

## Simple Sundays

Will I Be  
Left Behind?



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# Will I Be Left Behind?

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### Main Idea

We live into the faith that Christ came to save all. Participants will explore what this means for all of humanity and how we live our lives.

### You Will Need

Bibles, smartphones or tablets

### Faith Statement

Question 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*

## Background

*Eschatology* 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 and “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Presbyterians and others within the Reformed tradition affirm this belief, but we don’t claim that we can know much about *how or when* it will happen.

Various films and books, such as the *Left Behind* series, have created a buzz about the premillennial dispensationalist view of the end time. Though the word *rapture* does not appear in Scripture, many presume that the scenario of Jesus gathering up true believers into heaven while leaving nonbelievers behind comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. In this passage, Paul dramatically writes about Jesus’ return in order to create a sense of hope throughout the Christian community in Thessalonica. This hope, which distinguished the Christians from other members of the city, underscored God’s power in the face of death. Though one could interpret this passage literally, expecting a grandiose scene of angels and bodies rising into the air as Jesus returned, it is wise to also consider other Scripture passages.

In Titus 2:11–13, the author (Paul or someone writing in Paul’s name) writes that salvation through Jesus Christ is for all, challenging followers to lead upright lives as they wait for the “blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (v. 13). This passage makes no distinction between believers and nonbelievers and offers a positive view of Jesus’ return, calling it “the blessed hope.” The eighth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans echoes this notion of hope, stating that “creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (v. 19). Paul’s statement in verses 38–39 affirms

that nothing has and nothing will separate humanity from God. We should never fear being “left behind.” Biblical scholars debate exactly what the passage in 1 Thessalonians is intended to mean. But the dominant note for the future is that Presbyterian Christians can be joyful in the Lord, believing our salvation is secure in Jesus Christ, and trusting in the hope in which we are saved.

For more study, go to [www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/millennia.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/millennia.pdf) to download “Between Millennia,” a paper prepared by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) concerning Presbyterian beliefs about the coming of Christ.

## You and Your Youth

“Will I be left behind?” This question stems from the premillennial dispensationalist view of the end time, which assumes a rapture that will leave nonbelievers behind. Since Reformed theology does not share this viewpoint, the simple response to this question is *no*. The deeper message in the response to the question, however, involves understanding God’s amazing grace and love. This connects with the participants in your group because there is a great deal of pressure on teenagers to be perfect—get perfect grades, be perfect in sports or performing arts, and so on. At the same time, they know they cannot be perfect, and the contradiction between reality and what is expected causes stress and feelings of inadequacy. Participants can be reassured that God does not look for perfection, but loves us all—warts and all! Where God is concerned, we don’t have to be perfect; we just have to share God’s love with one another.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

**Video Clip—Left Behind**

Bibles, smartphone or tablet

Explain that the film *Left Behind* depicts the rapture, in which Jesus takes all of the true believers up in the air with him, while leaving behind people who do not truly believe. Together watch the trailer for the film *Left Behind*, which is available on YouTube. Discuss:

- Do you believe that all people are saved? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that we can choose whether or not to be saved? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that we can lose our salvation once we've received it? Why or why not?
- Where do your beliefs about salvation come from?

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, we give thanks that you love us enough to have sent your Son, Jesus, to live among us and to die for us. Help us remember how much you love all your creation, including those who seem different from us, and help us to show that love to one another. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible**

Bibles, smartphones or tablets

Invite the youth to search the term *dispensational premillennialism* on their smartphones or tablets. Ask them to summarize their findings. Explain the following:

- Being "left behind" refers to one aspect of the rapture, which is part of the dispensational premillennialist viewpoint of the end times.
- Most people in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do not subscribe to this viewpoint. Instead, they hold to an amillennial viewpoint, which affirms that when Christ returns, our broken, sinful world will be changed into a world that reflects the promises of God.
- The word *rapture* does not appear in the Bible. However, the concept is based on a passage from 1 Thessalonians.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and discuss:

- A dispensational premillennialist would interpret this Scripture passage literally. What are some other ways to interpret the passage?

Read Titus 2:11–13 and discuss:

- What does this Scripture passage teach us about Jesus' return?
- How is the "blessed hope" (v. 13) of Jesus' return different from your understanding of the rapture?

Read Romans 8:18–24 and discuss:

- 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 and discuss:

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

**Faith Statement**

Read and discuss the faith statement (*Study Catechism: Confirmation Version*) together. Explore the following questions:

- How does this catechism question and answer connect with the concept of being left behind?
- How does this catechism question and answer respond to the question, "Will I be left behind?"

**Left Behind Games**

Smartphones or tablets

As a group, do an Internet search for "left behind games." Together explore the video games available that support the dispensational premillennialist view of eschatology. Lead the participants in a conversation about whether these games are appropriate for children and youth to play.

**Express**

*These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not relate to these situations, change them to make them relevant to your own life.*

## Youth Issue

One of your friends goes to a church that believes in the rapture. She invites you to a Sunday service, where the preacher announces that Jesus will be coming back any day now. When he does, according to the preacher, all true believers will be lifted off the earth and taken to heaven. He concludes his sermon by saying, "If you want to make sure you're not left behind, now's the time to get right with God. Come to the altar this morning and be saved!"

At a subsequent meeting of your church's youth group, you mention your experience at your friend's church. The youth leader tries to assure you that you are secure in your salvation because of God's grace and the love of Jesus Christ. He asks:

- How does it feel to be secure in your salvation?
- How can you live your life in a joyful response to your salvation in Jesus Christ?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Are you going to be left behind when Jesus returns?"

## Action Steps

*Smartphones or tablets*

Work together to create short skits that respond to the question, "Will I be left behind?" Skits can be in the form of a newscast, a conversation that happens at a coffeehouse, a debate that happens at school, or any other form developed by the group. Record the skits and upload them to your congregation's website.



**Exit**

Invite each person to share one tangible way that he or she can express the belief that God loves everyone and everything. Close with prayer.

## Closing Prayer

Christians, this Lord Jesus shall return again,  
with his Father's glory o'er the earth to reign;  
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.  
Amen.

—Caroline M. Noel, 1897