

# Grieving the Death of a Believer with Unique Christian Hope

By Marco Scouvert



You may be grieving the death of a fellow believer who was close to you. It might be a dear family member or cherished friend. Whether in the distant past or more recently, they passed away, and you began the natural grieving process.

God does not want you, as a follower of Christ, to grieve in the same way that unbelievers do, with “no hope”

(1 Thessalonians 4:13). Rather, he desires for you to mourn in a way that is filled with and shows the unique Christian hope that we have as believers in Jesus. To help us, in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, the Apostle Paul presents two realities concerning the second coming of Jesus and what all believers — both the dead in Christ and those who are alive — will experience when he returns.

## New Bodies

First, *believers will receive new bodies*. Paul says that believers who have died will receive resurrected bodies when Christ returns (v. 14). When Jesus comes back, God will raise dead believers through Christ in the same way God raised Jesus from the dead (John 5:25-29). Like a Jewish bridegroom coming to collect his bride for the wedding feast, Christ will suddenly appear from heaven to raise and gather believers to himself (v. 16).

But what about believers who are still alive? Paul says that they will be snatched up into the clouds (v. 17). When that happens, they will receive instantaneously *transformed* bodies. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Some talk like the Christian hope is to one day be free from the ‘cage’ of our current bodies. However, a new body is central to our future hope. The presence and effects of sin cause us to groan for and eagerly look forward to “the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23-24). Sam Storms explains what we have to look forward to:

[T]here will be no fatigue, pain, discomfort, chronic aches or itches. There will be only pure physical pleasure with no bodily obstacles to diminish our ability to see and feel and hear and touch and taste and smell the glories of paradise. . . The physical and emotional and intellectual pleasures of heaven will infinitely exceed the most ecstatic of physical and sensual pleasures on earth. There will be no bodily lusts to pull you

down, no physical fatigue to cloud your mind, no wicked impulses against which you must fight, no dullness of heart to hold you back, no lethargy of soul to slow you down, no weakness of will to keep you in bondage, no lack of energy to love someone else, no absence of passion to pursue what is holy. . . . [O]ur experience will be indescribably joyful.<sup>1</sup>

## Forever with the Lord

Second, *believers will be with the Lord forever*. Paul’s focus is not on *where* believers will be but *on whom* we will be with — namely, Jesus (v. 17). He says we will “meet the Lord” and “be with the Lord.” The Christian hope is to be with Jesus, wherever he is. That’s why Paul said he would rather die than go on living because that would allow him to be “at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8) and “be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). When Christ returns, we will finally be with the Lord who loved us and gave himself up for us.

The best part about this is that our time together with Jesus will never end. Paul says we will “*always* be with the Lord.” Our greatest experiences here and now must come to an end: summer breaks from school, a week-long Christian camp, special weekends with friends. The expectation of an impending departure hinders us from thoroughly enjoying these times, especially as their end draws near.

But it is not so in the world to come! We will never have to fear its ending or be anxious about being separated from Jesus. We will be liberated and enabled to fully enjoy Christ and the glory of his reign in the new creation. After millions and millions of years in the new heavens and new earth, our time with Jesus will not end. In fact, it will barely have begun! As John Newton put it, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.”

## Encourage One Another

We need to know these truths and to hear them from others. Therefore, Paul instructs us to “encourage one another with these words” (v. 18). They are not primarily for self-counseling, but to speak to other believers when necessary.

Here are a couple of practical suggestions. If you are grieving, resist the temptation to isolate yourself from other believers. Show them your tears and express your emotional turmoil. Allow the body of Christ to serve you by speaking these encouraging truths to you. And if you are aware of other believers who are struggling as they grieve, remind them of the realities that are theirs in Christ. He’s coming again. There’s a lifetime of hope and encouragement in that truth, even when a fellow believer dies.

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<sup>1</sup> *Joy’s Eternal Increase: Edwards on the Beauty of Heaven*, located at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/joy-eternal-increase-edwards-on-the-beauty-of-heaven>, accessed November 10, 2025.