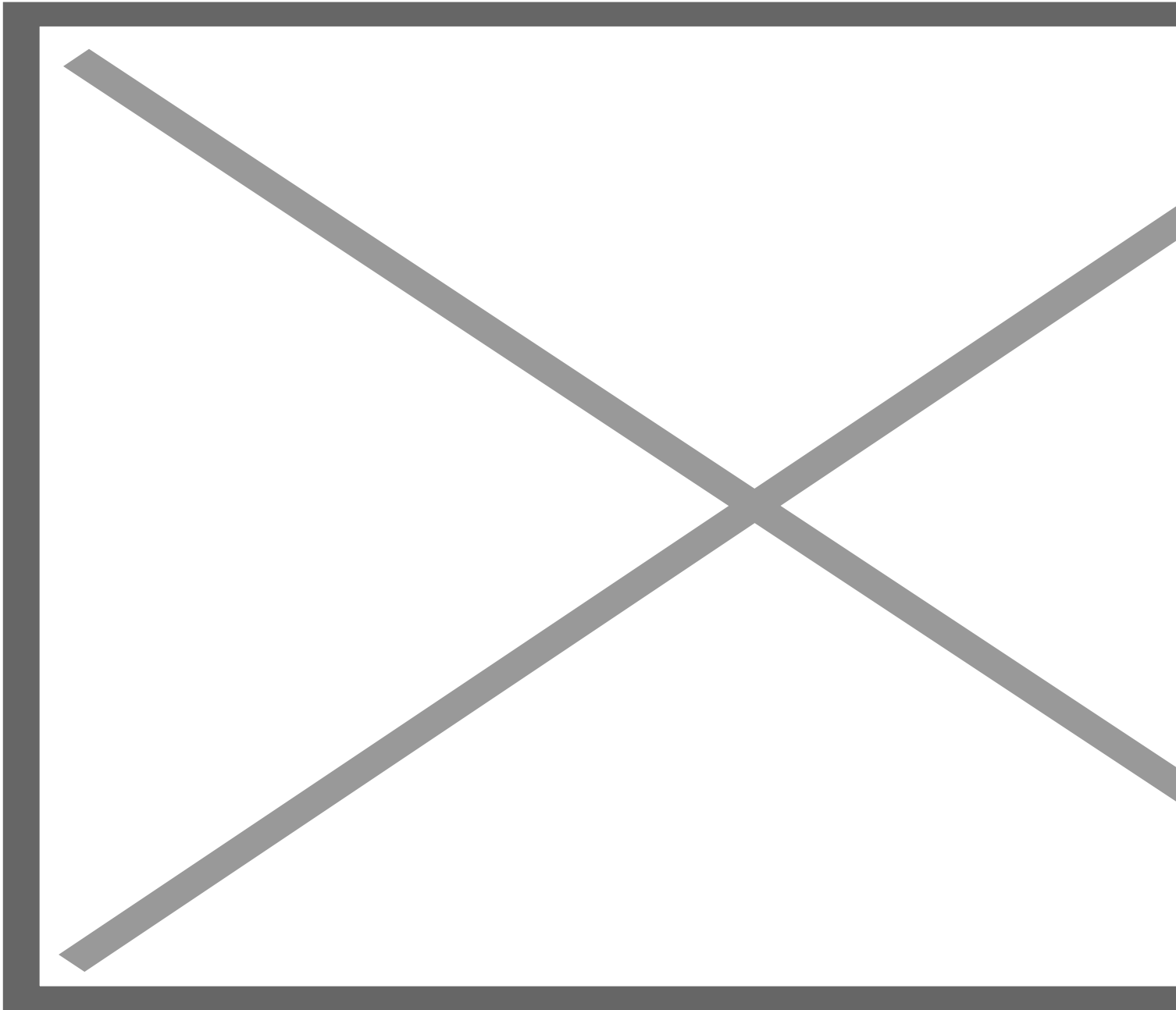


***Stranger Things* at the hinge point of faith**

If it seems impossible that these characters are gone, maybe it's because in some sense, they aren't.

by [Michael Woolf](#)

January 15, 2026



The cast of *Stranger Things* (Courtesy of Netflix / Everett Collection)

After ten years and five seasons, the immensely popular *Stranger Things* concluded on New Year's Eve. The series about the adventures of a group of childhood friends in the 1980s premiered in 2016 and quickly became a marketing juggernaut for Netflix. Over the years, fans grew and changed along with the members of the "party"—a reference to the player characters in a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign—as they confronted an otherworldly evil trying to destroy their hometown of Hawkins, Indiana, and the United States military intent on covering it up.

I'll be honest: As a huge fan, I was disappointed with many of the decisions the show's creators, the Duffer Brothers, made in the final season—especially in the bloated finale, which failed to wrap up important loose ends. Yet I delighted in one ending the writers left up for interpretation (SPOILER ALERT): Eleven, who with her telekinetic powers has always been the heart of the show, seemingly sacrifices herself to defeat the cosmic evil of the Upside Down, the alternate dimension that the Hawkins kids have been fighting. But in the end, we're left to wonder if she may have survived. What intrigued me most about that decision is how it mirrors the Gospel stories of the immense grief that the disciples experienced at Jesus' death, and what role this may have played in the emergent doctrine of the resurrection.

The show has been foreshadowing the eventuality of Eleven's death for a few seasons. I remember wondering if it would be possible for her character to make it out of season two alive. Like Jesus' forthright statements about the necessity of his death in Jerusalem (Matthew 16:21), season five's arc includes Eleven wrestling with whether she should sacrifice herself to end the villain's plans and foil the government agents who will never stop pursuing her. "I have to end the cycle," Eleven says. Her friends, like the disciples, even say the equivalent of "never, Lord!" (Matthew 16:22).

The last episode concludes with Mike's theory that Eleven only *seemed* to sacrifice herself, but that she is alive and well and aware that contacting her friends would risk their safety. After concluding their final *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign in Mike's basement, bringing us full circle to the show's beginning, he explains his theory to the rest of the party. In response, one by one, each of the characters seated at the table says, "I believe."

Watching this scene, I felt like a follower of Jesus in the months after his death. Wanting to believe in something so badly, but having no way to prove it is true. This is in many ways the hinge point of faith.

I considered again the resurrection stories in the New Testament, accounts presented as factual. Paul even insists that Jesus "appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died" (1 Corinthians 15:6). These accounts reveal a Jesus who is markedly different after the resurrection. John 20:19 makes it clear that he can appear in locked rooms. But I've always been drawn to perhaps the most perplexing accounts of Jesus' life after death:

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him... When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight (Luke 24: 13-16, 30-31).

These stories are fantastical; Jesus is clearly not recognizable to his best friends and disciples, and he defies the laws of physics. He can appear and disappear at will. Whoever the resurrected Jesus is, he is notably different from the Jesus who died on the cross. A story like this can only be entered into by the way of faith. Just as the members of the party add their "I believe" to the theory of Eleven's resurrection, the disciples must add theirs to

these stories about Jesus. We are asked to do the same today. It is an act of trust. There is no incontrovertible or scientific proof.

The original Gospel narratives were made in the context of immense grief, especially for Jesus' closest friends and confidants. They had just witnessed the death of their spiritual leader, much in the same way that the entire party witnessed Eleven's death. That's what makes the "I believe" scene so powerful to me—everyone in that room is dealing with the reality that they will never see their friend again. Resurrection does not diminish that grief, but it does say that it does not have the final word. For those who believe, a new world opens.

Because the resurrection is never just about Jesus' singular comeback arc; the Gospel contends that everyone who believes will share in this holy mystery. That is how Paul could write that "death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54). In Jesus' resurrection, we are invited not only to believe in one impossible act but in the possibility that we and everyone we love could share in it.

That's why it was so striking to see the party's hope for Eleven's resurrection; it gives a foretaste of how our own grief might be addressed. The darkest story can have another chapter, one more brilliant than we could have ever realized when we were first dizzied by loss.

Perhaps that's what ignited the rapid spread of a fervent online conspiracy called "Conformity Gate," which purported that the final episode was fake, or a hallucination or simulation of the villain Vecna, and that a real, final, ninth episode would debut on January 7, 2026. That hope turned out to be illusory, but it shows the depth of interconnection between the concepts of resurrection and grief. If it seems impossible that these characters are gone, maybe it's because in some sense, they aren't.

Honestly, it seems unlikely to me. I even anticipate a resurrection or two in spin-offs. But I'm thankful for the creators' commitment to hope even amid deep uncertainty, and the way those claims echo the Gospel. Eleven's sacrifice sent me back to those texts, beholding them anew as stories fundamentally shaped by grief, love, loss, and fragile hope. Like the members of the party gathered around the table, we have no proof—only faith. Sometimes, that is enough. I believe.