

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Study the Text . . .

Confidence in Salvation

In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks clearly of the day of the Lord, giving assurance that it is coming. Not only is it coming, but it is meant to be a joyful day for Christians. While the church at Thessalonica was in many ways the model for Paul's church planting efforts, they still needed correction or assurance on several points. The second coming of Christ is the highlighted theme in Paul's letters to this church. It is referenced in nearly every chapter of the letters to the Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-28

- What Paul and his company write is based on the authority of the word of the Lord (v15).
- They dispel any worry believers may have about those who have already died in the faith (v16).
- Ultimately all Christians past and present at the Lord's return will be united together with Christ and will be with Him always (v17).
- These promises give peace and confidence about the end to all Christians.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-10

- Paul encourages Christians to be ready rather than fearing the day of the Lord. They are prepared with faith, love and hope for salvation (v8).
- For Christians this is a day in which they are confident. There is no fear because they know Christ has destined them for salvation (v9).

Brokenness for the Lost

If we as Christians have such unwavering confidence in the salvation Christ delivered on the cross, then we most naturally would be confident in the damnation of those who have not believed. We must also remember that many have not believed because they have not heard. This truth was heavy on Paul's heart when he carried the good news to new places. It was this heart heaviness that drove him to do that very thing. This was the business of Paul and his companions. They, like Christ, were about the Father's business of reaching out to the nations.

This is the portion of the passage immediately preceding what was just read as a comfort to Christians. Observe the contrasting description of the Day of the Lord when looking through the lens of a lost soul.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-7

- Paul says that for some the Day of the Lord will be unexpected and unwelcomed as a thief coming in the night (v2).
- Those who think that there is peace will be caught in inescapable pains (v3).
- When he refers to sleep and drunkenness in darkness, Paul is describing the unaware and undisciplined state of those caught in sin (v7).
- The lost, on the Day of the Lord, have no hope of salvation and are blind to the desolate end that will come of their faithless lives.

One great privilege we have in reading letters Paul wrote to the churches he had helped start is that we get to see the heart he and his companions felt toward the lost and those they had reached. 1Thess. 2:8 speaks of their affections and desires for them. Verse 19 of that same chapter calls them their “hope” and “joy” and “crown of boasting.” In Chapter 3, Paul tells of how they could not bear to be without news from them and that when they heard of their endurance of faith they were comforted even in the midst of great personal affliction. Paul said, “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” It is evident that Paul was not content with selfish peace of mind in the assurance of his salvation. The flip side of the assurance he had in Christ was utter hopelessness for those who had yet to hear such good news.

Living Between the Times

As followers of Christ we can all look back to a time when we were dead in sin. We know the truth of God’s grace and that we have been redeemed only by the completed work of Christ on the cross. We know the joy we have already received by Christ’s death and look forward with a guarantee of Christ’s glorious return and a future with him. While we live between the times of the incarnate Christ and the coming of Christ in glory, our hearts are filled with urgent peace. We are assured of our own salvation but burdened for those who have no hope. As we seek God’s face and He sanctifies us, we will be all the more confident in our salvation and our lives given to the work of sharing the Gospel with all nations.

Group Discussion . . .

- What emotions would you use to describe the way you typically feel about the second coming of Christ?
- What are some questions you have or have had from others that might cause you to think negatively about the return of Christ?
- What are some other scriptures you have memorized or are familiar with that give you confidence when looking forward to Christ’s return?
- Is urgent peace a concept that resonates with your soul? Do you find you lean more toward one over the other, urgency (for the lost) or peace (in your own salvation)?
- What is your motivation in sharing the Gospel? Do you see it as a duty or command? Have you experienced brokenness for the lost?
- How can you tangibly live in anticipation of Christ’s return?