LESSON EIGHTEEN

Built Different

"A Disciple Labors in Hope"

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 15:35–58

MEMORY VERSE

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

MAIN IDEA OF THE TEXT

Built different: disciples labor faithfully because of the promise of their own resurrection.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM

Discipleship Distinctive: Eternity and Bodily Resurrection

GROUP TIME

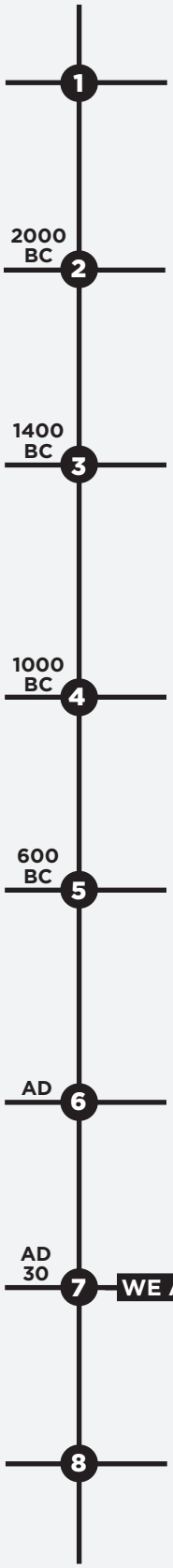
5 minutes	**Welcome**
5–10 minutes	**Attention Grabber**
10 minutes	**Story / Context**
25 minutes	**Discussion**
5–10 minutes	**Closing & Prayer**

PRAYER FOCUS

- **Next Steps Class** – Pray for NSC this weekend. Pray for people to connect with Lakepointe in an intentional way, committing to the church family to be discipled and finding a place to leverage their gifts and skills.

<u>BEGIN</u> this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

GOD'S STORY TIMELINE



1. God Creates the World and Promises a Rescuer *(Genesis 1-11)*
God created everything good and placed humans in a garden to live in close relationship with Him. But Adam and Eve chose to trust themselves instead of God, and sin entered the world. Relationships, creation, even our connection to God was broken. Yet even in judgment, God promised that one day, a descendant of Eve would crush the serpent and bring healing.
+This points to Jesus as the promised Rescuer who defeats sin, Satan, and death.

2. God Calls a Family and Makes a Promise *(Genesis 12-50)*
God chose a man named Abram (later Abraham) and gave a covenant to him: that he would have a large family, receive a land, and be a blessing to all nations. Though Abraham and his descendants were deeply flawed, God continued His promise through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.
+This points to Jesus as the true offspring of Abraham, through whom all nations are fully blessed.

3. God Rescues His People and Forms a Redeemed Nation *(Exodus-Deuteronomy)*
Generations later, Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt. God raised up Moses to rescue them from oppression and slavery. God called His people into a relationship with Himself. He made a covenant with them, gave them the law, and instructed them in worship. He was forming a people who would live differently and show the world what it looked like to belong to Him.
+This points to Jesus as the greater Moses, who rescues us from slavery to sin and writes God's law on our hearts.

4. God Gives a Home and Promises a King *(Joshua-2 Chronicles)*
God brought His people into the promised land under Joshua's leadership. Over time, they asked for a king like the other nations. It was a disaster. But God graciously gave them David, with whom he made another covenant: one of David's descendants would rule forever. Solomon built the temple, but after his death, the kingdom split into two and began spiraling into idolatry and injustice again.
+This points to Jesus as the forever King from David's line, who reigns with justice and peace.

5. God Removes His People and Reminds Them of His Promise *(Ezra-Nehemiah)*
Because of their rebellion, God allowed His people to be conquered and taken into exile. First, it was the Northern Kingdom, Israel (to Assyria), then the Southern Kingdom, Judah (to Babylon). The temple was destroyed, and the glory of the kingdom faded. Yet God continued to speak through the prophets, reminding the people of His promise to restore them, give them new hearts, and send a Rescuer.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the new covenant, restores hearts, and fulfills every prophecy.

6. God Sends His Son and Fulfills His Promise *(Matthew-John)*
At just the right time, God sent Jesus into the world—born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. He perfectly obeyed the law, pointed us to the Father, and laid down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. On the third day, He rose again, proving that He is the Savior, the King, and the fulfillment of every covenant promise God has ever made.
+Jesus is the center of the story—all of Scripture leads to Him.

7. God Sends His Spirit and Builds His Church *(Acts-Jude)*
After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to empower His followers. The early Church spread the good news of Jesus across the Roman world—planting churches, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles, and learning to live as God's new covenant people. Though imperfect, the Church carries Jesus' mission forward today.
+This points to Jesus as the risen King who gives the Spirit to dwell in us and send us on mission.

8. God Restores All Things and Dwells with His People *(Revelation)*
The story isn't over. One day Jesus will return to judge evil and make all things new. There will be a new heaven and new earth, where God's people from every tribe and nation will live with Him forever. There will be no more pain, no more death, and no more sin—just joy, justice, and unbroken peace.
+This points to Jesus as the one who brings the story to its perfect and eternal culmination.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

LEADER TIP

To grab your participants' attention, start your lesson by telling a story related to the lesson's main idea. We have provided you with three options in this section, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

When construction began on the Brooklyn Bridge in 1869, the project seemed almost impossible. Nothing like it had ever been built on that scale. The bridge would have to stretch across the East River, withstand enormous loads, and rise high enough for ships to pass under. Before construction was finished, the project's original designer, John Roebling, died after an accident. His son Washington took over as chief engineer, but he became seriously ill from decompression sickness while working in the underwater caissons that supported the bridge.

Washington could no longer regularly visit the construction site, but the work continued. His wife, Emily Roebling, became the crucial link between him and the engineers carrying out the project. For years, thousands of workers continued building toward something they could not yet use. In 1883, fourteen years after construction began, the Brooklyn Bridge finally opened. The work that occupied so many people for so long became a structure millions of people would eventually cross.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever worked on something that took much longer than you expected? Maybe that piece of Ikea furniture or a work project?*
- *How do you keep going when you can't clearly see the end?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
The future we are working toward in our faith can often seem so distant. What we believe about the end can change the way we live in the present. In 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, Paul explained what the resurrection of God's people would actually mean. Our present bodies will not last forever, but God will raise His people with bodies fitted for eternity. Paul ended the chapter by drawing out the practical result: because resurrection is certain, disciples can "stand firm," give themselves fully to the work of the Lord, and know their labor in the Lord is not in vain.

OPTION 2: ABRAHAM'S CITY HE COULDN'T SEE GENESIS 12:1–9; 23:1–20)

God called Abraham to leave his country and go to a land God would show him (Genesis 12:1). God promised the land would belong to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:7), yet Abraham spent most of his life there living in tents. He traveled through the land, built altars, raised his family, and trusted God's promise, but he never saw the promise completed (Genesis 12:8–9; 13:14–18).

When Sarah died, Abraham even had to purchase a field and cave simply to have a place to bury her (Genesis 23:1–20). Abraham's life was shaped by something beyond what he could presently see. He lived as a stranger in a land God had promised to give his family. He could continue to trust and obey because he had committed himself to a promise even though he didn't experience it fully himself.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever waited on a promise, maybe a future job promotion, a spouse to change, or a promised vacation? Share about it.*
- *What makes it hard to wait on something like a promise to be fulfilled?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
Abraham's story reminds us that faith often means living in the present based on a future God has promised. In 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, Paul talked about the disciples' future and how it impacts living in the present. In our future, death will not be the end of our story. God will raise His people bodily and transform them for eternity. Because that future is certain, disciples can give themselves fully to the work of the Lord, knowing their labor is not in vain.

OPTION 3: PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE

Some trees take decades before they provide the kind of shade people imagine when they are planted. A person puts a small sapling into the ground knowing someone else may be the one eventually sitting beneath its branches. The planter may water it, protect it, and care for it for years without ever seeing what the tree will finally become or experiencing the benefit of all the work of nurturing it.

At first, that can make the work seem strange. Why invest so much effort in something, the greatest benefit of which may belong to another generation? Yet people plant trees for exactly that reason. They believe the work they do now will become part of a future they may not see.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *Have you ever done something knowing others would benefit from it in the future? Tell us about it.*
- *What makes that kind of work worthwhile? What makes it hard?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:
Paul ended 1 Corinthians 15 by telling disciples that the future God promised gives lasting significance to what they do now. Their bodies would be raised and transformed, and death itself would be defeated. Because that future is certain, Paul told them to "stand firm" and "give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord."

2 SET THE STAGE

LEADER TIP

This section provides the historical, cultural, and literary context needed to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

I. Greetings and Thanksgiving (1:1–9)
II. Problems in the church (1:10–6:20)
  A. Divisions and factions (1:10–4:21)
  B. Gross immorality (5:1–13)
  C. Litigation before pagan courts (6:1–11)
  D. Fornication with prostitutes (6:12–20)
III. Replies to questions from the Corinthians (7:1–14:40)
  A. Questions about marriage (7:1–40)
  B. Limitations of Christian liberty (8:1–11:1)
  C. Veiling of women in public worship (11:2–16)
  D. Disorderly behavior at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)
  E. Exercise of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40)
IV. The Resurrection of the Body (15:1–58)
  A. Centrality of Christ's resurrection (15:1–20)
  B. Sequence of resurrection events (15:21–28)
  C. The resurrection and suffering (15:29–34)
  D. Nature of the resurrection body (15:35–49)
  E. The believer's victory over death (15:50–58)
V. Conclusion (16:1–24)
  A. Collection for the believers at Jerusalem (16:1–4)
  B. Paul's plans for visiting Corinth (16:5–9)
  C. Exhortations, instructions, and salutations (16:10–24)[1]

CONTEXT

In the first part of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argued that Jesus's resurrection is central to the gospel and that the future resurrection of believers is just as certain. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised (because he was actually dead), faith is useless, and those who have died in Christ are lost. But Christ has been raised, and His resurrection guarantees that those who belong to Him will also be raised (1 Corinthians 15:12–28). Paul then pressed the practical importance of that hope. If death is really the end, then the hardships and work of the Christian life make little sense (1 Corinthians 15:29–34).

In verses 35–58, Paul answered the question of what that future resurrection will actually be like. He used the picture of a seed to show both continuity and transformation. What is raised is truly connected to the body that dies, but God will raise it with a glory and power it does not presently possess (vv. 35–44). Paul then contrasted Adam, who brought death, with Christ, who brings life (vv. 45–49). Whether a disciple has died or is still alive when Christ returns, every believer will be changed (vv. 50–53). Death itself will be swallowed up in victory. Paul ended by showing why this matters now—because resurrection is certain, disciples can stand firm and give themselves fully to the work of the Lord, knowing their labor is never in vain (vv. 54–58).

[1] F. Alan Tomlinson, "1 Corinthians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1811.

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

Apart from Christ, we naturally live as though this life is all there is. That can make death feel like the final loss and like present sacrifices are pointless if they do not produce an immediate payoff. We look for meaning in what we can accomplish, possess, or experience in the here and now.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

The gospel announces that death does not have the final word because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. He died for our sins and rose again, defeating the power of sin and death. Everyone who trusts in Christ is united to Him, so His resurrection becomes the guarantee of their own future resurrection. Disciples do not have to build their hope on what they can accomplish before they die. Because Jesus lives, they can face death with hope and give themselves fully to His work now, knowing their labor in the Lord is not in vain.

DISCIPLESHIP RHYTHM: DISCIPLESHIP DISTINCTIVE: ETERNITY AND BODILY RESURRECTION

Disciples live with the hope that death will not have the final word. Our future is not simply an escape from this life. Charles Swindoll captured this biblical truth clearly, and it is instructive for our understanding: "By becoming truly human, Christ demonstrated that nothing is inherently wrong with the material world or the physical body, for He could be fully divine and fully human—spiritual and physical—without compromising His holiness (John 6:69). By resurrecting Christ's body from the grave, God demonstrates that not only our spiritual aspects but even our physical component is part of His plan for redemption (Rom. 8:23)."[2] The physical reality of humanity and the world are created and cherished by God.

So, as we learn from Paul that God promises to raise His people and transform what is perishable into what is imperishable, we are learning about how far He goes to preserve and restore His creation (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–54). The resurrection of Jesus gives us confidence that our own bodily resurrection is coming.

This future gives meaning to faithful work in the present, even when we cannot yet see the results. Paul told the Corinthians to "stand firm" and to "give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord" because their labor in the Lord was not in vain (v. 58). We do not need immediate results to know faithfulness matters. What is done for the Lord is never wasted because death will not have the final word.

[2] Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 248-9.

3 LOOK AT THE BOOK

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your group through Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the leader, work through all the exercises below to ensure you understand the text well.

1 Corinthians 15:35–41 Paul anticipated two questions: "How are the dead raised?" and "With what kind of body will they come?" (v. 35). Those are reasonable questions on the surface, but Paul's "How foolish!" (v. 36) suggests there is a faulty assumption behind them. The Corinthians seemed to be treating their inability to imagine resurrection as an argument against it. If they could not picture how a body that has died and decomposed could ever live again, perhaps bodily resurrection is absurd.

Paul answered by pointing them to something they already accepted every day, which is an illustration of the resurrection with some similarities and some differences. He explained both. A seed is placed into the ground, disappears from sight, and what eventually emerges looks remarkably different from the seed that was planted. Yet no one concludes that the plant is unrelated to the seed. The seed illustration provides a way to hold together two truths about resurrection: continuity and transformation. God raises the person who died. This person is unchanged in their personhood, retaining their individual identity. But God does not merely restore that person to the same mortal condition. The resurrected body is qualitatively better!

In resurrection God does not reverse the clock and return us to the bodies we had at twenty-five. Paul was describing something greater. The resurrection body belongs to the same person, but God transforms it for a life that death can no longer end.

Verse 38 shifts attention away from the mechanics of resurrection and toward the One doing the raising: "God gives it a body as he has determined." Paul did not explain the biological process by which resurrection happens. He pointed to God's creative power. The same God who can produce a stalk of wheat from a buried grain is not limited by what the Corinthians could imagine. Likewise, God is not limited by what we can understand or envision.

Paul expanded that point in verses 39–41 by drawing attention to the variety of bodies God has already made. Humans, animals, birds, and fish are not interchangeable. The sun, moon, and stars differ in glory. Creation itself shows that God is not limited to one kind of embodiment. He gives His creatures bodies appropriate to the purpose He intends for them to live out. The question, then, is not whether our present bodies are capable of eternal life. They are not. The question is whether God can give His people bodies fitted for the resurrection life He has promised. Paul's answer was yes.

1 Corinthians 15:42–44 Paul now took the seed illustration and applied it directly to the human body: "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable" (v. 42). The burial of a Christian can look like the final proof that death has won. A body that once moved, spoke, worked, laughed, suffered, and loved is placed into the ground. Paul deliberately used that image of burial as the starting point for resurrection.

The four contrasts in verses 42–44 all make the same basic point: resurrection is not simply getting our present life back. It is God

transforming us for a kind of life our present bodies cannot sustain. "Perishable" describes bodies that are subject to decay. "Weakness" reminds us how little power we ultimately have over sickness, aging, and death. "Dishonor" captures something of death's humiliation. The body that once carried the dignity of a living person is finally laid helplessly in the ground.

But none of those descriptions gets the last word. What is buried perishable is raised imperishable. What goes into the grave in dishonor is raised in glory. What dies in weakness is raised in power. Paul did not deny what death does to us. He announced what God will do to death, demonstrated in removing its curse from upon His creation.

The final contrast, between a "natural body" and a "spiritual body," can easily be misunderstood. Paul did not mean the resurrection body will be less physical, as though the final Christian hope were becoming a spirit without a body. That would work against his entire argument. The contrast is between a body suited to our present mortal existence and a body fully fitted for life under the power of God's Spirit. The resurrection body is still a body, but it no longer carries the limitations of the present experience marked by decay and death. Instead, the resurrected body is outfitted for kingdom living.

1 Corinthians 15:45–49 Paul now explained the resurrection body through a larger biblical story. He quoted Genesis 2:7: "The first man Adam became a living being," and then said "the last Adam" became "a life-giving spirit" (v. 45). Paul was not merely comparing two individuals. Adam and Christ represent two humanities.

Adam received life from God, but he was a man "of the dust." Everyone who belongs to Adam shares the kind of life Adam had. We are embodied creatures, but our bodies are mortal. We know hunger, fatigue, sickness, weakness, and eventually death. That is what it means, in part, to bear the image of the earthly man.

Christ introduced something Adam could never give. Paul called Him a "life-giving spirit." Christ does not merely possess resurrection life. As the risen Lord, He gives that life to those who belong to Him. The contrast is not between a physical Adam and a nonphysical Jesus. It is between Adam, who stands at the head of mortal humanity, and Christ, who stands at the head of resurrection humanity.

Verse 46 makes the order clear: "The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual." Resurrection life is not something human beings secretly possess underneath their physical bodies and simply release at death. It is something God gives. Paul's argument pushed against the idea that salvation means uncovering some immortal part of us that was already untouched by death. The Christian hope depends on God acting to raise and transform us.

That is why verses 47–48 keep returning to Adam and Christ. "The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven." Adam tells us where our present humanity comes from and what it is subject to. Christ tells us where our humanity is going. Those who belong to Adam bear Adam's mortality. Those who belong to Christ will share Christ's resurrection life. Paul's point is not that disciples stop being human. It is that, in Christ, humanity finally becomes what death can no longer destroy.

Verse 49 brings the whole section to its promise: “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.” We already know what the first half of that verse feels like. We live every day in bodies that tire, hurt, weaken, and age. Paul said disciples will know the second half just as truly. The risen Christ is not merely proof that resurrection can happen. He is the pattern of what God intends for His people.

1 Corinthians 15:50–53 Verse 50 explains why transformation is necessary: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” Paul was not saying physical bodies are a problem. He spent the previous verses defending bodily resurrection. The problem is perishability. Bodies that are presently subject to death are not yet suited for a kingdom where death has no place.

That is why the language of inheritance matters. God does not abandon His people because their bodies are mortal. He prepares them to receive what He has promised. The future kingdom requires a kind of life we do not presently possess, so God must change us.

Paul then revealed a “mystery” in verse 51: “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” Not every disciple will experience physical death before Christ returns. Some will still be alive. But no disciple enters the fullness of God’s kingdom in the present mortal condition. The dead must be raised, and the living must be transformed. The common denominator is not death. It is change.

That keeps Paul’s emphasis away from speculation about what happens to different groups of believers and places it on the certainty of God’s action. Whether a disciple has been buried for centuries or is still alive when Christ returns, God is able to bring both into the same resurrection future.

Verse 52 emphasizes how decisively God will act: “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” Resurrection transformation does not come about through gradual human progress. We do not slowly evolve beyond death. God intervenes. The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and the living will be changed.

Verse 53 explains why: “The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Notice Paul did not say the perishable is discarded and replaced by something unrelated. It is “clothed.” The person God created and redeemed is the person God will raise, but now fitted for a life death can no longer touch.

1 Corinthians 15:54–57 Paul reached the climax of the chapter by turning resurrection into a victory song. When the mortal has been clothed with immortality, “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (v. 54). There is a reversal in the image. Death presently seems to swallow everything. Every generation eventually disappears into the grave. Paul said a day is coming when death itself will be swallowed. The enemy that seems to consume everyone will itself be consumed by God’s victory.

That allowed Paul to taunt death: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (v. 55). The word translated “sting” can refer to the sharp point or barb by which something wounds.

Paul pictured death like a creature with a poisonous stinger. Death is frightening not merely because life ends but because something gives death its power to wound and condemn. Paul identified that poison in the next verse: “The sting of death is sin” (v. 56).

That gets beneath our experience of grief to the deeper biblical problem. Death is not simply painful because we miss people we love. Death entered the human story through sin, and sin makes death more than a biological ending. It places guilty people before a holy God. In that sense, sin is the venom in death’s sting. The law then gives sin its power by naming God’s righteous standard and exposing our failure to keep it. The law is not evil, but sinners cannot use it to rescue themselves. It reveals the very guilt that makes death such a terrible enemy.

But Jesus has dealt with the thing that gives death its sting. He bore sin and its judgment in His death, and then He rose from the grave. That means resurrection victory is not God merely helping Christians survive death somehow. Christ removes death’s weapon. Death can still separate us from people we love. Christians still grieve, and our bodies still die. But death can no longer condemn those who belong to Christ, and it cannot keep their bodies in the grave forever.

That is why verse 57 erupts in thanksgiving. “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christians do not defeat death by becoming brave enough to face it. God gives the victory through Jesus. Christ has dealt with death’s sting by dealing with sin, and His resurrection guarantees that death itself will finally lose its hold on His people. Paul could mock death because in Christ it has lost both its venom and its victory.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Verse 58 begins with “therefore,” and that word is crucial. Paul did not spend an entire chapter teaching resurrection so Christians can merely have better information about the afterlife. Resurrection changes the value of the present.

That is why Paul’s first response to resurrection hope was not “think about heaven.” It was “stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.” Future resurrection produces present endurance. If death cannot finally undo what God is doing, then disciples have a reason to remain faithful when faithfulness feels costly, slow, or unnoticed.

The final phrase explains why: “because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Earlier in this chapter Paul used the same idea of “vain” or “empty” to describe what Christian faith would be if Christ had not been raised. If resurrection is false, then preaching is empty, faith is empty, sacrifice is empty, and death eventually erases everything.

But Christ has been raised. That changes the meaning of Christian labor. Something can look unsuccessful without being wasted. A disciple may serve without recognition, pray without immediately seeing an answer, invest in someone who seems not to change, or remain faithful through years that appear unproductive. Paul did not promise that disciples would always see the fruit of their work. He promised something stronger: labor done “in the Lord” is not empty because resurrection means death does not get to decide what ultimately mattered.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:35–58

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of
body will they come?” 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to
life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will
be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God
gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives
its own body. 39 Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh,
animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also
heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the
heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is
another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the
stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown
is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is
raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown
a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written:
“The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving
spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that
the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second
man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are
of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of
heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so
shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot
inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the
imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but
we will all be changed—52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at
the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised
imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe
itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When
the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal
with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death
has been swallowed up in victory.” k

55 “Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But
thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move
you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you
know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.[3]

[3]The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Corinthians 15:35–58.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Gather in groups of three to five people to discuss the Observation and Interpretation questions.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: WHAT IS THE RESURRECTION BODY LIKE?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–44. What farming illustration did Paul use to explain resurrection? What contrasts did he give between the body that is sown and the body that is raised?

Suggested Response: Paul compared the body to a seed that is sown and then given a new form by God. He also pointed to the different kinds of bodies and glory God has already created. Paul said the body is sown perishable and raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonor and raised in glory. It is sown in weakness and raised in power. It is sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: ADAM AND CHRIST

Read 1 Corinthians 15:45–49. Paul contrasted Adam and Christ. What contrasts did he identify? What did he say disciples will one day bear because of Christ?

Suggested Response: Adam is the first man, from the dust of the earth, and became a living being. Christ is the last Adam, the second man from heaven, and is described as a life-giving spirit. Paul said believers have borne the image of the earthly man and will one day bear the image of the heavenly man.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: CHANGED, VICTORIOUS, AND STEADFAST

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50–58. What did Paul say will happen to believers at the last trumpet? In light of victory over death, what does a disciple believe and do?

Suggested Response: Paul said the dead will be raised imperishable and believers who are still alive will also be changed. The mortal will be clothed with immortality, and death will be swallowed up in victory. God gives this victory through Jesus Christ. Because of this, believers are to stand firm, let nothing move them, and give themselves fully to the work of the Lord because their labor in the Lord is not in vain. They believe the way they live and the things they do have meaning and impact. They are not in vain or meaningless.

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: RESURRECTION MEANS TRANSFORMATION

In 1 Corinthians 15:35–44, what does the seed illustration teach us about the relationship between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies?

Suggested Response: The seed shows both continuity and transformation. God raises the same person who dies, but resurrection is not simply a return to our present condition. What is now perishable, weak, and subject to death will be raised imperishable, glorious, and powerful. Paul was describing bodily resurrection, not escape from the body. God will transform His people for a kind of life their present bodies cannot sustain.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: FROM ADAM TO CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians 15:45–49, why did Paul contrast Adam and Christ?

Suggested Response: Paul contrasted Adam and Christ because they each represent humanity. Adam represents the humanity we presently share—earthly, mortal, and subject to death. Christ represents the resurrection humanity God is bringing His people into. Just as we now fully share Adam's mortality, those who belong to Christ will one day share the likeness of the risen Christ. Paul's point is that Adam does not get the final word about what it means to be human.

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: WHY OUR PRESENT LIVES MATTER

In 1 Corinthians 15:50–58, why does the certainty of future resurrection lead Paul to tell believers to stand firm and give themselves fully to the work of the Lord?

Suggested Response: Because God will transform His people and finally defeat death, faithful work done in Christ is never ultimately wasted. Disciples may not see the full result of their labor in this life, but death cannot erase what God is doing. Resurrection gives present faithfulness lasting meaning. That is why Paul moved directly from victory over death to the command to remain steadfast and abound in the Lord's work.

LEADER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God calls them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

Leaders – share your story with your group. It takes 3-5 minutes. You are modeling this for your group, so follow the guidelines. (Click here for the guidelines).

Challenge – group people into 2's or 3's and have them prepare to share their story with each other next week. Set aside 15-20 minutes of your group time for this.

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: Have you thought about your future resurrection before? Tell us how you think about it?

Suggested Response: Use this question to begin the conversation with your group and invite them to begin talking. The goal is not necessarily a doctrinally correct response. As your group responds, use follow-up questions to guide responses beyond a one- or two-word response. Encourage story-telling or explanations of how death and resurrection are thought about.

QUESTION 2: Paul used an analogy to help us understand the resurrection. He talked about planting a seed and how it sprouts into a grain stalk. Our current bodies are the seed, and our resurrected bodies are the grain stalk. How are these similar? How are they not similar?

Suggested Response: Bodies that die are described as perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural. They are connected to Adam, being made from the dust of the earth. What dies is not completely different from what is resurrected. We maintain our personal identity, just like the seed that is planted can only grow into the type of plant the seed is. So, our bodies that die are connected to who we are. Our resurrected bodies will be different in that they will be better, equipped for eternal living. They are described as imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (this does not mean non-physical). They are connected to Jesus Christ.

Use this question to continue the discussion at a level where it is easy for your group to participate. Try not to allow one- or two-word responses. Ask for descriptions and elaborations.

QUESTION 3: How does Christ's victory over death change the way you face death or grief?

Suggested Response: Resurrection does not mean death stops hurting. Christians still grieve, because death is an enemy. Death causes a break in relationships because we can no longer experience each other's company. But death does not have the final word. Jesus has risen, and those who belong to Him will also be raised. So, Christ's victory can help us look to the promise of the future, where death is overcome and disciples who have died are resurrected.

QUESTION 4: It is hard to live in light of a future promise that seems so distant. Where are you most tempted to live as though this present life is all that matters? How do you over-emphasize this area of your life?

Suggested Response: I may put too much weight on comfort, success, health, possessions, experiences, careers, or what I can accomplish right now. Resurrection reminds me that my life is moving toward something God has promised beyond what I can presently see.

This question can be very general, and responses can be disconnected from the individual. Use follow-up questions to invite your group to share in a more detailed and transparent way how they are over-emphasizing (or putting too much focus on) the area of their life they identified.

QUESTION 5: Where are you discouraged because you cannot see the results of your faithfulness?

Suggested Response: I may need perseverance (steadfastness) in a relationship, ministry responsibility, difficult season, long-term prayer, or area of obedience where I am tired of continuing. Resurrection hope gives me a reason to remain faithful even when I cannot see where God is taking the story.

QUESTION 6: Paul told believers to stand firm and not be moved by pressures or influences. Where in your life do you most need perseverance right now?

Suggested Response: The people I spend time with, the media I consume (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, podcasts, etc.), and the voices I listen to can shape what I value. Some influences can slowly disciple me to live for comfort, success, pleasure, or fear instead of Christ. I need to pay attention to what is shaping my view of life and keep returning to the truth of the gospel.

QUESTION 7: What is one way you can give yourself fully to the work of the Lord this week?

Suggested Response: I can take a specific step of faithfulness instead of waiting for better circumstances or clearer results. That might mean serving someone, encouraging another disciple, sharing my story, praying for someone, using my gifts in the church, or continuing something God has already called me to do.

QUESTION 8: How can our group encourage one another when faithful work feels like it is not making a difference?

Suggested Response: We can remind one another of God's promises, pray for those who are discouraged, notice faithfulness instead of only visible success, and encourage one another to keep going. Because Christ has been raised and we will be raised with Him, our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

4 CHALLENGE

LEADER TIP

End your study time with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

Disciples are built different because the promise of resurrection makes faithful work meaningful, even when its results cannot be seen. Paul ended his teaching on resurrection with a "therefore." Because Christ has been raised, because His people will be raised, and because death itself will be defeated, disciples can "stand firm" and "give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord" (v. 58).

This week consider where resurrection hope needs to make you more steadfast.

• Where are you tempted to give up because you cannot see the results of your faithfulness?
• What work of the Lord has God put in front of you that requires you to keep going?
• Who could you encourage this week by reminding them their labor in the Lord is not in vain?

Resurrection means death does not get to decide what matters. Jesus is alive, and those who belong to Him will be raised with Him. That means disciples do not have to demand results before deciding whether faithfulness is worthwhile. We can keep serving, praying, giving, sharing, and obeying because God has promised that labor done in the Lord is never wasted.

Let's pray.