives …

**Key Points**:

* Christians who are alive have hope in Christ and ought to encourage to one another with the truth (4:13, 18)
* Christians who are dead will rise and will join Jesus on the day of His return (4:14-16)
* Christians who are alive will join Jesus on the day of His return (4:17)

**Discussion and Application Questions:**

Verses 4:13, 18

1. The Thessalonians experienced sorrow and grief, because of their lack of knowledge in Scripture. What are some examples today where ignorance of biblical teachings creates confusion and grief?
2. Can you think of someone who could use encouragement because of the death of a loved one whom you could share this word with?
3. What is one hindrance for you to share the hope you have in Jesus with those who don’t have hope?
4. Christians are to encourage one another by reminding one another of the Gospel. How has the community group helped you to place your hope in Jesus?
5. Who is one person that you can encourage with the Gospel of hope this week? How will you do this?

Verses 14-16

1. The end times in the Bible is a difficult teaching to comprehend. What are some things you can be doing to grow in your understanding of these things?
2. Paul was not afraid to tell what God says about an issue. Are you afraid to tell the truth from God’s Word? Why do you feel afraid of telling other people the truth from God’s word?
3. When grieving the loss of loved ones, what becomes an encouragement to you? How can you actively press into those encouragements, so you do not lose hope?
4. How can your community group (or Highview Baptist Church) help with grief?

Verse 17

1. What effect should end times theology have on your eagerness to be missional and make disciples?
2. If we believe the promises of Jesus’ return, what kinds of things would we be doing while we waited for it?
3. How can you overcome distractions in our lives that take our focus off of Jesus’ return? How can your community group help you?
4. How does the thought of being with Jesus always when He returns grow our worship in difficult circumstances?

*Share a key take away or challenge for the week…*

*Pray together in light of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18…*

**Prayer Guide:**Pray for our church that those who are grieving the loss of loved ones would be comforted by God’s word and his presence. Pray that we would be a loving and compassionate church who initiates encouragement for our brothers and sisters by reminding them of the gospel.

Pray for our city that our neighbors and friends who do not have hope in Christ would have their hearts changed by the gospel. Pray that they would hear the trumpet of the Lord’s shouts now in the period of grace before his return in judgment.

Pray for our world, that many who are ignorant of the truth because they live in unreached nations would be reached for Christ, and that disciples would emerge in their midst to continue to spread the message of hope in Christ the Lord.