

Paul Gave Hope

BIBLE PASSAGE: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

MAIN POINT: Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
2 We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Consider how your life would change if you could know the future—if you could accurately predict the weather or outcomes of baseball game. If you could know how your life is going to turn out, would you live today differently? In the bigger picture of God's plan for the world, we do know the future. God reveals the outcome of His plan for humanity in His Word.

In the Book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes about the future to encourage believers facing persecution. Their hope as believers then is the same as our hope as believers today. We look forward to a final resurrection, the return of Jesus, and the judgment of the world.

Around AD 50, the city of Thessalonica was filled with those who worshiped idols, Greek and Roman gods, and even the Roman emperor himself. So when Paul started a church there, he quickly faced persecution and was forced to flee the city. Even though he could not return, Paul still loved the young church and was concerned for them, so he sent Timothy to check on the believers.

Timothy reported back with good news—though the church was suffering from persecution, they were holding tightly to their faith. They did have some misunderstandings about Christianity, especially the return of Jesus, but they were working hard for the Lord. Paul wrote a letter to encourage the believers and to clear up misunderstandings about the future and what happens when Christians die.

Perhaps Paul's greatest message was about the return of Jesus. On that day, Paul said, believers will be freed from their sufferings. On the Day of the Lord, Jesus will return for His people and judge the wicked. That's a promise we can still claim today.

Paul's letter gave believers hope. The hope we find in the Bible is stronger than just wanting something to happen; biblical hope is expecting with confidence because we know God is faithful and true. Believers live with hope, trusting that Jesus will come again.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Go vertical:** Use a step stool to help kids visualize believers going up to be with Jesus, and Jesus coming back to rule the world.
- **Display a map:** Use a map that shows the Bible times cities and borders to help kids imagine where the city of Thessalonica was. Consider also showing pictures from the Internet of the modern day city, called Thessaloniki or Salonica.

Paul Gave Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

About 20 years after Jesus died on the cross and rose again, **Paul traveled to the city of Thessalonica.** The people there worshiped idols. Some of them even worshiped the Roman emperor. **Paul told the people the good news about Jesus, and many people believed in Jesus. Paul started the church in Thessalonica, but some people did not like Paul or his teachings and they forced him out of the city.**

Paul worried about the people in Thessalonica. They had not been believers for very long. **So Paul sent his friend Timothy to see how they were doing. Timothy brought back good news. Even though the Thessalonians faced suffering for their faith, they did not give up. Paul wrote a letter to encourage the believers. He told them that Jesus will return someday. On that day, Paul said, believers will be freed from their sufferings! This message gave them great hope.**

Paul wrote to the believers at the church in Thessalonica to help them know what is true and to teach them what happened to friends who had died. The people could grieve with hope. Because Jesus died and rose again, God would bring with Him those who had died—if they trusted in Jesus.

On the day that Jesus returns, the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout. Those believers who have died will be raised to life first. Then believers who are still alive will be raised up together to meet the Lord. We will live with Him forever!

No one knows when Jesus will come again. The Day

of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, when you do not expect it. **So be ready.** God has promised us eternal life; He has saved us through His Son, Jesus. **Whether we are alive or dead when Jesus returns, He will bring us all home with Him forever. So continue to encourage each other because we have this future hope.**

Christ Connection: The prophets in the Old Testament told about the Day of the Lord, a day when God would come to judge the world and save His people. Paul said that in the future, on the Day of the Lord, Jesus will return for His people and judge the wicked. Believers live with hope, knowing that Jesus will come again.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover how God's Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce the STORY

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MAIN POINT: Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.

Tip: Be sensitive to kids who may still be in the midst of uncertain situations or family struggles.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them to share about a time they worried about the future. Maybe it was a move to a new part of the country. Maybe it was a time their family faced a financial hardship.

SAY • It can be scary not knowing about the future. We have lots of questions that we don't always have the answer to. But we can be encouraged knowing that God is in control, and He will give us everything we need.

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the "Hopeful Questions" on the activity page. Ask kids to complete the statements with words or pictures to represent what they hope for.

SAY • Sometimes we use the word *hope* to mean something that would be nice, but it may not happen. The Bible talks about the hope we have in Jesus' return, but that hope is certain. We know Jesus will return because He has promised us that He will.

- "Hopeful Questions" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Future hope charades

Ask kids to think about what they want to be when they grow up. One at a time, kids will silently act out their desired profession for the class. The other kids will try to guess what it is. Play as time allows.

SAY • We all have hopes for our future. Some are small, like what we're going to eat for dinner. Others are big, like what kind of job we want to have or where we want to live. Sometimes when we hope for something in the future, we may be able to do things now to prepare for it. Jesus has promised that He will return to us one day. This promise gives us hope. The hope we get from Jesus is more than just wanting something to happen, it's knowing that it will happen because Jesus keeps all His promises.

OPTION 2: What makes it better?

Present kids with scenarios in which there is a problem or difficult situation. Invite kids to offer suggestions on how to handle their emotions. Talk about each idea suggested.

Suggested scenarios:

- A bully shoved you, and you scraped your knee falling down.
- Your grandmother has trouble walking up stairs.
- Your pet gerbil died.

SAY • Because of sin our whole world is broken! We get hurt and sick, things wear out and break, and people and animals die. But there is hope because Jesus has promised to make all things brand new one day! In our story today we'll hear that Paul encouraged the Thessalonians. How do you think he did that?

Transition to teach the story



Teach the STORY

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

[Leader enters wearing a flight suit and carrying a large helmet.]

LEADER • Good morning, boys and girls! My name is *[leader's name]*, and I'm so glad to see you all. It's been a hard week of training for our space mission. And I don't just mean it's been hard physically. I've been worrying a lot, too, about what it's going to be like in space. I've never been there before so it's a little scary. What if our spaceship breaks? What if we run out of water? Or oxygen? Have you ever been scared to do something new? *[Allow time for kids to respond.]*

My team and I have been working hard to get ready and prepare for lots of different problems that we may face while up in space. Some unexpected things will always happen, but we have to trust that God will see us through.

I think our Bible story might be able to calm my fears. It's about how **Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return.** Paul's friends may not have been going to space, but they had worries of their own that Paul addressed by reminding them of the hope that we have in Jesus.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Who remembers our big picture question?

How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel. It can be hard to wait for something when you don't know when it will happen. We all have to wait for Christmas or our birthday, but we know for sure when our birthday will be. We don't know when Jesus will return, but we do know how to live while we wait.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Paul visited many churches throughout the ancient world, planting churches along the way. He shared the gospel everywhere he went, and in each area pockets of people put their faith in Jesus. Paul couldn't be everywhere at once to continue teaching the people, so he wrote letters. Many of Paul's letters make up the New Testament. Our story comes from his letter written to the believers in Thessalonica. It's called "Paul Gave Hope."

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

- Bibles
- “Paul Gave Hope” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Paul Gave Hope.”

LEADER • When Jesus went back to heaven, angels told the people watching that Jesus would return to earth the same way He went up into heaven. Although Jesus taught that no one but God the Father knows exactly when He would return, some people still believed that Jesus would come back before they died. When that didn’t happen, some people began to worry if Jesus’ promise could be trusted.

Paul wanted to encourage the believers in Thessalonica. He knew that some of them were worried about their friends who had died. What had happened to them, and what would happen to them when Jesus comes back? Paul encouraged them that everyone who has believed in Jesus will be raised to life one day and be with Him forever.

People who have put their faith in Jesus don’t have to worry about death, because Jesus has promised eternal life to those who trust Him. One day we will see Jesus face to face. We will be with Him forever and never experience sadness, pain, or death ever again! Even though it is natural to worry about the future, believers don’t have to be afraid because Jesus has promised to return and make all things new. In the meantime, *how do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God’s truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.*

Christ connection

LEADER • The prophets in the Old Testament told about the Day of the Lord, a day when God would come to judge the world and save His people. Paul said that in the future, on the Day of the Lord, Jesus will return for His people and judge the wicked. Believers live with hope, knowing that Jesus will come again.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

LEADER • The Bible tells us about who God is and what He has done. It allows us to know God. Every word in Scripture comes from God and helps us know how to live while waiting for Jesus to return. ***We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.***

Lead boys and girls in singing “Inspired by God.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “Inspired by God” song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever been doing a difficult task and wanted to give up? Think about that as you watch this short clip.

Show the “Unit 35, Session 2” discussion starter video. Discuss what motivated Maria to keep going and finish the race. What did Paul say to encourage the Thessalonian believers? Ask the kids why they do or do not think Paul’s words would be encouraging. How can we encourage one another?

- “Unit 35, Session 2” discussion starter video

LEADER • We do not know when Jesus will return, which can make it difficult for us to always remember that He is coming. Even so, the Bible teaches that God

always keeps His promises. Jesus will return someday to fix all that is broken in the world. We live with hope because we know that Jesus will take away all sin, sadness, and pain.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Hope of Heaven” song

LEADER • I’m so thankful for the hope I have in Jesus because I know that one day He will return and make everything in this broken world right again. Let’s sing praise to Him together!
Sing together “Hope of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, thank You for giving us the gift of hope. We face hard things sometimes, but because of Jesus we don’t have to be afraid or worry about anything. We trust that You will keep Your promises. Help us to remember Your truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel as we wait for Jesus to return. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply the STORY

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- poster board
- markers
- scissors
- timer (optional)

Write out the key passage on two pieces of poster board (or more if you have a large class). Cut the poster board into puzzle pieces and give each team a puzzle. The teams must reassemble the puzzle, stand up, and read the completed puzzle aloud. Time the kids to see which team can work the puzzle and say the key passage the fastest.

SAY • We've been talking about how to live while waiting for Jesus to return. ***We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.*** Reading God's Word allows us to do these things. If we want to remember God's truth, we must learn about God's truth in His Word. If we want to grow in godliness, we learn what godliness is through God's Word. And if we want to spread the gospel, we must know what the gospel is through God's Word!

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- index cards
- pen
- dry erase board or chalkboard
- markers or chalk

Distribute Bibles to kids. Ask a volunteer to tell you what book of the Bible today's story comes from. (*1 Thessalonians*) Help kids open their Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11.

Before small group time prepare several index cards with words or phrases related to the Bible story. Form two groups of kids. One at a time, a kid from each group will come to the board and choose an index card. She will draw a picture to represent the word or phrase on her index card. If her team guesses correctly, they win one point. If they cannot guess, the other team has a chance to guess the picture. Then, the other team will have a turn to take a card and draw a picture. After each word or phrase has been guessed, ask kids how it was used in the Bible story.

Suggested words:

- Jesus
- letter
- good news
- heaven
- thief in the night
- Paul
- waiting

SAY • Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return. We can also be encouraged by Paul's letters by remembering that Jesus will keep His promise to come back. One day we will see Him face to face and be with Him forever!

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Thief in the night

Give each child a clothespin to clip on her clothing. Instruct kids to spread out around the room and close their eyes. Silently choose one child to be the "thief." The thief will steal a clothespin from someone else and return to his place. The child whose clothespin was stolen must try to guess

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.



LOW PREP

• clothespins

who the thief is. Return clothespins and play as time allows.

SAY • Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return. Jesus' return will come like a thief in the night—not because he is sneaking or because He wants to do something wrong, but because no one can predict exactly when Jesus will come back. Even though we don't know the date or time that Jesus will come back, we know that He will because He has promised to return for His people. Instead of worrying about the exact date we can live lives that honor and glorify Him now, and make the most of our time on this earth! ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.***

OPTION 2: Musical chairs

- chairs
- music player (optional)
- "Hope of Heaven" or "Inspired by God" song (optional)

Form a circle of chairs so that there is one fewer chairs than the number of kids in your group. Instruct the kids to stand around the circle of chairs and begin walking clockwise around them when you sing or play music. When you stop the music, kids should sit in a chair as quickly as they can without hurting anyone. Whoever is unable to find a seat is out. Remove a chair and play again. Continue until there is one player left.

SAY • In that game, none of you knew exactly when I would stop the music. You each had to be ready at all times for the end of the round. In a way, that's similar to how we live our lives. ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.***

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by reminding them that Jesus will return. We cannot know when Jesus will return, but we remain hopeful for that day by trusting the Holy Spirit to help us live for God's glory each day.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.