



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Find time to explore these questions as a family after each session.

Session 1

- What is the second coming of Jesus Christ?
- Do you think Scripture has literal signs of the second coming or not?
- What would you do if Jesus returned today?

Session 2

- What does *left behind* mean?
- Will anyone be left behind when Jesus returns? Why or why not?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Am I going to be left behind when Jesus returns?"
- Where do your beliefs of salvation come from?

Session 3

- What or who is the false prophet?
- What does the Bible say or not say about who the false prophet is?
- What images of the false prophet exist in films and television shows?
- What is the difference between a religion and a cult?

Session 4

- Do you think Jesus will return in your lifetime? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to live as if Jesus' return was imminent?
- How is learning about end times connected to the theological concept of hope?



CLUES

**Find something
made with strings
that is bigger
than your foot.**

**Find something
permanent that
you can hold in
one hand.**

**Find something
that is a real
cutup.**

**Find something
that is a portable
library.**

**Find something
that holds liquid
even though it
has a hole in it.**

**Find something
that spends its
time just hanging
around.**



ESCHATOLOGY

Eschatology (*es-cah-to-lo-gee*) is the term scholars use to talk about the end of time. The word comes from the Greek word *eschaton*, or "last." For Christians, it refers to the return of Christ (Christ's second coming) and "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). Presbyterians strongly affirm this belief, but we don't know much about how it will happen.

Because Scripture lacks a comprehensive picture about Jesus' return, Christians have different understandings about it, including **amillennialism**, **postmillennialism**, and **premillennialism**. The term *millennium* refers to the one-thousand-year reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20:4. Generally, many Christians agree that the millennium is the reign of God on earth, but we often disagree about how it relates to Christ's return.

Amillennialism holds that the one-thousand-year reign of Christ is not to be taken literally, but figuratively describes Christ's reign in the church and throughout history. This approach affirms that our broken, sinful world will be changed into a world that reflects the promises of God when Christ returns. Reformed theology—which forms the basis of Presbyterian doctrine—holds to an amillennial position. While we believe the world is a broken, sinful place, our belief in ultimate redemption is fundamentally founded upon hope.

Postmillennialism holds that the one-thousand-year reign of Christ is not literally one thousand years, and that the events described in the book of Revelation are not to be read literally. This approach contends that the reign of Christ is already under way—it began with his death and resurrection, and continues today. Christian preaching and teaching will eventually win over the world, and this will usher in the reign of God on earth.

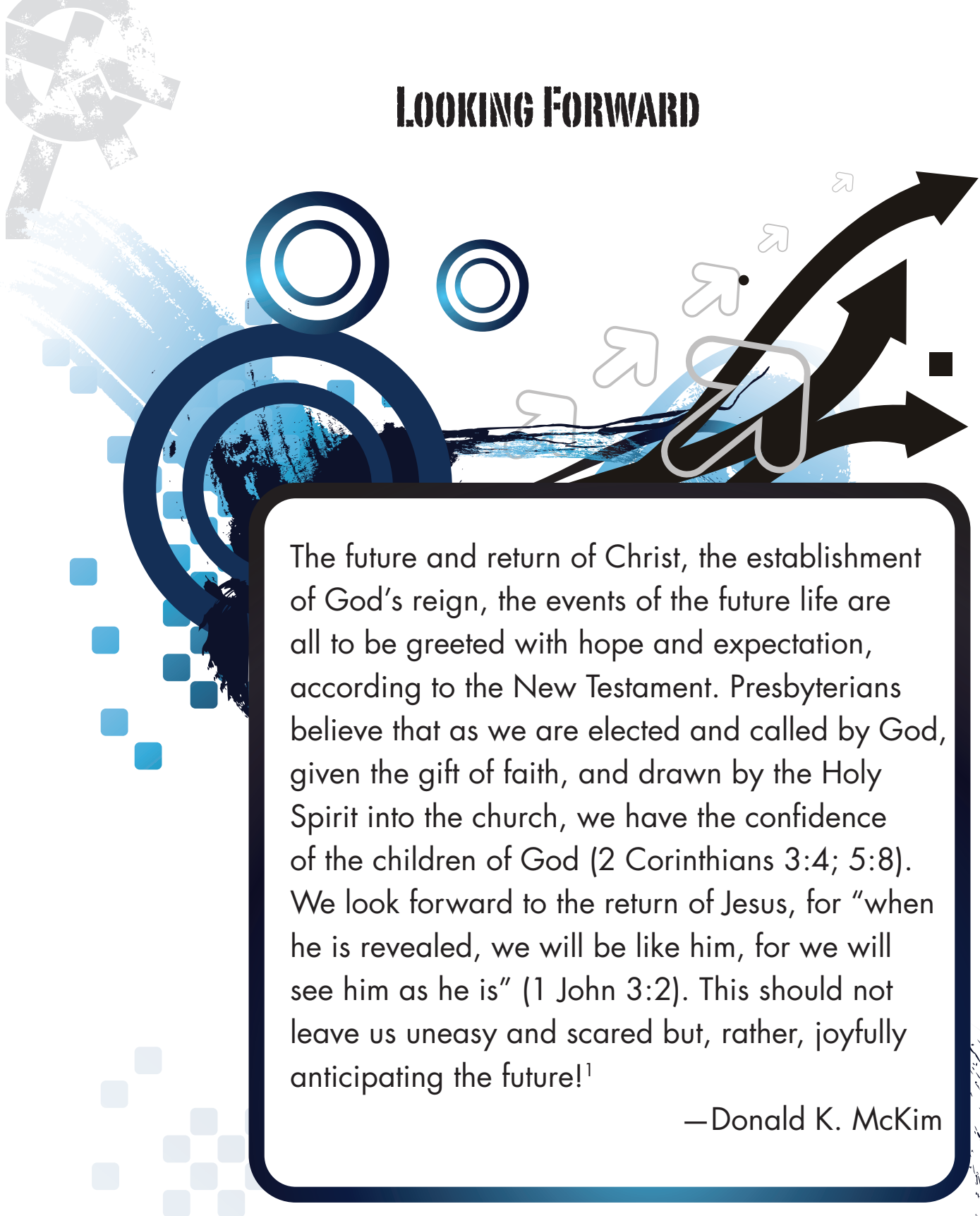
Premillennialism holds that Christ will return to earth prior to a literal one-thousand-year reign over the earth. This one-thousand-year reign will be shared with the saints, who will reign with Christ until a final rebellion precipitates the battle in which Satan and his minions are eternally banished to a lake of fire.

Premillennial dispensationalism is a popular and currently influential branch of the premillennial view. From their study of the whole Bible, various dispensationalists conceive of three to seven progressive historical periods in which God offers salvation to humankind in a different way. The final dispensation will be the "rapture" of the church from this world, prior to a time of tribulation during which the antichrist will rise to power, and the final, world-ending battle of Armageddon will take place. Jesus will emerge victorious to rule over the world, which will now be populated only with the faithful. All others will have been destroyed or thrown into the fires of hell.

This material is excerpted from *Revelation in Context*, a supplement by Karen Russell to the 2010–2011 *Horizons* Bible study, *Journeys Through Revelation: Apocalyptic Hope for Today* by Barbara Rossing (copyright 2010, Presbyterian Women). The entire supplement may be downloaded from horizons.pcusa.org/bible.htm. Excerpts are used here by permission.



LOOKING FORWARD



The future and return of Christ, the establishment of God's reign, the events of the future life are all to be greeted with hope and expectation, according to the New Testament. Presbyterians believe that as we are elected and called by God, given the gift of faith, and drawn by the Holy Spirit into the church, we have the confidence of the children of God (2 Corinthians 3:4; 5:8). We look forward to the return of Jesus, for "when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This should not leave us uneasy and scared but, rather, joyfully anticipating the future!¹

—Donald K. McKim

1. Donald K McKim, *Presbyterian Questions, Presbyterian Answers* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2003), p. 99.



BIBLE STUDY



The film *Left Behind* depicts the rapture, which is part of the premillennial dispensationalist viewpoint of the end times. In the rapture, Jesus takes all of the true believers up in the air with him, while leaving behind people who do not truly believe in Christ.

Most people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do not subscribe to this viewpoint and instead hold an amillennialist viewpoint, which affirms that our broken, sinful world will be changed into a world that reflects the promises of God when Christ returns.

The word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible. However, the concept is presumably based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Read this passage and explore these questions:



- How would a premillennial dispensationalist interpret this Scripture passage?
- How would an amillennialist interpret this Scripture passage?

Read Titus 2:11–13.



- What does this Scripture passage teach us about Jesus' return?
- How is the "blessed hope" (v. 13) of Jesus' return different from the scenes depicted in *Left Behind*?

Read Romans 8:18–24.



- What does this Scripture passage teach us about Jesus' return?
- What does verse 24 teach us about hoping in our salvation?

Read Romans 8:38–39.



- What do these verses teach about our salvation?
- According to these verses, who will be left behind?



SESSION 2 FAITH STATEMENT

Q. 38. Will all human beings be saved?

No one will be lost who can be saved. The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

—*Study Catechism: Confirmation Version*



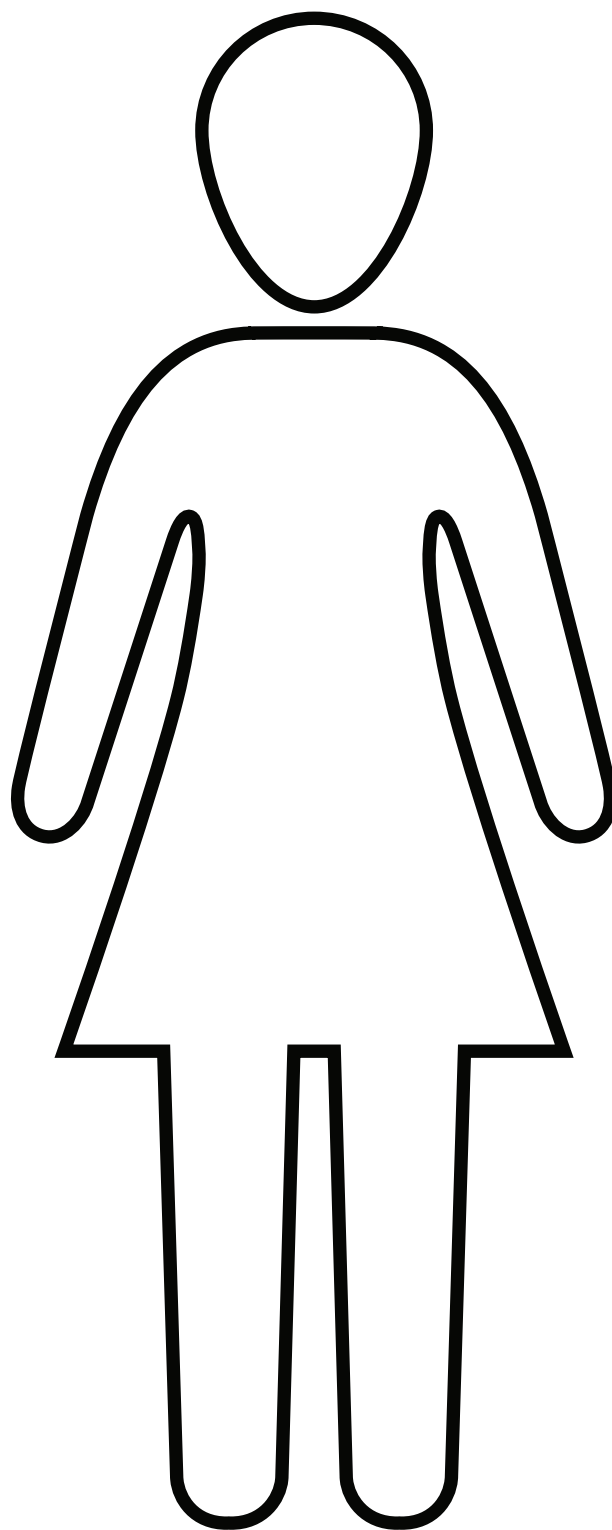
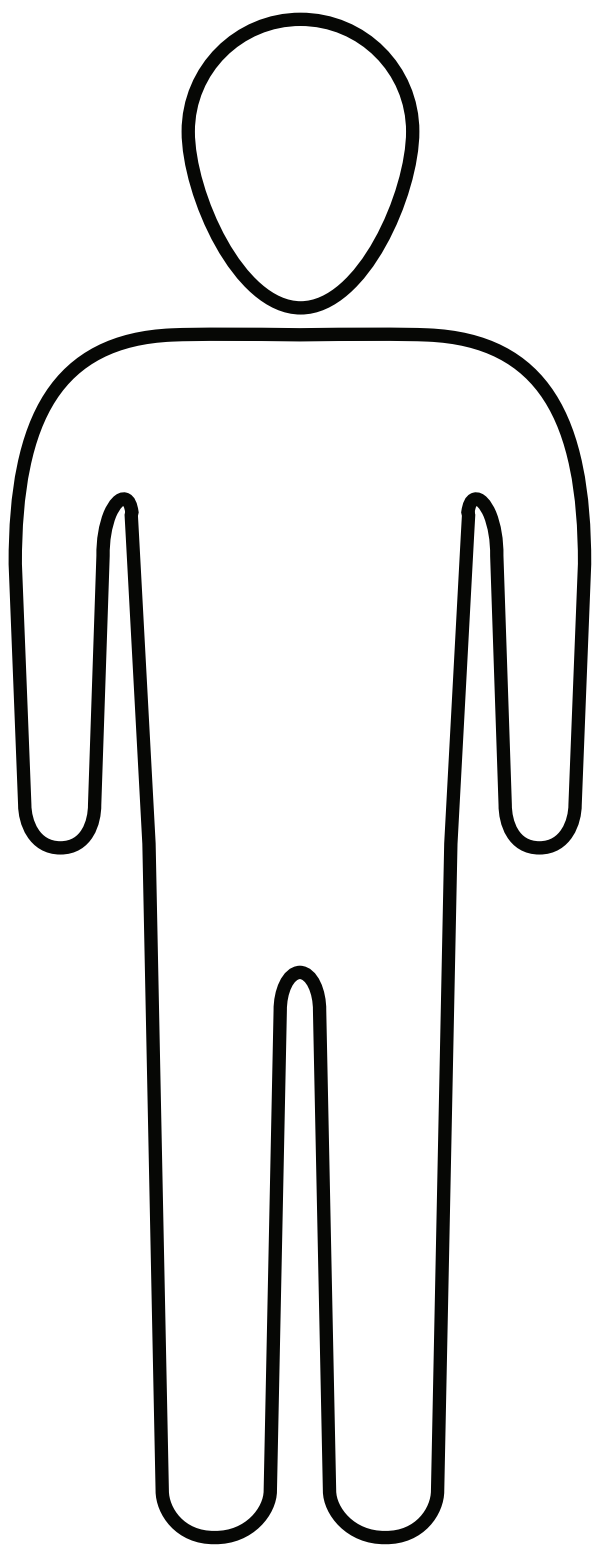


CULT CHECKLIST

- ☐ The group displays unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his beliefs as law or truth.
- ☐ Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
- ☐ Mind-altering practices are used in excess to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
- ☐ The leadership dictates how members should think, act, and feel. (For example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry, have children—or leaders decide what types of clothes to wear, where to live, and so on.)
- ☐ The group claims a special status for itself, its leader(s), and members. (The leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar—or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity.)
- ☐ The group has an “us-versus-them” mentality, which may cause conflict with those outside the group in society.
- ☐ The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders, or clergy of mainstream religious denominations).
- ☐ The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted goals mean it can act however is necessary to achieve its ends. Members may participate in behaviors or activities they would have considered illegal or unethical before joining the group.
- ☐ The leadership induces feelings of shame or guilt in order to influence and control members.
- ☐ The leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends.
- ☐ The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
- ☐ The group is preoccupied with making money.
- ☐ Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group.
- ☐ Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
- ☐ The most loyal members (the “true believers”) believe there is no life outside of the group. They can be afraid for their lives if they try to leave the group. Those who do leave the group are often branded as betrayers.



PROPHETIC FIGURES





DAILY PLANNER

TODAY

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WATCHFULNESS

Matthew 24:36–44

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

—New International Version

But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven's angels, not even the Son. Only the Father knows.

The Arrival of the Son of Man will take place in times like Noah's. Before the great flood everyone was carrying on as usual, having a good time right up to the day Noah boarded the ark. They knew nothing—until the flood hit and swept everything away.

Two men will be working in the field—one will be taken, one left behind; two women will be grinding at the mill—one will be taken, one left behind. So stay awake, alert. You have no idea what day your Master will show up. But you do know this: You know that if the homeowner had known what time of night the burglar would arrive, he would have been there with his dogs to prevent the break-in. Be vigilant just like that. You have no idea when the Son of Man is going to show up.

—The Message

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

—New Revised Standard Version



SESSION 4 FAITH STATEMENT

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

—A Brief Statement of Faith (lines 72–76)

How can we live a life that represents the future of Jesus' return?

FAiTh