

4 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of

END OF DAYS

17 When I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering ten thousand, they encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they were saying:

Small Group Discussion Guide

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"



PREPARATION

STUDY

Spend the week studying Matthew 24:29-44. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

PRAY

Pray for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT

I must be ready and alert for Christ's return.



GROUP DISCUSSION

CONFIDENTIALITY | What's said in the group stays in the group.

NO CROSS-TALK | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

NO FIXING | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

SHARING | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

LIVING WITH EXPECTATION

In this series we've been looking at what Jesus taught His disciples about the last days. Jesus gave them a glimpse into the future to show them that His return and the events surrounding the end of the age would happen together. He shared these things so that His disciples—and we—would remain faithful and look forward with hope to Christ's return and His final victory in the end.

This week your group will discuss the fact that believers should *be ready and alert for Christ's return*. Because we don't know when Christ will return, we must strive to live with expectation and persevere through the faith tests we encounter along the way.

Q: *Share about a time when you received an unexpected surprise from someone. It could be a surprise visit, present, etc.*



DEEPER DIVE

Select 2–3 questions to discuss as a group.

THE RETURN OF THE KING

What will the return of Christ to earth actually look like? Jesus tells us by using memorable images and examples to help us understand what will happen and how we are to live leading up to the return of the King of kings.

Q: *Have a volunteer read Matthew 24:29–44. Have another volunteer retell the story in their own words.*

Q: *How would you describe the return of Christ in 29–31? What words would you use?*

Q: What things can distract you from being ready and alert for Christ's return?



REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

FAITH TESTS

Author and speaker Tim Elmore says that the pop quiz is a good reminder about life. A pop quiz tests whether we are prepared; and God often uses circumstances and unexpected events in our lives to test our faith. God does this with the best of intentions because it's His way of growing and maturing our faith so that we are ready and alert as believers.

Here are five faith tests¹ from Elmore that God often uses to reveal the state of our faith:

- *Small things.* Are you faithful in the little things that make up your day-to-day life?
- *Authority.* Do you give Jesus complete authority over every area of your life?
- *Integrity.* Is the person you are in the light the same as the one in the dark?
- *Offense.* How do you respond to offense? Are you able to forgive others?
- *Motivation.* Is your ultimate motivation in life to know and please God?

Q: Tests may not be pleasant but they're necessary. Why?

Q: Which of the above faith tests do you most need to focus on right now?

Q: What's one change you can make this week that will render you more ready and alert?

Q: How can the group be praying for you this week?



LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE? “Whether these events [in v.29] are to be understood as being primarily literal or primarily figurative, it is clear that these will be “earth-shattering” events, through which all creation will be radically transformed at the return of Christ.”²

THE NATIONS WILL MOURN The sign of Christ’s return will cause the nations to mourn, which could be an allusion to Zechariah 12:10-12.³ This might be a sorrow that leads to repentance or regret because it’s too late to repent.

THE EVERLASTING WORD “Jesus’s ‘words,’ especially on the topics of this sermon, are more permanent and certain than even the present universe, which must give way one day to a new heaven and earth.”⁴

‘THIS’ GENERATION? “One point of difficulty over this passage is Jesus’s prediction that these events will take place within the current generation (v. 34). If we see Him running the destruction of Jerusalem together with His own return in prophetic prediction, we will understand His meaning. The destruction of Jerusalem would take place before many of His hearers died; but the same pattern of sudden, swift, merciless judgement will accompany His return at the end of time.”⁵

ENDNOTES:

1. Tim Elmore, *Habitudes Book* (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardners Publishers in association with Growing Leaders, 2012), 29-31.
2. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1874.
3. R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1715.
4. D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 1749–1750.
5. Iain D. Campbell, *Opening up Matthew, Opening Up Commentary* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008), 149.