



Share in pairs: Share a time when you were really struck by how fleeting life is.

A funeral. An ancient landscape. A tragedy. A striking bible verse. Different things can push us to see more fully how brief life can be. While our society may try to hide death and what lies after, as Christians we can look it full in the face. God's word equips us to live with realism, wisdom and hope.

Two eternal destinations

What do these passages teach about the future which faces every human? Divide them amongst the group and then share your findings.

Passage	What do we learn about the future people face?	How does this passage describe those who will enjoy eternal life with God?
Hebrews 9:27-28		
Revelation 20:11-15		
Matthew 13:36-43		
1 Thess 4:13-5:3		
Revelation 7:9-17		

1. What key points do these passages have in common?
2. According to these passages, what determines a person's eternal future?

These are confronting passages! Sometimes we can only see the darkness of the judgment - because we tend to think we *don't* deserve it. And we lose sight of the remarkable miracle of salvation - because we tend to think we *do* deserve it.

In his kindness, God lets us know what is coming not to scare us, but to prepare us. These passages are here to prepare us to live lives that bear fruit for eternity. What's more, in his kindness, God sent his own son to take on his judgment so that our future can be paradise rather than punishment.

3. When you think about these eternal futures, does it change how you feel about your life now? If so, how?

One (short) life now

Again and again, the scriptures remind us that this life is short. Compare the two passages below. What do the Psalmist and James have in common?

Psalm 39:

4 "O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting I am!

5 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! *Selah*

James 4:

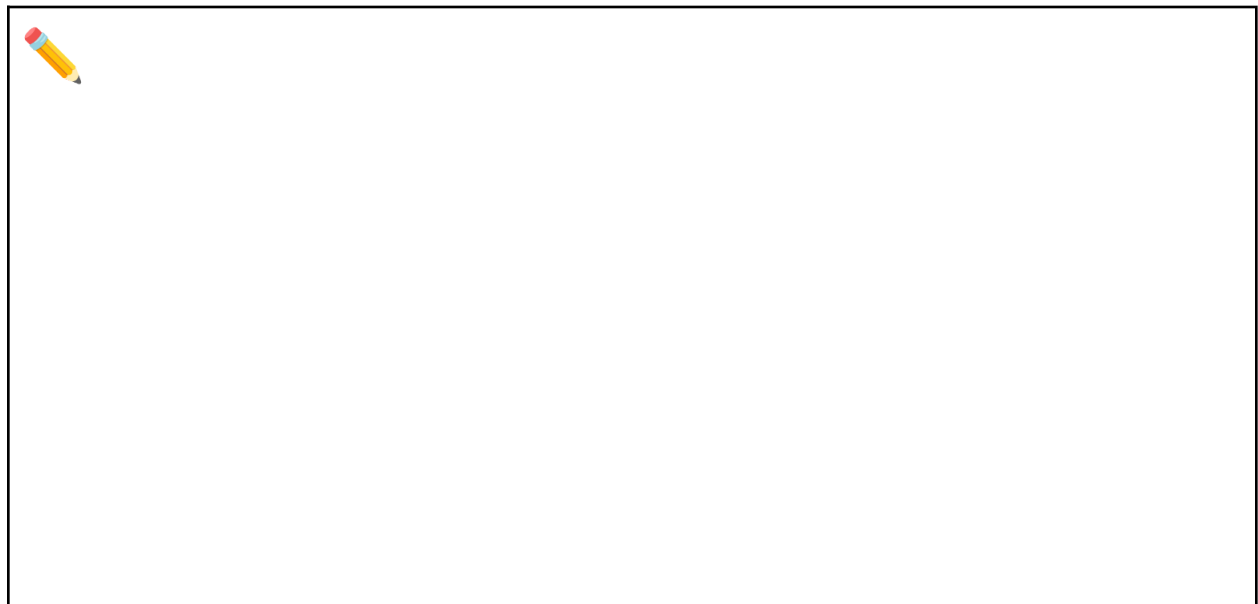
12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— **14** yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a

<p>6 Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!</p> <p>7 “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.</p>	<p>mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.</p>
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Let's press pause...

Take a moment to reflect on how short this life is, and how significant it is for the eternal times to come. Use the space to write out your reflections or draw a sketch which summarises for you the contrast between this life and the life to come...



As a group, have a short time of prayer - ask God to “Let me know how fleeting I am!”

Personal takeaways...

4. Imagine you could have a day where you knew with absolute clarity:
 - 1) the two destinies all people face and
 - 2) the brevity of your life now.

What would you do in that day?

5. In light of those two realities above (and reflecting on the passage we've looked at)....what might a life wisely-lived look like?

....What might a wasted life look like?

6. In pairs, discuss - how do these lives compare to your life now? What are the wise trends you see in your life? What are the waste-ful/foolish ones?

"To be a believer is to be a stranger and a misfit. We have no permanent roots in this world and no sense of real belonging here. We are travelling through. Or are we? People who follow Jesus often lose sight of the world to come. We become resident Christians rather than nomadic Christians. We become fully integrated into this world rather than viewing ourselves as passing through, and we do this by living as if our greatest treasures are the here and now" (David Gibson, *Destiny: Learning to Live by Preparing to Die*, p34)

7. Can you think of a person who lived knowing life is short, and heaven and hell are long...who were they and how did this knowledge impact their lifestyle?

Pray together

Spend time praying that as a group we would spur one another on to live this life wisely in light of the life to come.

Leaders notes:

In this series we are considering 4 big truths that compel us to live whole-heartedly for Christ.

Truth # 1 (last week): All things are being brought together under Christ's rule.

Truth # 2 (this week): Life is short, heaven (new creation) & hell are real and they are eternal.

Truth # 3 (next week): The cross is the centre of Christianity. It is central to what God did, and central to how we live.

Truth # 4 (final week): Love shapes all we do. God is love, true love is to shape the life of the Christian.

Please note: This may be a confronting study. Please pray for your group beforehand, be mindful of those who may have lost loved ones recently or have not-yet-Christians in their family/friends. Keep in mind that these passages are given to us by a loving father who sent his son to save us from the hell we deserve. He is the king of a kingdom which is always growing. Every person can choose to trust in Jesus. These passages are not here to scare us, they are here to prepare us to live lives that bear fruit for eternity.

Big idea: Life is short. Heaven (New creation) & hell are long.

Big application: Let's live wisely in light of these truths by prioritizing things that will last.

Possible side topics:

- Annihilationism: that after judgment those not in Christ are just destroyed. This does not sit with what we see in Scripture e.g. Revelation 14:11, Matthew 13:42. These passages suggest an ongoing (and eternal) experience of God's judgement.
- Timeless eternity? Sometimes we can think of eternity as timeless. However in light of how God interacts in the scriptures within time, perhaps it is better to see 'our own future is not to be a 'timeless' eternity but 'eternal ages' (c.f. 1 Cor 15:53, Eph 2:7) - The Life of Faith, Peter Jensen p 97.
- Hell as the absence of God. Hell is not the absence of God, it is the presence of his right and eternal judgement.

- If people would benefit from extra thinking about hell, a short, accessible book is: “The Most encouraging book on Hell Ever” (Thor Ramsay).