

Session 6

Not As Those Who Have No Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 51-57; Revelation 21:1-5

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that Christian hope does not cancel grief but transforms it; that those who die in Christ are not severed from his Body, so that our bond with them continues in the communion of saints; and that God has promised to wipe away every tear.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 1012: the Christian vision of death receives privileged expression in the liturgy of the Church, which prays that for the faithful, life is changed, not ended. The Church buries her dead in hope, prays for them in love, and expects to see them again.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 Thessalonians is among the earliest writings of the New Testament, and already its first grief question has arrived: believers have died before the Lord's return, and the community is shaken. Read Paul's answer with Session 1 in your ear, because it closes the loop of this whole study: he does not say do not grieve. He says that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope (4:13). Grief remains fully licensed; despair is evicted. Hope changes grief's horizon, not its existence, which is exactly where our first steelman ended in Session 1. The comfort is concrete: since Jesus died and rose, the dead in Christ will rise, and so we shall always be with the Lord: reunion language, given expressly to be spoken to mourners: therefore comfort one another with these words (4:18).

Notice Paul's vocabulary: those who are asleep. Christians so owned this hope that the Greek word that became our cemetery, koimeterion, means a sleeping place, a dormitory. The word itself was not coined by Christians, but their use of it for burial grounds is of a piece with Paul's language here. Every Catholic cemetery is a dormitory with an alarm set.

1 Corinthians 15 supplies the engine of the hope: Christ the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, then at his coming those who belong to him; and the destruction list of 15:24-26 ends with a familiar face: the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Your group met that enemy in Session 1, in the flare of Jesus's anger at Bethany. And at 15:54, Paul reaches back to the very verse the group found in Session 1. His words are Death is swallowed up in victory; Isaiah's are He will swallow up death for ever (Isa 25:8). The wording is not identical, and the promise is the same one, announced as coming true. Let them catch both harvests themselves; the discoveries are designed for it.

Then the communion of saints and prayer for the dead. The Church is one Body in three conditions: pilgrims on earth, the being-purified, and the blessed in glory, and death does not amputate members from the Body. So the ancient instinct: we pray for our dead (2 Macc 12:43-45 shows the practice already in Israel; and Paul prays that Onesiphorus may find mercy from the Lord on that Day while greeting his household separately, 2 Tim 1:16-18, which many readers have taken to mean he had already died, though the text does not say so), we have the Mass offered for them, and we ask the prayers of the saints in glory. On purgatory, one clean paragraph tonight is enough: the purification of the already-saved, which is

precisely why our prayers can help. The Church has long read Paul's saved, but only as through fire (1 Cor 3:14-15) as part of the scriptural basis for that, though the verse by itself speaks of work tested on the Day rather than describing the state of the dead. If the group wants the full doctrine, our study *Hold Fast What Is Good* treats it in depth; the canon question behind 2 Maccabees is handled in *Unless Someone Guides Me*. Tonight stays with grief: prayer for the dead means the relationship continues, with new job descriptions.

Pastoral note: end warm. This final session should feel like a homecoming, not a lecture. The optional naming ritual in *Send* (each person names a beloved dead aloud) is often the most moving minute of the study; offer it, never require it. Have the fresh bookend sheets ready. And send them out with practices, because Catholic grief is embodied: Masses offered, All Souls, anniversaries, graves visited. The Church gives grief a calendar and an address, which is what hope looks like with shoes on.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Resurrection hope germinates late but unmistakably in the Old Testament: Isaiah's mountain feast where death is swallowed up and every tear wiped away (Isa 25:6-9), Daniel's many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake (Dan 12:2), Job's Redeemer who at last will stand upon the earth (19:25-27), and Israel's practice, by the second century before Christ, of praying and sacrificing for its fallen (2 Macc 12). Every one of these roots flowers in tonight's readings: the swallowing of death becomes 1 Corinthians 15's victory shout, the sleepers wake in 1 Thessalonians 4, the standing Redeemer has a name and a face, and the prayers for the dead continue at every altar of the Church. Nothing in this study's Old Testament has been wasted.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose *On the Death of His Brother Satyrus, across the two orations (summary)*

When his brother Satyrus died, Ambrose preached his grief in public. In the funeral oration he defends his own tears; in the second oration he turns fully to the case for the resurrection. Taken together his teaching, in substance, is that nature gives us tears and faith does not confiscate them, while the resurrection changes what the tears mean, so that Christians grieve their dead as men who expect to receive them back. He wept and hoped in the same breath: the whole doctrine of this session in one funeral.

St. Augustine *Confessions, Book IX, on the death of his mother, St. Monica*

Dying at Ostia, Monica told her sons not to trouble over where her body would lie: one thing only she asked, that they remember her at the altar of the Lord, wherever they might be. Augustine tells us he first held his tears back, thinking loud lament unworthy of her death, then let them come and wept freely before God, submitting even his grief to God's judgment. And he does exactly what she asked: he prays for her sins in hope, and begs the readers of his book to remember Monica at the altar too, so that her request would be answered by more prayers than his own. Sixteen centuries later, every reader who prays for her is still answering it. That is the communion of saints, working.

The Roman Liturgy *Preface I for the Dead (older ICEL wording, familiar from Catholic funerals); the same preface is quoted at CCC 1012*

Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. (The current Missal renders it: Indeed, for

your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended.) This third voice is not a saint but the praying Church herself. She has said these words over emperors and over infants, in plague years and last week, and she has never once had to take them back.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 958: our communion with the dead: the Church has honored their memory from the beginning and offered prayers for them, for our prayer is capable of helping them, and of making their intercession for us effective.
- CCC 1012: the Christian vision of death receives privileged expression in the Church's liturgy, which prays that life is changed, not ended.
- CCC 1030-1032: the purification of the saved; the Scriptural footprint (2 Macc 12; 1 Cor 3:15; and the Church's reading of Matt 12:32, drawn out by St. Gregory the Great, that some faults can be forgiven in the age to come); and the practice that follows: prayer, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, offered for the dead.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

HARVEST NIGHT · EVERY THREAD RESOLVES

- *The last enemy (S1)*. 1 Cor 15:26 names the enemy Jesus raged at in Bethany. Q3 harvests it; if someone remembers the Greek verb, celebrate.
- *The Isaiah seed (S1)*. 1 Cor 15:54 takes up Isaiah 25:8 in different words. Print both for yourself so you do not misstate it: Paul writes Death is swallowed up in victory; Isaiah writes He will swallow up death for ever. Q4 is a recognition harvest from Session 1, not a concordance hunt; do not give it away, but do not claim the English is identical either.
- *The tears thread (S1-S5)*. Rev 21:4 resolves it: the tears kept in the bottle (Ps 56:8) are wiped by God's own hand. Q5 is the landing.
- *Job 19:25 (S3, S4)*. Recited from memory in Q7; the Redeemer now has a name.
- *The bookend*. Fresh sheets in Send: the sealed question asked one last time, answered in the open, kept in their Bibles at Psalm 22.

SESSION GOALS

1. Hear 1 Thessalonians 4:13 close the loop of the study: grief licensed, despair evicted, comfort commanded.
2. Harvest every planted thread: the last enemy, the Isaiah seed, the tears, the Redeemer, and at last the Beatitude the study is named for.
3. Understand the communion of saints as a continued relationship with our dead, with prayer for them at its heart.
4. Meet the practices: Masses for the dead, All Souls, anniversaries, graves: hope with shoes on.
5. Answer the sealed question one final time, in the open, and take it home.

THE 90 MINUTES

Opening prayer and settling in	5
Win: two opening questions	8
Build: 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, the steelman, Revelation 21, the Beatitude	56
Send: naming our dead, and the bookend sheet	14
Live It, memory verse, closing prayer and sending	7

This plan uses the full 90 minutes. If the room runs long, drop in this order: (1) Win question W1, (2) the second half of Q6, (3) Q1. Send is long on purpose and may not be shortened: the naming and the bookend are the study's landing.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you are the God of the living, and all your children are alive to you: those in this room, and those we carry in our hearts tonight.

As this study ends, gather every grief we have brought through these six weeks, and teach us this last lesson: how to grieve as those who have hope. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN

W1. What is one way your family remembers its dead: recipes, stories, graves, Masses, photographs, holidays? Where did the custom come from?

W2. Honestly: after you die, what do you want the people who love you to do about you: forget quickly for their own sake, remember you how, pray for you what?

BUILD

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 aloud.

Q1. Listen to verse 13 with Week 1 ears. What does Paul *not* say to these grieving Christians, and what exactly does he regulate?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He does not say do not grieve. He says that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope: the manner is regulated, never the existence. This is the very verse our first steelman left half-open in Session 1, and here is its resolution: Christian hope does not cancel grief; it changes grief's horizon. Tears with a horizon are still tears. And notice the Christian nickname for death throughout: those who are asleep: the word behind our word cemetery, a sleeping place. The language itself refuses despair.

Q2. What grounds the hope in verse 14, and where does the whole passage land in verses 17-18?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again: the grounds are the last two sessions, Cross and Resurrection; hope for our dead is not optimism about them, it is faith in him. And the landing is reunion: so we shall always be with the Lord: with him, and therefore with them. Then the instruction that turns doctrine into ministry: therefore comfort one another with these words. These verses were written to be said aloud to mourners. Some of you will say them at a bedside or a graveside within a few years; you now know where they live.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 aloud.

Q3. HARVEST. Verse 26: the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Where has this study met that enemy before, called exactly that?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Session 1, at the tomb of Lazarus: it was this verse the group found when they weighed the strange force of Jesus's groaning (John 11:33, 38), which an ancient reading takes as indignation at death itself. The whole study bends together here: the enemy the Lord raged at in Bethany is, in Paul, formally scheduled for destruction. God's anger at death and God's victory over death are the same love, at two moments.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 aloud.

Q4. HARVEST. In verse 54 Paul says a written saying is coming to pass: Death is swallowed up in victory. He is announcing a promise this group already found, on the first night of this study. Where was it written, and in what words?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Isaiah 25:8, found in Session 1: He will swallow up death for ever. Paul's words are not Isaiah's word for word (Isaiah says for ever where Paul says in victory), and the promise is unmistakably the same one, now announced as cashed: when the trumpet sounds, Isaiah's sentence comes true. And if anyone checks Isaiah's verse closely, its second half is still outstanding: the wiping of the tears. One text remains tonight.

STEELMAN · BUILD IT, THEN PRESS IT

Build it at full strength. A biblically serious friend says: praying for the dead is useless and unbiblical. Second Maccabees is not in my Bible, and you cannot hang a doctrine on a disputed book. Paul says he would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), which this friend takes to exclude any intervening purification, and Hebrews says that after death comes judgment (Heb 9:27): the dead are settled, beyond our help. Praying for them at best wastes breath and at worst insults the finished work of Christ, as though our rosaries topped up his Cross. Notice its strength: it protects Christ's sufficiency, quotes Scripture, and refuses superstition.

Press it, and let Scripture do the pressing. First, a discovery, and let them actually make it: send the group to 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 and ask three questions before you say anything. What does Judas Maccabeus do? Why does he do it? How does the writer evaluate it? Only then supply the summary: he takes up a collection and makes atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin, and the writer calls the thought holy and pious. For Catholics this is inspired Scripture, and the dispute about the canon is finally a question about who has authority to identify the canon; say that plainly rather than dodging it, and point anyone who wants the full argument to our study Unless Someone

Guides Me. Even bracketing inspiration, the passage documents that faithful Israel prayed and made offerings for its dead before Christ. (Do not lean on the fact that Jesus is never recorded correcting the practice; silence proves little on its own.) Second: 1 Corinthians 3:14-15: a man's work is tested, and some are saved, but only as through fire. The verse does not by itself describe the state of the dead; the Church has read it, within her wider tradition, as part of the scriptural basis for a purification of the already-saved, which is exactly the state in which prayer can help. Third: 2 Timothy 1:16-18: Paul prays that Onesiphorus may find mercy from the Lord on that Day, while greeting his household separately; many commentators through the centuries have read Onesiphorus as already dead, which would make this a New Testament prayer touching a dead man's judgment. Fourth: Matthew 12:32 speaks of a sin that will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come; the Church has long drawn, with St. Gregory the Great, the inference those words invite: some faults can be forgiven in the age to come (CCC 1031). Last, concede the guardrails, because the friend is guarding something true: prayer for the dead adds nothing beside Christ's finished work; it is Christ's own Body doing what living bodies do, supplying every member; there is no second chance at repentance, no reincarnation, and 2 Cor 5:8 and Heb 9:27 stand untouched: purification is of the saved, on their way home.

Read Revelation 21:1-5 aloud. Read it like the ending it is.

Q5. RESOLUTION. Verse 4. Six weeks ago we found a psalm that said God keeps our tears in his bottle, written in his book. What happens, finally, to the tears God has been keeping?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Set that beside Psalm 56:8, where God keeps count and the psalmist asks him to store his tears: Scripture does not formally identify the two, and the canonical echo is unmistakable. Kept, counted, and at the end wiped away, and notice the verb: not deleted by decree from a distant throne, but wiped. Our own picture for that, not the text's: the gesture of a hand on a face, the most intimate thing one person does for another. And then the full demolition: death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. Every tear this study has permitted, every lament it has taught, has been prayed toward this verse.

Q6. Come down to Monday. What follows for us is the Church's teaching rather than something to be read off tonight's three passages, so take this as Catholic synthesis: those who die in Christ are not severed from his Body (see CCC 958). If that is so, what changes about your relationship with your dead, and what continues?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

What changes is the mode; what continues, for those who die in Christ, is the relationship, now routed entirely through God. We do not certify anyone's salvation; we entrust our dead to God's mercy and keep praying. We pray for them: by name, at Mass above all, on All Souls and anniversaries, because our prayer is capable of helping them (CCC 958). We can ask the prayers of the holy dead, because their intercession for us is real. We visit graves as visits, keep their names in the household, have Masses offered. Christian remembrance is not an archive; it is traffic. The relationship has not ended; it has been handed to God to carry, both directions.

Q7. HARVEST. From memory, together, recite the verse planted in Session 3: Job 19:25. After these six weeks, answer Job's blind hope: who is the Redeemer who lives, and what has he done about death?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth. Job cried it from the ash heap toward a vindicator he could not see. The group can now answer him across the centuries: the Redeemer is the Man of Sorrows, risen; he has stood upon the earth once already, at Easter, and he will stand on it at the last, when the trumpet sounds and death is swallowed up. The study's first truth and its last are the same truth: our Redeemer lives, and he wept.

Q8. HARVEST. One text has governed this study from its cover and has never been opened. Find Matthew 5:1-4. Read the fourth Beatitude aloud, and answer it now: who are the mourners Jesus calls blessed, and what exactly is promised them?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed does not mean cheerful; it means standing in the favor of God and inside the kingdom he is opening, which is why Jesus can say it over people in tears. The mourning is wider than bereavement, as this study has been: grief over the dead, and also grief over sin, and grief over a world still far from God. And the promise is not an explanation, a reason, or a lesson. It is comfort, and in the passive voice: they shall be comforted, which in this Gospel means God will do it. Six weeks ago we asked where God is when we suffer. The Beatitude answers in the future tense what Revelation 21 shows in the last scene: the mourners are not the forgotten of the kingdom, they are named in its opening lines, and the One who wept at Bethany has promised to dry their faces himself.

DIG DEEPER (optional)

Find Daniel 12:2-3, one of the Old Testament's clearest dawn-lights of resurrection: many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. There is the sleeping language again, centuries before Paul, and the awakening that gives it meaning. Those who turn many to righteousness, Daniel adds, will shine like the stars for ever: a good benediction over a Bible study group on its last night.

SEND

S1. THE NAMING. If you wish, and only if you wish, name aloud one of your beloved dead, simply their name and who they were to you. After each name, the group responds together: Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. (Anyone may pass with a nod; silence participates too.)

S2. THE BOOKEND. Take a fresh sheet. The same question one last time: Where is God when we suffer? Write tonight's answer, unsealed this time. Keep it in your Bible at Psalm 22, next to whoever you were six weeks ago.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Have a Mass offered for one of your dead this month: call or visit the parish office; it is simpler than most people think. Go to it if you can.
2. Pray Revelation 21:1-5 once each night this week, and let verse 4 be the last thing your grief hears before sleep.
3. Write a short note of pure presence to someone who is grieving, using the shiva skill from Session 3: no fixing, no explaining. I was thinking of you, and I am praying for [name] by name. Send it.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope."

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Closing Prayer and Sending

Father, six weeks ago we asked where you are when we suffer. You have answered us: near the brokenhearted, on the Cross, and at the end of all things with your own hand wiping every tear.

For our beloved dead, named tonight and unnamed: eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.

And for us who remain: teach us to weep as your Son wept, to lament with your psalmists, to sit in silence with the suffering, to offer what hurts, and to grieve as those who will be comforted. Blessed are those who mourn. Amen.

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Read aloud in session

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; Revelation 21:1-5

Discovery passages (group finds them live)

- Isaiah 25:8 via 1 Corinthians 15:54 (Q4)
- Matthew 5:1-4 (Q8, the study's title verse)
- 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 (steelman, first press)
- Daniel 12:2-3 (Dig Deeper)

Cited in answers and steelman

- 2 Corinthians 5:8; Hebrews 9:27 (steelman, build; conceded in press)
- 1 Corinthians 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:16-18; Matthew 12:32 with CCC 1031 (steelman, press)
- Psalm 56:8 (Q5 harvest); Job 19:25 (Q7 harvest); CCC 958 (Q6)

Leader background

- Isaiah 25:6-9; Daniel 12:2; 2 Maccabees 12:43-45 (OT Roots)
- CCC 958, 1012, 1030-1032