**Uninformed?**
Small Group Discussion Guide
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*Begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you all through God's word, and to lead your discussion.*

**Intro questions** (try to get everyone involved in discussion!)

- Assume for a moment that our future, heavenly existence includes a great banquet of food. What is one food you would ask God to put on the menu?
- Today we're looking at a passage that speaks about what happens to believers in Jesus after death. For the Thessalonians, this topic was very practical, as they were worried that their deceased loved ones would miss out on all that Jesus had promised for the future. *At this present moment in your life, how pertinent does this topic feel?*

1. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18,** then discuss the following:
   - In what way do you think that the Thessalonian Christians were "uninformed?"
   - In v. 13, Paul gives a very practical reason why it is important to be informed about this matter. How would you describe that reason, in your own words?
     - What is the difference between grieving like the rest of the world, and informed, Christian grief?
     - What does Paul's statement in v. 13 show us about the practical importance of studying Christian doctrine?
   - On Sunday, Pastor Josh claimed, "If we don't let our minds and our hopes be shaped by God's word, they'll be shaped by something else."
     - What are some theories or philosophies—popular in our world at present—that people cling to for hope in the face of death?
     - Josh also mentioned an Australian woman who is hoping to use cryogenic preservation to give her deceased son the chance at a future life. How likely would you be to try cryogenics, if the financial cost were not an issue? What factors would inform your decision?
   - In this passage, we see that **we have a concrete reason for hope**. What is that concrete reason?
     - In saying that it is "concrete," we mean that it is factual and reliable, as opposed to wishful thinking. What makes our hope factual and reliable?
     - How might we functionally use this concrete reason for hope as an "anchor" in storms?
     - To what degree do you feel that your hope is being tested at present? How well is your "anchor" holding? How can our group support you?
   - In popular Christian thinking, our future hope often gets lumped together into a disembodied, spiritual existence called "heaven." But in Sunday's sermon, we saw that God makes promises for our life after death, as well as for "life after life after

death" (quoting N.T. Wright in *Surprised by Hope*). To what degree was this a new concept for you? What questions or challenges did it raise?

- In the passage at hand, Paul speaks about those believers who have already passed away. What do we learn here about their current state of being, or our **short-term hope**? (Pastor Josh mentioned two things in the sermon, but there may be more.)
    - Pastor Josh mentioned that death for believers is like sleep, in that it is temporary and fleeting, and deceased believers are still "in Christ"—in other words, not even death breaks our bond with Jesus. To what extent do these truths give you practical comfort?
    - Do you find these truths to be more pertinent for concerns about your departed loved ones, or for your own future, or both?
- What hint do you see in the passage that Jesus' death was different from our deaths? (Clue for leaders: Paul says that Jesus "died," whereas we "sleep.") What is the difference? How does that difference give us hope?
- What do we see in this passage about our long-term hope, when Jesus returns to earth?
    - Pastor Josh explained the concept of the Parousia, quoting N.T. Wright's description (below). How does this description help us understand the point that Paul is making?
    - *When Paul speaks of "meeting" the Lord "in the air," the point is precisely not…that the saved believers would then stay up in the air somewhere, away from earth. The point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him royally into his domain, that is, back to the place they have come from.… Being citizens of heaven…doesn't mean that one is expecting to go back to the mother city but rather means that one is expecting the emperor to come from the mother city to give the colony its full dignity, to rescue it if need be, to subdue local enemies and put everything to rights (N.T. Wright,* Surprised by Hope*).*
    - Josh described our long-term hope as follows: **we will be with Jesus, and we will be with one another, in a transformed, perfected, physical reality.** How does this fact inform your future outlook today?
- In v. 18, the passage concludes on a very practical note. How can we practically do what Paul is imploring us to do here? How/why does this truth make a practical difference for us today?

2. **Prayer**
    - Pray for group members who may be struggling with grief or fear, as discussed above.
    - Share and pray for other needs that may exist among your group members.