

HOPE

A FIVE-WEEK STUDY FOR SMALL GROUPS

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Beth Crawford, General Editor, VCC

Introduction to the Hope Bible Study Series

WHAT IS HOPE?

In Scripture, hope is linked to faith, but it is not the same.

Faith is trusting in God and His character, while **hope** is confidently expecting God to grant future blessings (Harrison, p. 751; Tasker, p. 535). Both the Old and New Testament words for hope include waiting or expecting, and also refer to the good things we hope for that God will give (Gilchrist, p. 373; Hartley, p. 791; Hoffmann, p. 238). Yahweh, Himself, is the hope of Israel in many texts, too (Hoffmann, p. 239).

Many in the ancient pagan world did not admire or practice hope. Some today scoff at hope of an afterlife while others hold only a vague assumption of it. But Biblical hope is more than wishful thinking. Christ's followers have abundant reasons to hope in God because He has fulfilled many unique promises (Harrison, pp. 752–753; Tasker, p. 535). The New Testament clearly sees our hope based in Jesus, whom God raised from the dead and who has poured out His Holy Spirit on us as a taste of the life to come (Everts, p. 416; Hoffmann, p. 242). Since Christ has been raised from the dead, death no longer has power over Him or those united in Him by faith. And since He has risen with a transformed body and has sent His Spirit to live in us, we can hope to be like Him one day (1 Corinthians 15; 1 John 2:2).

Paul indicates that this certain hope of new spiritual and bodily life should encourage us to share this message with others (1 Corinthians 15:58) and live as citizens of heaven now (Philippians 3:20–21). Paul also indicates that what we do for the Lord is not in vain, so we should not give in to discouragement or doubt (1 Corinthians 15:58). In fact, there is a correlation between this world and the re-created world, and how God is transforming us who believe in Christ is a foretaste of what He wants to do to the whole creation (Wright, pp. 201–202).

Old Testament prophecy, New Testament parables, and end time passages point to not only new life and new bodies, but also to a new world in which God restores everything. His justice and righteousness will right every wrong—another reason to hope in Him (Wright, p. 213). The Holy Spirit has poured out God's love into our hearts already so we have reason to continue to hope and not fear disappointment (Romans 5:5). While hope has a subjective side to it (Hoffmann, p. 243), faith in God strengthens it and love from God and for God renews it

Our desire is that as you study the texts in this series, you will find your hope in God clarified and strengthened. And from this experience, we pray that you will more confidently share this hope with others around you so that they might overflow with the knowledge and hope of Christ as well.

Beth Crawford
General Editor
Vineyard Church of Columbus
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WHAT IS OUR HOPE?

Study # 1 — 1 Corinthians 15:1–11
By Mary Youtz
Hope Bible Study Series

STUDY GOALS

To help the group members see Jesus' resurrection as our basis of hope as Christians, and to see how it might impact our daily lives.

BACKGROUND

Paul wrote the Corinthians primarily to address opposition within the church to his leadership and teaching. A major issue in the two Corinthian letters is what it means to be spiritual. The first letter begins and ends with the basics of the faith—Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Everything else in the letter must be understood in light of these (Fee, *Book by Book*, p. 326). Chapter 15 deals with issues relating to Christ's resurrection and the believer's resurrection.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

*If "hope" is eagerly expecting something from God, what do you hope for in the next year?
Why?*

Some people mistake wishful thinking for hope. But Biblical hope is firmly grounded in God's reliable character and actions. When He raised Jesus Christ from the dead, God demonstrated that nothing and no one could oppose Him. In these studies, we'll look at the hope we have of sharing in the resurrection, too.

PRAYER

Pray that people will see in the resurrection the reality of God's kingdom breaking into the existing fallen world, and how they can extend the hope of God's kingdom on a daily basis.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1—11

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. Of what does Paul remind the Corinthians (v. 1)? Why does this matter (v. 2)?
2. What are the basic points of the gospel (vv. 3—4)? What hope does God offer in His good news (vv. 2—4)? How does the resurrection signal God's eternal kingdom has come?
3. What evidence for Jesus' resurrection does Paul mention (vv. 5—8)? What impact might it have on someone to see Jesus alive again? Why do these eyewitnesses matter to us today?
4. How does Paul see himself (vv. 8—9)? Why? What impact does God's grace have on Paul's life (vv. 10—11)?

APPLICATION

Select one of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- How "hopeful" a person are you? Why? What would help you live more aware of the hope we have through our risen Savior and Lord Jesus Christ?
- How is Christ's resurrection and God's grace impacting your life on a daily basis? How can we live more aware of the hope we have in Jesus?
- How do you share the basic gospel message with another person? Why? How can we be more effective in sharing God's message of hope with others?
- Think through the people you regularly see during any given week. What are some ways you could share the hope of the kingdom of God with them? Let's write a few of those down and then pray for opportunities to share the reason we have hope in Jesus Christ.

WRAPPING IT UP

Jesus' resurrection is the definitive proof of God's kingdom breaking into our present fallen world. For the individual believer, receiving the Holy Spirit is proof of the new kingdom in their lives. Our privilege and responsibility as believers is to tell and demonstrate the reality of this new kingdom to those around us.

RESOURCES

The full set of Hope studies is available online at
<http://www.vineyardcolumbus.org/resources/sgresources/index.asp>.

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WHAT IS OUR HOPE? PART 2

Study #2 — 1 Corinthians 15:20—28

By Mike Farley

Hope Bible Study Series

STUDY GOALS

To understand how Jesus' physical resurrection relates to our present and future hope.

BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul wrote First Corinthians to the church at Corinth around A.D. 53. Corinth was a Roman-founded city, and most of the Corinthian believers were Gentiles. In this letter he tries to correct wrong behavior and beliefs (Fee, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 324). Many of the Corinthian's behavioral errors stemmed from a core contradiction—believing in Jesus' physical resurrection, while denying their own (Fee, *The First Epistle*, p. 714). 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 describes the hopeless results of the Corinthians' beliefs. The passage for this study follows that by declaring the truth that God has provided bodily resurrection for those who are Christ's, when He returns. Paul concludes this chapter with an exhortation to continue to serve Christ because what we do now will matter in the resurrection reality later (15:58).

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What do you think life after death will be like? Why?

Many people are confused about what happens after death. This study affirms the reality of physical resurrection and the hope it provides for this life and the life to come.

PRAYER

Pray that study participants will grasp the reality of Jesus' resurrection and how the assurance of their own resurrections should impact their present lives.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:20—28

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. Since “firstfruits” refers to the beginning crops of a harvest, how is Jesus’ resurrection a firstfruit of God’s harvest (v. 20)? According to verse 20, what is the foundation for belief in our physical resurrection?
2. What does it mean to be “in Adam,” and what is Adam’s impact on the human race (vv. 21—22)? What does it mean to be “in Christ,” and what is Christ’s impact on the human race (vv. 21—22)?
3. Reread verses 23—26. List some events associated with Christ’s reign and return.
4. Why is it inevitable that the risen Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (vv. 25—26)? What is placed under Jesus’ feet? Who set up the structure of authority and why is it important (vv. 26—28)?
5. How will our physical resurrection demonstrate the final destruction of all enemies? What hope does that give us now?

APPLICATION

Select one of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- This passage clearly teaches that Christ will come, and that when He does, He will resurrect those who belong to Him. What does it mean to belong to Christ? How do you know that you belong to Him?
- This passage teaches that, in the end, Christ will come to us—not that we will go to Him. If Christ is coming here to do His resurrection work, how does that affect your hope for today and for the future? What might that imply for the way you use your body and the earth’s resources today?
- According to the Gospels, Christ’s resurrection body was similar to His original body, but transformed. How does it change your ideas about heaven to know you’ll end up with a body again? How does this impart hope to us now while we still live on earth?

WRAPPING IT UP

This study leaves us with two key questions: 1) Am I “in Christ”? and 2) How will I live today, given the hope and responsibility associated with the assurance of a physical resurrection? Through this week, consider these questions and reflect on what a great hope we have if we have joined ourselves to Jesus by faith.

For those who are not certain they are “in Christ,” your group leader will be glad to pray with you or arrange for time to discuss questions about salvation and what it means to follow Christ.

RESOURCES

If you need help to better understand the passage, other Biblical support for issues related to end times, and the link between resurrection and hope for living today, please read *Surprised by Hope*, by N. T. Wright.

The full set of Hope studies is available online at
<http://www.vineyardcolumbus.org/resources/sgresources/index.asp>.

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HOW DOES OUR HOPE IMPACT US NOW?

Study 3 —Isaiah 65:17–25; I Corinthians 15:58

By John Ebert

Hope Bible Study Series

STUDY GOALS

To encourage Christians that their work matters to God in this life and in the future resurrected life for which we hope.

BACKGROUND

Isaiah was a prophet in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel beginning around 740 B.C. (Knight, p. xi). This was several hundred years after King David and King Solomon reigned over a united Israel (Anderson, p. 258). Isaiah addresses threats against Judah from Assyria, the coming exile of Judeans to Babylon, and the subsequent restoration of the Jews back to the land of Israel (Knight, p. xi). The Jews during this period most likely understood “new heavens and a new earth” (Isaiah 65:17) as describing a return to Israel’s golden age of peace and prosperity under David and Solomon. They were looking for an earthly kingdom in the present age (Watts, pp. 353–354).

In contrast, Christians today tend to read “new heavens and a new earth” in light of Jesus’ ascension into heaven and promised second coming (Acts 1:6–11). We are looking for “a new heaven and a new earth” in the age after Jesus returns. At that time, the current, broken world will be replaced by a new, perfect creation (Revelation 21:1–5).

Both these interpretations, fulfillment on the present earth and fulfillment in a new world, have validity (Oswalt, p. 656). Through His miracles and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated God’s kingdom on earth now (Matthew 12:28, Wright, pp. 29, 67). However, we currently experience His kingdom only in part. When Jesus returns, He will fulfill all the promises of God’s kingdom, and God will reign over all (I Corinthians 15:23–28). Since Christians believe that resurrection and restoration started with Jesus, we can work now to transform the present by the power of the Holy Spirit in light of that future (Wright, p. 46).

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What images come to mind when you think of “new heavens and a new earth”? When do you think they will appear? What do you think life will be like then?

The passages for this study illustrate some aspects of the new heavens and new earth, and how they relate to the earth as it is today.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for suffering and dying on the cross to free us from our sins. Thank You for rising from death so that we can hope for our own resurrection. Guide us as we study this passage. Show us what You want us to know about the new heavens and the new earth. Empower us to do our part to advance Your kingdom on earth now. Amen.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: ISAIAH 65:17—25; I CORINTHIANS 15:58

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passages. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passages.

1. What does the Lord promise to rebuild or recreate? How will He bless His people?
2. What will He take away or eliminate?
3. What will His people build or create? What will result from their efforts?
4. What will God’s people enjoy?
5. When will these things happen? What things in both passages suggest a future hope?
6. What things in the passage might we see fulfilled, or partially fulfilled, in the present world? What does that illustrate about the Kingdom of God?

APPLICATION

Select one of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- Refer back to discussion question 3: Which of these building or creating actions have you been doing lately? Do you see any connection between doing these things now and what you will do in God's new creation? What hope does that give you?
- What would you like to do as part of the new creation that you are not doing now? Why? What is one step you can take this week to move in that direction?
- What can we do now to fulfill the promises in this passage? What hope might that convey to others?

WRAPPING IT UP

The Bible states that people who have put their faith in Jesus are part of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). God has begun to recreate us into His holy people and to make this world a more holy and just place. Although God is the one who will create the new heavens and the new earth, the promise of this passage in Isaiah is that we have a part to play in His new creation, too. Therefore, let us begin *now* to build, plant, and work with God. Let us give ourselves “fully to the work of the Lord,” knowing that our “labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58; see also Isaiah 65:23).

RESOURCES

The full set of Hope studies is available online at
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HOW DOES HOPE HELP US IN TRIALS?

Study 4 — Romans 8:18–39
By Tammy Lawlor
Hope Bible Study Series

STUDY GOALS

To convey hope to Christians because God understands our present suffering, suffering cannot separate us from God, and God will resurrect our bodies for His Kingdom on earth.

BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul authored the letter to the Romans in A.D. 57 during the reign of the evil Emperor Nero although Paul had not been to Rome yet (Alexander & Alexander, p. 681). He dictated the letter to Tertius (Romans 16:22) from the city of Corinth to the Roman believers who were suffering great persecution. The early Christians in Rome were living in the capital of the world, an epicenter of famous politicians, philosophers, poets, and statesman. But now they had a new identity, citizens of the Kingdom of God. Paul knew that the church in Rome, made up of Jews and Gentiles, would need a core statement about their Christian faith (Swindoll, p. 1190). Paul wrote to fellow Christians, who were experiencing pain in a culture that did not accept them, about the hope of future glory to reassure them in their present sufferings (8:18). Paul exhorted these Christians to take hold of the hope that nothing could separate them from God (8:38–39) and that nothing could stop their future resurrection (8:23).

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

What is your relationship with God like when you experience pain or suffering? Do you think Christians should respond differently to suffering than non-Christians do? If so, why?

This study helps us understand the basis for hope in this world despite present suffering.

PRAYER

Lord, we ask that You would open our minds and hearts to hear and experience Your truth in Your Word. Reveal to us the hope we have as Christians, even if presently we are experiencing great suffering. Through this teaching, help us identify what this hope is and make us passionate about sharing this hope with those who do not yet know Christ. Amen.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: ROMANS 8:18—39

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. What does Paul say about our present sufferings (v. 18)? Whom has Paul just mentioned in verse 17 that also faced suffering before seeing glorious victory? How can it help us when we put our hardships in an eternal perspective?
2. If “glory” refers to the radiance of God’s perfect, praiseworthy character, which we have already seen in Jesus, what do you think Paul means by the “glory that will be revealed in us” (v. 18)? How hopeful are you that you will one day be like Jesus?
3. In verses 19 through 22, Paul talks about how creation is subjected to frustration and feels the pain of decay. How do you see creation in bondage to sin and decay?

Optional: Who subjected creation to frustration and why do you think creation is currently in bondage (Genesis 3:17–19)?

4. When will creation and humans be free from pain and suffering (vv. 22–23)? How should this fill us with hope now (vv. 24–25)?
5. Look at verses 26 and 27. How does the Spirit help us in our weakness? Reading further in the passage, Who else is praying for us (v. 34)? How can we draw hope from their prayers? How have you felt the Holy Spirit assist you when you were trying to pray during pain and suffering?

6. What is God's promise to those whom He has called (v. 28)? Paul mentions that believers are called, known beforehand, predestined, justified, and glorified (vv. 29—30). When we hear those words, how do they give us hope that God will fulfill His plans for us?

Leader's note: You may want to prepare for this study by looking up the terms in a good Bible dictionary.

APPLICATION

Select one of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- Reread verses 31 to 39. Why should our relationship with God give us hope? How do you think the Roman Christians would have felt in hearing these words? How do you feel when you read verses 31 through 39? How can we make these promises more real to us this week?
- How does the hope of future glory, of being resurrected with other Christians when the Kingdom is fulfilled, affect how we live now? What might help us keep this future reality more in focus this week?
- How could our proclaiming the hope of future glory, of being resurrected with other Christians when the Kingdom is fulfilled, impact others this week? Whom would you like us to pray for to hear this message?
- How does the promise of a transformed world, where people like Jesus are carrying out His plans, help you face what you are going through right now?

WRAPPING IT UP

In Romans 8, Paul considers our present sufferings as inconsequential in comparison to the glorious future in our resurrected state. It's as if he looks at our present ugly duckling world and says to fellow Christians, "Hold on. This is not all there is. One day each of us, and all of creation, will be changed into beautiful swans." As we face various trials and difficulties, we need to recall that our Savior is stronger than death, and that His eternal Spirit is living in us. We are in the process of becoming like Him, and one day will experience fullness of life with Him in our resurrected bodies in a transformed world. In that day, God will right every wrong and all will experience His good government. This week let's not only celebrate these truths but also look for opportunities to share the reason we have such a great hope.

RESOURCES

The full set of Hope studies is available online at

<http://www.vineyardcolumbus.org/resources/sgresources/index.asp>.

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HOW DOES OUR HOPE HELP US FACE DEATH?

Study #5

1 Corinthians 15:35–58

By Michael Karoly

Hope Bible Study Series

STUDY GOALS

To help group members understand that our hope is rooted in bodily resurrection. When Christ comes, our bodies will be transformed, clothed in the likeness of Jesus Christ, and adapted to life in the Kingdom of God.

BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus sometime between 54–55 A.D. One of the major themes throughout the letter was what it meant to be “spiritual” (Robbins, p. 15). Some Corinthians believed that they had entered into the promised eschatological [end times] spiritual existence, since they had received the Holy Spirit and were able to speak in tongues. They believed the physical body would be unnecessary and denied a bodily resurrection of the dead (Fee, pp. 715, 778). Paul reaffirmed the truth of bodily resurrection and showed how foundational it is to believers’ hope.

OPENING QUESTION

You can use the following question to get discussion started before you begin the study.

*When you think of dying and the promise of bodily resurrection, what comes to mind?
How does the thought of bodily resurrection encourage you? Why?*

Through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, God has won the final victory over sin and death. So Jesus’ resurrection, and our eventual resurrections, signify that sin and death no longer have any power. Upon Christ’s return, our bodies will be transformed. Our new bodies will be incorruptible—free from sin, decay, and death—ready to serve our Creator in His Kingdom throughout eternity.

PRAYER

Pray that God would give us a new understanding of the resurrection as we study the passage. Pray that He would open our hearts and encourage us through His Holy Spirit. Give thanks to the Father for His plan and His purposes for us, which were inaugurated through His obedient Son Jesus Christ who will one day bring His Father's work to completion.

STUDY THE PASSAGE: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35—58

Ask one or more group members to share in reading the passage. Use the following questions to lead an inductive study of the passage.

1. Who is responsible for the differences in the bodies of creation (v. 38)? How does Paul compare and contrast the different bodies (vv. 35–41)? What can we learn from a seed about our resurrection bodies (vv. 35–38)?
2. Compare the characteristics of the natural body and the resurrection body. Is there anything similar about them (vv. 42–44)?
3. How does Paul use Adam and Jesus Christ to further explain the differences between the natural and resurrection bodies (vv. 45–49)?
4. According to verses 50–53, what must happen in order to inherit the kingdom of God? Who will be included?
5. What do the resurrection and the transformation of our bodies signify? Why should we rejoice with Paul (vv. 54–57)?
6. What does Paul exhort the Corinthians to do in light of bodily resurrection (v. 58)? Why?

APPLICATION

Select one of the following application questions to finish your discussion time.

- Think of some examples of how others perceive death and resurrection (books, movies, other religions, etc.). How are the world's views of death and resurrection different from the biblical view? What gives you hope today in light of the biblical record?
- How does our hope in the resurrection/transformation of our bodies enable us to live out Paul's exhortation in verse 58? How do you live your life "in light of the end"?
- How can we apply our hope in bodily resurrection to evangelistic opportunities at home, in the workplace, and in the community?

WRAPPING IT UP

Our Christian hope is founded upon Jesus' bodily resurrection. Our natural bodies, created for the earthly world, are subject to the effects of sin and death. God clothed us with an earthly body, but one day He will raise us and give us transformed resurrection bodies (like that of Jesus). Our resurrected bodies will be suited for eternal life in the kingdom of God. They will be glorious, incorruptible, and not subject to sin or death. This resurrection event will signify the final victory over sin and death, won by God through Jesus Christ for us. We can experience freedom now because sin no longer has power over us, and death is not our final destiny. Our hope in the resurrection propels us forward as we devote ourselves fully to the gospel and the work of the kingdom. What we do now for Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit will have eternal significance in the future kingdom of God, so we can know our work is not in vain.

RESOURCES

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