


ABSTRACT

Enlivening Resurrection Hope for Caregivers of the Dying

Sally Lombardo

Academic Supervisor: Brian Brewer, Ph.D.

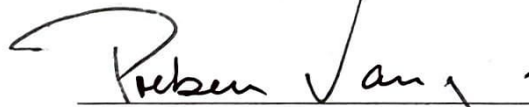
The purpose of this research project was to inspire, equip, and encourage church members who are caring for loved ones with terminal illness or persons close to the time of death. The *Christian Hope when Life is Hard* curriculum was offered to participants who struggled with understanding the biblical promises about resurrection and how to best offer biblical truth to people in their care. Research participants volunteered for an eight-week study of scriptural witness for the bodily resurrection. Theological motifs rooted in samplings of historical theology from the days of the first-century church to the present day were also studied. Participants kept a record of weekly responses, also sharing them freely in the group. Qualitative and quantitative questions comprised the pre-intervention surveys that measured a baseline for caregivers of the dying, and participants were interviewed to examine their reasons for joining an in-process grief course. Post-intervention surveys measured professed changes in attitude toward biblical understanding of the resurrection and bedside competency with a dying loved one. By first exploring the expectations of the group, then providing information on resurrection hope, the goal of measuring effective change could be reached, and church members could redefine their bedside care.



Brian C. Brewer, Ph.D., Academic Supervisor



Shawn Shannon, D.Min., Field Supervisor



Preben Vang, Ph.D., Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

Enlivening Resurrection Hope for Caregivers of the Dying

A Culminating Project Submitted to the Faculty of

George W. Truett Theological Seminary

Baylor University

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Ministry

By

Sally Lombardo

Waco, TX

September 2023

Copyright © 2023 by Sally Lombardo

All rights reserved.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ix
DEDICATION.....	x
CHAPTER 1:.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Goal of the Project.....	5
Statement of Purpose.....	5
Explanation of Key Research.....	6
A. Rationale for Thesis.....	6
B. Intention and Goals.....	7
C. Research Approach/Plan of Action.....	8
Overview of the Process.....	8
Logistical Details.....	9
Research Questions.....	9
Key Terms and Concepts.....	10
Project Significance and Conclusion.....	17
CHAPTER 2: Biblical and Theological Foundations.....	19
Introduction.....	19
Biblical Foundations.....	21
Part I. Resurrection Hope in Old Testament Scripture.....	22
Part II. Hope Is Revealed in Jesus’s Life and Ministry.....	26
A. Jesus Warns He will be Crucified and Rise Again.....	26
B. Jesus Confesses He Is the Resurrection and the Life.....	27
C. Paradise and the Concept of Afterlife.....	32
D. Jesus Rises and Appears to the Disciples.....	35
Part III. Resurrection Hope Fuels the Ministry of Paul.....	38
A. Resurrection Allows Christians to Grieve with Hope.....	39
B. The Resurrection Provides Fellowship with God.....	42
C. The Resurrection Produces Confidence in times of Suffering.....	50
D. Creation Is Restored in a Heavenly Dwelling.....	52
Part IV. Justification (Romans 4:16-25).....	54
Theological Foundations.....	57
Early Christianity and Apostolic Fathers.....	58
The Didache (c. Late First to Second Century).....	58
Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (c. 60–130 AD).....	60
Tertullian (155–220).....	65
Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.....	66
Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (296–373).....	66
Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354–430).....	70
Post-Nicene Cappadocian Fathers.....	74

Gregory of Nyssa (335–395)	75
Gregory of Nazianzus (330–391).....	77
Early and High Medieval Period (550–1350)	79
Gregory the Great (540–604).....	79
Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109).....	81
Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).....	84
Late Medieval Period (1350–1500).....	88
The Ars Moriendi.....	89
Dietrich Kolde (Coelde), (1435–1515).....	92
The Reformation in Continental Europe	94
Martin Luther (1483–1546)	94
Martin Bucer (1491–1551)	99
John Calvin (1509–1564).....	101
Tudor and Later English Protestantism.....	105
Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667).....	106
Post Enlightenment Period and N.T. Wright.....	107
CHAPTER 3:	110
The Intervention: Reasons, Methods, and Measurements	110
Introduction	110
Description of the Intervention.....	110
Research Questions	112
Description of the Method.....	113
Role of the Researcher.....	114
Entering the Field and Obtaining the Sample.....	114
Data Collection: July to September 2022	115
Data Reporting/Analysis.....	116
Validity and Reliability	117
Ethical Issues	118
Conclusion.....	119
CHAPTER 4:	121
Statement of Findings from the Project	121
Qualitative Change in Attitude towards Resurrection Hope	121
Description of the Group	121
Research Questions	123
Summary of Inquiries in Follow-Up Surveys:	124
Initial Findings from the Pre-Intervention Assessment.....	124
Conclusion for Primary Post-Intervention Findings	135
Conclusion.....	138
CHAPTER 5: Evaluation of the Project	140
Reflections on Caregiving	140
Assessment of the Project: Christian Hope when Life is Hard	141

Contemporary Setting as a Reflection of Findings	142
Limitations of Research and Corrective Measures.....	148
A Trajectory Forward.....	150
Project Conclusion.....	152
APPENDIX A: SYLLABUS AND CURRICULUM.....	154
APPENDIX B: IRB Approval	179
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent.....	181
BIBLIOGRAPHY	183

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially grateful to the pastor and staff at South Main Baptist Church of Houston, Texas. The support of Drs. Steve Wells and Matt Walton was invaluable as I worked through the stages of development in my writing and offered the intervention group to willing participants. South Main is the church where I grew up, and offering my project there has been both a satisfying and fitting bookend to my seminary journey.

I would also like to offer thanks to my dedicated and helpful Field Supervisor, Dr. Shawn Shannon, pastor of Spiritual Formation at Tallowood Baptist Church, Houston. Her investment in my emotional and spiritual well-being, as well as her availability for meetings that both strengthened and encouraged me, will never be forgotten. Shawn, thank you for choosing to believe in me and the message of this project.

Other individuals whose significant contributions to my project require mention. The staff at Lanier Theological Library in Houston were most kind and patient, offering me entry when the library was officially “closed” and providing help locating and accessing uncommon primary texts on the top shelves. My editor, Dr. Kevin Hrebik, deserves special thanks. His advice and instruction provided great encouragement. Dr. Preben Vang was a patient and able guide in his role as director of the Truett DMin program, and Dr. Brian Brewer deserves credit for the refinement of my writing and overall project depth. His instruction supported me on this academic journey, as he read draft after draft of the chapters. I am grateful for his scholarship and the high bar he set for my work.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, my five children and husband who endured my devotion to seminary and the DMin courses that culminated in my project work and its arduous demands. You have always supported me, and I am grateful to all of you. I also dedicate this work to my two grandparents, Enid and Robert Markham, both teachers at Baylor and my inspiration. Enid Markham is the lyricist of “The Good Old Baylor Line.” She would be delighted to know that I am part of that line at Truett.

In addition, I dedicate this work and offer special thanks to my dear friend Sarah who has walked with me in my journey to know Christ and see him “formed in me.” She supported me with unfailing encouragement through seminary and the writing of this project, even when I could not see the end. Thank you.

The transformed soul can only be enlivened if the flesh serves the indwelling Holy Spirit and is willing to be animated anew.

—*St. Augustine*

CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

Problem Statement

This project emerged out of a difficult death experience in my own family. During the time leading up to our loved one's untimely death, both inner and outer circles of the family were affected by discord, fear, and lack of preparation. Misunderstandings had not been healed, and lack of trust had never been addressed. My family member's anger and confusion were evident, and my conservative, traditional family's unpreparedness to confront these issues or discuss deeper spiritual truths took a great toll. As a student at that time, I had hoped to be able to talk with my family member about her Christian beliefs and hope in the promised bodily resurrection. I had hoped to be able to reconcile with her over past mistakes, but the path to healing appeared dim.

I approached my brother's church to ask for help, but staff confessed discomfort with offering the guidance our family so desperately needed. As the illness progressed, family wounds deepened, and hopelessness increased. Opportunity for healing seemed to recede, and the scars from our lack of meaningful dialogue as we navigated anticipatory grief lingered long after our loved one had died. Deeper issues were left unresolved, and our extended family, although Christian, did not use the time to discuss forgiveness, ways to reconcile, or the promised bodily resurrection within the love and purposes of God. After my relative died, several years went by before healthy relationships were restored. This spark ignited my interest in exploring ways that Christian families can know resurrection hope more fully and live in the power of God to restore.

Thankfully, in times of crisis and great need, churches and ministers provide excellent pastoral care. Many churches offer biblical hope for life after death and the promise of future resurrection. Surprisingly, Lifeway Research's "2020 State of Theology" concluded that 66% of Americans actually do believe in Jesus's bodily resurrection. One in five, or 20%, disagree, and 14% are unsure, which also means that 34% do not or are not sure. The good news is that people who attend church or regular Bible teaching are more likely to believe (89%), but the unfortunate reality is that belief that Jesus rose from the dead may have little impact on how even Christians live.¹ Americans need to understand the vital difference it makes that Jesus is risen.

In comparison, a Scripps Howard/Ohio University poll found that "most Americans don't believe they will experience a resurrection of their bodies after they die," and this places them in opposition to core beliefs of Christianity. One conclusion is that American Christians live in tension with the traditional Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Only 36% of 1,000 adults interviewed said they believed their physical bodies would be resurrected one day; 54% said they did not believe at all, and a majority of 18 to 34-year-olds (men more than women) do not believe the biblical accounts.²

Taking these statistics into account, some churches are challenged to recognize the rich scriptural and theological resources of their own heritage that can supply a lifeline of resurrection hope into life's desperate situations. The *National Catholic Reporter* quotes the Barna group on faith in America, observing how the statement from

¹ Aaron Earls, "What Do Americans Actually Believe about the Resurrection?" *Lifeway Research* (March 26, 2021), accessed July 24, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2021/03/26/what-do-americans-actually-believe-about-the-resurrection/>.

² Thomas Hargrove and Guido H. Stempel III, "Most Americans Don't Believe in the Resurrection," *Religion News Blog* (April 10, 2006), accessed Aug. 23, 2023, <https://www.religionnewsblog.com/14273/most-americans-dont-believe-in-the-resurrection>

the Nicene Creed, “On the third day, he rose again,” is an actual source of deep rifts in Christianity and a stumbling block for many. The writer asks if believers must take the resurrection literally: “Can one understand the Resurrection as a metaphor . . . and still claim to follow Christ?” The Barna poll (2010) stated that 42% of Americans say Easter is about Jesus’s resurrection, but some see Easter as a “big problem” that obstructs the symbolic truth—Jesus can “break every limit, including the limit of death.”³ This project idea grew out of a desire to help families in crisis challenge this ongoing cultural trend.

According to Anglican Samuel Wells, people in the church today are plagued with anxiety that often leads them down the wrong path, drawing them away from the core tenets of faith. Present day Christian denominations offer a wide range of options about resurrection hope, from theories about historical “dispensations” to stories of the soul’s journey to the clouds. The endless spectrum of ideas about life-after-death has compromised the Christian message, and resultant anxiety and lack of assurance about resurrection hope, says Wells, “may be at the root of the deadly sins that plague believers, shifting what they are in Christ from a gift to a limitation.”⁴

Jesus’s death and resurrection are a paradigm for the Christian’s promised future and offer solid ground for Christian hope. By “opening the gates of everlasting life—achievements concentrated in his passion, death and resurrection,” Jesus bequeathed hope in the form of a re-created existence.⁵ Biblical witness for resurrection can be trusted.

³ Kimberly Winston, “Can you Question the Resurrection and Still be a Christian?” *National Catholic Reporter* (April 17, 2014), accessed Aug. 28, 2023, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/theology/can-you-question-resurrection-and-still-be-christian>.

⁴ Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 3.

⁵ Wells, *Incarnational Ministry*, 11.

Historically, Christian dying was a more shared occasion than it is today, and this accompanied a focus on biblical hope. Social emphasis on community over the individual ensured that a dying person was surrounded by friends and family rituals, and church teaching on renouncing evil was a bulwark for family hope. Although contemporary advances in medical science and psychology have extended life, a focus on scriptural truth at the gates of death has largely been lost. Allen Verhey explains:

Attended by family and friends, the dying person was the center of attention. Even strangers would fill the room, followed by the priest who delivered the sacrament. Death was not a solitary event. Like life, it happened in community . . . but also *to* the community. It was a communal loss, and both grief and comfort were communal tasks.⁶

The church today may not always explain the practice of Christian hope as well as it explains its meaning. “Hope” is a favorable and confident expectation, an anticipation trusting in the unseen.⁷ For purposes of this research, trusting in the unseen constitutes faith in God’s promise of eternity. Paul would write in Galatians: “For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (5:5). Christian hope anticipates resurrection with Christ, our forerunner and intermediary for life in eternity with God.

Belief in a bodily resurrection on a new earth, however, must be sought through faith. Eugene Peterson describes the “hazardous work” of faith thusly:

What is hazardous in my life is my work as a Christian. Every day I put faith on the line. Every day I put hope on the line. I have never seen God. In a world where nearly everything can be weighed [and] explained, . . . I persist in making the center of my life a God whom no eye hath seen. . . . I cheerfully persist in living in the hope that nothing will separate me from Christ’s love.⁸

⁶ Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), Kindle version, Loc. 184.

⁷ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 311.

⁸ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2018), 76.

This project idea grew out of my desire to prevent the fear and hopelessness that can accompany the process of illness and death. Many Christians do not live as if they believe the words spoken at the tomb: ““He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him”” (Mt. 28:7). Andrew Purves observes that ministry in the church today often operates somewhere in the “in-between, of Holy Saturday,” where Jesus is not yet risen. Christians may exist between hope and despair, despite the biblical witness.⁹ Yet the church was launched on resurrection day, and its mission is to proclaim a transformative message of hope for all seasons of life.

Goal of the Project

The goal of the intervention project I developed, therefore, was to create a course for the church that would allow participants to be assured of the bodily resurrection of believers. The intent was to help participants process spiritual needs during a season of caring for a loved one in decline. Family members often feel a mix of guilt and abandonment by God that does not make sense in the light of Christian witness. If there is weak faith and little resurrection hope, death becomes the great dismantler of Christian peace. Thanks to the loving redemption of the Lord and his offer of bodily resurrection for all Christians, seasons of dying do not have to be this way.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the intervention was to place before participants the biblical and theological witness for Jesus’s bodily resurrection. Materials were chosen to enliven belief and provide a context for exploring biblical and theological truth. The dual purpose

⁹ Andrew Purves, *The Resurrection of Ministry* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2010), 14-15.

was thus: 1) to provide scriptural support for the triumphant resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and 2) to supply fresh hope that these pivotal events must embolden and sustain a Christian, both in life and in seasons of impending death.

For clarification, the project was *not* intended to simply rehearse the “Easter faith” that Christians already know; rather, it was written to inspire and encourage all that was *embodied* by Jesus’s inaugurating resurrection. N. T. Wright encourages the church to move past the simple faith of Easter day by anticipating renewed life with Christ in his coming kingdom on earth. He explains that the word “resurrection” (Gr. ἀνάστασις) indicated a “new bodily life on earth *after* one’s life-after-death,” not a human resuscitation or revivification during one’s human life.¹⁰ A Christian’s heaven-bound life is not simply a spiritual existence but a “going on in the present world” that will be remade, a new community of love, albeit in another dimension.¹² My project was written to support Christian caregiving and witness by providing a foundation for shared hope.

Explanation of Key Research

A. Rationale for Thesis

1) *The church* as God’s representative has a responsibility to care for its flock; therefore, church leaders should support the dying and family who care for them with hope in the resurrection of Christ. 2) *Pastoral care providers* can be trained to equip others to care for those close to death. With belief in the bodily resurrection, caregiving

¹⁰ N. T. Wright, “Acts: New World, New People,” Summer Intensive Conference (Houston: South Main Baptist Church, April 4, 2023). A key passage used was Mt 27:53: “They came out of the tombs after Jesus’s resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

¹² N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 19.

for the dying becomes a combination of witness and love. 3) *All Christian caregivers and the dying they serve* must see mortality as part of God's design. When families trust God's promise for life after death, they can assure the dying that one day the body, and all of life, will be redeemed. Believers act as "Christ-embodied Christians in both life and in death," mediating the tension between human mortality and hope.¹¹

B. Intention and Goals

The intention of my project was to offer reflection on the resurrection of Christ, discussion, and room to process fear and loss. Most Christians know the gospel story, yet at times of death, the need for reconciliation, honest sharing, and processing of great loss presents challenges. Rather than robbing us of peace, the season of dying can be one that fulfills our ultimate purpose of a lifelong walk with God.

Bodily resurrection can be understood as part of a larger vision of God's long-term plan for followers of Christ who will one day rise with him. Joshua Mugg affirms the Christian's need to wrestle with "eschatology," the final events during Christ's return, in order to make sense of life's most confounding moments.¹² The resurrection, as part of the eschaton, completes the story of God. Inaugurated by Jesus's death, the eschaton is God's plan for judgment, the destruction of the old and restoration of a new world, and human bodily resurrection. Each part of the story is essential.¹³

¹¹ N. T. Wright, "Acts: New World, New People," Summer Intensive Conference (Houston: South Main Baptist Church, April 4, 2023).

¹² Joshua Mugg and James T. Turner, Jr., "Why a Bodily Resurrection? The Bodily Resurrection and the Mind/Body Relation," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 5 (May 2017): 122.

¹³ Hagner, Donald A., "Gospel, Kingdom and Resurrection in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Life in the Face of Death*, Richard Longnecker, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 99, via Ibid.

C. Research Approach/Plan of Action

My plan included researching scripture on resurrection hope, distributing corresponding developments in historical theology on Jesus's resurrection, and facilitating group sharing on the journey of caregiving with faith. The readings, journaling activities, and questions helped demonstrate tangible ways that Christian families can prepare for a coming death through a lens of Christian hope.

The intervention course, *Christian Hope when Life is Hard*, provided biblical passages from Old Testament prophecies, Jesus's own testimony about his coming death and resurrection, and Paul's teachings on hope for those who have died. Theological readings, reflection questions, and surveys were compiled, and participants were encouraged to share what they had learned in their unique caregiving situations.

Overview of the Process

The course adopted an eight-week plan for rehearsing fundamental questions: How does hope in Jesus's resurrection and promise of new life help Christians face the terminal illness or death of a loved one? How can the church help Christians grow closer to God as they embrace their own mortality? How can churches better help congregants find secure hope in the teachings of Jesus on the bodily resurrection to come?

My central theme was that assurance of bodily resurrection as witnessed to in scripture, Bible commentary, and through historical theology undergirds all of life. As a guiding focus, I presented the goal that pastors and lay ministers alike can be equipped to explore life and death issues with honesty through a "resurrection lens." Assessments were made about the effectiveness of the course by using phone calls, discussion, pre-course interviews, and follow-up surveys.

Logistical Details

The course was offered at South Main Baptist in Houston, Texas, on Sunday mornings July-August, 2022 from 11:00 am–12:30 pm. The upstairs parlor behind the baptistry was the setting for the class, a place where the pastor gathers the ministry team and where families meet before funerals. Comfortable furniture and rugs created a welcoming atmosphere. Ample seating welcomed all participants.

Theology and scripture readings were supplied as “homework,” opening prayers were read aloud, and questions were strategically posed for sharing. Weekly handouts included pastoral care texts on grief and loss, the need for forgiveness, and questions of theodicy. My goal was to support caregivers who attend South Main, and I was curious about not only the need for resurrection hope but participants’ desire for companionship as they process guilt and loss. I collated findings into a pamphlet for future church use.

Research Questions

The standard for whether a group is successful is measured by the change in group participants rather than by specific external measurement. The study attempted to discover the effectiveness of reinforcing resurrection hope for caregivers of the dying; therefore, collected data was intended to stand on its own, independent of prior expectations or assumptions. Surveys and follow-up calls measured lasting effects.

1. How does participation in a church-based grief preparation program on resurrection hope influence a participant’s faith in Christ during seasons of death?
2. How does participation in a grief-preparation program on resurrection hope impact a participant’s quality of care for a dying loved one, and does participation impact a person’s commitment to caregiving?

3. Can participation in a church-based grief preparation program help caregivers face their own mortality in a more confident way, resting in Christ's faithful love?

Key Terms and Concepts

The following are definitions of key terms and definitions used throughout:

Gr. ασφάλεια (*Asphaleia*). This New Testament term refers to the peace, unity, and security possible for those in fellowship with Christ. Paul contrasts the peace (*asphaleia*) of Christ to the false security of the Roman empire. He assures believers that the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night” with judgment and “sudden destruction,” despite the peace and security (*asphaleia*) in the land (1 Thess. 5:2-3). The focus of security in Christ is on reconciliation and peace, not on military repression or power. The boots of the armor of God “proclaim the gospel of peace” (Eph 5:15), no longer as “trampling boots of the soldier,” but good news that true security has arrived.¹⁴

Michael Holmes observes that safety, firmness, and certainty are the foundations for Paul's argument. Christians can be assured of what God will do since they are rooted in the security of what he has already done. Eternal hope, our “Christological purpose,” provides the utmost security.¹⁵

Bodily Resurrection. Taken from the Gr. *Soma* (σώμα, body or corps) and *anastasi* (ἀνάστασις, revive, resurrect), “bodily resurrection” includes the whole man who will be raised after death (cf. Mt 27:52).¹⁶ Paul professes that the perishable body,

¹⁴ David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 210-11.

¹⁵ Michael Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NIV Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 148.

¹⁶ Mt. 27:52-53 reads: “The tombs were also opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city.”

“sown in weakness,” will be transformed at the final resurrection into a spiritual body “raised in power” (1 Cor. 15:43). The flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God because it is perishable, but Paul assures, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven” (15:49). At a believer’s resurrection, the new life of the Spirit of God in each person lives on, replacing the soul of the old man.¹⁷

In the coming bodily resurrection, believers are promised their existence will contain body and spirit just as Christ exhibited in the dichotomy of his spirit and flesh. Wright asserts that bodily resurrection does not apply to just one aspect of man that does *not* die, but instead, “to a going on into a continuing life in a new mode, to something that *does* die and then is given a *new* life.”¹⁸ The Christology of the early church was built on this core tenet, “the source from which all exegetical reflection emerged . . . [and] the trunk from which the branches sprang.”¹⁹

The Church. The birth of the church is the primary reason for Paul’s constant emphasis on oneness and unity. Acts 4:33 describes the nature of the early church: “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”²⁰ The church (Gr. ἐκκλησία) is a body of “true believers in Christ” who are both universal and gathered into a particular place.

There are some believers who interpret Paul’s eschatology to mean that Jesus at his second coming will “snatch up the church to be with him,” or remove and spare her

¹⁷ Freedman, ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, 768.

¹⁸ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 314.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁰ Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, 1820.

from the coming tribulation.²¹ While on earth, however, the church's work is to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19) by proclaiming the message of resurrection hope.

Deification. The term "deification," or, more explicitly, "*theosis*," was traditionally used in the Eastern Orthodox Church to propose that Christians can become, by means of grace, that which God already *is* by his nature. Jesus is the only person who became incarnate by the nature of God, which he possessed, and he assumed oneness with God at ascension. Theologians today are careful to avoid "pantheistic absorption of the believer into the person of God," since Jesus alone has God's divine nature.²²

Wright claims that the nature of Jesus's divine call of Messiahship is a major theme of the gospels. Jesus was embraced as Messiah in early Christianity because he was raised bodily from the dead and spoke of it as his vocation ("I am the resurrection and the life," Jn. 11:25). Paul, therefore, refers to Jesus consistently using *kyrios*, the term for a deity, and his way of foretelling God's coming Kingdom and announcing the resurrection of all who believe. Paul intentionally echoes "imperial ideology" to show that Jesus is the true "Son of God" to whom the world owes allegiance (Rom. 1:4).²³

The word "deification" in Jesus's day commonly referred to the practice of treating a person in authority as divine ruler by right; therefore, early Christians' use of the word "Savior" for Jesus incited opposition from supporters of Augustus Caesar and

²¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 35.

²² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 903-4.

²³ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 566-568. Rom 1:3-4 reads, "the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David . . . and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

the Pax Romana.²⁴ Yet Paul continued to use the term, and Jesus himself announced, ““All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me”” (Mt. 28:18).

Death and the Art of Dying Well. Dealing with death is a deeply personal part of a faithful life and a mix of both sorrow and hope. Death is physical separation from life on earth and, for the non-believer, separation from God as the consequence of Adam’s sin. Christian tradition has varied over a theology of dying well, but Erickson defines “spiritual death” as an event when one’s inner being is totally separated from God, and if one is dead in sin, there is no ability to respond. Just as wages compensate a person for a day’s work, physical death is “a fitting return and just recompense for what we have done,” and eternal death is when both spiritual and physical life are extinguished.²⁵

Brent Waters defines ‘good dying’ as an experience that leads Christians to eternal life with God. A good Christian death was modeled by the martyrs, who remained faithful to their belief; a good death, according to Augustine, is one where one’s desire is oriented toward God; a good death, as described by Jeremy Taylor in *Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, is the outcome of lifelong preparation and a life well-lived.²⁶ Paul encourages believers that facing death with hope means trusting that one is never fully dislodged from God’s love. He writes: “though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness,” and “the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead” will give life to the body (Rom 8:11). He explains a believer’s eternal connection to God:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship . . . or peril, or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,

²⁴ Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 48.

²⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 557-60.

²⁶ Brent Waters, “A Good Christian Death,” in *Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*, George Kalantzis and Matthew Levering, eds. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 236.

nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35-39)

Paradise. Jesus promises “Paradise” to the penitent thief as a place of rest in the care of the Lord, a dwelling where Jesus will meet the believer after death but before new creation is restored (Lk 23:43). “Paradise” refers to the spiritual Garden in Eden and foretells hope in the eschaton and Christ’s return as an intermediate “third heaven” of the righteous dead (2 Cor. 12:4). In Judaism, Eden was considered a place free of trouble where one goes upon death, a place where the human and divine work together.²⁷

Early use of the word “Paradise” was taken from Persian and described the forest of King Ataxerxes (Neh. 2:8) as well as the fragrant orchards of Solomon (Song of Sol. 4:13).²⁸ Today, this word for a beautiful park is often confused with “heaven” and man’s final destination, the reason for Christian hope. Wright expounds on this concept, stating that current church practice and liturgy do not reflect firm hope in resurrection of the dead, but a vague picture of heaven that does nothing to transform lives. The picture is a powerless hope. Instead, “Paradise” is meant to reflect a temporary lodging (Gr. *monē*) and “blissful garden where God’s people rest prior to the resurrection,” a prelude to the restoration of new heaven and earth.²⁹ Wright comments in a pejorative tone that current literature on heaven can often be grossly misleading, promising heaven as a permanent, cloudlike place you get to drift around on when you are good.³⁰

²⁷ Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, 154-155.

²⁸ *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*, Kindle ed., 475.

²⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

The *Parousia* (Gr. “arrival, appearance”) refers to the Second Coming of Christ, an anticipated event that infused the apostolic kerygma of the early church and the witness of Paul. Christians are assured that the promised Parousia will be personal in nature (Jesus will know us), bodily in form, and visible: “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go (Acts 1:11).³¹ The disciples ask, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming (*Parousia*) and of the end of the age?” (Mt. 24:3). Jesus’s explanation includes a foretelling: “They will see ‘the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven’ with power and great glory” (24:30b) because Christ’s eschatological coming in glory is the pinnacle of Christian existence, completing the resurrection event.³²

A Realized Eschatology is related to the Parousia. “Eschatology” is the teaching regarding events that will take place when Jesus returns, the final steps toward his established rule in heaven and on earth. This coming of the “last things” includes the final judgment, and there is understandably a wide range of views on when and how God’s kingdom will manifest.³³ “Realized Eschatology” is the proposal by C. H. Dodd and others that eschatological passages in the Bible do not refer only to the future but to already fulfilled prophecies. The noted “Day of the Lord” passage of 1 Thessalonians 5:2-11 and the coming persecution foretold in Matthew 24:9-31 describe predicted events that would begin while followers were alive and had begun during Jesus’s lifetime.

³¹ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1087-1090.

³² Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, 166-167.

³³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1057.

Accepting the premise of a realized eschatology means that future and present hope are “cut from the same fabric.” Likewise, Jesus’s resurrection and return both point to anticipation of God’s goodness in new creation as well as hope for today.³⁴ In this light, the gospel can and must be lived and realized daily.

Synergeia describes the committed relationships between Paul’s companions who “risked their necks” for his sake and for the gospel message (Rom. 16:4). Priscilla and Aquila were fellow workers for unity (*synergeia*) in Christ, as were those who “devoted themselves to the service of the saints” in order to build the Christian church (1 Cor. 16:15). Fellowship (*synergeia*) lay at the root of Paul’s work and ministry. His focus on the “table fellowship” of the Eucharist shows how communal meals were vital to preserve the identity of the first Christian community.³⁵ Paul instructs his followers: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? . . . We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (10:16-17). Eating the Lords’ Supper in *synergeia* shows hopeful anticipation of Christ’s return: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (11:26).

Theodicy is man’s effort to solve the problem of evil, or, more literally, human attempts to justify God. The problem of human mortality is man’s greatest dilemma, and the book of Job makes clear that God’s goodness still persists despite the reality of death and the presence of evil.³⁶ Man is left to wrestle with questions of God’s sovereignty and wonder why evil is allowed to cause sorrow and pain. Jesus’s crucifixion, death, and

³⁴ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son*, 214.

³⁵ Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, 302-3.

³⁶ Job 1:7-8 reads: “The Lord said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ . . . ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.’ The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? . . . a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.’”

resurrection, however, demonstrate that although God is not the immediate cause of sin, he orchestrates all things and brings good from evil intent. Despite evil's pervasive presence, God's overriding and efficacious will is behind every event.³⁷ This is the solution of Job and a possible resolving of the problem of evil and death.

Paul reconciles suffering in light of God's promise of eternity: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). C. S. Lewis reconciled theodicy by advising human acceptance. He explained that great suffering may be allowed by God so people will choose God over life's futile endeavors. Suffering, then, can be redemptive.³⁸

Project Significance and Conclusion

The significance of this intervention project is that it provided church members with a forum to discuss present and past pain concerning dying loved ones, to examine their own fears about dying, and to find hope in the final resurrection. Biblical testimony for bodily resurrection was presented with the intention of conveying the reality of God's loving plan for all humanity. The project offered God's words of hope for times when life becomes a challenging mix of caring for a loved one and releasing the person to the arms of God, whether in the context of a long-term illness or of impending death itself.

Scripture passages and theological readings were provided to help group participants navigate the challenging journey of in-process grief leading up to a death. Some families do not experience great difficulty in death, but there are many who need

³⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 388.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 41-3.

support. My goal in developing the project was to enliven hope and renew confidence in the promises of God that were known by many, but not accessed. When believers hold to the promise of resurrection hope, they can rebuild family trust, love, and joy in anticipation of the promise to all Christians that they will one day be raised.

Since my own family struggle was left unfinished when our loved one died, I felt a great sense of call to help families with loved ones who die at home or in hospice care. I envisioned a course to encourage people to find hope in the resurrection of Christ, both during life and at the end of life. I attempted to infuse Christian faith with a renewed, firm belief in the coming resurrection at Christ's return and to assure participants that hope can be found in what God has done and will surely do in the ages to come.

CHAPTER 2:

Biblical and Theological Foundations

Introduction

The cross and the ensuing resurrection of Jesus cast a shadow both backwards and forwards in history. Biblical stories and prophecy look with hope to a promised redemption that only the Christ would fulfill. This biblical and theological foundations chapter underscores the biblical promises that provide faith, hope, and trust in Jesus's teaching on promised resurrection for all who believe. The biblical witness for hope in a bodily resurrection forms a bridge between the covenants of God, and the gospel message acts as a theological linchpin for the promise of God to restore and redeem. Jesus is the cornerstone of all Christian faith and the resurrection, a model and means for Christians to envision and find eternal life with God.

This chapter unpacks the promises of God as evidenced in two Old Testament passages that form the beginning of hope for Israel and trace the reasons that Christians can have hope in the face of suffering and death. Gospel passages outline resurrection as an historical fact and foundation for the faith. A passage from John 11, the story Lazarus's death, sheds light on Jesus's understanding of himself and his mission, describing how believers find hope through the pain of death. The remainder of the biblical section focuses on Paul's robust expansion of the concept of life after death and the Christian's bodily resurrection to come.

The underlying promises of God to Christians are multiple, and biblical witness for hope points to the redemption and resurrection of the Son. No part of experience,

even death, is impermeable to God's glory, and scripture testifies to this truth. The following promises of God are explored: God's presence and provision are inescapable (Psalm 139); the Redeemer lives and will stand upon the earth (Job 19:25); Jesus warns he will undergo suffering and be killed but would rise on the third day (Luke 9:21); and Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The Bible promises believers hope through God's provision of Paradise, a place where Jesus gathers Christians who wait for his return (Luke 23:43); Jesus rose and appeared to the women at the tomb (Mark 16) and to the men on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24), proving a bodily resurrection; and Jesus ascended to the Father (Luke 24), proving his divinity.

Further biblical themes explored in the chapter include the letters of Paul, testifying that those who have died will be restored, and the Day of the Lord for believers (1 Thess. 4-5); all will be made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15); suffering produces the endurance required to maintain Christian witness (2 Cor. 4-5); Christians are united with Christ in death and resurrection alike (Rom. 6:4-5); and death is not the end but a beginning to a greater life in the Spirit with God (Rom. 8).

After reviewing the teachings of Jesus and Paul's foundational texts for resurrection hope, the chapter rehearses the thoughts of Christian theologians who attempted to describe doctrinal development of the biblical themes of resurrection. Their development of such themes could have secondarily provided comfort and mitigated grief as well. Selected samples of scripture reveal the promises granted to believers. Patristic theologians are reviewed, followed by medieval writers and their contribution to the 200-year *Ars Moriendi* tradition, a form of sacred literature that offered instruction on how to die well. Its spiritual exercises may have shifted focus away from resurrection by

mitigating fears of those unprepared for death, and it ultimately implied that resurrection is only attainable in a set of instructions. Biblical witness, however, teaches that Christians have hope through grace and do not need ritual exercises.

Martin Luther's theology, as unveiled in treatises, sermons, and many other sources, is explored for its contribution to the Christian preparation for death. Liturgical Texts from England demonstrate writers' attempts to provide hope in the midst of suffering by way of "liturgical" and devotional literature on death and decline. After the Enlightenment and into the contemporary era, the deathbed struggle was removed from clergy hands. In recent years, however, an increasing body of work has been devoted to the spiritual dimension of dying in peace.¹

Close examination of texts shows that resurrection hope was part of the earliest Christian teachings on the faith. Such hope can embolden believers as they companion a loved one through a season of death or decline. The resurrection promise strengthens the witness of caregivers as they communicate the meaning of the gospel, becoming the hands and feet of Jesus.

Biblical Foundations

Christians are encouraged in the letters of Paul to live faithful lives and to bear fruit, one of which is the secure peace that a Christian can know.² In a surprising way, the crisis of mortality can be a journey into greater patience and peace, where "living is

¹ A sampling of current work on dying includes Linda Dugdale, *The Lost Art of Dying* (New York: HarperOne, 2020); Henry Fersko-Weiss, *Caring for the Dying* (Newburyport, MA: Canari Press, 2017); Kathy Kalina, *Midwife for Souls* (Boston: Pauline Press, 2007).

² "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23), New Revised Standard Version Bible, NRSV. All subsequent biblical references are to this edition.

Christ, and dying is gain,” as Paul faithfully notes in Philippians 1:21. The fruit of the Spirit then is one’s strength. God calls Christians to wrestle with mortality and to understand his purposes. After exploring the biblical witness for hope, subsequent chapters can be used as a model intervention for caregivers with dying loved ones, offering biblical wisdom, theological reflection, and encouragement for those experiencing grief as they wait with hope.

Part I. Resurrection Hope in Old Testament Scripture

Psalm 139. A prayer of assurance about God’s abiding presence and care beyond the grave, Psalm 139 begins with a declaration of God’s desire to know the Christian’s heart and hopes. A person may fear separation from God during times of suffering and death, but God is present nonetheless. The tone is intimate and trusting. Dennis Tucker stresses that the Hebrew verb for “to know” (*yādā*³) is used seven times in the prayer, as a way of reinforcing the “I-Thou” relationship between the psalmist, who knows God intimately as his only source of hope. The psalm is considered a wisdom meditation reflecting on the destiny of man in both life and death, in darkness and light.⁴

A discerning God is at the beginning and end of all one’s days: “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me” (139:5). The Lord’s protective, divine knowledge binds the psalmist, keeping him safe. He describes a presence within:

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)

³ BlueLetterBible.org, *yādā*, Strong’s H3045, “to know, perceive, understand,” <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3045/rsv/wlc/0-1/>.

⁴ W. Dennis Tucker and Jamie A. Grant, *Psalms*, The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 2, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 915-16.

Scholars have suggested that v. 8 (“If I ascend to heaven”) refers to the three-tiered worldview of the heavens, earth, and below the earth, which may indicate eternal life with God. Tucker suggests that, even with reference to heaven, the central focus is the inescapable goodness and provision of God. The strophe ends with darkness being the place of death and separation from God, yet it is not dark to him. Light represented divine presence; even darkness is dispelled in the shadow of God.⁵

Birth and death are surrounded by God, who will see one’s days through to completion: “For you created my inmost being” (v. 13). Each season of life is governed by God. Kenneth Bailey suggests Psalm 139 comforts by its references to the incarnation, as God covers all of life: “Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book” (v. 16). God is uniquely with believers as a constant presence.⁶ In the light of the resurrection, believers can read Psalm 139 as evidence of God’s covering of hope in “all the days formed” for us, even before those days existed.

Job 19:25-27. The beloved declaration of Job about the presence of a Redeemer is a passage describing a posture of hope beyond the despair of death. Dating from the sixth century BC, the text expresses themes of affliction, unjust pain, and fear of mortality, along with God’s redemptive suffering. John Walton notes the New Testament never fully implies that Job was a prototype fulfilled in Christ; nonetheless, the connection between Job’s deepest need, to be seen and rescued by God, and the redemptive work of

⁵ Tucker and Grant, *Psalms*, 920.

⁶ Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 50.

Christ is unmistakable.⁷ Job's words echo through the centuries in Christian understanding of the cross:

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27)

Job is persuaded that his Redeemer (Heb. *gā'el*⁸) will be his advocate and boldly take a stand. Three theories have been proposed by scholars concerning just when the kinsman-redeemer will arrive, and their theories laid groundwork for later Christian teaching. The first is hope in a bodily resurrection with a Redeemer who lives and will return to earth to restore his followers, where Job believes God will raise him from the grave to witness his own vindication. Second, a theory of "posthumous vindication" says that Job expects a bodiless, unknown spirit to be his witness who will come down when he has died. Third, Job expects God to intervene in a "last-minute reprieve."⁹

J. Gerald Janzen maintains that later Jewish and Christian scholars have debated Job 19:25-26 as either faith in bodily resurrection or a resignation to fate. Two perspectives are presented: the idea of dying without hope from Genesis 3:19 ("for out of [the ground] you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return") and the hope of retributive justice, where man is vindicated.¹⁰ Both can be understood as true. Job's earlier confession, "Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort before I go" (10:20)

⁷ John H. Walton, *Job*, The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 1, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 218.

⁸ BlueLetterBible.org, *gā'el*, "avenger," www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h1350/rsv/wlc/0-1/.

⁹ Walton, *Job*, 219.

¹⁰ J. Gerald Janzen, *Job*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, James Luther Mays, ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 135.

reveals his lack of hope, and his prayer, “But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they?” (14:10) reflects his fear of annihilation. Old Testament wisdom literature supported this perspective.¹¹ In ancient times, to die was to render ‘breath’ back to God, “sadly to be forgotten for good.”¹²

With God’s appearance, Job’s prayer for an advocate is finally heard. N. T. Wright acknowledges that Job finds justice, redemption, and rescue, even though evidence from the “dust” of Gen. 3:19 lies in the background. Although ancient scholars professed that “death [was] a one-way street” and a journey with no return, New Testament witness provides hope in bodily restoration.¹³ Job’s agony over death’s irreversibility illustrates the human dilemma, yet he cries, “Remember that you fashioned me. . . . Will you turn me to dust again?” (10:9). He advocates for himself and his steadfast hope endures, even as he approaches death.¹⁴ Job’s heroic profession of faith shows that he believed he would live to see God and be restored rather than finish his days with “the unfamiliar God of his recent turmoil.”¹⁵

The groundwork for a redemption through unexpected means is made evident in Old Testament books such as Psalms and Job. All books of the Bible, however, contain an image of resurrection hope and testify in some way to God’s redemption. Job’s perfect rescuer, the “Redeemer who will stand upon the earth,” prefigures the role of Jesus,

¹¹ Ecclesiastes 3:20 reads, “All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.”

¹² Janzen, *Job*, 98.

¹³ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 97.

¹⁴ Janzen, *Job*, 138-9.

¹⁵ Walton, *Job*, 221.

whose narrative of crucifixion, death, and resurrection is recorded in all four gospels, and upon whose effects Paul theologically reflected. Part II reviews this hope revealed.

Part II. Hope Is Revealed in Jesus's Life and Ministry

Jesus's teachings in all four gospels, just as the teachings of the Law and the Prophets, reveal God's overall plan through centuries of history. Each scripture below shows a development of Jesus's prediction of his own suffering, death, and rising from the grave, revealing the nature and purpose of resurrection. Seven passages demonstrate a continuum of God's plan, from Adam to Jesus to the restoration of Creation itself.

A. Jesus Warns He will be Crucified and Rise Again

Matthew 12:39-40 and 16:21. Jesus predicts his crucifixion and resurrection in various ways, but his dialogue with the disciples is replete with provocative language to narrate what will come. In one instance, the Pharisees ask for a sign, and Jesus answers:

An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. (Mt. 12:39-40)

His phrase describing the Son of Man in the earth confuses the disciples, who refuse to accept the possibility that part of Jesus's mission is to die. They do not see the hope Jesus is offering in the statement, "Something greater than Jonah is here!" (12:41).

Charles Talbert explains that the words "evil and adulterous generation" in Matthew 12:39 refer to the Jewish leaders who only saw Jesus as a way to overthrow the reign of Rome. Jesus's reference to a Son of Man draws a comparison between himself and a prophet who will suffer but who also returns to earth to finish his prophetic call to

mission.¹⁶ Like the Jonah allusion, the synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—each references Jesus’s predictions about the necessity of his death and rising again:

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. (Mt. 16:21)

He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, “The Son of Man *must undergo* great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Lk. 9:21-22)

Jesus assures his followers that rescue will occur *after death*—a resurrection, something astounding and unbelievable. It is the first of Jesus’s four predictions in Matthew that attempt to explain how he would die and rise again (Mt. 17:23, 20:19, 26:2). Jesus does not mention Old Testament prophecies, nor does he imply that he will die for the sins of man. There is only the Greek word for “must go” (δεῖ) ¹⁷ showing that Jesus’s suffering, inevitable death, and extraordinary resurrection were done in obedience to God. Only a true prophet or Messiah would have foreknowledge of such an event.¹⁸

B. Jesus Confesses He Is the Resurrection and the Life

John 11:1-54. The story of raising Lazarus precedes the death and resurrection of Jesus, but it acts as a harbinger of Jesus’s ultimate victory over sin. This divine act is a turning point in his ministry and a foreshadowing of his own eventual death at the hands of Rome. The Lazarus story is not, according to Christian tradition, a *resurrection* like that of Christ, but a *resuscitation* that revealed the power of God to heal. Lazarus did not

¹⁶ Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament, Mikael C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 156.

¹⁷ BlueLetterBible.org, δεῖ, “must, ought,” www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1163/rsv/mgnt/0-1/.

¹⁸ Talbert, *Matthew*, 202.

receive a glorified body, and although he was revived, eventually he died again. Jesus is the “first fruits” of the harvest and the only living narrative thus far of resurrection into eternity with God.

The resuscitation of others in the Old and New Testaments are accounts of people being raised after death, but not into a new bodily form. Their resuscitations are also essentially healings. Elijah revived the son of the widow of Zarapeth with a prayer, “O Lord my God, let this child’s life come into him again,” and his petition was granted (1 Kgs. 17:21). Elisha raised the Shunammite woman’s son in a tent, where he “lay bent over on the son, and the flesh of the child became warm” (2 Kgs. 4:34). Jesus himself raised a widow’s son in the village of Nain. When Jesus saw the woman, “his heart went out to her,” and he caused the young man to sit up and be revived (Lk. 7:14-15).

Jesus meets Jairus at his home and raises his daughter, saying, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” Taking the child’s hand, Jesus calls her, saying, “*Talitha qûm*” [get up], and she rises to walk (Mk. 5:39-41). Paul uses the same metaphor in 1 Corinthians 11:30: “For many among you are weak and ill, and some have died” (Gr. κοιμάω). The stories are healings, but they may also be considered signposts anticipating coming hope. Jesus knew that Lazarus would die, but raising him affirmed Jesus’s future resurrection and was a moment of eternal significance. He implies that those who believe are already given a kind of immortal life.¹⁹ Jesus tells them:

So, the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer.” (Jn. 11:3-6, 9)

¹⁹ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 444.

According to Francis Moloney, the narrative is part of a storytelling tradition and has aspects of a biblical-type scene. The people around the grave are hoping to witness another miracle, but they cannot know what to expect. There is palpable tension in the waiting, and what Martha learns about Jesus is as vital as her brother's reviving. She sees that resuscitation is an act of God alone, and she witnesses Jesus's divine nature. The connection between his promised glorification and the temporal nature of death acts as a signpost and herald for what will come.²⁰

Gerard Sloyan notes that Jesus's use of the phrase, "It is for God's glory, so the Son of God may be glorified through it" (11:4), allows Jesus to reveal God's work without seeking self-praise. Lazarus is a foretaste of the power of God to restore all life in Christ, and the narrative demonstrates why Christians know with certainty that they can look forward to life beyond death in a new creation.²¹ The signs of the restoration launch the beginning of Jesus's true mission for himself: to suffer, die, and then rise again.

Arthur John Gossip terms this climactic story, "The Raising of Lazarus and the Doom of Jesus," explaining the series of textual signs—sleep, death, light, and life—that offer the "supreme gift of the Logos himself to men."²² John continues:

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him. . . . "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." (Jn. 11:20-26)

²⁰ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 4, Daniel J. Harrington, ed. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 325-6.

²¹ Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973), 141.

²² Arthur John Gossip, *Exegesis: The Gospel According to St. John*, The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 8, George Buttrick, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 635.

Martha acknowledges Lazarus's future resurrection, but Jesus calls her to deeper faith, to see his work as not just about Lazarus or Israel, but also about the truth of a resurrection for all believers. Her fear reflects the desperate Messianic hope of the Samaritan woman in John 4:29 ("He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"), the questions of Nicodemus in 3:9 ("How can someone be born when he is old?"), and the skepticism of Thomas in 20:25 ("Unless I see the mark of the nails"). Martha's hope is based on Daniel's prophecy over Israel: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2).

Jewish nationalism as reflected in this story often colored the way people viewed the Messiah. Like other disciples in his early ministry, Martha was anticipating a final resurrection for all believers, but the idea that Jesus was indeed the "I am" (Gr. εἰμι) who would redeem Israel was politically charged.²³ Even the disciples had to be careful about making such bold statements. She invites Jesus's self-revelation, but she does not expect Jesus to openly present himself as the "I am"; in fact, this surprising logic creates confusion. As Jesus circles the future resurrection back to himself, Martha's response reflects her rootedness in Pharisaic Judaism, yet also an anxious willingness to believe.

Wright expands on Martha's baseline of Pharisaic belief. Jesus's assurance validates the resurrection she counts on but goes further to show that eternal life is available now for all who believe. In other words, a Christian can live in hope and also claim an immortal life which will survive death and be re-embodied in the final resurrection. It will involve a transformation, something Jesus will experience first, and

²³ Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, 328-9.

then his followers will come later.²⁴ The statement marks one of Jesus's key teachings about his identity, along with his statements, "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35), "I am the light of the world" (8:12), and "I am the good shepherd" (10:11).

Beneath Martha's comment lies an undercurrent of desperate hope that humans are not just transient creatures, here for a moment and then forgotten. She reveals her desire that believers will receive good on earth *and* in a life after death. In Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, the God's promises were made real and visible.

Martha asks Jesus to travel to Bethany despite its proximity to Jerusalem and opposition. When Martha protests, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days" (11:39), she is respecting Jewish tradition that stated a person passed from death to the "bosom of the ancestors" after three days in the grave. Jesus's action, however, overrode assumptions about death. He demonstrates not just a potential healing but a resuscitation that foreshadows his own rising after, and not before, three days.

As explained in the definitions section of Chapter 1, "realized eschatology" refers to prophetic passages in the New Testament that may refer to the ministry of Jesus and his legacy while on earth. Martha's dialogue shows how resurrection life can be enjoyed in the present, but Jesus's words provide a foreshadowing. Both realities are true, and Jesus is providing evidence of his divinity. Her previous comment in v. 29, "If you had been here," perhaps reveals her Jewish assumption that hope was something she must wait for, but Jesus proves that hope is available now. The corpse would have certainly deteriorated, but this is something Jesus also would overcome.²⁵ Steve Wells, pastor of

²⁴ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 445.

²⁵ Sloyan, *John*, 143.

South Main Baptist Church, Houston, once noted that Martha's anxious comment mirrors our own fear of a life without God's power to heal. Envisioning the future without God's commitment to hope would be bleak, and Christians are promised a better future.

There are similarities between the raising of Jesus and the resuscitation of Lazarus—the large stone, the three days in a tomb, the strips of cloth—but the contrasts are also evident. One difference is that Lazarus was also undeteriorated, yet Lazarus returns from death back into his former life, and Jesus does not return to his former role but has a new, resurrected body that will ascend to God.²⁶ The raising of Lazarus would have prepared people to see the promise of God for a future life, readying them for Jesus's own miracle event with implications for the present and future as well.

C. Paradise and the Concept of Afterlife

Luke 23:39-43. Alongside the miracles Jesus performed that restored life through healing touch, other aspects of his teaching on life beyond death are significant. Jesus's dialogue with the penitent criminal on the cross reveals an intermediate state, or a "Paradise," as defined in chapter one. Luke is the only gospel writer who records Jesus's commentary on the vague waiting place beyond earthly life. The narrative between Jesus and the penitent thief at Calvary sheds light on an undefined time and place where believers are guaranteed to be with him after death. The passage tells a unique narrative:

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" . . . Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk. 23:39-43)

²⁶ Sloyan, *John*, 144.

The confession of the penitent thief is embraced by Jesus, who assures the man that a new life would begin that very day with him. Paul Scherer explains that the word “Paradise” was a term borrowed from Persia and describes a place where “souls of the righteous go at death before entering bliss.” Even though it appears to refer to a type of soul rest common in ancient thought, Jesus’s words in Luke 23 (“Today, you will be with me”) became part of Christian doctrine and messianic invitation to the afterlife.²⁷

The Luke passage is full of kingdom imagery. Immediate salvation in his words to the thief can be compared to other biblical uses of the phrases referring to “this very day,” such as Jesus’s invitation to Zacchaeus: “Today, salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham” (Lk. 19:9) and “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:21). Both stress salvation as a present reality. Jesus’s true kingdom began at the cross where forgiveness of the thief represents Jesus’s ultimate mission. His declaration to the penitent thief, therefore, declared the kingdom that began that very day, when his earthly work was finished.²⁸

Mikeal Parsons comments that Paradise was seen as two realities, the Garden of Eden where Adam had fellowship with God and a “temporary but joyful abode for the righteous before the final resurrection.” Early apostles taught of a resurrection before the last judgment (Acts 4:2), but the words “heaven” and “Paradise” morphed over time to represent a final, permanent dwelling place.²⁹ In popular spirituality, Paradise is often seen as a place where Christians go if they have attempted to be morally upright.

²⁷ Paul Scherer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 8, George Buttrick, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 411.

²⁸ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 339.

²⁹ Parsons, *Luke*, 338.

N. T. Wright develops the concept of Paradise as a place of rest that all Christians enter upon death, but one that precedes the final resurrection. The body is “asleep,” as in the biblical reference to physical dying, but Paradise is not the Christian’s final destiny; instead, the blissful waiting place is a “life-after-death in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God” and Jesus’s presence. “*Life-after-life-after-death*,” as coined by Wright, is the final existence and true meaning of the union of heaven and a restored earth in eternity.³⁰ Paradise is not a believer’s ultimate future, nor a place where the soul is lost. Instead, as Jesus instructed Martha, Christians are promised the “ultimate resurrection that will be placed inside the new creation itself,” a final place of joy where all life is renewed.³¹ Those in relationship with Christ can expect to be united with him, as the thief was promised, and know this peace of ultimate union.

At the time of Luke’s writing, early Christians were despairing over Christ’s expected, but seemingly delayed, return. The confession of the penitent thief offered hope to a searching group of followers. David Pao insists that searching for a place of destiny is a Lukan theme, seen in both the Paradise response and the story of a regretful rich man.³² Luke 16:22-31 offers a quite different perspective on the destiny of an immediate afterlife, one where Paradise is not a guarantee. In the passage, a rich man dies and goes to Hades, where he is tormented by seeing Abraham far away, with Lazarus, the poor man he mistreated, by his side” (16:23). Abraham looks down on the man through a “great chasm” that exists between them. Parsons argues that Luke may have been using

³⁰ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 172, 174.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

³² Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *Luke*, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2007), 32.

the idea of Hades to correct an unjust social system of economic inequality, but his words also appealed to the common idea of an “eschatological reversal of fortunes” that might take place when man moved into his waiting place of life-after-death.³³

D. Jesus Rises and Appears to the Disciples

Mark 16:1-7. On the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus’s parables, predictions, the raising of Lazarus, and his self-definition as “the resurrection and the life” would begin to make sense for those at the tomb and all who witnessed his body post-resurrection. The resurrection was for believing Jews a culmination of Old Testament prophecy, a moment that light overcame the darkness of the Adamic curse. The women at the tomb were witnesses to foundational events for all Christian belief: Christ died, was buried, and was raised (1 Cor. 15:4):

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise . . . [the women] looked up, they saw that the stone . . . had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe; . . . he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. . . . But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” (Mk. 16:4-7)

David Garland notes that the moment of sunrise dispels the darkness that shrouded the arduous crucifixion and death, and the date, “first day of the week,” marks a new beginning for all of humanity.³⁴ Furthermore, Mark’s passage is bookended with messengers announcing new awareness of God’s presence and purposes: first, an announcement of God’s intentions in “the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk. 1:1), and, in the end, a different messenger announcing what God has done: “He has

³³ Parsons, *Luke*, 250.

³⁴ David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 612.

been raised; he is not here” (16:6). Just as John the Baptist was a herald of Jesus, so the angel at the tomb now foretells resurrection hope.

The resurrection changes the roles of the disciples. Now, instead of Jesus teaching the disciples lessons of truth, Peter and the others are charged to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (16:15, longer ending). The resurrection revoked death, and the sacrifice of Jesus had cancelled the power of sin and given followers a new mission based on a risen Christ.³⁵ Jesus would go ahead of the disciples rather than leading them as they followed. The mission of the church was launched.

Luke 24:13-35. On the road to Emmaus a few miles from Jerusalem, two unsuspecting disciples encounter the risen Lord. Although Jesus would go unrecognized by the men, perhaps the greatest evidence for his victory over death is his appearance. Paul Sherer argues that, in this passage, Jesus has supernaturally dulled the men’s senses for purposes which may remain unclear. They are not just blinded by preoccupation and paralyzing grief; their confusion represents the greater problem of unbelief.³⁶ The men are unsuspecting as they walk along the road. The story reads:

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”. . . Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered and said, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things which have taken place there in these days? . . . The things about Jesus of Nazareth who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God. . . . But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel . . . and it is now the third day.” (Lk. 24:15-25)

³⁵ Garland, *Mark*, 613-14.

³⁶ Scherer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 420.

Parsons reflects on the fact that Jesus eats, walks, and even asks repeated questions to show he was “not a phantom or an apparition”; in fact, over his entire ministry, the bodily nature of the incarnation and, later, the resurrection were evident, although most did not see it.³⁷ The resurrection was not an imagined event, as evidenced by the testimonies that emerged. Luke captures the desperate nature of their questions:

“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter in to his glory?”. . . They urged him strongly, saying “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So, he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table, 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. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?” (Lk. 24:26-32)

Cleopas initially laments that they hoped Jesus was the one to redeem Israel, indicating that, until their eyes were opened, the cross seemed to have meant ultimate failure to the early Christ followers. The women also were kept from recognizing Jesus until the appointed time, and they had despaired. Scherer observes that Luke may have intended to show how disbelief, turning one’s back to the cross, and walking away from an empty tomb is to turn a blind eye to the “unexpected glory of resurrection.”³⁸

D. Jesus Ascends to the Father: Luke and Acts

Luke 24:48-52. The ascension of Jesus is a fulfillment of his resurrection glory. Just before his ascension, Jesus continued to instruct the disciples to be “witnesses of these things,” to preach the good news of the resurrection of Christ. The ascension completes the resurrection by revealing Jesus’s destiny and instructions:

³⁷ Parsons, *Luke*, 353.

³⁸ Scherer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 424-5.

“I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. (Lk. 24:48-52)

Although the cross inaugurated the beginning of Jesus’s rule, his ascension is an unanticipated event that reveals a new “in-breaking” kingdom and reign of salvation to restore hope. Parsons notes that, with his raised hands, Jesus gives the disciples a “priestly blessing,” after which they were ushered “out of the symbolic world of the narrative and back into the real world,” where the gospel must now be proclaimed.³⁹ The followers returned to Jerusalem where Jesus’s life and ministry had begun. Wright describes the ascension as a turning point, where the “sovereign rule of Jesus is not postponed until his return but truly inaugurated as the sign that God’s good world is now under new management”; consequently, the new work begins as it started, with Jesus.⁴⁰

Part III. Resurrection Hope Fuels the Ministry of Paul

In the years after Jesus’s death, an emboldened missionary proclaimed hope in the resurrection of Christ beyond Israel. While belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a core tenet of the Christian faith, for many in the ancient world, Jesus was only a Jewish teacher whose body was stolen by misguided followers. The ministry of the Apostle Paul, a Jewish leader and rabbi, began with his conversion on the road to Damascus and an anointing by Ananias (Acts 9:1-9). For all of his converted life, Paul proclaimed the resurrection of Christ and connected it to the promise of our own. A hinge of Christian faith, the resurrection was and is the event around which all doctrine pivots.

³⁹ Parsons, *Luke*, 355.

⁴⁰ Wright, “Acts: New World.”

Paul's letters teach on the hope that believers have in Christ during times of suffering and death. Sections A, B, C, and D below cover aspects of how the story of Jesus's resurrection offers Christian assurance of their own resurrection to come. The reality of what happened on the third day following Jesus's burial changed the course of events for all Christians, and Paul interprets the resurrection of Christ by laying out what this means for Christian hope. According to Paul's inspired revelation, Jesus's resurrection allows Christians: a) to grieve as people with hope, b) to establish intimate fellowship with God, c) to have confidence in suffering, and d) to enjoy the reality that God has made a way for all creation to be restored.

A. Resurrection Allows Christians to Grieve with Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In a passage based on the truth about Jesus's resurrection day ("For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again," v. 14), Paul instructs Christians that because of all that took place, they are not to grieve as people without hope. He describes believers' final resurrection to come, compassionately addressing the concerns of those who have lost loved ones:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thess. 4:13-17)

Paul emphasizes a promised final resurrection rather than the sorrow surrounding human mortality. Believers can fully grieve loss but must trust in all they learn from the

teachings that override hopelessness, since death is a powerless foe and a temporary state.⁴¹ Perhaps some of Paul's followers witnessed Jesus's ascension. They could now know that loved ones who had died were not lost from God's love, nor would they miss out on his promised return.

Todd Still observes that Paul does not speculate here on the timing of Jesus's return in glory, but he instead "impresses upon his converts the importance of preparedness."⁴² Christians in Thessaloniki were to resist the culture by cultivating moral purity and excellence in lifestyle; they were also to find strength to one day face death. Christians could grieve and mourn when death arrived, but they were to suffer with hope and be encouraged about those who had died. Bible texts may translate the same Greek word κοιμάω⁴³ as "fall asleep" or "be dead," but each indicates the same fate. Metaphoric language for death was common, and Jesus also describes the death of Lazarus as a state of having "fallen asleep" (Jn. 11:11). He refers to the synagogue leader's daughter as "not dead but sleeping" (Mt. 9:24), a gentle way to speak about the dead.

Michael Holmes explains the confusion that must have been experienced by early converts, in a world where the pervasive Greek, dualistic concept painted deceased souls as roving separately from the body, wandering in the spirit realm looking for rest.⁴⁴ Paul would spend much of his life arguing against this perspective, as would later theologians

⁴¹ Michael Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary Series, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 148.

⁴² Bruce Longenecker and Todd D. Still, *Thinking Through Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 64.

⁴³ Blue Letter Bible.org, κοιμάω "fall asleep, be dead," <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2837/rsv/mgnt/0-1/>.

⁴⁴ Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 155.

who claimed soul and body were united and remained so. For Christians, human life means that an ultimate, restored physical life alongside a spiritual component awaits after the life-after-death. Christian afterlife is not a disembodied existence in shadows.⁴⁵

As an added deterrent to the gospel message of hope, Thessaloniki's relationship to the Roman Emperor was problematic. Caesar considered himself a god, so for those following Christ as "risen Lord," Christianity would necessitate a shift from cult loyalties and loss of prestige that one might have enjoyed before conversion. Loss of patronage from the Roman government would place a community at great risk. Abraham Smith notes that Paul's announcement, "We declare to you by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15), emphasized the authority of Christ and prophetic authority. Paul uses the word *Parousia* (Gr. παρουσία, Strong's G3952, "coming, presence," and as defined in Chapter 1), to suggest that a ruler's state visit was rivaled by the "coming of the Lord."⁴⁶ In addition, he intentionally uses the double pronoun, "Lord himself" (v. 16).⁴⁷ Provocative language could convince hearers of Jesus's authority and power, but potential converts may have steered clear of Paul's message to avoid harm.

The use of Old Testament imagery in vv. 16-18—a cry of command, the archangel's call, and the sound of a trumpet—acts as a reminder of the God who gathered scattered exiles and then delivered them with a single command.⁴⁸ Just as Moses told the

⁴⁵ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 48-9.

⁴⁶ Abraham Smith, *The First Letter to the Thessalonians*, The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, vol. 11, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 677-8.

⁴⁷ Blueletterbible.org, Strong's G846, αὐτός, "pronoun . . . with the added force of a demonstrative pronoun," https://www.blueletterbible.org/rsv/1th/4/1/t_conc_1115016.

⁴⁸ Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 149.

Israelites at the Red Sea, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today” (Ex. 14:13), Paul is asking his followers to stand and wait for the Lord’s rescue. His confident hope in Jesus’s return was not based on mere optimism but on faith and trust. Followers could grieve with hope.

Beverly Gaventa observes that Paul’s statements about Jesus’s promised return were a “herald of a new reign of freedom,” sounding a “death knoll” to the old way of living under the Law. Paul encourages believers to live between the “already” of what God had done in the history of Israel, including the Law, and the “not yet” that awaited with the gift of the Spirit. Jesus’s death divided the old era from the new, heralding the “in-breaking power of God” that tied the two together.⁴⁹

Holmes sums Paul’s eschatological hope: a resurrected life with God may not be so much in an imagined *place* where God lives as a deepened and renewed *relationship* with him.⁵⁰ The hope conveyed in Paul’s descriptions of Jesus’s resurrection, ascension, and eternal life with God is a definition of renewal on which Christians can depend. Even those who have died will transition to joyful fellowship with Christ.

B. The Resurrection Provides Fellowship with God

1 Corinthians 15. Belief in the resurrection event of Jesus and faith in one’s own coming resurrection are not only essential for coping with grief, but they should become the core tenets of life here and now. Belief in this fundamental of the faith is necessary for fellowship with God and for understanding the role and work of Christ. In this

⁴⁹ Beverly R. Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians, an Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1998), 64 via Smith, 724-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 159-61.

section, three aspects of resurrection hope are explored: Jesus's substitutionary atonement, his charge to establish the church, and his command to spread the gospel.

1) Fellowship Is through Substitutionary Atonement

In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul lays out the doctrine of the bodily resurrection and its necessity for the Christian understanding of substitutionary atonement. His words, "in accordance with the scriptures" lent recognizable authority to the teaching. He begins with a reminder of the good news to which they should firmly hold:

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. . . . Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Cor. 15:3-9)

Craig Blomberg posits that 1 Corinthians 15 can be understood as a narrative of Jesus' prophesied death and resurrection, but also a foretelling of how the dead will be raised in bodily form.⁵¹ The initial passion narrative of Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection acts as an "*inclusio*" that both emphasizes the text and sheds light on information that follows. The narrative of Jesus's rising on the third day is a statement of core belief on which all of Paul's ensuing testimony would rest.

Paul testifies that after Jesus's ascension, the risen Christ appeared to him on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-7), and this dramatic, personal appearance of the divine presence would fuel his future work with struggling churches. J. Paul Sampley asserts that a passionate life such as Paul's would help to undergird a community of faith. Paul's

⁵¹ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 295.

desire to please Christ, his close walk with God, and his ability to endure hardship would become paradigmatic for all believers.⁵² The reality of the atoning work of Christ would guide even followers who challenged God's Law, as he once had done.

Early Christians often misunderstood Jesus's role as atoning sacrifice and how this opened the way for Jesus to overcome death. Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ("that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day") proves Jesus's role and personal sacrifice as the prophesied atonement.⁵³ His resurrection validated his own words: "All who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day" (Jn. 6:40). Hebrew authors in past centuries had focused on atonement, but primarily on its sacrificial requirement for the future of Israel and the seed of Abraham. They looked for prosperity in an abundant land, and communal rescue of the nation took precedence.⁵⁴ The trajectory of belief was based on prophetic promises and patriarchal hope.

There was not, however, an absence of belief in human life beyond the grave in the Old Testament period. Pharisaic Judaism and its doctrine of a final resurrection for all who believed held onto a "living and vibrant hope" that Yahweh, the God of Israel, had created the world in love and that he would be faithful by one day raising them from the dead. The role of a future king in Jerusalem and just how promises would be fulfilled

⁵² J. Paul Sampley, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10, Leander E. Keck, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 977.

⁵³ Blomberg, *I Corinthians*, 296.

⁵⁴ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 99-100.

were still uncertain, yet the Judaic belief was that, as followers atoned for sin, Yahweh's faithfulness would be known on earth and in a "promising life beyond the grave."⁵⁵

2) Fellowship Fuels the Church's Mission

The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus not only rearranged the way the Christian community viewed sacrificial atonement, but it established a fulcrum for envisioning the mission of the church. The church was founded on hope in Christ's return, and from there her mission grew. Acts 4 recounts how Christians were gathered in fellowship as the church was born.⁵⁶ In this context, Paul resounded the theme:

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, . . . If Christ has not been raised. . . and you are still in your sins, then those who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:12-19)

Paul's rhetorical questions were designed to challenge unbelief in both Christ's and the Christian's resurrections, and he uses confrontive "if-then" statements to create an argument. A new bodily existence awaited the followers of Jesus, and if their hope were only in this life, faith would be misguided and pitiable.

Pharisees anticipated a general resurrection of body and soul, but new pagan converts in Corinth often disbelieved in resurrection hope due to their former culture. As stated above, resurrection for the Jews was not just another way to describe the "Sheol"

⁵⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 102. An indicator of Yahweh's faithfulness is Joel 2:28: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . your young men will see visions."

⁵⁶ Acts 4:33-34 reads: "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

of the Greeks, but a way to talk about a different, renewed life after death. A foundational text for evolving belief was the prophetic Daniel 12:2 and its reference to bodily resurrection.⁵⁷ Wright argues that reading Daniel is to “stand on the bridge between the Hebrew Bible and the Judaism of Jesus’ day, looking both backwards and forwards,” anticipating a new, but nonetheless biblical, way to talk about the dead.⁵⁸ Jesus was the fulfillment of all Scripture and prophecy, and a fresh reading of Isaiah 26:19 now was possible.⁵⁹ For Christians working alongside Paul, faith in Jesus’s unprecedented act on the cross enabled them to gain a new perspective on past prophecy, as well as service in the present and hope and service.

Part of Paul’s mission was to address the destiny of loved ones who had perished, seemingly without an eternal future. If the fledgling church had conflict about the fate of those who died, they might lose hope in the resurrection’s central truth.⁶⁰ Their belief would then be a false conclusion about Christians in their congregation who already died before Christ’s expected return. Professing that all believers would be raised was essential for unity in the church and for believers to retain hope. Blomberg notes that if Christ has not been raised in body, Christian doctrine is nullified: believers have been tricked, apostolic preaching was useless and devoid of meaning, Paul and his companions were deceptive about hope, and all humanity now stood condemned.⁶¹ Such were Paul’s

⁵⁷ Daniel 12:2 reads: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

⁵⁸ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 109.

⁵⁹ Isaiah 26:19 reads: “Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.”

⁶⁰ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 332.

⁶¹ Blomberg, *I Corinthians*, 297.

own conclusions as evidenced in his letter. Without resurrection hope, belief in Christianity would not survive.

3) Fellowship through Jesus as First-fruits

Paul's metaphor of first fruits guaranteed that the resurrection was the hope of Christian life and the fulcrum for Christian belief. Although death came through Adam, hope arrived through Jesus, who was the first fruit of the harvest reaping:

Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. . . . For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:20-26)

In this passage, the metaphor of first fruits dominates the passage, providing harvest imagery to describe the present and coming age. The first sheaves of grain were a herald of abundance, and priests consecrated grain at the Feast of First Fruits, pledging the crop to the Lord. Abundant fruit was a blessing, and the image foretold restoration:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance. (Lev. 23:10-11)

Jesus was the first and only person to be resurrected from the dead as an exemplary "sheaf" and harbinger of the restoration of humanity.⁶² Although Elijah "went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2 Kgs. 2:11) and experienced a permanent raising, it was not the same as Jesus's resurrection for all mankind. Jesus was a perfect offering to the Lord, and those who follow him are part of the same end-times harvest. Archibald Robertson notes that this ancient sign of God's favor suggests a rich "community of

⁶² Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 332.

nature among believers” in which all are united by God’s promise of life as abundant fruit.⁶³ Believers will be raised, like the sheath of the harvest, to be with God. Paul’s bold imagery creates a bridge between the past to the present, as believers wait for the Lord.

While Adam’s sin produced dead seed from old grain, Jesus reaped new wine and grain, as passages from Deuteronomy and Joel foretold.⁶⁴ Adam’s sin initiated the physical process of decay, but Jesus “set in motion the reversal of the curse” and the fulfillment of spiritual and physical renewal, paving the way for reaping fruit.⁶⁵ Renewal came to pass in the work and preaching of the early church. With Jesus’s death, the former age of law, famine, and punishment yielded to the fruitful mercy of God. Paul continues his discourse:

If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day! . . . If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (1 Cor. 15:29b-32)

Paul’s statement, “I die every day,” makes use of a pattern of “hardship talk,” a linguistic device used in ancient writing as a sign of stoic endurance. Paul paints a picture of daily self-denial and crucifixion of one’s sin patterns, and his hardship narrative about fighting with animals may have given the church impetus to bear on with courage.⁶⁶ The

⁶³ Archibald Robertson, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, Samuel Rolles Driver and Alfred Plummer, eds. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 351.

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 7:13 reads, “He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, and crops of your land—your grain, new wine and olive oil.” Joel 2:19 reads, “I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied.”

⁶⁵ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “I Corinthians,” *Romans–Galatians*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 11, David E. Garland & Tremper Longman III, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 396.

⁶⁶ Sampley, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 983.

phrase, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” ties a prophecy in Isaiah to the mission of the church.⁶⁷ Without a promise of Christian hope, ordinary human behavior—to simply “eat, drink and be merry”—would be the only path to joy, and pleasure seeking its own reward. Paul insists that instead of fame and achievement, resurrection should be the reason for moral effort.

4) Fellowship Ensures Incorruption of the Body

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown in a physical body; it is raised in a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. . . . [T]he last Adam became a life-giving spirit. . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. (1 Cor. 15:42-49)

Paul uses two verbs—*speirō* (to sow, as in “sown in dishonor”) and *egeirō* (to raise, as in “raised in glory”)—to demonstrate the profound transformation that takes place from earth-bound, human limitation to a glorified existence with God. In an “Adam-Christ typology,” Paul makes a distinction between Adam’s human choice initiating death and Christ’s divine action bringing new life.⁶⁸ Perishable seeds are insignificant, but the resulting fruit bears fullness. Although the first Adam would die (and all humans with him), the physical body would be the seed from which the resurrected body would be remade. This perspective, the body as a seed, motivated Christians to teach the Romans to bury, and not burn, the bodies of their dead.

⁶⁷ Isaiah 22:5 recounts a stern warning that God will bring a “day of tumult and trampling” on Jerusalem, since he had called them to weep and mourn, but instead “there was joy and festivity . . . eating meat and drinking wine” (v. 13). Eccl. 2:22-24 reads, “What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink and find enjoyment.”

⁶⁸ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 360.

C. The Resurrection Produces Confidence in times of Suffering

2 Corinthians 4:1-18. Suffering must be faced by all believers and non-believers alike. Paul encourages followers to have boldness in suffering and confidence in resurrection hope, as he would explain in multiple ways. Henceforth, I refer to “bodily resurrection” as “resurrection”—the only proper way to understand what life in Christ will one day be. This section explores two themes: Christians can experience comfort in suffering, and because of Jesus’s resurrection, they can face death with confidence.

1) Comfort for Boldness in Suffering (2 Corinthians 4:1-11)

Believers must encourage one another in challenging times. Paul promises, “just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant (1 Cor. 1:5). Scott Hafemann suggests that, in these verses, Paul does not compare human suffering to that of Jesus on the cross; instead, he argues that faithful endurance helps one “partner with the cross and the glory revealed through it.”⁶⁹ When Paul endured hardship, God’s comfort was present. When he was on trial in Corinth, God gave him courage to stand (Acts 19:23). Paul describes the emotional work of a disciple:

Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. . . . For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:1-6)

Michael Coogan calls Paul’s life-work a “ministry of hardship,” and Paul chose to weather the difficulties in full identification with Christ.⁷⁰ Paul’s reasoning shows that

⁶⁹ Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 175.

having hope in the resurrection can outweigh earthly experience and provide purpose in suffering. Such hope can act as “the engine that drives us” and the only motive that can produce true self-denial in the midst of pain.⁷¹

The metaphor of a breakable clay jar depicts the flesh of man. Earthenware was inexpensive and fragile; here it represents the human frailty of believers. Paul explains:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. . . . We are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:8-11)

Murray Harris maintains that, in this passage, there is an offer of life coming from the hand of God, even when affliction and despair seem to overwhelm: “Life is a treasure, but one housed in human fallibility and finitude.”⁷² The treasure is kept safe in anticipation of God’s promise to restore new life to one’s rough earthenware shell. Paul’s comment, “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus” (4:11), reflects a life of sacrifice. Paul’s own martyrdom, for example, allowed for the gospel’s spread. His attitude toward his own suffering became his way of “turning burdens into inspirations.”⁷³ Such spiritual awareness fueled his pastoral work, providing hope.

⁷⁰ Michael Coogan, ed., *New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV* (London: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2030.

⁷¹ Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 198.

⁷² Murray J. Harris, *2nd Corinthians*, The Expositors Bible Commentary, vol. 10, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., et al., eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 346.

⁷³ James Reid, *II Corinthians*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 10, George Arthur Buttrick, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 321.

2) Confidence for Living (2 Corinthians 4:13-18)

Jesus left his disciples with a promise: “In this world, you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (Jn. 16:33). Persecution, illness, family crises, and ultimately death cause suffering, yet God’s word gives hope. Paul explains:

We also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence. . . . So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:13-18)

James Reid observes that the phrase describing an “eternal weight of glory” is apocalyptic imagery similar to the “crowns” of reward that Christians are promised in life after death. Isaiah names the Lord a “bestower of crowns” (23:8), and Revelation tells of elders who “cast their crowns before the throne” (4:10). Paul believed in the rewards of life beyond death, and he encourages Christians that suffering is not in vain but prepares them for eternity. His words helped plant a “seed of immortality” that would bear fruit.⁷⁴

D. Creation Is Restored in a Heavenly Dwelling

2 Corinthians 5. Paul explains in this chapter just how the earthly body will be exchanged for an eternal and heavenly building from God. The “earthly tent” was a common Hellenistic term for the human body; here, the tent reminds readers of similar temporary/eternal and visible/invisible contrasts. Paul claims:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. . . . we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed. . . . He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Cor. 5:1-5)

⁷⁴ Reid, *II Corinthians*, 322.

Paul lived in a nomadic world, both physically and spiritually, and the tent in these verses is a vivid metaphor for the temporality of the body while on earth. Homes of nomadic groups in the ancient world were easily damaged and needed constant repair, so Paul references the vulnerability and tenuous nature of earthly existence that mirrors one's spiritual journey as well.⁷⁵ This struggle fostered his dependence on God.

The logic of Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 5 follows immediately from the preceding passage: If believers see their inner nature as daily renewed, they may "groan under the burden" but can be assured of spiritual and bodily transformation and thus "be further clothed" when Jesus returns (v. 4). The Spirit is a guarantee that death will be an existence in the care of God where Christians will be at home in a permanent body.⁷⁶ Paul assures followers of an embodied life greater and more permanent than imagined, where the author of this renewed spiritual and bodily life is God.

Christians are to see death as a door to a new creation that will restore all that was originally intended for mankind. William Barclay observes, "Earthly time is a testing ground of eternity" and the Holy Spirit is an *arrabon* (guarantee) of God's presence.⁷⁷ Paul describes the new life in Christ that will reverse the old way of seeing:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. . . . that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them. (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

⁷⁵ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 29 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999), 249.

⁷⁶ Harris, *2nd Corinthians*, 346.

⁷⁷ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 242-244.

As a result of Christ's undoing of Adam's curse, believers can be reconciled to God and to one another in forgiveness and love. There will be no penalty, punishment, or future exile when Christians are finally bound to Christ in a new, fulfilled existence. The bodily resurrection is the culmination of Paul's teaching, and he charges believers:

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:20-21)

Becoming "the righteousness of God" is an important Pauline phrase that will be further explained in the following section. A Christian becomes God's righteousness by embracing all Jesus did on the cross and living a life that testifies to the resurrection and its hope. Jesus became righteousness by identifying with man; thus, a Christian takes on the righteousness that proceeds from God, is justified before God, and is made new.

Part IV. Justification (Romans 4:16-25)

The doctrine of righteousness by faith allows Paul to connect faith to living a victorious life in Christ based on his resurrection. Romans 4 describes Abraham's faith as reckoned through the righteousness of belief, but guaranteeing an inheritance to come:

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants. . . . - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Rom. 4:16-17)

The resurrection of Christ was a promise once made to the patriarchs, now fulfilled, and a holy foretelling of what God will also one day restore.

Douglas Moo observes that just as Abraham believed God could restore things that seemed long dead (4:17), God also created life in Sarah and a people where before there was none. Abraham received a future of promise, foretelling what the Messiah

would provide.⁷⁸ Paul expresses God's "immeasurable greatness," saying, "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at this right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19-20). The death and resurrection of Jesus served as Abraham's fulfillment, and "his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:22).

In a similar way to 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul's language in Romans 4 anticipates what would become creedal language ensconced later in Christian Church tradition: "Jesus our Lord . . . was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Paul does not mention resurrection per se in the Romans passage; he does, however, indicate that faith in Jesus's resurrection produces for believers "a living relationship with God."⁷⁹ Justification, righteousness, and resurrection must be embraced as the total work of Christ and the foundation for Christian living.

Romans 5:1-10. Romans 5 is considered by most Protestant scholars to be a conclusion on justification by faith that shifts focus to the blessings of God rather than requirements of the Law. Believers can know peace with God through Jesus's self-giving action on the cross. Just as for Jesus, suffering on earth is part of the Christian life:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; . . . We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom. 5:1-5)

⁷⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 165.

⁷⁹ Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, *Romans*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11, Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 86.

Justified by faith, one can find peace with God despite suffering. For the Christian, hope is certain, not just because Christ died, but because his death and resurrection are both rooted in God's love and provide a path to endurance, character, and joy.⁸⁰ Paul is careful, however, not to provide a sweeping picture of God's grace as given with no price; instead, a future life of resurrection comes with responsibility. Part of the hope of a life with God is accepting hardships that inevitably come in this present one.

The Greek word for hope (ἐλπίζω, "trust, hope for"),⁸¹ used in v. 5 of this passage, can also be translated in the future tense, so the implication is that hope does not and *will not* disappoint.⁸² Justification through faith is no longer about the Law but is bestowed for believers to live a victorious life of faith. It is not an earned reward but the work of the cross and the Christian's hope for a life of overcoming. Paul argues:

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Rom. 5:8-10)

Challenges to Christian hope can serve to strengthen one's walk with God, who not only has given us his love for dealing with death and physical decline but also has "poured it out" in abundant amounts (5:5). Everett Harrison maintains that believers can see trials as forms of the "suffering experienced by Christ in the days of his flesh, rightly

⁸⁰ Moo, *Romans*, 169.

⁸¹ Blueletterbible.org, "Rom. 5:5," ἐλπίζω, Strong's G1680, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1680/rsv/mgnt/0-1/>.

⁸² Moo, *Romans*, 171.

to be experienced now by those who make up his body.”⁸³ God’s *hesed* (devotional love and mercy) will provide for his faithfulness to all generations.

Abraham’s righteous belief was justified and made complete in the resurrection of Christ. At the restoration of all things, one’s standing before God and identity will be merged, and the gap between what a believer is in Christ and what he was once in Adam will be fully closed. No longer will Adam’s curse reign, but the heavenly Adam will restore life where death prevailed, and the promise to Abraham is fulfilled (Rom. 4:13).⁸⁴

Paul concludes his argument in the first verses of Romans 6: “Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (6:3-4). The resurrection of Christ is not a vague pipedream, but an action meted out from glory to glory and strength to strength—a purposeful, timed, and restorative action by God that offers “newness of life.” Resurrection hope satisfies the human longing to be rescued, to have sin justified, and to have salvation proclaimed.

Theological Foundations

The biblical witness for the resurrection of Christ laid a foundation for generations of Christian thinkers and writers who would ground their theology in God’s unprecedented act of redemption, rescue, and grace. Scripture passages show the promise of resurrection as extended to all who embrace Jesus as redeemer and Lord. Over the centuries, the Christian tradition grounded the process of dying with hope in these words

⁸³ Harrison and Hagner, *Romans*, 89.

⁸⁴ Rom 4:13 reads: “For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”

of the gospel writers and of Paul. Great Christian thinkers in the centuries after Christ carried the faith, developing the spirit of hope and belief in a bodily life after death.

Early Christianity and Apostolic Fathers

The theme of this section is that Jesus's resurrection and the hope it instilled for life with God infused and motivated all that early Christian communities practiced, taught, and shared. This portion on early Christianity develops the ancient document of the *Didache*, followed by writings of Ignatius and Irenaeus, bishops within the Eastern and Western churches. Christian thought is further explored from the Middle Ages to the English and Continental Reformations and through the Post-Reformation era.

The Didache (c. Late First to Second Century)

The Didache is a document written as early as 90 AD when the Gospel of John was also written. A treatise of moral instruction, the ancient instruction book was described as "The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles," and it offered training in "The Way" of the Lord through topics and a framework for Christian living. Main sections outline praxis for good patterns of moral behavior and a life of self-denial.

The Didache's admonitions for ethical living tied the early church community together with a sense of purpose, a sense of social responsibility to the poor, and many shared values. For purposes of this discussion, *The Didache* will be explored for the ways it prompted Christian hope through a careful sense of moral encouragement and demands for purity in anticipation of Christ's return. A final section addresses the resurrection.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Thomas O'Loughlin, "The Missionary Strategy of the *Didache*," *Transformation* 28, no. 2 (April 2011): 77.

The authors were potentially a part of a second generation of Apostolic Fathers, whose focus was on simplicity of prayer and Christian rituals of worship and service. As a teaching document, it held up a lifestyle consistent with moral lessons of Jesus. J. B. Lightfoot observed that the “archaic simplicity of its practical suggestions is consistent with the infancy of a church” searching for direction and assurance of hope.⁸⁶ Its order for worship alluded to days when Jesus would return in glory to save all who believed, describing the importance of belief in the resurrection life and worship of the same:

Watch over your life; do not let your lamps go out, and do not be unprepared for death, but be ready, for you do not know the hour. . . .Gather together frequently, seeking the things that benefit your souls, for all the time you have believed will be of no use to you if you are not found perfect in the last time.⁸⁷

Wright calls the *Didache* an “historical starting-point” for the early church community. Beliefs about the resurrection as a wider explanation for “God’s world controlling story” were cemented in corporate practices such as Eucharist, baptism, and worship in believers’ homes; subsequently, communities of faith replayed the central question: “What really did happen to Jesus after the crucifixion?”⁸⁸ Asking this question repeatedly through the ritual liturgy and patterns set by the *Didache* cemented the reality of divine intervention in the world. Over time, the hope of resurrection became a foundation for the entirety of Christian life.

⁸⁶ “The Didache: Teaching of the Apostles,” in *The Apostolic Fathers: Early Christian Writings of Church Leaders*, J. T. Lightfoot, ed. (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2020), 87.

⁸⁷ *The Didache, Part II*, 16:1-2, in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Maxwell Stanforth (New York: Dorset Press, 1986), 332.

⁸⁸ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 28-9.

Michael Holmes argues that the end of the *Didache* predicts coming judgment in a way similar to the “Little Apocalypse” of Mark 16.⁸⁹ The document also draws from Matthew 24:31: “He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet . . . to gather his elect from the four winds.” The apocalyptic section reads:

Then the Deceiver of the World will show himself, pretending to be a Son of God and doing signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands. . . . First, the sign of the opening heavens opening; next, the sound of the trumpet’s voice; and third, the resurrection of the dead—but not of everyone, but as it has been said: *the Lord will come and with him all his holy ones*. Then the world will see the Lord as He comes riding upon the clouds of heaven.⁹⁰

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (c. 60–130 AD)

An early Christian writer, Ignatius Theophorus (“God bearer”), served as bishop of Antioch for the first church outside of Jerusalem. He faced martyrdom in Rome during the early years of persecution for his belief in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. While traveling to Rome under guard, he authored several letters that now are part of an epistle collection attributed to bishops Ignatius, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp: the ‘apostolic fathers.’ In his “Letter to the Smyrnaeans,” Ignatius emphasizes how the suffering of Jesus was necessary for the resurrection to be salvific for those who believe:

In His body He was truly nailed to the Cross—so that He might raise, for all ages, in the one body of His church, a standard for the saints and faithful. For He suffered all these things for us, that we might be saved. And he suffered truly, and raised himself from the dead. . . . [I] know that even after His resurrection he was in the flesh . . . In the name of Jesus Christ, I suffer along with Him.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Michael Holmes, ed. and intro., *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 158.

⁹⁰ *The Didache, Part II*, 16:1-2, in *Early Christian Writings*, 235.

⁹¹ St. Ignatius of Antioch, “To the Smyrnaeans,” in *The Fathers of the Church: The Apostolic Fathers*, Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M. F. Marique, Gerald G. Walsh, trans. (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 1947), 119-20.

Holmes describes Ignatius's journey toward martyrdom as shaped by three factors: a deep desire to imitate the suffering of Jesus and become a true disciple, a desire to mitigate any fear of failure that he might give in to apostasy, and an effort to stay true to his faith. Ignatius knew he would encounter spiritual opposition in his death, but in so doing might become one with Christ.⁹² Martyrdom would lead to resurrection life.

Ignatius described a vision of his coming death in the arena as a surrounding choir gathered for worship. His prayer is captured in the following words:

Grant me nothing more than to be poured out as a drink offering to God while an altar is made. . . . It is good to be setting out from this world to God in order that I may rise in him . . . in order that I may be found as pure bread.⁹³

The reference to bread and to being “poured out as a drink offering” paralleled Jesus's own words to his disciples at the Last Supper before his death: “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). Ignatius used the image to express his desire to identify with Jesus in a life of service, a willingness to die, and in hope for a resurrection with him. The apostle Paul described his life of ministry in the same way: “Even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice . . . I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (Phil. 2:17). Ignatius's devotion to Christ and his identification with his suffering may have led to false accounts of his martyrdom, but discourse about the suffering of God on the cross was included in his body of writing.⁹⁴ His perspective on the resurrection was reflected in his focus on disciples who were truly “poured out” as offerings for love of Christ.

⁹² Holmes, “Letters of Ignatius,” in *Apostolic Fathers in English*, 89.

⁹³ Ignatius, *Letter to the Romans*, 2.2, in Allen Brent, *Ignatius of Antioch: Martyr, Bishop, and the Origin of Episcopacy* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 18.

⁹⁴ William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters* (New York: Fortress Press, 2016), 1-2.

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (c. 130–202)

Irenaeus of Lyons is an apostolic father who fueled resurrection hope by refuting the heresy of Docetism, which denied Jesus was human and that he rose in bodily form. As Bishop of Lyons after Roman persecution under Marcus Aurelius had begun, his letters encouraged the community to maintain hope amidst fear. Irenaeus testified to the scriptural witness for bodily resurrection, a concept that challenged Platonic idealism regarding the soul and its mystical journey. He defied the gnostic concepts of “Aeons” and divine emanations, claiming that the body includes both physical and spiritual attributes that are never lost, even in death, and is eternally part of God’s image.⁹⁵

Eric Osborn notes that Irenaeus created a theology of hope based on the resurrection and its promises of security and eternity with God. The “breath” or Spirit of God (Heb *rûah*, or רוח) gave life to the soul as the reality of God’s presence, and being rooted in the soul, it could assure believers that they were saved from doom. The soul was always part of the physical being, not a wandering entity, and enabled the resurrected life to take place.⁹⁶ Jesus’s actions overturned any separation that existed before.

Against Heresies was an apologetic testimony of resurrection proving that the Father sent the Son, and the Father and Son together sent the Spirit, a stance eventually defended and codified at Nicaea (325). *Against Heresies* develops Irenaeus’s theology of how God will bring those who practice righteousness into a “place of refreshment” with the Spirit of God. This place is a future destiny for both body and soul:

If righteousness hath power to guide those beings which have partaken with her, so will our discourse of the resurrection prove true and firm. And this we indeed

⁹⁵ Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 120.

⁹⁶ Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 220.

believe: namely, that such of our mortal bodies that keep righteousness, God will raise up, making them incorrupt and immortal. God is mightier than nature, and with Him is the Will, because He is good, and the Power, because He is able.⁹⁷

The debate about the fate of the soul was ongoing in the second century. For Irenaeus and other theologians who espoused bodily resurrection, the empty grave was irrefutable proof that God could unite a physical, mortal body to a spiritual one, and a renewed, spiritual body indicated more than just a soul, but a body given new life by the *agency* of the Spirit. The Spirit appeared because of Jesus's resurrection and ascension:

And the Word borne by the Father gives the Spirit to all in the manner which the Father wills for us. To some according to their creation, he gives . . . the spirit which is something made; to others according to their adoption he gives the Spirit which proceeds from the Father, the Spirit which is his progeny.⁹⁸

Irenaeus explained the entire resurrection event in line with the traditional notions held by the early church. Jesus did not go straight to the Father, but lingered on the earth, even descending to the dead, proving that his resurrection and ascension were separate, representing a two-stage, post-death experience. After death, there will be time in Paradise that God has ordained, and then eternity. God's promises "are not allegories, but must have fulfillment. . . . in a final resurrection and terrestrial Jerusalem."⁹⁹

The Eucharist symbolized how this union of flesh and spirit would take place in an eventual resurrection: the body, once alive on earth, lives now incorruptibly. In *Against Heresies* IV.18, Irenaeus compares bodies enlivened by Christ to grains of wheat in the Eucharistic bread. He quotes Jesus: "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat

⁹⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2.29.3, John Keble, trans., in *Five Books of St. Irenaeus of Lyons* (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1972), 72.

⁹⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.18.2, in A. Rousseau via Osborn, trans., *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 223.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.3:5, in *Five Books of St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 123.

falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn. 12:24). Our bodies must be deposited in the earth in order to rise at the appointed time of Jesus’s restoration and return. He describes flesh as Eucharistic bread:

How can they say that the flesh passes into corruption and partakes not of life? . . . our communion and union profess a Resurrection of flesh and spirit, that as Bread from the earth, as if receiving the summons from God, is no longer common Bread . . . so also our bodies, partaking of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of Eternal Resurrection.¹⁰⁰

Irenaeus’s *Proof of Apostolic Preaching* testified about the primacy of Christ and the replacement of Adam who brought the curse, a common theme in ancient Christian literature. Christ, he says, is the “promise to Abraham fulfilled” that created a new people to follow God. Jesus had to be human first, like Adam, in order for God to one day “loose his bonds.” He explained that, without Adam, there would have been no need for Christ:

He sanctified our birth and abolished death, loosing the same bonds by which we were held. And He showed forth the resurrection, becoming Himself the first-born from the dead, and raised in Himself prostrate man, being lifted up to the heights of heaven, at the right hand of the glory of the Father. . . . And if anyone accept not His virgin birth, how shall he accept His resurrection from the dead; . . . for how can one who did not take on man’s beginning receive his end?”¹⁰¹

Irenaeus’s proofs concerning Jesus rising in bodily form are a window on resurrection hope. Echoing the Apostle Paul: “As for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat” (1 Cor. 15:37), Irenaeus underscored the point that God allowed death for Adam, but a new Adam was ultimately

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4:18:4, in *Five Books of St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 139.

¹⁰¹ St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, Joseph P. Smith, trans. and ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1952), 72-73.

raised incorruptible. Divine rescue kept man from “perpetual, incurable sin . . . and dissolution of the flesh,” but instead, raised him to glory.¹⁰² Such is our Christian hope.

Tertullian (155–220)

Quintus Tertullianus, an African Christian who lived in the Roman province of Carthage, authored books on Latin Christianity in the century following the apostles. He is often referred to as a father of Latin Christianity and of Western theology in general, since his writing helped develop the doctrine of the Trinity and early Christian apologetics. To him, Christianity was “the whole truth” over any school of thought.¹⁰³

In *Apologies*, Tertullian described Christ’s identification with human flesh, defending this against heretics who denied Jesus’s humanity. Tertullian argued that such denials avoid the reality of Christ and resurrection in both spirit and physical body. To prove this, he refuted those who claimed Christ was an angel who rose from the dead:

Never did any angel descend for the purpose of being crucified, of tasting death, and of rising again from the dead. . . . They had not come to die. . . . Christ, however, having been sent to die, had necessarily to be also born, that He might be capable of death. . . . For One who was to be truly a man, even unto death, it was necessary He be clothed with the flesh to which death belongs.¹⁰⁴

The heretics were opposed to the supreme God. They presumed a lesser “demi-urge” who brought inherent corruption in man and all creation, claiming a body could not rise again. Refuting them, Tertullian described the resurrection as compelling belief:

¹⁰² Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 217.

¹⁰³ Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, intro and trans., “Tertullian: Apologetical Works,” in *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 1950), ix–x.

¹⁰⁴ Tertullian, *Apologies*, 5:5, “Christ Truly Lived and Died in Human Flesh,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to 325 AD*, vol. III, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), 526.

The resurrection of the dead is the Christian's trust. By it we are all believers. . . . Truth compels us—that truth which God reveals, but the crowd derides, which supposes that nothing will survive after death. . . . [They] deem it more tolerable to change the quality of the corporeal state than to deny it.¹⁰⁵

The apostolic fathers of the church laid a foundation of belief in the necessity of the resurrection and developed church practices based on evidence for Jesus's sacrifice and raised body. Sacramental rituals practiced by the early church were designed to point to God's grace, although their practice asked believers to have faith in what was unseen. The fathers' historical proximity to the apostles infused their teaching with the hope in Jesus's imminent return, centering them in the reality of the resurrection and its hope.

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

Nicene orthodoxy in the year 325 rested firmly on the fact that Jesus had physically died and then bodily risen three days following from the grave. To the church fathers of the Nicene and Post-Nicene eras, the person who rose on Easter is the seedbed of Christian hope. The promise to believers is that one day they will share in the final resurrection and be *with* Christ in a new heaven and earth. This section further develops the bodily resurrection of Christ with special focus directed to caregivers of the dying as persons in ideal roles to offer words of assurance.

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (296–373)

Church father Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century, a time when Nicene-era theologians argued against Arianism, a heretical belief of the priest Arius, who claimed the subordination of the Son to the Father, who was “One” and

¹⁰⁵ Tertullian, *Apologies*, 6:3, in *ANFP*, 535.

denied the timeless generation of the Son. In response, Athanasius defended Christ's eternal nature and authored "Defense of the Nicene Definition:"

God is He who through His Word made all things small and great, and we may not divide the creation and say this is the Father's, and this is the Son's, but they are of one God, who uses His proper Word as a Hand, and in Him does all things; Therefore, the Son alone was brought into being by the Father alone.¹⁰⁶

The importance of Athanasius's contribution to the hope of resurrection cannot be overstated, as the eternal and timeless nature of Jesus is what enables his ongoing, redeeming work on the cross. Athanasius argued for Christ's bodily resurrection as the hinge event for all believers based on three fundamental truths: Jesus was and is forever with the Father, thus rendering his resurrection redemptive; through the bodily resurrection, Christ defeated death; and his eternal identity enables moral transformation.

Treatises such as *On the Incarnation of the Word* (319), along with various *Letters* written to ministers in the Roman Empire, testify to Athanasius's convictions. *Incarnation* outlined his belief that the Father, as eternally one with the Son, first *created* the world through the Word, and then *saved* the world through the death and resurrection of the same. A passage from *Incarnation* explains:

For as it was not fitting for the Word of God, being the life, to inflict death Himself on his own body, so neither was it suitable to flee from death. . . . The [eternal] Son of God is living and active . . . to bring about the salvation of all. But death is daily proved to have lost its power.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, "Defense of the Nicene Definition," III:7-8, *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4, Archibald Robertson, ed., in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 155.

¹⁰⁷ St. Athanasius, "Incarnation of the Word," 2:22-25, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 47-8.

The humiliation and shame Jesus experienced as incarnate God were both necessary and sufficient to destroy death, and the resurrection created a way for all humanity to be delivered from death's shame. "On Humiliation and Incarnation" explained his belief:

What men, in their conceit, laugh at as merely human, He by His own power demonstrates to be divine, subduing the pretensions of idols by His supposed humiliation—by the cross. . . . [B]ut that being incorporeal by nature, and Word from the beginning, He has yet of the loving-kindness and goodness of His own Father been manifested to us in a human body for our salvation.¹⁰⁸

Jesus could completely undo Adam's sin, Athanasius reasoned, because Jesus is a divine being who fills all things as "sustainer and creator of all." One with God, Jesus remains eternally "the Word who visited earth." Athanasius cited Acts 17:27-28: "Indeed, he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being,' as even some of your own poets have said."¹⁰⁹ Athanasius further explained Jesus's identity:

He had mercy on our infirmity and condescended to our corruption, and, unable to bear that death should have the mastery . . . he gave [his body] over to death in the stead of all . . . [so] the law involving the ruin of men might be undone . . . and He might . . . quicken them from death by appropriation of His body and by the grace of the Resurrection, banishing death from them like straw from the fire.¹¹⁰

Incarnation was also written in part to show the power of the resurrection over the effects of evil on humankind. Bradley Green explains this argument: When the eternal "Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn. 1:14), a moral and spiritual transformation of the world was launched. Jesus's act of grace, therefore, enabled the church to triumph

¹⁰⁸ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," in *The Complete Works of St. Athanasius*, Phyllis Schaff, trans. (Amazon.com: Kindle, 2016), Ch. 1, 48.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Ch. 8, 56.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 56-7.

over idols, false religions, and their evil influence on humanity.¹¹¹ *Incarnation* defends this sufficiency of the cross to prevail over Adams's sin. He explained:

For since from a man it was that death prevailed over men . . . by the Word of God being made man has come about the destruction of death and the resurrection of life; . . . but as men who rise from the dead we await the general resurrection of all, which in its own times shall show.¹¹²

Athanasius argued in *Incarnation* that the resurrection enabled moral transformation in the lives of believers, allowing for sanctification. Christians can live “no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15). The transformation of ordinary people into bold defenders, martyrs, and witnesses to the faith testifies to this truth. Carl Beckwith notes that, according to Athanasius, identification with Christ and the fellowship of believers transforms and bears immediate fruit in behavior and moral choices. This *synergeia* (as defined in Chapter 1, “co-working”) is “the life-giving, transforming, and perfecting work of the Word.”¹¹³ Athanasius argued that evil would never “have been brought to naught” and God’s people transformed unless the Lord’s body had risen:

[N]ow that the Savior works so great things among men, . . . will anyone still hold his mind in doubt whether a Resurrection has been accomplished by the Savior, and whether Christ is alive? . . . How, if He be not risen but is dead, does . . . the adulterer no longer commit adultery, and the murderer murders no more . . . and the profane is henceforth religious? How does he . . . cast down those false gods said by unbelievers to be alive?¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Carl Beckwith, “Athanasius,” in Bradley Green, *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 167-8.

¹¹² Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” Ch. 10, in *Complete Works*, 59.

¹¹³ Beckwith, in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 170-1.

¹¹⁴ Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” Ch. 30, in *Complete Works*, 79.

To further emphasize his claim that the risen Christ empowers, Athanasius wrote *Epistles* to encourage boldness in the lives of church leaders and martyrs. He stressed that only a resurrected Savior—a living person—could bring about transformative change. A letter to co-worker Amantius described the power of the Lord to overcome evil deeds:

For the Lord died in those days, that we should no longer do the deeds of the dead. He gave his life, that we might preserve our own from the snares of the devil. . . . The Word became flesh, that we should no longer live in the flesh, but in the spirit should worship God and receive his mercy.¹¹⁵

To Philagrius the Cappadocian, Athanasius wrote that Jesus, by way of his resurrection, enables a Christian's victory over death, ultimate incorruptibility, and bodily rising:

He who died for us is alive. . . . We can see the signs of victory against death, even our own incorruptibility, through the body of the Lord. For since He rose gloriously, it is clear that the resurrection of all of us will take place. . . . “For as by one man . . . sin passed upon all men, so by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall all rise” (Rom. 5:12).¹¹⁶

Athanasius's insistence on the necessity of resurrection helped to proclaim Jesus as one with the Father and eternal in nature. Jesus is a living Savior who defeats death and helps believers to live in a way that sin is overcome and can be defeated.

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354–430)

Augustine of Hippo lived during an era when Christians passed repeated theological milestones, and he is often considered the most significant theologian of the first millennium of the church. Augustine became known for “painting the various states of the soul and the *facts* of the spiritual world,” and *The City of God* is considered his

¹¹⁵ Athanasius, *Epistle 48*, 6.1, via Beckwith, in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 178.

¹¹⁶ St. Athanasius, “Epistle 30,” 14, in *Complete Works*, 739-40.

hallmark alongside copious theories of exegesis.¹¹⁷ Augustine wrote on many themes of Christology and the Trinity, but the fact of a bodily resurrection, the need for a quickened spirit, and the life-giving nature of Christian hope are three of his central concepts.

Disagreements over Christology prior to Augustine's birth led to the Council at Nicaea (325) that established various important traditional doctrinal beliefs. In Augustine's lifetime, other subsequent councils would reflect his contributions: the First Council of Constantinople (381), the Council of Ephesus (431), and, in particular, the Council of Carthage (412), where his view of soteriology triumphed over that of Pelagius.¹¹⁸ After early struggles with faith and morality, Augustine would claim the incarnate Son as mediator between humanity and God by way of his death and resurrection and as the means for Christians to rise again.

In *The City of God*, Augustine traced the origin and destiny of the temporal, earthly city and the heavenly realm, that latter of which represents Christian life and godly desires. The first city grew from Adam's sin and love of self, but the heavenly city is rooted in God's love. The choice between the two ways of life represents the human dilemma and the story of Christian redemption.¹¹⁹ Augustine's life provides evidence.

Augustine described hope in a bodily resurrection of Christ as brought about by the quickening spirit of God, and he based his life on the "veracity of the resurrection" as seen in Scripture.¹²⁰ An example is found in his scriptural references in *City of God*, such

¹¹⁷ Paul A. Böer, intro, *The City of God*, Paul A. Böer, ed. (Amazon Kindle, 2012), loc. 1230.

¹¹⁸ Pelagius (354-418) denied original sin and emphasized human choice in salvation.

¹¹⁹ Green, intro., "Augustine," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 280-1.

¹²⁰ Gerald O'Collins, *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), vii.

as Psalm 3:5 which refers to the body as asleep in death but awakened by God's hand ("I lie down and sleep in peace; I wake, for the Lord sustains me"). Although death may separate a soul from the body for a time, Augustine claimed, risen bodies along with the soul will be held together by the Breath and Spirit of God:

About his resurrection also the oracles of the Psalms are by no means silent . . . [as] in Psalm 3, "I laid me down and took a sleep, [and] I awaked, for the Lord shall sustain me." . . . He had not slept and risen up, unless that sleep had been death, and that awaking the resurrection. . . . Shall not he that sleeps rise again?¹²¹

In *City of God*, Augustine described those who die as having resurrected bodies with a transformed brightness, a "quickening," that shapes them for dwelling in heaven. Gerald O'Collins explains Augustine's view that the true identity of a Christian will be reshaped and reformed. The new, spiritual body endures past death, so a Christian's hope is not in the soul, but *must* be found in Christ, who modeled a bodily resurrection before he ascended to the Father.¹²² Augustine explained that the body will be reclothed and the soul revived. He references Paul's harvest imagery from 1 Corinthians 15:44:

It shall rise again, transformed from the oldness of the animal body into the newness of the spiritual body, and clothed in incorruption and immortality. . . . The flesh shall then be spiritual, . . . when the same flesh shall have that resurrection of which the words speak: "It is sown an animal body; it shall rise a spiritual body."¹²³

As Paul foretells, a physical body is transformed by God, sown in dishonor and weakness but raised in glory and power (15:43). The bodies of the dead still decay, therefore, but they are ultimately renewed because flesh will be quickened and changed

¹²¹ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XVII, Ch. 18, Kindle, loc. 20558.

¹²² O'Collins, *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ*, 91.

¹²³ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XXII, Ch. 21, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Augustine*, 499.

by the Lord. Even with hardship and earthly “indignities received,” the human body will not cease to exist but be renewed as both physical and spiritual. For this to take place, the flesh must be subject to the spirit in willing obedience to die and rise again. *City of God* gives a detailed picture:

Because [the body] will be subject to the spirit with a perfect and marvelous readiness of obedience . . . all reluctance, all corruption, and all slowness are being removed. For the body will not only be better than it was here in its best estate of health, but it will surpass the bodies of our first parents, . . . God’s marvelous grace secured them by the tree of life . . . in the midst of Paradise.¹²⁴

Augustine claimed that there are two resurrections, with the first happening after death “in the midst of Paradise” and the second when all creation is restored. The “second man” will hear the voice of God calling him from the grave and experience the “second resurrection” to an awakened soul.¹²⁵ He explained the distinction:

For in this resurrection none have part save those who are eternally blessed . . . but to Him who died and rose again for our justification, that we, believing in Him . . . may be able to attain to the first resurrection. . . . The one is the resurrection of mercy, the other of judgment . . . The first is a spiritual resurrection which preserves us from death, and the second is of the body, not of the soul.¹²⁶

Augustine continued to wrestle with the destiny of the soul, but he consistently connected it to a bodily form as modeled by Christ. After coming to repentance, Augustine testified, a person’s body and soul will both change. The transformed soul, however, can only be enlivened if the flesh serves the indwelling Holy Spirit and is willing to be animated anew. In his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, he explained:

¹²⁴ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book VIII, Ch. 19, 249.

¹²⁵ O’Collins, *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection*, 93.

¹²⁶ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XX, Ch. 6, Kindle 2012, loc. 24364.

Just as the soul, after it has put away and destroyed by repentance its former habits, is created anew after a better pattern, so we must hope and believe that the body, after that death which we all owe as a debt to sin, shall at the resurrection be changed into a better form. . . . and the good to receive eternal life.¹²⁷

Augustine's teachings and sermons proved that the ultimate endpoint of the City of God—the heavenly city—is eternal blessedness and life with God. To achieve this union with God, a “perfecting transformation” will happen, one where “all the inhabitants of the City of God will be raised up and transformed without a deformity to their appearance, and God will be the end of their desires.”¹²⁸ Although it may have seemed like foolishness to pagans, this resurrection hope for a bodily transformation is what distinguished and unified Christians in Augustine's time. His testimony continued to be that the same God who made the world *ex nihilo* and raised Jesus from the dead was powerful to resurrect all believers with incorruptible bodies and revived souls:

The Creator . . . will not lack the means when it comes to the work of resurrection. Since in his wisdom and compassion, God created what was not, he is also able to free what he created from corruption. . . . and restore the dead to life.¹²⁹

Post-Nicene Cappadocian Fathers

Two leading Cappadocian bishops acted as defenders of Nicene orthodoxy between the years 330–391: Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, both brilliant theologians and close friends. Gregory of Nyssa was a theologian who, like Augustine, helped to shape understanding of how Christ's body was transformed. He shares with

¹²⁷ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book I:19, 21, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 527.

¹²⁸ Green, “Augustine,” in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 281-2.

¹²⁹ St. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 525-6, 530, via O'Collins, *Saint Augustine*, 37.

Gregory of Nazianzus a view of Christ's humanity and incarnation that contributed to the development of the Western church's doctrine.

Gregory of Nyssa (335–395)

The younger brother of Saint Basil the Great, Bishop Gregory of Nyssa stressed God's intentional goodness in his creation of man. He advocated that Christ's dual nature assured that his resurrection had overcome death, and one day evil would run its course and the world would be restored by God's love. Gregory provided a robust argument for the divine nature and its effect on the human nature Jesus assumed on our behalf. The incarnate, yet spiritual, Son of God was transformed in death, but his physical being was not destroyed. As a result, Christ now can act as defender of both human, earthly existence and life in the Spirit.¹³⁰ His redeeming actions were sufficient then, and continue now, for all Christians.

Gregory contended that the resurrection revealed Jesus's compassionate giving of himself in both aspects of his being, and thus, his sacrifice is even more complete and life-giving. Like other theologians, he wrestled with the destiny of the soul but believed fully in the rising of the dead to resurrection life. He wrote in "On the Soul and Resurrection" about the mystery of the resurrection body:

[A]nd our Lord does not declare in word alone that the bodies of the dead shall be raised up again; but he shows in action the Resurrection itself, making a beginning of this work of wonder from things more within our reach and less capable of being doubted. . . . [T]hen after three days, He raises from the dead his own human body, and brings the print of those nails and spear-wound to witness in the Resurrection. . . . But still the question remains: Is the state in which we are expected to be like the present state of the body?¹³¹

¹³⁰ Robert Letham, "Three Cappadocians," in Green, ed., *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 218.

¹³¹ Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," in *Select Works of Gregory of Nyssa*, Kindle ed., loc. 13945, emphasis added. Available in public domain.

Another of Gregory's early convictions was that a Christian's salvation took place in the renewed soul that continued in its destiny alongside the body. Having a "firm and immovable belief in the soul's continuance," Gregory attempted to answer just where the soul would reside "when the coalition of elements in the body ceases." The soul was a complex thing, forming a barrier between the lower and higher self, in just the same way that man is "imprisoned in a world that obstructs the view beyond, but gets a glimpse of the sky."¹³² The immortal soul was the part of man that would find union with God. In his final years, Gregory came to see the soul as transformed and reunited in bodily form with Christ. His sermons maintained that if God created all humanity, he can re-create mankind. Gregory insisted that the resurrection was of great moral value: "If there is no resurrection, there is no judgment; and if judgement is removed, fear of God will be eliminated."¹³³ Christian hope should expect not just a destiny for the soul, but all that God intended, including future joy for the whole person:

We will say that the Resurrection is "the reconstitution of our nature in its original form." But in that form of life, of which God Himself was Creator, it is reasonable to believe that there was neither age nor infancy nor any of the sufferings arising from our present infirmities, nor any bodily affliction.¹³⁴

Restored body and soul one day will exhibit the true image and glory of God, a day when God's intentional goodness as seen in creation will be made complete.

¹³² Saint Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," loc. 13010 and 13021.

¹³³ Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Text, 'Then the Son Himself will be Made Subject to the One who has Subjected All Things,'" J. Kenneth Downing, ed., in GNO III (Leiden: Brill, 1987) via Brian E. Daley, "Gregory of Nyssa on Death and Eternal Life," in *Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*, George Kalantzis and Matthew Levering, eds. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 81.

¹³⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 5.8, in *A Select Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers*, 270.

Gregory of Nazianzus (330–391)

Gregory of Nazianzus, a fourth century Archbishop of Constantinople, was known as Gregory the Theologian. He was a great orator who helped bring Hellenistic philosophy into the early church, while also emphasizing strong Trinitarian theology. A significant contribution of Gregory of Nazianzus to the understanding of the resurrection is his perspective on the eventual “deification” of believers. Gregory explained that the deification of Christ was conferred by his rising as “superior to the dualism of matter, through the unity which is perceived in the Trinity.”¹³⁵

“Deification” is a concept that is defined and explained in chapter one. In Gregory’s interpretation of deification, the raising of believers to new life reflects a new relationship with God that will be divinely orchestrated. Deification represented a final goal of the Christian life—a “direct and dynamic relationship with God” in an embodied existence.¹³⁶ Gregory held that, as Christians live and follow Christ, they participate in God’s nature in observable ways of love and grace, but they do not become like gods.

In Oration XLI, *On Pentecost*, Gregory expounded on his perspective that the disciples knew Jesus in three ways: as a human before he was crucified, after he was raised in the resurrection event, and after his ascension and restoration to God. Jesus could reconcile Christians because he appeared in these spiritual and bodily forms:

Now the first of these forms manifests Him—the healing of the sick and casting out of evil spirits . . . and so does his breathing upon [the disciples] after the Resurrection (Jn 20:22), clearly a divine inspiration; . . . Since He is . . .

¹³⁵ Saint Gregory Nazianzen, “Oration XXII,” in *Saint Gregory Nazianzen Collection* [2 Books] (Amazon Kindle: Aeterna Press, 2016), loc. 3867.

¹³⁶ Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 14.

associating with us and dwelling in us. For it was fitting that as the Son had lived with us in bodily form—so the Spirit too should appear in bodily form.¹³⁷

Gregory clarified that knowing Christ as resurrected Lord was sufficient for man's deification and future relationship with God. His writing assisted Christians to embrace the power of Christ's resurrection to bestow righteousness. In *Fourth Theological Oration*, Gregory, like Paul and previous theologians, described Jesus as the second Adam, reversing what the first Adam had brought and restoring humanity to righteousness. *Oration* explains Gregory's perspective on Jesus's purpose: to liberate believers from the hold of death, bestow righteousness, and provide sanctification:

He is Sanctification, as being Purity, that the Pure may be contained by [Goodness]. And he is Redemption, because He sets us free, who were held captive under sin, giving Himself a ransom for us. . . . And he is Resurrection, because He raises us up. . . and brings to life again us, who were slain by sin.¹³⁸

Purves further interprets Gregory's concept of deification and "sacrificial expiation" by explaining how such sanctification breathes life into pastoral ministry. Since humans are a composite of flesh and spirit, body and soul, Gregory believed the pastor must treat illness as a "sickness of the soul" and a foe of total healing. Gregory's ultimate hope for humanity was sanctification; his "pastoral goal was, in short, to deify and bestow heavenly bliss upon one who already belongs to the heavenly host."¹³⁹ All of life was to be an upward journey toward God, anticipating the resurrection to come.

The theology of Cappadocian fathers, and in particular Gregory of Nazianzus, established a conduit for hope in a restoration that would come by way of Jesus's death.

¹³⁷ Saint Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration XXX:20 The Second Concerning the Son*, in *Select Orations of Saint Gregory* (Kindle, Aeterna Press), loc. 7453.

¹³⁸ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration XLI:11*, loc. 5404.

¹³⁹ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 17.

When believers embrace Jesus's act of "yielding us up to a paradisaal and holy state," they will experience new birth, a rebuke to what was destroyed by evil.¹⁴⁰ Gregory mandated belief in a Trinitarian Jesus as one with the Godhead, and this role gave Jesus the authority to deify believers and enable resurrection hope.

Early and High Medieval Period (550–1350)

Gregory the Great (540–604)

During the Roman papacy of Gregory "the Great" (590–604), the lack of central leadership and medical care, coupled with poor hygiene and poverty, led to bouts of widespread illness, with the result that death prevailed and was considered an instrument of evil to be feared. The vast Medieval Era spanned roughly 1,000 years between the Roman Empire's demise in 476 and the European Renaissance in the late 1400s. During this time, the church, rather than a city-state or governmental body, was a unifying force for the West. Clerics had a sense of responsibility for the common good, and "Christendom" came to represent the entire church-state that cared for its subjects within a Christian value system.

Gregory's instructive *Book of Pastoral Rule* became an influential treatise for the sick and dying. Sin-sickness caused "diseases of the soul," he wrote, and such illness should be treated not only physically but spiritually, by trained clerics and physicians.¹⁴¹ Pastors carried Gregory's book to parishioners' deathbeds and, in 796, a letter from the

¹⁴⁰ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Life after Death According to the Orthodox Tradition*, John Champoux, ed., trans. (New York: Holy Trinity, 2021), 5.

¹⁴¹ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 56-7.

Bishop of York instructs, “Wherever you go, let the pastoral book of St. Gregory be your companion. . . . It is medicine for the wounds inflicted by the Devil’s deception.”¹⁴²

The Middle Ages witnessed evolution in theology and intellectual thought. Religious schools became branches for Scholasticism and monastic movements, and Celtic approaches to Christianity spread among Gaelic/Celtic peoples in Scotland and Ireland. In 1054, the Great Schism between the communions of the Western and Eastern Orthodox Church affected church ritual and sacramental worship. For the Western Church, the *filioque* (“and the Son”) clause added to the Nicene Creed stated that the Holy Spirit came through *both* the Father and the Son, clarifying it was not just the Father who had sent the Spirit.

Key Western theologians were part of the era’s theological shifts: Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Dietrich Kolde (1470–1515). Each is explored in detail, along with The *Ars Moriendi* tradition of deathbed ministrations that began in 1418 but would endure over 200 years. *Ars Moriendi* and its subsequent interpretation, *The Crafte of Dyinge*, attempted to assuage guilt and provide security with God in a time when clerical authority was still dominant.

The theology of the Middle Ages fostered a fear of demonic forces and the belief that, if Satan were allowed to be greater than Christ, evil would win. Theologians considered the dying and rising of Christ, therefore, and its implications for Christians through a “divine ideas tradition,” holding that all creatures came to share in existence through the relational love of a Trinitarian God, and all would die in this love.¹⁴³ Church

¹⁴² Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 59.

¹⁴³ Mark A. McIntosh, “The Father’s Vindication of the Word,” in *Christian Dying*, 124-5.

leaders focused on this truth in order to develop mastery over evil, so to speak, and this attitude would be evident in much of the theological reflection of the era.

After the Middle Ages, Protestant reformers followed with a theology of simple belief in resurrection hope in lieu of a series of ritual acts, creating biblical tenets focused on faith that restructured devotion in the West. Their work became known to history as the Reformation and, following an era of searching for effective words of confession and clerical roles, would revive belief in Jesus's death and resurrection as justification for sin.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

Anselm of Canterbury, an Italian-born monk, theologian, and Archbishop of Canterbury, authored a type of devotional writing that gave voice to the penitent Christian's desire for such victory over death, which he addressed through a theology of hope in the Word and the Trinity. His *Monologion* asked monks to consider that humans exist only through the Word. As McIntosh notes, humans are "reflections in time only in virtue of the fact that God knows them eternally."¹⁴⁴

Theologians such as Anselm and Aquinas attempted to write with a broader understanding of biblical implications within the entire canon. Believers must approach God first to understand him in the ways that God ordained. Both Anselm's *Proslogion* ("Discourse") on the existence of God, *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became a Man"), and *Prayers and Meditations* fall into this genre. As Abbot of Bec in Normandy, Anselm turned the abbey into a center for learning. His writing is thought-provoking, describing the need for Christian hope.

¹⁴⁴ McIntosh, "The Father's Vindication of the Word," 126-7.

Anselm, however, was also a Scholastic writer and philosophical theologian who taught methods of approaching God, the Prime Mover, based loosely on Aristotle's reasoning. He proposed that everything is subject to God's design for creation, but mankind's ultimate purpose was to be restored, and that Jesus Christ would bring this fulfillment in the form of his resurrection.¹⁴⁵ Samson Covatch postulates that, in Anselm's theological framework, misery, pain, and struggle are the opposite of God's intentions in creation, and God intended for humanity to reach contentment. A Christian's desire for God is part of this longing to be restored, and this is met through Christ's resurrection, a "rising with the same body [the Christian] has in this world except that it will be as though sin never entered. . . . We are resurrected in the likeness of Christ."¹⁴⁶ A Christian's restoration, therefore, to future glory unites him to Christ in eternity.

Cur Deus Homo addressed Jesus's atonement in the crucifixion. In the extensive treatise, Anselm reminded believers that, as David Hogg put it, sin was "weighty, that the Devil was not in charge, that God was still on his throne . . . holy and just." Redemption was not achieved through a set of rituals, but through faith in Jesus's atoning death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father.¹⁴⁷ In the treatise, Anselm explained that in the cross and his rising from death, Jesus provided for humanity what humanity could not do for itself, assuring hope in a final resurrection.

¹⁴⁵ Benedicta Ward, *Anselm of Canterbury: His Life and Legacy* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2009), 10.

¹⁴⁶ Samson Covatch, "Anselm's Concept of the Resurrection to Perfect Eternal Happiness for Believers and the Resurrection to Complete Misery for Unbelievers," *The Theology Pit, A Christian Education Ministry* (May 7, 2018), accessed June 15, 2023, <http://thetheologypit.com/new-blog-1/23p9gpe6kjgw53mhjf8c34atscz2s9>.

¹⁴⁷ David Hogg, "Anselm," in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, 302.

Meditation on Human Redemption was written to address the believer's response to redemption. Anselm described a Christian's love for Jesus's atonement as follows:

Wherein is the power of the strength of your salvation? It is surely in the fact that Christ has brought you back to life. He is the good Samaritan who healed you. . . . The man who accepts the death of the body . . . destroys the death of souls.¹⁴⁸

One aspect of Scholasticism, fed by the theology of Augustine that attempted to create a “philosophy of history” proving the efficacy of Christian wisdom over other perspectives, was that it subjected reason to the dogma of the church.¹⁴⁹ This included theories of Christ's resurrection. Anselm, therefore, attempted to reconcile the resurrection both to faith and reason. He argued that the Father raised Jesus up from the grave out of love for humanity, and having faith in this act of redemption is pivotal to Christians, more important than assurance acquired through priestly absolution of sin. Anselm's

Proslogion presents the attributes of God that enabled such loving restitution:

He is that of which nothing greater can be thought. . . . We believe by faith that God exists and is defined as the highest and most excellent thing. He is the supreme good so that no perfection can be lacking in Him. . . . This is true of God alone . . . for God is not limited by place and time.¹⁵⁰

For Anselm, death was a theological reckoning with a loving God that must be mediated by what Jesus did on the cross. He testified that all Christian faith must rest securely in Christ's atonement and its redemption of human souls; such belief leads us

¹⁴⁸ Anselm of Canterbury, *Meditation on Human Redemption*, 2:57, in *Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, Benedicta Ward, ed. (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973), 231.

¹⁴⁹ Paul A. Boër, Sr., ed. *St. Augustine of Hippo, The City of God*, Excerpted from Select Library of NCNF (Veritatis Splendor Publications, Kindle Edition), Loc. 1356.

¹⁵⁰ St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, M. J. Charlesworth, intro and ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1979), 80.

“away from the eternal death to which all misery was leading.” The power of Christ, therefore, was found in the “worthy cross that is our salvation, life and resurrection!”¹⁵¹

Along with other Western theologians, Anselm stressed humility and confession alongside the clerical roles in absolution. Over the coming centuries, however, Christ would be recognized as the satisfaction in the all-time ritual, giving meaning and depth to future Protestant ritual and sacramental devotion in the church.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

Saint Thomas Aquinas was a Scholastic philosopher and priest, often credited with being the great systematic theologian of the medieval period. He is known in part for drawing a contrast between the natural man and the divine idea of God as creator and sustainer. In his writing, Aquinas argued that truth can be known through human reason, but this must work in conjunction with God’s divine revelations of grace. Jesus was the highest embodiment of such grace.

Steeped in the high scholasticism of the thirteenth century, Aquinas aimed to find true knowledge of God and mankind’s ultimate destiny. He professed that only the “free and unmerited grace of God” offered through Jesus could restore humanity.¹⁵²

Sacraments of the church, such as the Eucharist, Baptism, Penance, and Last Rites, all worked to make sinners acceptable before God, enabling them to live in obedience.

While the sacraments conveyed grace because of the cross and resurrection, however, the

¹⁵¹ Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayer to the Holy Cross*, 2:15, in Benedicta Ward, ed. *Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973), 102-3.

¹⁵² Mark W. Elliot, “Thomas Aquinas,” in *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy*, Bradley Green, ed., 344-5.

true work of Christ was an act of embodied grace that allowed man to be reconciled.

Aquinas's seminal work, *Summa Theologica*, was a compendium of theological teaching on creation, man's purpose, the sacraments, and the redemption offered to man.

Aquinas insisted that the resurrection of Jesus was the Father's overturning of the power of death, and Jesus's dual nature made this divine reversal possible. After his bodily appearance and subsequent ascension, the Spirit was sent, and a new law began. Jesus's resurrection on the third day changed humanity's course because Pentecost recreated a new "feast of Christ's Passion" that recalled resurrection hope. Aquinas addressed this divine recreation and new living spirit in *Summa Theologica*:

As to the sabbath, which was a sign recalling the first creation, its place is taken by the "Lord's Day," which recalls the beginning of the new creature in the Resurrection of Christ. . . . Hence the feast of the Passover gave place to the feast of Christ's Passion and Resurrection; the feast of Pentecost when the Old Law was given, to the [day] on which was given the Law of the living Spirit.¹⁵³

Aquinas wrestled with the concept of the soul's destiny, as did his predecessors. He argued the ideas of earlier theologians Athanasius and Augustine on matters of the soul and resurrection through a series of questions and objections, but he acknowledged a coming bodily resurrection. On the soul and its certain capabilities, Aquinas wrote:

All the powers of the soul belong to the soul alone . . . as the intelligence and the will, these powers must remain in the soul after the destruction of the body. . . . [Yet] these powers have no act apart from the corporeal body.¹⁵⁴

Adam Wood observes that Aquinas considered the soul to be "disembodied at death" but believed it would be reconstituted to its original form in the final resurrection. Just as the

¹⁵³ St. Thomas Aquinas, Part II, Art.3, Q. 103:3 (Of Ceremonial Precepts): 3, *Summa Theologica*, American ed., Fathers of English Dominican Province, trans. (Coyote Canyon Press, Kindle ed.), 2807. Hereafter referred to as *ST*.

¹⁵⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, I:78 Art. 1, 1010.

brain works to animate a human body, Aquinas professed, so the soul makes humans alive to God. In the afterlife, the soul is held by God to preserve one's unique identity; between death and resurrection, the "blueprints of our physical lives" will be rejoined.¹⁵⁵

In an answer to how this "rejoining" takes place, Aquinas offered the example of the testimony of angels. He reasoned that just as God produces angels "with bodies to be ministers of God," so God does something in human bodies beyond the angels' power, such as raising the dead on a final resurrection day. Angels acted as ministers in the formation of Adam, and they will do the same at the last resurrection by "collecting the dust of those who die."¹⁵⁶ With regard to the state of the soul, Aquinas penned:

In the final state, after the resurrection, the soul will, to a certain extent, communicate to the body what properly belongs to itself as a spirit; . . . glory, and power to the good, whose bodies will be called "spiritual." So, after the resurrection, man will not require food; . . . [for] the immortality of the primitive state was based on a supernatural force in the soul, and not an intrinsic disposition of the body.¹⁵⁷

Aquinas also reasoned that Jesus's initiatory resurrection was the inaugural event paving the way for God's elect, all believers, to be resurrected for life eternal. When questioned about Jesus's physical body after the third day, Aquinas responded that Jesus did not have the same body, since he entered a room with "doors being shut" (Jn. 20:26), but he did reveal his wounds, so his corporeal form remained. Christ's dual nature was part of creation's "divine economy," and "when the mystery of Christ's passion and death was finished, straightaway the soul communicated its glory to the risen body."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Adam Wood, "My Soul Is Not Me: Thomas Aquinas on Humanity and the Afterlife," in *The Table*, Biola Center for Christian Thought (September 26, 2016), no page numbers.

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I:91, Art. 2, 1203.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I: 97, Art. 3, 1276.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, III: 54, Art. 1-2, 597, 1-4.

Aquinas based his conviction about Jesus's unchanged nature on his knowledge of the Trinity. He compared Jesus's resurrection to the coming resurrection of all believers, using the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9) and the Trinity, who were present in both his baptism and transfiguration on the mountain with Peter, James, and John:

Just as in the Baptism, where the mystery of the first regeneration was proclaimed . . . so also in the Transfiguration, which is the mystery of the second regeneration, the whole Trinity appears . . . so in the resurrection will He give His elect the clarity of glory.”¹⁵⁹

Consequently, one of Aquinas's unique contributions to resurrection theology was the concept of a “First and Second resurrection” for believers. Matthew Fox examines the complexity of Aquinas's theory by explaining the reality of “waking up” and rising spiritually from the death of the soul that is brought about by sin. The penitent heart, said Aquinas, should produce an awareness of justice, love, and kindness: “We are asleep if we ‘neglect good works;’ we come awake and resurrect when we participate in good work,” such as caring for the poor and the hopeless.¹⁶⁰

Various passages elucidate this mindset: “Therefore, ‘Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’” (Eph. 5:14) and “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection; the second death has no power over them” (Rev. 20:6). Christians become fully awake when they have experienced a first resurrection that involves awakening from sin, despair, and a passive life. The second resurrection happens after dying, and Aquinas calls this the time when the soul rejoins God in a spiritual reuniting with Christ. On the two resurrections, Aquinas wrote:

¹⁵⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, III: 45, Art. 4, 5842.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew Fox, “Thomas Aquinas on our First and Second Resurrections,” *Daily Meditations with Matthew Fox* (April 14, 2020). No page numbers.

Resurrection is a restoring from death to life. Now a man is snatched from death in two ways: first, from actual death, so that he begins in a way to live anew after being [spiritually] dead; in another way, so that he is not only rescued from death, from the necessity or possibility of dying again. Such is the true and perfect resurrection.¹⁶¹

Christ is the “first in the order of our resurrection” and the prime cause of what is to be ultimately received by humankind. Identification with Christ in life and in death creates a foundation for Christian hope. The Word that became flesh provides this:

The Word of God first bestows immortal life upon that body which is naturally united with Himself, and through it works the resurrection in all other bodies. Christ’s Resurrection is the cause of ours through the power of the united Word, who operates according to His will . . . namely, that first of all we be conformed to the suffering and dying of Christ in this mortal life, and afterwards may come to share in the likeness of His Resurrection.¹⁶²

Late Medieval Period (1350–1500)

The Black Plague cast its shadow over Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, influencing Christian thought in varied ways. The era’s theology was preoccupied with the theme of the deathbed struggle as depicted in woodcuts, paintings, and literature. Wars, overcrowding, and church teaching on purgatory contributed to the ominous sense that death loomed, waiting to consume its victims. Theological literature concluded neither for an assurance of salvation nor a confident hope for a future bodily resurrection but predicted detailed punishments in purgatory or hell for unconfessed sin.

David Cressy describes the event of dying in the eyes of the medieval church as having two histories: the cosmic account of death’s conquest by Christ, and the more mundane story of how humans coped with mortality. The art of “dying well” and

¹⁶¹ Aquinas, *ST*, III: 53, Art. 3, 5967.

¹⁶² Aquinas, “On the Causality of Christ’s Resurrection,” in *ST*, III: 56, Art. 1, 6003.

concerns about the fate of the body and the soul's destiny resulted in a theology of the afterlife that led to alterations in funeral practices and pastoral care focused on how to navigate the journey from this world.¹⁶³ The resurrection as a locus of hope did not take the forefront; instead, the deathbed struggle and a sinner's need for penance and prayer were prioritized by clergy and lay people alike.

Christians believed death was not part of God's original plan, so faithful Christians were trained to expect another side to the "veil of tears" on earth. In the final years of the medieval period, the Western church maintained its insistence on penance and hope for "eternal bliss," as was previously espoused by Aquinas, who claimed the soul remained in the presence of God and awaited reuniting with its original physical body.¹⁶⁴ A solemn tradition reflecting beliefs surrounding Christian deathbed ministrations arose and would endure for more than 200 years.

The Ars Moriendi

Ars Moriendi ("the Art of Dying") was a literary tradition in Europe that described how a Christian should die by holding tightly to his or her faith. It became the "fountainhead of a literary stream" that addressed the concerns of a generation too familiar with untimely deaths.¹⁶⁵ The tradition encouraged the church to stand at the bedside to facilitate a good death, and ministrations of a priest were seen as a conduit both *of God* and *to God*.

¹⁶³ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 379.

¹⁶⁴ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 382-3.

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: Literary Tradition of the 'Ars Moriendi' in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 1.

Although the title represents an entire genre, the original *Ars Moriendi* texts comprised two distinct literary works in the era, each having its own audience and tone. The longer *Ars Moriendi* version, *Tractatus* (or *Speculum Artis Bene Moriendi*), likely was written c. 1415 by an anonymous Dominican friar for the Council of Constance. A shorter, less detailed version would follow. This shorter version, published in 1450, was an adaptation of the second chapter only of the original *Tractatus* and was accompanied by eleven woodcut images. The *Tractatus* was a standard for all versions of the *Ars* that followed. For many readers, it became a skeletal handbook of practical advice for the dying and was used primarily by the common man.¹⁶⁶

In a time when death was seen as the “smothering of life’s flame,” the longer version of the *Ars Moriendi* offered practices that included preparation for coming judgment. The hope of bodily resurrection apparently was not a central focus apart from the need for confession and absolution of sin.¹⁶⁷ The genre grew as a type of consolation literature, and the shorter woodcut version stressed the importance of consolation and assurance by the saints and faithful friends.¹⁶⁸

Translator Columba Thomas notes that one of the key principles in the *Ars Moriendi* was the “priority of the Soul over the Body,” emphasizing that man should most “fear the death of the soul that motivates the devil to afflict the dying” with great

¹⁶⁶ Beaty, *The Craft of Dying*, 6-7.

¹⁶⁷ David William Atkinson, ed., *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 3.

¹⁶⁸ Caxton, *Ars Moriendi*, via Harry Rylands, ed., 10. The advice reads: “To this might well serve a felawe. . . assyste hym truly.”

temptations that can cause eternal death.¹⁶⁹ One of these temptations is to despair. Due to sin, man may never earn pardon, but the angels provide hopeful inspiration:

Second, the devil tempts the sick person to despair, which opposes the hope and confidence he should have in God. For when the sick person is tormented with bodily suffering, the devil compounds his suffering by assailing him with the memory of his sins, especially those he has not confessed, in order to make him despair, saying: “You wretch, look at your sins, which are so great that you will never be able to receive pardon.” . . . Through these and similar words, he leads the person into despair, which is to be avoided above all evils.¹⁷⁰

The implication is that when one is tempted to “despair of true pardon,” he has fallen into sin and “loses God’s mercy entirely,” even when the angels appear at his side to encourage him toward a humble heart that is contrite before God (Ps. 51:17). The ensuing narrative suggests that one call on God’s mercy, “since despair accomplishes nothing except to offend the most loving God much more,” adding weight to other sins.¹⁷¹

An English translation by Richard Rolle and a sub-genre of the *Ars* tradition, *The Book of the Crafte of Dyinge* emerged in the latter part of the fifteenth century. As in the original version, *The Crafte* encourages the dying to confess and warns them that the journey towards death is “dangerous, and ‘ryght ferefull and horrible.’”¹⁷² Cressy notes that sudden death or dying while sleeping avoided the need for “comforting witnesses,” but could be seen as God taking the soul directly to heaven without the benefit of a “holy death.” English poet John Donne (1572–1631) later would describe dying alone in the Middle Ages as a “‘multiplied misery’ . . . to be so tormented by sickness that one could

¹⁶⁹ Columba Thomas, *The Art of Dying: A New Annotated Translation* (Philadelphia: National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2021), 7.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁷² Beaty, *The Craft of Dying*, 9.

not ‘enjoy death’ or to face the ordeal alone.”¹⁷³ Dying without assurance of bodily resurrection was a continual source of fear and disquiet.

Both *Ars Moriendi* and *The Crafte* reflected the medieval church’s perspective on redemption in an era when clerics were seen as more deserving of favor than the righteous, penitent soul. Devoted Christians, however, continued to cultivate the art of dying, so much that life was seen as preparation.¹⁷⁴ Over the years leading up to the Reformation, the pastor became a “physician of souls” rather than just a confessor, although bodily resurrection was still not in the foreground. Ironically, the metaphor of “soul physician” reflected earlier texts of Gregory of Nazianzus who wrote that pastoral care of the dying was rooted in God’s redemptive purpose to heal the heart of man.¹⁷⁵

Dietrich Kolde (Coelde), (1435–1515)

In 1470, the Augustinian and later Franciscan Dietrich Kolde wrote a transitional text titled *Mirror for Christians* on the eve of the Reformation in the Holy Roman Empire. As consolation during the aftermath of the plague, Kolde’s *Mirror for Christians* was an instruction manual for laypeople on the traditional topics of the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed, but it included commentary and advice, including how to die well. His penitent stance became the clergyman’s locus of ministry. Kolde taught that proper confession of sin, along with various articulations of faith and personal appeals, should

¹⁷³ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death*, 90.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 389.

¹⁷⁵ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 17, 47.

take precedence over dependence on one's righteous human works. He was not, however, a type of proto-Protestant who grounded belief in faith and confidence.

The theology of the previously noted high and late Medieval era theologians, including Dietrich Kolde, represents the transition at hand in the Western church. Each system of thought reflected an aspect of the "dynamic pluralism that characterized late medieval theology, just as it characterizes Roman Catholic theology today."¹⁷⁶ Medieval theology, however, laid groundwork for a path to victory over death through trust in the redeeming nature of Christ.

The irony in Kolde's genre of writing is that prayer sought God's favor through steps one should take while dying, and the many deathbed acts and types of appeal that could better one's chances for entering God's kingdom. In a subsection of *Mirror for Christians* explaining how a Christian should die, Kolde wrote distinctive prayers that described offering one's soul into the hands of the Lord. One example includes:

O dear Lord, I am the poor human being that you yourself redeemed and delivered . . . I am the poor human being that you can preserve. . . . Stand by me in my hour of death, when all the world departs. . . . [I]nto your hands I commit my spirit, because you have redeemed me, O my God of truth.¹⁷⁷

Although based in ritual and repeated confessions, Kolde's writing offered prayers that a lay person could say in case no clergy were available, and such a humble stance could potentially bend God's ear.

After Kolde, in what would become Protestant territories following the Reformation, the focus of deathbed ministrations began to shift from emphasizing the need

¹⁷⁶ Denis R. Janz, ed. *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 3.

¹⁷⁷ Dietrich Kolde, *Mirror for Christians* (1470), in Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 63.

for confession to making clear one's assurance of salvation. Many Protestants still believe in confession and some in absolution, but the fear and uncertainty which motivated those acts were now assuaged. As the Medieval era's social woes dimmed, Europe saw a rebirth in art, literature, and theological tradition. For Protestants, the former dread of purgatory was replaced with hope for life in heaven, and with the arrival of Martin Luther and others who witnessed to confident hope in bodily resurrection, care for the dying was increasingly accompanied by a strong devotional faith in God's mercy and grace.

The Reformation in Continental Europe

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Martin Luther is considered the “Father of the Reformation” and the theologian best known for the revelation that now epitomizes his writing and ministry: the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. His body of writing and preaching was a response to the issue of works righteousness, a debate on which he believed Christian doctrine in the sixteenth century would stand or fall. At a time when the church offered papal indulgences as a kind of shortcut for satisfaction in penance, Luther and others saw this requirement as spiritual abuse of the poor. This and other expected “merits” in the hour of death became fertile ground for Luther's claims about the victory of Christ over mere church practice, especially indulgences:

That indulgences are not temporal treasures is certainly clear. . . . Nor are they the merits of Christ and the saints; for even without the pope, the latter always work grace for the inner man, and the cross, death, and hell for the outer.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Martin Luther, “Ninety-Five Theses or Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences” (1517, #57-58), in Janz, ed., *A Reformation Reader*, 91, via *Career of the Reformer I*, *LW*:31, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999, c1957), 30.

Brian Brewer explains the history of the church's pastoral care to the sick and the rituals for the dying that Luther would reframe. In a chapter entitled "Extreme Unction," Brewer observes that the intent of the original biblical tradition of anointing of the sick for healing was geared to restoring health in body, mind, and soul. What began, however, with pastoral prayers for the faithful offered by an elder had evolved in the Western church into works-based efforts at gaining the approval of God.¹⁷⁹ Extreme Unction was seen as preparing a person for a death rather than acting as a channel for God's healing power. Luther would claim that dying should be a time of being held by Christ's death, not a time for recounting sins or receiving unnecessary sacraments. He wrote:

If you gaze steadfastly at this mirror and image, at Christ the Lord, who died and rose again, you will see where you will go and where those will go who have not fallen asleep in Christ. . . .He has wrapped them in Christ's death and included them in his resurrection. . . .Let us comfort ourselves now in this sorrow with the fact that we know with certainty that we will rise again with Christ. . . . [W]hen I believe this with my whole heart, then I have the greatest treasure, namely the death of Christ and the power which it has wrought.¹⁸⁰

Since the sick often did not recover and the terminally ill were not healed, the faith of the Christian community wavered regarding deathbed prayers and anointing. Clergy-led promises of an unhindered journey after receiving Last Rites was less convincing. Luther would eliminate five of Peter Lombard's (1096–1150) traditional seven sacraments. He was convicted that unction was a priestly ministry to the sick, but it could not provide ultimate assurance to believers who felt unsure of salvation or clarification of whether they qualified for heaven.

¹⁷⁹ Brian C. Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 142-3.

¹⁸⁰ Martin Luther, "Sermon at the Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony: 1 Thess. 4:13-14" (1532), in *Luther's Works*, American ed., "Sermons," vol. 51, John W. Doberstien, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 235, 239-41.

In several sermons and treatises, Luther protested the false guarantee of “anointing,” insisting instead that it was the dying person’s faith, or at least the faith of a “righteous man” who might be praying for the person in decline, and not the administrations of clergy that forgave sins. In his 1519 “Sermon on Preparing to Die,” Luther described reasons that Christians can hope in the promised resurrection instead of a final rite, and he offered both practical and spiritual advice for the time of death. Along with acknowledgement of sin, he offered hope in the love of God. A dying person could identify with those who had died in faith, but not simply depend upon the supererogation of beatified saints who performed meritorious actions on their behalf. He instructed ordinary Christians to “turn [their] eyes to God”:

[S]ince everyone must depart, we must turn our eyes to God, to whom the path of death leads and directs us. . . . All must joyfully venture forth on this path. . . . Therefore, the death of the dear saints is called a new birth. . . . We should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move.¹⁸¹

Neil Leroux suggests that Luther’s “Sermon on Preparing to Die” may have been inspired by a version of the *Ars Moriendi*. While this may have been the case, Luther did not reinforce the tradition’s saint-oriented consolation; instead, his sermon spoke to the common man with a Christ-centered approach to faith at the time of death. Death need not be feared because of what Christ had done for man in the resurrection.¹⁸² Temptations at the time of death might be real, but faith could overcome doubt and terror.

¹⁸¹ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die (1519),” *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Timothy F. Lull, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 419-20. See also Luther, *Devotional Writings I*, in *LW*: 42, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 95–115.

¹⁸² Neil Leroux, *Martin Luther as a Comforter: Writings on Death and Illness* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Pub., 2007), 47.

The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Luther's 1520 treatise on sacramental theology and the Western church's traditional seven sacraments, explained that anointing the sick should not be reserved only for those who were close to death, but for those who were sick with any form of illness (Ja. 5:14-16).¹⁸³ In using James 5, Luther showed how prayers of a righteous person are effective, and any layperson administering the rite, which was not deemed a biblical sacrament, could be that faithful, righteous person.

Luther believed and testified that faith in God's promise of grace to repentant sinners should be foremost at the time of death. He wrote in *The Babylonian Captivity*:

The apostle's promise expressly declares: "The prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up, etc." See, the apostle commands us to anoint and to pray. . . that he may not die, and that it may not be extreme unction. This is proved also by the prayers used even to this day . . . because the prayers are for the recovery of the sick man, but they say, on the contrary, that the unction must be administered to none but the dying. . . . Furthermore, if this unction is a sacrament, it must necessarily be (as they say) an effective sign of that which it signifies and promises. . . . If it heals, it cannot be extreme unction.¹⁸⁴

Luther ultimately advocated for pastoral care as a replacement for the sacrament of Last Rites. Brewer notes that Luther's lengthy efforts to reform the practices of the church began in large part with a reform of the "care of souls." Luther stated plainly that his reading of *sola gratia* in Scripture had led him to recognize he was saved, not by the rituals of the church but by God's objective grace. Likewise, Luther held that every Christian was a priest who may minister to those around him (1 Pet. 2:9).¹⁸⁵ Thus, the verses from James 5 would be directed toward faith and priestly work of each believer.

¹⁸³ James 5:14-16 reads: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray. . . . The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up. . . . Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

¹⁸⁴ Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520)," *Word and Sacrament II*, in *LW*:36, Addel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 119-20.

¹⁸⁵ Brewer, *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, 150-1.

Luther concluded that the dying who believe in God's promises will find peace because of their own trust in God, his Word, and his blessings. He professed in a sermon from 1522 that the Eucharist was often administered to the dying due to fear. This, too, should be overcome with faith and the love of God, which covered all:

Yesterday we heard about the use of this holy and blessed sacrament and saw who are worthy to receive it, namely, those in whom there is the fear of death, who have timid and despairing consciences and live in fear of hell. . . . We shall now speak of the fruit of this sacrament, which is love.¹⁸⁶

When Luther and his wife decided to stay in the city of Wittenberg during the Bubonic Plague of 1527, he remained occupied with care of the sick, arguing that pastors had an ethical responsibility to do so. His pastoral counsel for those facing impending death was designed to guard against despair through reflection on the extended grace of God in Christ. His treatise "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague" reasons:

Those who are engaged in a spiritual ministry such as preachers and pastors must likewise remain steadfast before the peril of death. We have a plain command from Christ, "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but the hireling sees the wolf coming and flees" [Jn. 10:11]. For when people are dying, they most need a spiritual ministry which strengthens and comforts their consciences by word and sacrament, and that in faith overcomes death.¹⁸⁷

Unlike his predecessors from the late medieval period, Luther would insist that ethics do not earn one a place in heaven; by contrast, only God's grace offers eternal life. Personal ethics must then be lived out in response to this grace. The Christian life can be described as "an ascetic pedagogy unto God-wardness" that plays out in the midst of temptation, desire, and affliction, all of which can lure the Christian away from alignment

¹⁸⁶ Luther, "The Seventh Sermon," March 15, 1522, in *LW:51*, 95, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁷ Luther, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 480. See also Luther, *Devotional Writings II*, in *LW: 43*, Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 119–38.

with the things of God.¹⁸⁸ Living a life of holiness should reflect one's faith, serving as evidence of secure dependence on God.

Luther's convictions about deathbed ministrations led him to replace the sacraments of auricular confession to a priest with the priestly work of confessing to one another. The bedside rituals of penance and absolution were not the acts that made him alter his beliefs; instead, Luther's ultimate desire was to reaffirm the gospel message of Christ. A minister's or fellow layperson's role was to reassure the dying believer of salvation and to rehearse Christian hope through the words of Scripture. Luther ultimately but reluctantly allowed for anointing, provided it served only a sign of God's promise to heal the sick as they prayed and believed. He encouraged believers to have faith in the light of God's grace, rooted in the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and such faith would suffice that death had been overcome. Protestant bedside ministrations after Luther began to offer communion with Christ by faith as a way toward genuine assurance and hope.

Martin Bucer (1491–1551)

Theologians after Luther's reforms joined him in redefining the pastoral role for the sick. A first-generation reformer from the Continent, Martin Bucer developed a Protestant and biblically-based approach to pastoral care of dying souls.¹⁸⁹ As a pastor influenced by both Lutheran and Reformed theology, Bucer believed in the original apostolic intention for the gospel of Christ. His meeting with Luther was a "catalyst that

¹⁸⁸ David Luy, "Dying for the Last Time: Martin Luther on Christian Death," in *Christian Dying*, 136.

¹⁸⁹ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 76.

transformed his life,” and he began to see the rites of Eucharist and Unction not as sacerdotal ministrations for achieving salvation and new life, but as “meeting places or crossroads between the dying man and God.”¹⁹⁰

An exiled reformer in Strasbourg, Bucer created a blueprint for the reformation of the English church in 1551 called *De Regno Christi* (“On the Kingdom of Christ”). The book described the “waste of energy” spent by the Roman clergy for “pious concern about the dead,” and he claimed that God’s coming Kingdom would be based on the Church’s love for God and one another, as the elect would embody the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus’s resurrection.¹⁹¹ A passage from *De Regno Christi* reads:

It is, therefore, the administration and care of the eternal life of the elect of God in this world, by which the only-begotten Son of God, after sending them his gospel . . . that gathers them to himself from the world. Those so gathered he incorporates into himself and his holy Church which is his body by holy Baptism.¹⁹²

At the request of Thomas Cranmer, Bucer helped compile a revision in 1552 of the original *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549, giving a more Protestant framework to prayers and liturgy. His *Ordinal* created a new service for burials that would mark a transition from the traditional role of clergy offering a sacrifice and saying burial Mass to one of preaching the true Word of God.¹⁹³ Bucer’s perspective on pastoral care of the sick became a spiritual discipline for English reformers after the Lutheran doctrine of the

¹⁹⁰ Purves, *Pastoral Theology*, 78-9.

¹⁹¹ W. Ian P. Hazlett, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 46.

¹⁹² Martin Bucer, “*De Regno Christi*, Chapter 5,” in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, Wilhelm Pauck, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 225-6.

¹⁹³ Hazlett, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland*, 47.

sufficiency of scripture and priesthood of all believers, and he believed that a pastor or praying friend could build up the dying in Christ through repentance and hope.¹⁹⁴

Bucer's stance on faith as sufficient for establishing salvation led him to observe:

It is established that our salvation and eternal life are based on faith alone, . . . By faith, we believe Christ alone has reconciled us to the Father by his death, so that now we are his sons and heirs. . . . Christ alone has reconciled us to the Father by his death, so that we are . . . indeed joint heirs with Christ.¹⁹⁵

Following the era of the Reformation, hope for bodily resurrection and its promise of a future life with God infused the ministry of pastoral caregivers. Luther's theological message continued to ring true: "Therefore, it is clear that the soul needs only the Word of God for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone."¹⁹⁶ Bucer's claim also continued to stand, that to be resurrected, the body must be conformed to "God's headship by the power of the Spirit."¹⁹⁷ The power to overcome sin with faith in God's Word changed both pastoral care and potentially the sick person's experience of dying.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

French theologian and reformer John Calvin espoused the doctrine of bodily resurrection, while also affirming the ancient belief in immortality of the soul.¹⁹⁸ He would influence the theology of faith-based pastoral care for centuries, based on his

¹⁹⁴ Donald K. McKim and Jim West, *Martin Bucer: An Introduction to his Life and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 134.

¹⁹⁵ Martin Bucer, *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, D. F. Wright, trans., ed. (Appleford, UK: Courtney Library of Reformation Classics 4, 1972), 319-20.

¹⁹⁶ Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" (1520), in Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 109. See also, Luther, *Career of the Reformer I*, in *LW*:31.

¹⁹⁷ McKim and West, *Martin Bucer*, 138.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004), 129.

extensive commentary on the resurrection. He, like Gregory of Nazianzus, Luther, and Bucer, professed in his own descriptions the pastor as “physician of souls” who encouraged the faith of the sick. His complex work also influenced Reformed Protestants on the concept of the soul *vis à vis* the body, although it has been distorted into a kind of vague spiritualism observable today. Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, addressed the firm hope in both spiritual and bodily life after death.

Calvin advised that when believers receive Christ, they can at once embrace the resurrection, which teaches everything for the Christian life. Believers must then rely on their faith and act obediently to prepare for inevitable death, and throughout human life, prepare joyfully for the future with God. He wrote in the *Institutes*:

Next comes the resurrection from the dead. Without this what we have said so far would be incomplete. For since only weakness appears in the cross, death, and burial of Christ, faith must leap over all these things to attain its full strength. We have in his death the complete fulfillment of salvation, but through it we were reconciled to God. . . . Nevertheless, we are said to have been “born anew to a living hope,” not through his death but “through his resurrection.”¹⁹⁹

The miracle of the resurrection lay in the fact that Jesus lived and died in the same way as all men, yet he received immortality of the body and soul. Jesus’s crucifixion abolished the finality of death and extinguished the power of sin, but it was only his resurrection that restored righteousness and a Christian’s promise of unity with God. Therefore, the “shame of the cross” could bring future glory. He explains:

These words express the truth of his death and resurrection, as if it were said: he suffered the same death that men naturally die and received immortality in the same body that, in the mortal state, he had taken upon himself. Now having laid aside the mean and lowly status of mortal life and the shame of the cross, Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol. 2*, Bk. III, Ch. XVI:13, Library of Christian Classics, John T. McNeill, ed. (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1960), 520.

²⁰⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. III, Ch. XVI:14, 522.

One of Calvin's most significant contributions, however, was his perspective regarding the final resurrection of believers. This and his views of purgatory are presented in a section entitled "The Final Resurrection." Using a biblical typology well-established from Malachi 4:2, Calvin refers to Christ as "Sun of Righteousness" and describes the victory brought by Christ. The hope of believers must be focused on heaven and life with Christ rather than on the "innumerable obstacles" that oppress them.²⁰¹

"The things of heaven," stated Calvin, are moving toward a sure "renovation of the grievous and burdensome sins of man," so those baptized in the fruits of the Spirit can look to the coming of Christ as redemption. Jesus will appear, Calvin explained, in the second coming, and God's redemption supports believers while they wait until creation is restored. In the meantime, those who are transformed can learn to "soar higher" and remain assured Jesus will come in "heavenly glory, with immortality."²⁰²

Calvin attested to the fact that human bodies will "endure corruption but be raised again," and although many theologians had wrestled with the idea of the soul's immortality, Calvin believed that scripture testified to the truth that Christ's body had been restored whole and free from deterioration. Calvin explained Colossians 3:2-4 as a "mirror that describes Jesus being raised."²⁰³ The Spirit gives an "image of our own resurrection" so we do not grow weary waiting for the coming kingdom on earth.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, Bk. III, Ch. XXV:1, 5th ed., trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publishers, Paul Jones, 1844), 200.

²⁰² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, Bk. III, Ch. XXV:1, 201-2.

²⁰³ Colossians 3:2-4 reads: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

²⁰⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. III, 25:2, 203.

Paul Helm observes that Calvin's early work, *Psychopannychia* (1534, Latin, "all-night-vigil of the soul") was written against the supposed Anabaptist and "moralistic" idea that the soul was only asleep before resurrection. Calvin argued that the soul would be "conserved," in a temporary separation. Helm argues that rather than attempt a rational proof of immortality, Calvin believed man was made in God's image but subject to the creaturely nature of God's "conserving agency."²⁰⁵

Calvin addressed the coming "resurrection of the flesh" by contrasting it to the "punishment of the reprobate." Although various obstacles to the Christian life await, scripture proclaims that "there will be no end of the happiness of the elect," and the sacred custom of burying the dead was a pledge of life to follow. If untrue, the custom of burial and respect for the dead would not have remained.²⁰⁶ The resurrected body is one where the glory of God will be fully displayed, and Calvin described it thusly:

[It] is a brutish error to represent the spirit, formed after the image of God, as a fleeting breath which animates the body only during this perishable life, and to annihilate the temple of the Holy Spirit; in short, to despoil that part of us in which Divinity is eminently displayed. . . . (2 Pet. 1:14).²⁰⁷

In the century following, Protestants in England who were influenced by Calvin's reformed theology rejected Purgatory and suggested it not be a source of fear for Christians, since any separation would be temporary. Instead, one should focus on the glorious promise of Christ in the final days and the presence of the Spirit here and now.

²⁰⁵ Calvin, *Psychopannychia*, trans. Henry Beveridge, in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, 414, in Helm, 134.

²⁰⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, III: 25: I, 207.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

Tudor and Later English Protestantism

As cited above, as architect of England's break from the Catholic Church, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, compiled, designed, and partly authored the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) that helped to embed Protestantism in Tudor England and provide an uniform service of worship for England. "Order for Burial of the Dead" was original to Cranmer and emphasized a bodily resurrection, concepts that reflected the Reformation movement on the continent. Commensurate church liturgy dictated finding peace despite the sting of death and solace in God's presence. The 1552 revised wording encouraged the Christian not to look to the journey of the soul but, instead, to believe in a life to come that involves joining a risen Christ.²⁰⁸ Reformers also reframed the way to achieve salvation with peace by consigning the soul to the bosom of Abraham and not the darkness of purgatory, as espoused by the Roman Catholics of the era. Rite II *Order for Burial* in 1552 and later revisions included a committal to eternal life that could be read by lay church members:²⁰⁹

We are mortal, formed of the earth, and to earth we shall return. . . . He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through his indwelling Spirit. My body also shall rest in hope . . . of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord. . . earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.²¹⁰

Continuing as a legacy into later Protestant years, Protestant forms of pastoral care held that Christ would return for the redeemed and raise them from the dead. As reviewed previously, Reformed burial practices stressed sanctification, the believer's

²⁰⁸ "The Burial of the Dead: Rite Two," *Book of Common Prayer, 1552* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 491. The passage reads: "After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body I shall see God. I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger."

²⁰⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, 397-8.

²¹⁰ "The Burial of the Dead: Rite Two," *Book of Common Prayer, 1552*, 501.

access to God through faith, and maintaining an ongoing relationship with God through repentance and humility. These important tenets would last into the present day.

Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667)

Jeremy Taylor was a cleric during the governance of Oliver Cromwell's Protestant Commonwealth. As a prolific poetic writer, he continued to translate the *Ars Moriendi* into the Reformation period in England, although, on the mainland, the tradition had begun to fade. His *Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1651) followed the height of the Reformation by a century, but the instructive tone remained. Taylor added threads of humanism, Counter-Reformation devotion, and a pastoral approach to care.

The Anglican *Holy Dying* was intended to be a devotional book on Christian death, and Taylor's high church piety provided ways to prepare, with appropriate prayers. Reformation tenets of progressive sanctification helped believers in Taylor's era to embrace God's quest for the individual, and this appealed to the commoner in its tone of reason.²¹¹ The introduction credits the work as a "most edifying and instructive duty of Christian morality." Taylor traces the virtues that a sick man must acquire to see salvation and himself "not as a skeleton, but as an angel, at the feast," and such faith helped prevent dying with no hope.²¹² With regard to Luther's success in eliminating Extreme Unction as a mandate, Taylor discusses the lack of effectiveness of Last Rites:

Can extreme unction at the last cure what the holy sacrament of the eucharist all his life-time could not do? Can prayers for a dead man do him more good than prayers when he was alive? If all his days, the man belonged to death and the dominion of sin, and from thence could not be recovered by sermons and

²¹¹ Beaty, *The Craft of Dying*, 199-201.

²¹² Jeremy Taylor, D.D. and Chaplain in Ordinary to King Charles I, *Holy Dying* (New York: Mershon Co., 1900), 6-7.

counsels, frequent sacraments, and by confessions and absolutions . . . his extreme unction is only then of use when made by the oil that burned in his lamp.²¹³

For Taylor, God was the author and perfecter of one's gradual growth and would be faithful to bring a person to the truth. *Holy Dying* reflects the medieval tradition but adds modern hope in God's forgiveness and grace, helping Christians settle painful issues.

Post Enlightenment Period and N.T. Wright

The Reformation on the European continent had returned Christians closer to true Christian hope in a Lord who was "coming soon." Christians during the Reformation era embraced belief in bodily resurrection, a doctrine first established in scripture and solidified by the first-century church. Four overarching Reformation themes influenced pastoral care and hope for the dying: emphasis on "faith alone" over outward ministrations at death; assurance and security for the believer who had professed faith in Christ; reverence for Christ, and not a clerical system, as the object of faith; and promised resurrection to life with Christ forever.

What is considered the Modern Era of theological development (c. 1500–1900) included the Enlightenment and its focus on humanism, reason, and the strengths of the individual. Its intellectual focus would lead to our current post-Enlightenment and scientific eras. Tragically, the strong roles of medical expertise and psychological analysis, coupled with the lessening role of mystery in traditional Christian faith, have fostered a declining focus on resurrection hope and the spiritual role of the church that had sustained the faithful for two millennia. Death moved from being a communal and

²¹³ Taylor, *Holy Dying*, 19-20.

spiritual event for the individual and perhaps immediate family or loved ones to the territory of hospitals and medical staff.

Recently, N. T. Wright has purposed to refocus Christian theology toward God's putting "everything to rights" in this cosmos, and his insistence on a coming bodily resurrection dominates his writing.²¹⁴ With this theme in mind, Wright draws on I Cor. 15, Acts, and Romans 8 to show that the New Testament tells the story of God making good on his promises to correct what the fall had rearranged. For Wright, hope in the eschaton does not include "the jettisoning of physical bodies upon death;" instead, a believer's afterlife will exist in a reshaping of the cosmos, on the earth we know, affirming the goodness of creation while removing the evil that once threatened it. The former earth will not be abandoned, nor will humans completely lose their humanity; instead, God will restore human beings, simply because "they are image bearers and will be renewed the way God intended them to be."²¹⁵ As part of a movement toward trust in Christian hope, Wright's testimony has influenced Christians around the world.

In his new study, *Acts: The Coming Kingdom*, Wright argues that the resurrection proved that death did not win, but, likewise, the Pentecost event in Acts rendered death overturned by the Spirit. It announced the promise completed: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ezek. 26:36). At Pentecost, all beheld that "God's world was under new management, and this was not indiscrete, but bravely launched by Jesus."²¹⁶ The book of Acts is God's redemption story. The birth of the church restored

²¹⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 142.

²¹⁵ Wright, 153, via Mugg and Turner, "Why a Bodily Resurrection," *Journal of Analytic Theology* 5 (May 2017): 124.

²¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Lecture Series at South Main Baptist: Acts, the Coming Kingdom* (June 4, 2023).

the temple promises as fulfilled by Christ as a “launching of hope” that will last until Jesus returns, and the dawn of the Spirit shows one can anticipate a “future body enlivened by God’s spirit,” a time when all the righteous will be raised.²¹⁷

Those who care for the dying can be encouraged that the inbreaking act of God is more than a theory or a dream; it is teaching that reflects Old Testament prophecy, God’s promise to restore what Adam forfeited, and a reflection of the character of God. This research project may supply hope that because of what Jesus did in his crucifixion and resurrection, death has been replaced with victory and is not to be feared.

²¹⁷ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 44-5.

CHAPTER 3:

The Intervention: Reasons, Methods, and Measurements

Introduction

This church-based project explores the effectiveness of a small group study in shepherding family members through seasons of grief. In particular, the intervention course was geared to caregivers during the adjustment phase of impending death. The seven-week course included an introductory session and an optional eighth follow-up session. Emphasis was placed on the needs of the individuals who chose to join, and the course design was tailored to the situations of each participant. Eight church members gathered each Sunday to discuss the curriculum entitled “Christian Hope when Life is Hard: A Course for Caregivers of the Terminally Ill.” The curriculum was based on five passages of scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 4-5, John 11:1-54, and Luke 23:39–24:31. Corresponding theological writings strengthened the meaning of the passages. Using qualitative research methods, the influence and effectiveness of group meetings was tested to determine if such fellowship resulted in a strengthened hope in caring for those who die.

Description of the Intervention

The overall intervention was comprised of one to one-and-a-half hour sessions that allowed ample time for discussion, reflection, and note-taking in a provided course binder. Eight participants were given opportunities to reflect on personal concerns, the biblical witness for resurrection hope, and theological reflections as they pertained to

loved ones in process of dying. Preliminary assessment of group members' concerns was made through course interviews and a two-page questionnaire. Final assessment was reached through post-course interviews and a second questionnaire. For each modality, answers were compared to establish course effectiveness and measurable change in attitude toward the process of dying.

The first step was to submit the project to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Baylor University. The research was deemed "non-human subjects research" and, therefore, not requiring IRB approval. Work began on crafting a syllabus and project that would reflect research, relevant scriptures, questions raised during the process of exegesis, and limitations for future research and re-presentation.

Initially, I met with Dr. Steve Wells, Senior Pastor of South Main Baptist, Houston, Texas and Associate Pastor Dr. Matt Walton to discuss intentions for a group to satisfy requirements for the Truett Seminary Doctorate of Ministry degree. In the month preceding the course, I announced the course in a worship service and offered the concluding prayer. This established name recognition and explanation of purpose. A summary of the course ran in the South Main newsletter:

Christian Hope when Life is Hard - A Study Group at South Main
Sundays, July 24–August 28, 11:15 a.m. in the Parlor

Are you someone who has experienced, or is currently navigating, a difficult season as a loved one declines? Have you wondered how our Christian faith can provide hope in the midst of impending death? If so, please join us for this study. We will discuss how families can find peace in the hope of the resurrection of Christ. Biblical and theological texts, such as writings by C.S. Lewis and N.T. Wright will be part of course readings. The group will serve as a Doctor of Ministry research project for Sally Lombardo and Truett Seminary, Baylor University. Illness and death are difficult topics, but that is exactly why the Church is the right place to provide help to families of loved ones on their final journey in this life. For more information, contact Sally at 409-781-2841 or shlombardo@gmail.com

The syllabus created for *Christian Hope when Life is Hard* is found in the Appendix. Binders were given to each participant that contained the syllabus and group list. Participants were guided in a prayer, followed by a moment of quiet and reflection.

The first session was informational, and an initial questionnaire was distributed that introduced the concept of “Finding Hope in the Resurrection of Christ.” Three basic research questions were paraphrased for the group, so all would know the course’s intent. Meetings were all the same format and concluded with a reading over the week’s content and a participant-led prayer. The eighth session included final questionnaires and discussion over suffering, God’s silence, and finding strength to move forward. After the course ended, individual phone or personal visit interviews were conducted to examine aspects of the course, with assessments compiled in chapter four.

Research Questions

The standard for whether a course or group is successful is measured by the change in group participants rather than by any external measurement of factors. This study attempted to discover the effectiveness of group class on Christian dying designed to support caregivers of the terminally ill. The data remained qualitatively separate from any measurement or expectation in group responses. The research questions, both before and after the intervention, were the following:

- 1) How does participation in a church-based preparation course influence a person’s confidence in resurrection hope when caring for a loved one?
- 2) How does participation in a scripture-based grief preparation program impact a person’s ability to care for a dying loved one, facilitating a shift in role?
- 3) How does a grief preparation program steeped in scripture and theological readings help participants accept their own mortality and the dilemma of suffering and death for a person they love?

The purpose of the research was to determine if a church-based course can measurably help prepare Christian families for the time when life on earth is finished. The intention of my research and group study was to examine how caregivers can be better equipped through a lens of Christian hope. Finding peace, participants can see death as the fulfillment of a life well-lived.

Description of the Method

The method employed by this research was qualitative rather than quantitative, and it involved comparison of responses and emotional awareness of spiritual truth. In this context, qualitative research is defined by John Creswell as “a means for exploring and understanding the true meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a societal or human problem.”¹ In this project’s context, there were subjective, multiple realities to be assessed rather than measurements of concrete data from an objective source.

The nature and scope of evaluations, which included the participants’ reactions and degree of benefit from the handouts and scriptures, were not values that could be measured in numbers or true/false questionnaires; therefore, the questionnaires were subjective in nature and required short answers. Evaluating the degree of benefit gained by the group did not involve calculations but post-course assessments of the change in perspective. According to Creswell, this type of data is suitable for a qualitative method of research.² Private phone and in-person discussions added to the pertinent information

¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2022), 180.

² Creswell, *Research Design*, 182. This information was gathered in Creswell’s chapter on Qualitative data collecting. Creswell elaborates on the need for measurement modalities that allow for variance rather than concrete data.

from questionnaires and in-course discussion. I purposed to stay centered on the biblical and theological material on resurrection hope to avoid having “group therapy.”

Role of the Researcher

As a Doctor of Ministry candidate and long-time member of South Main Baptist, I chose to approach the church in hopes that a group would be welcomed. All participants were South Main members. In the intervention, my role was to speak with each prospective group member and explain the course, study the pre-course questionnaires, teach the curriculum, conduct post-session interviews, analyze the data, and thus compose chapter four interpreting the responses.

Materials developed for the study included the course syllabus and readings, and pre- and post-class questionnaires. The syllabus included the Informed Consent Document, IRB determination for the project, and questionnaires. Post-class interviews and the extensive readings are not included in the appendix due to length.

Entering the Field and Obtaining the Sample

The location for the group was chosen with the help of Dr. Steve Wells, Senior Pastor at South Main Baptist, and Dr. Matt Walton, Minister for Discipleship. After sharing the names of those who had responded to the initial bulletin announcement, Walton suggested the large parlor for our setting. Research indicated that a natural place for the setting of an intervention group might lead to good discussion over sensitive or painful issues. The room had a comfortable, welcoming feeling.

The proposed intervention group was first introduced at monthly meetings of the Deacon's and Discipleship committees. During the six weeks before the course began,

the *SMBC Connections* newsletter published the description and nature of the class, and congregants were encouraged to respond by email. Participants were also gathered by personal invitation, bulletin postings, and announcement in worship two weeks ahead.

Members were chosen based on care for a dying loved one or past experience with a terminally ill member of the household. Two responders indicated that they needed the course so they would not, as one commented, “repeat what happened in an earlier season of family dying.” Nine participants gathered on the first meeting, with most attending each subsequent Sunday. Members were immediately made aware of the need to sign an informed consent document, as recommended by Baylor University IRB.

Data Collection: July to September 2022

I was the primary data collector in the intervention project, using two main forms of collection: personal interviews and pre- and post-class questionnaires that also gave space for reflection in paragraph form. Getting to know the group members in a unique way seemed vital due to the loss experienced by each. In individual discussions before the first class, the course content was explained and files were created for each member.

Interviews and questionnaires were open-ended and of a deep and probing nature that prompted members honestly to explore their own relationship with God. Interviews were recorded and transcribed with names altered on documentation. Detailed notes were taken during the class time and during phone conversations. The *Research Questions* section acted as a guide so my intentions could be communicated: 1) What is your sense of peace with God as you face the loss of a loved one? 2) Do you think participation in a course on in-process grief can improve your quality of care? 3) Might participation in this grief preparation program change your commitment to Christian hope?

Following the returned questionnaires, the group proceeded with weekly discussions over scripture passages and theological commentary. Care was taken to navigate the dynamics of the group carefully and ensure that all were given space to express thoughts and feel heard. Weekly readings and syllabus pages were supplied by email. Phone or in-person meetings followed, and final questions mirrored the pre-course questionnaire. Data was collected and compiled for later assessment, and final questionnaires were collected within three weeks of the last session and evaluated for effectiveness and application to the project goal.

Data Reporting/Analysis

In keeping with initial research questions, a “sense of peace” in the participants was measured by requests to describe the kind of peace participants had discovered and how change was seen and manifested in their lives. Final supplementary questions were worded differently from initial questions based on the seven weeks of class content:

- 1) What theological resources and scriptures were most helpful to caregivers as they processed an impending death?
- 2) Was there a measurable difference between the comfort gained by those who walk with loved ones with dementia and those who care for the physically ill?

Questions were crafted so the participants would answer in a personal, applicable way rather than just stating a simple “yes” or “no.” After collecting the prior survey questions, follow-up questions, audio recordings, and any notes from the course weeks, the answers were collated in spreadsheet form. Each person was then contacted for a personal interview, either in-person or by phone, and stories were assembled.

Making a spreadsheet allowed for graphic visibility of the level of change and analysis for the effectiveness of the course, and this seemed the best way to study

qualitative responses fairly. Speaking in person before and after the sessions allowed for trust to be established and enabled the measuring of effectiveness through body language, tone, and overall engagement. Participants thoughtfully completed the surveys.

The group was not a unit that lent itself to an analytic induction method or coding. Additionally, this research did not benefit from the use of indexes or tables, nor did it allow for a control group and an experimental one. It was unrealistic to provide a course on “caregiving for the dying” to anyone not dealing with death. As recommended by Creswell, inductive results were reported in narrative form rather than using a scientific report with tables or graphs.³ Responses were examined to reveal themes and areas of discussion that might act as triggers of painful memories. Members’ preferences for different scriptures and theologians were noted with trends compiled in chapter four.

Validity and Reliability

Given the subjective nature of a discussion group such as this, it was purposed to provide evidence that results were reliable and valid. To ensure this, effort was made to encourage respectful responses and allow time for each person to share. I was aware of my own desire that the group share openly and embrace the idea of support groups for caregivers of the dying. This desire admittedly created the potential for what Creswell terms “researcher bias,” or hope that the individuals or group who are part of an intervention will be changed for the better. Given this bias, it is imperative that the researcher be honest in reporting results.⁴ Thus, an anticipatory desire that participants

³ Creswell, *Research Design*, 200.

⁴ Ibid., 191.

would engage with the course and find encouragement in the readings and dialogue was noted. Using an analytic method of data analysis also helped guard against personal bias.

Since data was collected from three sources—interviews, dialogue in the group, and questionnaires—participants were asked if they understood the comments and specific responses. Post-course debriefing took place with the associate pastor, Matt Walton. Methods of assessment were discussed with a Truett seminary graduate.

In assessment of the group responses, it is my belief that conclusions were reliable and valid. The group was asked if they felt affirmed and supported overall, and the question was posed about most helpful course modules. Honest responses were requested regarding the efficacy of all modes. Three group participants were most helpful, three were somewhat helpful, and two were reluctant to reveal their estimation of the course. One member declined to comment due to low attendance. South Main's pastoral staff encouraged the research, insisting that, even if the intervention did not help all people equally, it was still a valuable project that offered information about the validity of caring for people in seasons of loss.

Ethical Issues

Discussion groups can place members at risk for psychological, social, or legal harm, and this needed to be addressed and explained. After this step, a document was prepared and distributed to each member individually for obtaining consent. The nine signatures were secured and the consent forms were placed in the folder for each class member. During the weeks of the course, effort was made to ensure the room was private and comfortable, and water, coffee, and snacks were offered at the sideboard.

In the first session, the initial questionnaire was distributed that detailed research objectives and the intention to collect data. It was explained that each person would have a folder for notes on responses and the signed consents and returned questionnaires, but no names would be mentioned to others. Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used for each participant in any writing submitted to Truett Seminary.

The following precautions were taken: 1) The forms included explanations of discussion and the nature of course content, 2) It was made clear that participants could miss a class if needed, since the course was over the summer, 3) It was explained that any data collected was kept in folders at my home and would not be available to anyone else, and 4) Readings were for encouragement and education and not mandatory. Interestingly, findings revealed that members greatly enjoyed the reading selections. One participant commented: "I have been at this church for seventy years, and I have never read a page of Martin Luther. Now I have a whole Sermon now that I can read when I need some wisdom!" A theology on "dying well" emerged as the most appealing part of the course.

Conclusion

The season of caregiving for the dying can be a lonely, challenging time. Even lifelong Christians struggle with issues of theodicy and the pain of suffering, and families are often left to struggle on their own with mortality. Church-goers may feel challenged to find hope in the resurrection promise of Christ, even when it has been preached and taught. Many families lack the tools to help them care for their loved ones and navigate life during seasons of death. Often a dying person may not admit that he/she needs spiritual support, and families are left to their own efforts to bring this to light and continue in the hope and promise of Christian life.

Pastoral care for the dying is essential during such times. Denial of death is common in contemporary culture, where death has become a medicalized process normally removed from the church. The hope of this researcher in offering the modality of a small support group was that the material would minister to church members who care for the dying and struggle with guilt, loneliness, and sorrow. Resulting evidence of qualitative change and honest testimony from the group led this researcher to conclude that learning about the power of resurrection hope when all seems lost can change the lives and practices of Christian families, especially as they care for dying loved ones.

CHAPTER 4:

Statement of Findings from the Project

Qualitative Change in Attitude towards Resurrection Hope

This project proposed a theory that if church members engaged in a group course on resurrection hope during a time when they were caring for a loved one in decline, they would develop two coping skills: 1) a keener awareness of the role of a Christian caregiver in the process of accompanying a friend or family member toward death, and 2) a greater sense of peace with God about human mortality and his love for humanity in spite of pain and sorrow. The purpose of this project was to test the theory's reliability.

Participants were chosen through careful research and consultation with pastoral staff in order to identify eight to ten church members dealing with loss and in-process grief. The search took several months, as it involved recommendations from the pastor and staff as well as phone calls or meetings over coffee with each person.

Description of the Group

The course had nine participants who agreed to complete sample questionnaires pre-and post-course. The first survey was provided at a personal interview before the course began and was collected on the first day of the course. The age range of participants varied between forty-five and seventy, and each participant was caring, or had recently cared for, a family member in decline towards death. The group consisted of three white men over 60, three Latino women between 30 and 60, and three white women

over 50. This is a relevant detail, since religiosity and grieving rituals vary by ethnicity. This will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

Two participants were coping with deep grief following an untimely death, having left many issues of faith unresolved. Each carried guilt over not offering Christian hope and counsel when it could have been helpful. Despite age and situational differences, the group bonded very well over their shared concerns and the experience of accompanying a loved one on his or her final journey. Regarding the group description, two issues should be mentioned:

1) Since the course had only nine participants, the sample was somewhat small to confidently state statistical significance about the degree of effectiveness of a program such as this; however, the pastor was pleased with the turnout and the response surveys, and he hopes to offer the course on a regular basis.

2) The intervention context of South Main Baptist, a downtown Houston church, might reflect a certain demographic that would relate to both the responsibilities and actual experience of death and dying in a manner that others from less privileged demographics might not report. For instance, as a hospital chaplain, I often see families who deal with death in a detached way, as if they are more accustomed to unexpected tragedy. In these instances, prayer and the presence of a pastor have seemed to be all the family needs to 'let go' of the dying loved one. This was not the case at South Main, where losing a family member was a rarer and a more unanticipated challenge.

In this chapter, I will acknowledge as part of any specific data collection that my findings may not be comparable to those of other congregations in different economic and social settings. It is difficult to obtain a representative sample in a project of this size,

and such projects are of necessity contextualized to the specific congregations within which they are conducted. This is the nature of church-based courses.

Each of the questions in my pre-course interview related directly to the intention I had set for my course goals: changing a caregiver's level of confidence in sharing hope in Christ and living in view of that hope while accompanying someone who is dying. In short, I composed each of the eight sessions to communicate fresh understanding of the resurrection and gain of competence in a Christian approach to caregiving. Anticipated outcomes acted as a guide for the overall effectiveness of the course and would either validate or call into question the material used. It was my belief that the message of resurrection hope is so powerful that the caregiving work of group participants would be transformed over the eight weeks of the course.

Research Questions

The following research questions formed a basis for the ensuing interview questions that were distributed before and after the 8-week course. Primary research questions guided the formation of my course syllabus, and from these would emerge the sub-questions that were asked in the pre-course survey. I posed similar questions respectively before and after the intervention group. Additionally, observations evolved during the study, and these are listed under Supplemental Findings.

Primary Research Questions:

- 1) How does participation in a church-based preparation course influence a person's sense of confidence in resurrection hope when caring for a loved one in decline?
- 2) How does participation in a scripture-based grief preparation program impact a person's ability to care for a dying loved one, facilitating a crucial shift in role?

- 3) How does a grief preparation program steeped in scripture and theological readings help participants accept their own mortality and the dilemma of suffering and death for a person they love?

Summary of Inquiries in Follow-Up Surveys:

- 1) What scriptures that were studied on resurrection hope were most helpful to caregivers as they companioned a love one in decline? What theological readings were most insightful?
- 2) What was the impact of the 8-week training for the group with regard to attitudes toward forgiveness, reconciliation, caregiving, and letting go?
- 3) How would each caregiver describe his or her own relationship with God after studying the scriptures and theological readings? Is there a greater sense of peace?

I will present my findings in three sections: 1) Initial findings from the pre-intervention assessment sheets; 2) Primary findings given the post-intervention assessment and interviews; and 3) Secondary and unexpected findings given the particularities of each participant's unique situation. Although these were collated, I evaluate them below in paragraphs verbatim dialogue. In each case, I use direct quotes, but the names of the nine group members are changed for confidentiality.¹

Initial Findings from the Pre-Intervention Assessment

Finding 1: The majority of the participants (9 total) who were caring for a loved one near death had not had the experience before and felt inadequate to cope with death or devise effective ways to communicate resurrection hope to a loved one, for those having experienced prior church teaching on the gospel.

¹ All participants were members of South Main, and, for purposes of this study, included the following: Andrew, Kristen, Marianne, Sharon, Kyle, Kenneth, Susanna, Anne, and Gail. These are pseudonyms as recorded in the following sections.

I asked the following initial questions the first day to help each group member assess his or her degree of comfort with the task of caring for a loved one: 1) What is your experience with caring for someone near death, and how have you coped with death before? 2) If you feel confident, how do you communicate Christian hope?

All participants came to the group with some Christian framework that supported them in caregiving and communicating God's love. Three participants (Andrew, Kristen, Marianne) expressed a feeling of confidence about communicating Christian hope, and six (Sharon, Kenneth, Kyle, Susanna, Anne, and Gail) confessed they were often at a loss about what to say or do in their particular crisis situation. For these, there was a vague awareness of how to help the dying person seeking assurance that heaven awaited.

For the first group of three, there was a sense of confidence in the resurrection message, coupled with some trepidation. Marianne shared: "I have always felt that the message of Christ had to undergird me, or I wouldn't have much to give. I believe in heaven and the resurrection, but I'm not sure I communicate this well. I'm here to learn."

A lack of spiritual formation in resurrection hope was evident in the responses of the latter group, such as "I don't usually talk about heaven, but I cope by taking over all the responsibilities and staying busy. I was mostly overwhelmed and confused" (Kenneth); "I try to be an encourager for my son who is mentally ill, but sometimes it's hard and I have to tell him not to believe lies. Honestly, I wish I knew better what to say to contradict those lies" (Sharon); "I didn't know what to say when my mother was dying, and the best I could do was be there for her, at her side. I guess I've come to this group so I will know better what to say next time, or know what to think at my own time of death" (Gail).

Finding 2: Almost all participants looked to church members and church-related activities for hope and strength. Some admitted to feeling God's presence with the suffering person in their journey of caregiving, while others confessed that they did not always sense God as there.

I asked the following questions in order to see how each person sensed God's presence in the midst of a situation of suffering: 1) Where have you sought and found support in your journey of caring for your loved one—church, friends, or personal spiritual practices? 2) How do you witness God being present with you in this journey?

I evaluated the questions based on the level of detail in the participants' responses and the role faith seemed to play from their responses. Six group members (Susanna, Andrew, Kyle, Kristen, Marianne, and Kenneth) expressed their awareness of God's love and presence, while three (Sharon, Gail, and Anne) said they did not see God at work and felt alone. Responses about God making himself apparent had a hopeful, positive tone: "If I know that my loved one who is suffering has a deeply-rooted faith, I absolutely feel God's presence deeply and all around me. When it's the opposite, I grieve for the person who doesn't see God at work, and then I only feel God in my mind but not my heart" (Susanna); "While I feel disappointment and hurt with my wife's dementia, I feel God's presence leading me to resources and opportunities to better deal with sadness. I feel his love and share this hope with my wife when we share joy. He opens my heart to understand others' suffering, and I know this is from God" (Andrew).

Among those who did not sense God's abiding presence in the journey of caregiving, responses were sad and almost desperate. Sharon added: "While I know God

is there, I worry about my son and do not have a sense of peace. He is very debilitated, and I want to say that I have faith God can heal him, I really don't."

Responses about church resources for caregivers of the dying were varied, but most (6) relied on some form of support. Their sources were similar: Sunday school, Bible study offerings, worship music, and being with family while in the church body. Andrew wrote: "I find great support in my Sunday School community for my deep needs. Greg, the associate pastor, has provided resources through Houston community Alzheimer's groups and Amazing Place." Kristen wrote: "I find support in my belief in God, worship services, journaling, my seminary journey, and leading grief groups."

On the other hand, Anne and Gail were unsure about how to access church support: "I used to feel help from the church, but I haven't come as often, and as I struggle with personal issues like depression and immobility. I am reluctant to be honest, especially now as I'm coping with my mother's decline" (Gail). Anne added to this sentiment: "I recently started to attend since my father became ill, and I don't know people well. I feel alone a lot of the time."

Interestingly, no one mentioned finding comfort in knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus and the hope it provides, or at least they hesitated to mention this in their responses. The intervention course argued that the resurrection should infuse believers with hope, helping them cope with death and provide for others, yet the group seemed somehow unaware that they could communicate this fundamental Christian truth to the dying. It is my belief that Christians should live with resurrection hope on a daily basis.

Finding 3: The group was divided before the intervention on whether they had a sense of peace about their own morality or the best way to communicate this to their loved one. They were unsure how to share about this with the group.

To address the caregiver's sense of calm in the face of death and hope in the bodily resurrection as promised in Scripture, I asked the following: 1) Explain how you feel a sense of peace, or do you have peace about your own mortality? About the final resting place of your loved one? 2) How does having hope in the resurrection of Christ help heal relationships and reconcile with a loved one who is dying?

As noted, the group was evenly divided on the issue of having peace with God in the end. Four members (Andrew, Kenneth, Marianne, Susanna) all described having either "absolute peace," "great peace from prayer and other spiritual resources," or "peace with my family and God." The other four members felt unsure about whether they or the people they loved are 'heaven-bound.' Kyle shared: "I feel some peace, some of the time, but dealing with the pandemic and economic burden is hard. I wonder often if my mom died as a believer." Sharon said: "No, not quite a sense of peace. I know my son is in God's hands, but I worry about suicide, and I don't feel security about what happens when we die." Kristen responded,

In some ways, I feel peace, but others, most assuredly not. I've gone to church all my life, but I don't really know where we go when we die. Facing first the loss of a spouse and, one day, my own mortality makes me scared and unsure of my faith sometimes.

In answer to the second question, some of the group expressed a positive response about hope for reconciliation with a loved one. Five out of eight responded that they knew hope in the resurrection of Christ should inspire them to reconcile, but they were often unsure about where to begin with someone who had hurt or abandoned them.

Susanna answered, “I needed to forgive my ex-husband before he died, but I certainly was not willing to reconcile with him;” Kyle shared, “I need to forgive my mom, myself, my wife, and my own daughters. I wish I had reconciled with my mom before she died.”

The three remaining participants did not feel the need to reconcile or heal old wounds with anyone during this crisis time. Kenneth shared honestly with the group:

I am blessed to not have broken relationships of any consequence, but if I did, I would think that the fact that Jesus says, ‘I am the resurrection and the life,’ means that we can have resurrection life now, in our relationships. I do pray that my 101-year-old mother who does not know the Lord will find peace in a promise of salvation before she dies. As for my wife, I take comfort that she is saved.”

Primary Findings from Post-Intervention Assessments

Primary Finding 1: Seven of the eight participants in the South Main intervention group experienced significant shift in their confidence level with regard to understanding and sharing resurrection hope to loved ones in decline.

The goal of this intervention project was to measure the effectiveness of a church-based group for caregivers in-process with grief who are accompanying a loved one in decline. The purpose was to offer scripture and reading material on the subject that Paul narrated so extensively—grieving with hope. He wrote: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). The purpose was to guide participants toward this hope as they learn to trust in God’s resurrection power. Chapter 3 described the research methods used to evaluate the holistic nature of behavioral and attitudinal research. Evaluations must of necessity measure emotional changes and show a participant’s firm grasp of concepts that could lead to a shift in confidence and ability.

In the case of Finding 1, when the pre-course interview and post-course questionnaire were compared, there was evidence of a measurable shift in the attitude of most group members toward Christian hope. Answers testified to a renewed desire to share biblical evidence for Jesus's promise of a resurrection in bodily form. For most participants, this was based on the weekly hour-long discussions and the materials read. In general, the group described a process of growth towards security in Christ.

The central questions addressed were the following: 1) What support, if any, did you find in the Bible passages that we read? 2) Which passages, in particular, were the most important? Most of the members of the group answered positively about learning from the passages, confessing that they felt nurtured by God in their efforts to understand more about his promise. Answers showed a greater depth of understanding Jesus. Some of the answers that showed a shift in attitude and a fresh understanding of resurrection hope were by those who seemed to have more experience with grief. Kyle shared:

I found myself greatly affirmed, even with reading difficult passages, in that we as believers are encouraged to live in the understanding that there is much more to life than what we experience with our five senses, and how we feel about those sources of input. This feeling of affirmation gives me hope. My favorite passage was 1 Thessalonians 4, where we read about grieving as those who have hope.

Andrew added to this response, saying:

Something I saw in the readings is that 'hope' was couched as a statement of absolute truth and not just a 'maybe.' I don't think I've seen it like that before. Hope was just as strong a word as faith in our Scripture passages. I suppose I got this from the readings in 1 Corinthians 15. Our hope is not an option.

Susanna wrote about the tragic experience that surprised her:

I suppose in our group I especially liked reading Psalms 139 and realizing we are always in God's grasp. The words expressed so many thousands of years ago reflected all the pain and loss my daughter and I are experiencing. In our readings, I found faith, strength, reassurance that mirrored what we were discussing in

group about God's grace and providence. I really liked 2 Corinthians 7 about our treasure in clay jars, and that we are not "struck down."

Kristen and Kenneth appreciated the variety of Bible readings they were offered, saying how each one spoke to them about what the resurrection truly meant, and how it could make a difference in their caregiving. Kristen noted:

It's so important that we have focused on many different types of Scripture because these mirror the myriad of needs that are part of living through the crisis of death with someone you love. I found encouragement and peace in the writings of Paul, but also a combination of feelings—anger, sadness, guilt that I did not do enough for Bruce, but also a release to God. I particularly loved the day we shared about God "working all things together for good" and I feel stronger about sharing this with people who are sick or dying.

Kenneth added:

The Bible passages helped me to deepen my own personal relationship with God. I found assurance and hope in the passages, especially the story of Martha and her understanding of Jesus as the "resurrection and the life" from John 11. Peter and John realized that Jesus was not only given the glory of God for his divine purpose; he *was* and *is* the glory that is being revealed to mankind.

Two of the group members shared ambivalence with the concept of resurrection hope.

Marianne confessed:

I found some support from the Bible passages we read together, but I received more from our discussion and what each person learned from the readings. It helped me to see that the resurrection was described in so many places in the Bible. I need to decide where I stand.

Another hesitant group member noted, "I found the readings informative, but the best part was the way you lead us in a ritual of reading the Scripture followed by silence.

It was *in the silence that I felt God was 'explaining' the reading*" (Sharon, italics mine).

Primary Finding 2: Most participants gained significant insight into their understanding of grief and how to process sorrow and disappointment in light of these readings.

The intervention used theological readings in which Christian hope was presented in different formats from various theologians, both past and present. The following post-survey questions were used to address the theological readings: 1) What insights did you gain from our various readings, including past and present theology about pain and suffering? 2) Which were the most transformative?

Six members responded that they gained new insight from the readings and reported a shift in attitude toward how to handle feelings of grief or abandonment by their dying loved one. Marianne answered:

What struck me most with the different readings, especially the patristic theologians and church fathers, was how the very things I am feeling now were also experienced by people several hundred years ago. Throughout the time Johnny was sick, I felt alone because his illness was unique, but through our readings and sitting alongside others, I saw that pain and suffering doesn't have to be the same, but God's answer is the same.

Kyle shared that the readings broadened his understanding about how the resurrection impacts us daily and can be described in many different ways: "I was able to broaden my understanding of grief and the way it keeps us from growing." A reading that really helped him was the John Claypool memoir, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Kyle said he could identify with Claypool's pain and honesty. He shared:

The readings taught me that suffering and death can be debilitating if we allow ourselves to only focus on those things and not on the hope we have in Christ. But if we allow ourselves to bring our sorrows to God for greater understanding, they can become blessings. We have to seek God in order to be faithful to our loved ones, and that means sharing about the truth of Jesus's ability to restore all things.

Kristen shared a renewed interest in ways to care for and offer hope to the dying. After losing her young husband, she was both shocked and alone, wishing she had done more, said more, encouraged him more about his coming life with God. She explained through tears one day the guilt she had carried around. In her post-course survey, she reported:

Attitudes about death have changed over the centuries, but dying well can be encouraged if we know what Jesus promised us. I liked hearing the experiences of the writers, and everything was helpful to me. My favorite take away was the “*Every Moment Holy*” text. It showed the presence of God when people are overwhelmed with the mundane things. I give over control to Him instead of hoping I can control the moment my life ends.

Two members confessed that being able to identify with the writers brought the readings to life. Andrew confessed that his shock in letting go of his wife of 45 years, who is now in a memory care unit, was made easier by the readings that explored death and suffering. He considered the *Ars Moriendi* book reading helpful in showing how people even in the earlier eras needed clergy to help them with the uncertainty of death. Andrew wrote:

The pain of death is really so bad that we need help. Pain is when you recognize and then over-react to injury, like when I first heard the news of my wife’s Alzheimer’s. Suffering on the other hand is a state of being immersed in and consumed by the pain, or in a state of prolonged acceptance with no hope of escape. A Christian shouldn’t get lost in his pain. When we fear the future, that can produce a state of suffering without any injury at all. I’ve heard it said, “Misery of uncertainty is worse than the certainty of misery.”

Susanna is a divorced spouse who is now witnessing her ex-husband’s decline with terminal illness. She added that she liked some of the contemporary readings on hope, especially Wright’s excerpts about the hope we have for reuniting in the resurrection:

The readings reaffirmed what I have learned as my ex-husband has been dying and I’m helping my children cope. Pain and suffering are met by everyone and through all time. Being a Christian means that we see death through new eyes, as a passage to meet Christ. Because I am divorced, his death means something different to me, but I believe one of our roles as Christians is to have compassion.

Only Gail and Sharon admitted to not growing much with the readings and wishing the group had undertaken more discussion instead. Sharon wrote:

While I learned about the role of the church in Christian dying through the readings like *Ars Moriendi* and the Martin Luther sermons, I mostly learned that pain is real to everyone over all time. I guess that suffering is a choice. The readings didn’t give me complete hope, but our group did. I liked hearing about

how other people reacted to the readings and would have preferred to have a prayer partner during the week.

Gail added: “The readings were too deep for me, and I got lost in some of the CS Lewis writing. My mother who is dying now has been such a part of my life, and I am so sad.”

Primary Finding 3: More than half of the group embraced a renewed sense of commitment and call to the caregiving of their loved one, produced by the examples of caregiving.

Questions asked in the post-course interviews addressing renewed commitment were as follows: 1) Do you sense a shift in role taking place over the past eight weeks, and what has initiated this for you? 2) Have any old wounds healed in your family, or between you and your loved one during this time? Five group members expressed their renewed sense of role and commitment, and the other three expressed a desire to embrace renewed hope, promising to re-read some of the material and pray for God’s direction. Some felt guilty about their caregiving and a sense of hopelessness colored their answers. Kyle shared about his previous role:

I still wrestle with a depth of grief I do not really understand, but I want to be more than just a person on mom’s “team.” I know we are called to participate in God’s intentional cycle of creation and rebirth in life, but I have resisted that out of fear of losing her. I feel encouraged to live the life granted to me with the best sense of hope that I can bring to bear for my mother’s sake.

Kenneth wrote that “reading and discussing human mortality has helped me embrace the role of caregiver for my wife with Alzheimer’s. Now I can consider how God has loved me and given me an example for faithful living, so I can better care for Lynn.” Another participant caring for his wife with dementia, Andrew, expressed a similar renewed sense of purpose after studying and sharing about Christian hope:

For seven years, I have been caring for my wife with severe dementia. I sold the 'dream home' we built and sold a property in my family for 90 years. I've been grieving this and feeling so much self-pity and guilt. After sharing my struggles with the people in our group and reading what you gave us, however, I am letting these roles change and letting go in a different way. Strangely, the sermon from Martin Luther helped me see death as part of life. Maybe the core paths of our lives are set and little can be done to change this; age and health are what they are. But instead of steeling myself against the hurt and pain, I see what God is providing to 'carry me,' as you've said. I don't feel sorry for myself now.

Marianne described the hope she sees in a new role, "caregiving without fear:"

During the beginning of Johnny's illness, God surrounded us with love, but I still felt scared and unsure of what to say or do. Over these eight weeks, I've seen that what people say isn't as important as their presence and willingness to 'be with us,' and I realized this is what God is doing for us. I am learning that with hope in Christ's ability to resurrect old, dead things, he can heal old wounds and help them become former pain, almost forgotten.

Conclusion for Primary Post-Intervention Findings

Evaluating overall transformation in the group members' caregiving roles and their ability to share about resurrection hope was based on three criteria: 1) a change in attitude that could be correlated with specific Bible passages and theological writings, 2) a change in behavior toward a loved one based on each participant's answer to the question of how they felt about a shift in role with your loved one in decline, and 3) a shift in a participant's understanding of his or her own mortality in light of God's redemption. Every group member shared about understanding pain and suffering in a new way and felt newly enlivened by God's grace and his purposes for the bodily resurrection. One participant seemed to speak for the group: "Each truth I learned caused a shift in appreciation of my caregiving role. God has covered me with his Word and the hope in resurrection of all things."

Several group members gave evidence for qualitative change in how often they thought about the hope we have through Christ while they were caring for their loved one in decline. The youngest member, Anne, wrote: “I never thought to mention heaven or God’s plan to my dad, but now I say it all the time—Dad, remember what Jesus did for you! He is waiting for you, and one day we will be together again.”

The group members shared openly about their own fears of mortality, both for their family member and for themselves. The consensus was that we talked about death so much in the course that it became less fearful, and less of a subject to be avoided. One of the women shared: “I didn’t know that Paul talked about death and the after-life so much in his letters! When I read all those scriptures together, I realized that God has told us about what is coming, and we don’t need to be afraid.”

Secondary findings in my context were unanticipated types of resistance to the study that resulted in less gain from the materials or a seeming inability or desire not to change. In short, I saw this as a resistance to embracing firm belief in resurrection hope and the peace it offers to Christians daily. The findings will prove helpful in the future.

Secondary Finding 1: Some caregivers were reluctant to be transparent.

The nature of a small study group on in-process grief is that it involves intimate sharing about death or letting go of loved ones. Three group members felt the setting was too vulnerable and revealing, or that it was “too much” to take on the pain of others. Recommendations varied for any group going forward. Andrew responded to the question about healing old wounds during an “in-process grief” session:

I could not read a lot of the material because I don’t want to address my self-inflicted wounds (especially guilt) or the indignation of wounds afflicted by others, even my dying wife. Also, the effectiveness of a group is subject to the pain of the individuals.

Gail wrote:

Talking about death, especially to a person who is dying, is really hard. It's my biggest caregiving challenge. I found that even with all the help you gave us, I am not much better, and I still feel embarrassed about my skills. What I learned is that I have to allow myself space to express all my feelings.

Secondary Finding 2: Even though all participants struggled with the purpose of suffering, there was a marked difference in those caring for cancer patients and those dealing with Alzheimer's.

Marianne shared her sentiments about her husband who has cancer:

I am super interested in the subject of whether God is an active or inactive participant in our lives during these crisis times. It is hard to reconcile what we call 'good outcomes' with the bad outcomes that are also supposed to be part of God's will for us. When I heard you say in our readings that it is not always our fault, I felt relieved. Reading all of this made me struggle with my own death one day, like wondering if it will be my fault too and where I will go.

Kenneth, however, confessed that he felt that mortality and other issues with the dying are different when one is dealing with Alzheimer's and ongoing stages of grief than for those living with imminent death of a loved one from cancer. He shared:

To me, God seems to appear differently in these cases of dementia, and the suffering is different. There is no defined end with Alzheimer's like there is with a cancer prognosis, and the grief changes as details of the causes change. God does not always seem present, and I don't know if I should bring up death with the doctors, because Lynn is not ready to die. I don't want to bring more fear.

In both cases, members expressed a desire to discuss finding God when they experience pain and suffering. Often simple answers are not apparent, and Christian writers and theologians throughout time have struggled with the dilemma of theodicy. This subject will be further explored in chapter 5 in pursuit of a path forward.

I encouraged deep conversation in the group and then individually after the course ended, and I followed up with recommendations for other helpful reading material;

nonetheless, many questions remained unanswered. The interviews were not exhaustive in the way of lasting counsel that could answer the deep questions these two group members struggled with about God seeming aloof or unavailable. However, the positive shifts observed indicated that the group as a whole had felt heard and validated with regard to the personal experience of caregiving.

Secondary Finding 3: All group members felt extremely lonely in their journeys, and most felt burdened with guilt of one kind or another that could not be reconciled.

Kyle struggles with loneliness when he attends church and shared about his experience:

Knowing other people are going through the same searching helps me not feel so lonely here on Sundays. I try to maintain a hopeful outlook for what remains of my life, and now I see that all these theologians and our group members felt the same. Considering my own mortality is easier seeing how much God loved us.

Andrew shared a great deal about his ongoing sense of guilt, despite comfort and encouragement from friends and family. His concluding comment was telling about what was really happening inside:

Thank you for taking time to talk to me one on one, and for giving this course. Sharing a kind of unlimited hope with the hopeless and the promise of God's endless love with the loveless is far better than just trying to check off a balance sheet for attendance at church programs or trying to change the values assigned by society to types of people who are sad or alone.

It was decided that looking at loneliness through a biblical lens would need to be a week's topic for any future group. The curriculum may need to revisit the way it conveys encouragement for those who care for others with guilt that cannot be assuaged.

Conclusion

Overall, the project accomplished its stated purpose for a group of people walking through grief with someone they love. Offering a course such as "Christian Hope when

Life is Hard” must involve a keen understanding of one’s church context and the doctrine of resurrection hope that a particular church adheres to. South Main is a traditional Baptist fellowship. For the purposes of our group, the study was tailored to deep theological study and scriptural exegesis. In another church context, this might vary.

After collecting post-group surveys and conducting short interviews, it seemed the South Main group overwhelmingly demonstrated a qualitative transformation in attitudes toward caregiving and ministering to the dying, even if this necessitated growth in competency and role. The group described an overall process towards deeper understanding of the bodily resurrection. Three primary changes were observed:

- 1) Increased awareness of the importance of understanding and communicating Christian hope based on the resurrection of Jesus and belief in the promises of God.
- 2) Increased willingness to utilize the gospel story in what is shared with a dying loved one and openness to the theological basis for grieving as those with hope.
- 3) A softening of initial resistance to considering one’s own mortality, even when this meant facing the dilemma of theodicy and the pain it can bring.

There were some unexpected findings in the sessions that spurred me to ask three additional questions in surveys and conversations. These questions would be useful in any subsequent group study on in-process grief:

Is there a measurable difference between the comfort gained by those who walk with loved ones with dementia and caregivers of those with terminal illness? Does a group such as this require a person to be too vulnerable and open? Is there a sense of peace to be gained despite loneliness and guilt? These questions were ones the group seemed to struggle with that our material did not specifically address.

CHAPTER 5:

Evaluation of the Project

Reflections on Caregiving

The final phase of any useful assessment of results is a set of suggestions for improving and implementing what has been evaluated. After looking at the history of resurrection hope for purposes of a project geared to helping participants maintain such hope, evaluation must include what is missing today. Sadly, contemporary attitudes regarding death and hope, even among Christians, seem to be a far cry from previous centuries. While former eras viewed death as a spiritual event where one is surrounded by family and friends, the act of dying is now often experienced in hospitals. Family may be present, but clergy are not always called. This chapter continues the project's theme, that without a doctrine of resurrection hope, believers cannot experience transformation in life and sustaining joy during seasons of death. Research questions are below:

- 1) How does participation in a church-based preparation course influence a person's confidence in resurrection hope when caring for a loved one?
- 2) How does participation in a scripture-based grief preparation program impact a person's ability to care for a dying loved one or a shift in role?
- 3) How does a grief preparation program steeped in scripture and theological readings help participants accept their own mortality and the dilemma of suffering and death for a person they love?

Contents of this chapter will include: the significance of my post-intervention findings, a contemporary theology of dying that helps to create a path forward, practical implications and instructions for how to implement a similar program in other church-based settings, and limitations of the study with suggestions for future research.

Assessment of the Project: *Christian Hope when Life is Hard*

The significance of findings from this intervention project were largely presented in chapter 4, so, for the sake of brevity, they are summarized as follows: 1) The group responded positively to the importance of Jesus's resurrection in their work as caregivers. They welcomed Paul's promises in 1 and 2 Corinthians for the hope of bodily resurrection, and this affected their commitment to care. 2) As evidenced by responses, group members saw the connection between Christian hope and a peaceful process of dying for their loved ones. 3) Most participants were eager to share about their new experiences and personal beliefs. 4) Group members were personally affected by the message of Christian hope as a way to find peace with mortality.

The research as performed in pre- and post-intervention surveys, follow-up phone calls, conversations at church, and emails indicated that the *quality* of participants' belief in resurrection hope had changed and deepened. Their caregiving practices were refreshed, along with the *quantity of time* spent communicating the truth of the gospel to loved ones near death. Exact quantities of time spent discussing Christian hope were hard to measure since the members were not asked to record clock time, but such change was evident in the tone of responses and in a willingness to share vulnerable feelings and thoughts. Post-intervention findings indicate great potential for group such as this one, since caregivers of the dying responded to the biblical witness for a gospel of hope. The group was markedly moved by the theological readings as well, with observable commitment to ongoing study.

My research concluded that the hope offered by resurrection life with Christ is fundamental for finding peace with God in the midst of suffering and death; therefore, it

is my suggestion that any potential trajectory for a course such as *Christian Hope when Life is Hard* must consider the current trend for medicalization of end-of-life care that exists alongside the emotional and spiritual needs of Christian caregivers. Most Christians feel a calling to communicate hope, but they may not have the tools to do so. The next section will explore each research question asked, using examples from contemporary theology of Christian dying to support validity of responses. This will be followed by sections describing practical implications for a future course on caregiving for the dying. The success or failure of research will be evaluated along with limitations of the study and a suggested plan for future hope for the church.

Contemporary Setting as a Reflection of Findings

Research question #1 posed the question about the impact of the doctrine of resurrection hope on a caregiver's sense of purpose in caring for a loved one. Responses showed that belief in such hope was vital and transformative. The group discussed ways that the culture today does not emphasize the necessity of faith and scriptural witness for the sick and dying, and this has affected caregiving, particularly in the world of hospital care. Chaplains have more limited roles in sharing Christian faith, and the dying more frequently die as "in-patients" attached to tubes and machines rather than at home.

To encourage engagement with this question, readings from *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* helped initially to spark conversation about a path forward. The author notes that, in our contemporary era, the death and resurrection of Jesus are often "eclipsed from pastoral care," and there is much less biblical foundation in the pages of current chaplaincy texts. Early Protestant caregivers had insisted on faith in Christ, yet modern-day pastoral theology often focuses on the dying person's "inner journey" into

regret or the need to make amends.¹ This shift was explained to the group, with the goal that coming to understand the secular world's avoidance of resurrection hope is essential in looking ahead in pastoral care. Today, chaplains may support the psychological well-being of a family, but there is an increasing reluctance to read from scripture or pray for the sick. Clergy and church ministers need acute awareness that belief in the resurrection renders pastoral care effective and transformative.

The South Main group looked at contemporary theology texts that address this change, and their responses agreed that Christian society may be experiencing a “lost identity” from former grounding in the fundamentals of the faith. In written and verbal group confessions, there seemed to be a feeling of powerlessness with regard to pastoral authority. Most participants’ responses revealed a deep sense of calling in life-and-death situations, yet they expressed a frequent loss for what to say. The one person who did not attend church regularly felt very unequipped to deal with her dying family member and expressed this through tears.

One significant cause of this is the pervasive invitation in our culture to a vague form of personal spirituality that is replacing traditional worship and Bible study. Spirituality on its own, without corporate worship and praise of God, provides insufficient ground for reflection based on hope in Christ.² Today the Bible is viewed as one of many accepted holy books, and personal spirituality, as expressed in various forms of meditation, solitude, and new forms of prayer, has become a substitute for traditional worship.

¹ Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in Classical Tradition*, 85.

² Dykstra, “The Intimate Stranger,” in *Images of Pastoral Care*, 11.

Research Question 2 asked whether the group study on resurrection hope helped participants' ability to care for a dying loved one. One significant finding was that the group felt strengthened by reading the scriptures and literature that confirmed their faith. I decided this was reflective of the "preparation" that the *Ars Moriendi* as a literary tradition required as instruction for the faithful in how to die. Author Rob Moll describes the dying process as deeply spiritual, actively undertaken, and part of a public and instructive communal event.³ Dying requires preparation, for the caregiver and the care receiver alike.

I pointed to contemporary theologian Robert Dykstra, who describes the changing roles of chaplains in his *Images of Pastoral Care*. The author provides metaphors for chaplains and pastoral care providers—"wounded healers," "wise fools," "intimate strangers"—showing how these are colorful depictions but do not seem to undergird the pastoral caregiver with authority and the peace of Christ once offered at the bedside.⁴ In many settings, people seem to think pastoral care lacks relevance, and all that is needed is psychological support; consequently, the dying often are not comforted with hope. The group wanted to find a way forward from this lack of authority and weakness in offering the gospel as a road to hope.

Several group members expressed frustration over how suffering is part of God's love, and this affected their ability to offer care. The readings and discussion helped participants see suffering as part of life, undergirded by the testimony of hope in the resurrection life of Christ. Part of my goal was to help group members see that Christians

³ Rob Moll, *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2004), 6.

⁴ Robert Dykstra, ed. *Images of Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: Harper One, 2008), 76, 94, 123.

would do well to reconcile the mystery of God's divine goodness in light of suffering—the mystery of theodicy. Wrestling with issues such as this can empower Christians to provide care in deeper ways for the dying family members they love.

As a help for understanding this mystery, I introduced C. S. Lewis and his body of work on suffering. Lewis postulates in his short work, *The Problem of Pain*, that suffering can be redemptive and may be allowed by God so people will choose him over futile endeavors. He argues that God's kind of compassion may cause pain to the object of its love, "but only on the supposition that that the object needs alteration to become fully loveable."⁵ With the study of various topics, group members were encouraged to see pain as a possible instrument of God, however unwelcome it may be.

Research Question 3 examined the group members' sense of peace about their own coming mortality. I was interested to see if the class readings and discussion made a difference. Most group members expressed great relief at being able to talk about issues of death, and some were tearful as they were honest about their fear of death. As a contemporary reading, Jean Stairs' *Listening for the Soul* lent new insight. Stairs notes that the modern era's "denial of death" has taken away from God's natural rhythm of birth and death, dying and being 'reborn' in Christ. If families avoid talking about the unknown, it is to the detriment of the dying loved one.⁶

I suggested that ministers and pastoral caregivers today can offer hope by helping their loved ones discern resurrection events in many facets of life, from the imagery of a split seed to restoration of broken relationships and to healing of emotional scars.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 48.

⁶ Jean Stairs, *Listening for the Soul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 75.

Timeless patterns of life-to-death are ordained by God, and, when openly discussed, suffering can seem less futile. In all facets of living, Christians must “discover the *death within life* and *life beyond death*” that awaits those who seek insight.”⁷

One favorite reading for the group was 2 Corinthians, where Paul describes Christian hope through suffering as a glorious burden: “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure” (4:17-18). Brent Waters comments on earthly pain in his essay, “A Good Christian Death,” saying control over life’s disappointments must be released. One phrase spoke to the group, that life is loaned and must eventually be surrendered back to the one who gave it first.⁸

The group also studied a book of liturgical prayers for the dying, *Every Moment Holy*. Sorrow can draw believers closer to God by providing a deeper glimpse of God; thus, the prayers help to redirect, and this was a favorite of the participants. “On Remembrance of Suffering” reads:

For if—even in my dying—I know that I am known and led and held by a love that has already willingly suffered all things for me, has already delivered me through a thousand wars and storms of life, then cannot even my frustrations...all become a final trust . . . trading anger for obedience, bitterness for faith, and disappointment for a hope so unyielding it will only fix my face more firmly toward the promise of my resurrection?⁹

⁷ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, 79.

⁸ Kalantzis, ed. *On Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*, 237.

⁹ Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy, Volume 2: Death, Grief, and Hope* (Nashville: Rabbit Room Press, 2021), 79.

*Practical Implications for a Course on Caregiving
of the Dying—What I Might Do Differently*

Implications for continuing a course for individuals who are caring for those close to death are multi-fold and can be taken in different directions depending on the theology of a particular church. Next time, I would offer some practical and daily applicable wisdom. Participants professed great personal change, especially when previous needs had been somewhat unmet by regular church programs, and several asked for more practical and “how to get through grief” advice in their follow-up surveys. Specifically, they asked for more readings and more time for discussion, which might include increasing the time to 1.5 hours instead of one hour. In a future group, I would not be reluctant to allow plenty of time for conversation, prayer, and processing.

To set up a similar program in another church setting, it would be prudent to begin early to look for participants through conversation with others who have also experienced past grief. Friendships found within the church membership are an invaluable tool for gathering participants. This search was a vital part of my group selection. In a future course, I would allow more preparation time for gathering participants, as some came forward when the course was nearing completion.

Another implication for future use is knowing the specific nature of the reading material and being aware of the willingness in the group to tackle the “homework.” Reading materials greatly assisted in personal growth and should be used in abundance if the group is willing. In retrospect, I would choose readings with specific population in mind. I was familiar with the people at South Main; thus, it was fairly easy to introduce the group to a wide range of reading matter from my own seminary studies without the

fear that it would intimidate South Main participants. In retrospect, I would use more poetry and short essays, and I would ask the group to write their own.

A fourth supposition is that any group going forward would benefit from not only longer sessions, but a 10 to 12-week time span. The first meeting was slow, as group members became acquainted with each other. The last meeting was emotionally challenging for the group, because they knew each other somewhat more intimately at that point. There was regret that we would not meet again. I promised to keep in touch and to recontact everyone during the next few weeks. In short, we needed more time for closure and recounting of all that had been learned.

Limitations of Research and Corrective Measures

There are pieces of information that do not require a separate seminar to be conveyed, but their mention could help future participants. Several group members asked for discussion about the guilt involved in caregiving. Guilt over “not doing enough for a loved one” seemed pervasive. This topic is not specifically addressed in historic or contemporary theology of resurrection hope, but an extra session could have been added for discussion. Like any organization that is set in its ways, the church has developed an acceptable level of discussion on subjects of grief and loss, and some people are stifled by this virtual ceiling. My group members expressed frustration with their own feelings of guilt and regret, and several members felt they “lacked faith.” Some knew how to discuss vulnerable subjects, but acknowledging the various levels of vulnerability is something that should be addressed in a future group. Additionally, and although confidentiality was emphasized, an initial session could gauge the group’s comfort in discussing caregiving and give more time for introductions, expectations, and hope.

Another recommendation I might make is for pastoral staff members to play a larger role one or two sessions. Most group members knew the church staff, so their presence would have shown support and compassion. Practical reasons for limiting staff, however, were that I needed lead the course as part of my doctoral project and that the pastoral staff members had overseeing duties on Sunday mornings during the education hour. A solution could be that an intervention group would be offered on a Wednesday evening to avoid Sunday conflicts. The leader could introduce staff to the materials and discussion well before the group begins.

A limiting factor could be the specific population of the group at hand. Going forward with data collection, a caregiving group on resurrection hope could be offered in a different setting, such as a para-church Christian counseling ministry, in order to collect fuller data. South Main Baptist is an historic church dating from 1901 and has a particular population despite its downtown location; it wishes to be a more diverse church but is not, despite its location. Additionally, South Main is not a “neighborhood church” in a suburban area, and members come from broad areas in greater Houston. It is a church in midtown Houston, located between downtown and the Texas Medical Center, where the resident population has changed with immigration, building usage, and city planning. The congregation is extensively involved with midtown missions, yet this has not contributed greatly to ethnic diversity. It is a goal that is slowly being realized.

Homogeneity of group members is another limitation. My group consisted of traditional, long-time South Main members and was composed of six white participants (3 men, 3 women) and three Latino women. Each person owned a Bible and was willing and able to read and study scripture. Participants were equipped with education and

preparedness for group study of deeper theology. The group responded to prayer in the same way, with heads bowed and hands folded. Prayers were spoken, not read, with the exception of one liturgical reading as the closing prayer.

I have observed in hospital chaplaincy how ethnic and societal differences can alter the way prayer is offered and experiences are shared. Looking ahead, I wondered what the course would become for people who attend South Main's 8:00 a.m. service on the lawn, a service intended for people who live on the street. Many homeless people are able to express concern over their lifestyle and process grief.

A Trajectory Forward

This section contains observations and implications for a future church-based course. The course presented moments of great discovery. During a season following the recent pandemic, a course on dying was certainly welcomed as a sort of oasis in a storm. Group members all described a newfound sense of community, bonding, and love.

One observation is that caregivers of the dying seem to hunger for connection with others out of loneliness in the depressing nature of their daily work. They seem to search for concrete evidence of hope, both in life and in death. Christianity offers hope in the resurrection life of Christ, and this can be translated into many languages, settings, and for many populations, no matter where the starting point begins.

The reading material my group used can be implemented in post-death grief groups, in hospice work with patients in decline, or in family situations before a death occurs. If congregations make time to minister carefully to their people during the in-process grief *before* death happens, church members might develop not only better coping skills but a keen awareness of how to communicate the gospel. When theology is

communicated in a conversational way in a safe place, it takes on a more comfortable and approachable tone.

The best source of data collection was group discussion and personal conversations following the course. The most important element for my assessment was the group responses to biblical truth about resurrection hope. Having wrestled with crafting a course for caregivers of the dying, then teaching the course to a group of core members and evaluating the results, I believe the project has successfully achieved the goals I set for exploration when my own family member died. I have argued in preceding chapters that the readings and discussion successfully transmitted the fundamentals of Christian faith. Belief that the resurrection provides true hope can produce behavioral change when caring for a loved one near death.

Any potential trajectory must examine the current theology on dying well. Without supplementary readings, my group would have been lost. One of the most transformative readings for all was John Claypool's *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Claypool's honesty about grief and loss offered the group inspiration and a tangible path forward. In a season of his own "dark night of the soul" following the untimely death of his daughter, Claypool wrestled with God but eventually turned to face the darkness of his grief. He claimed that "*life is gift*—pure, simple, sheer gift—and that we here on earth are to relate to it accordingly."¹⁰ At the end of the 8-week intervention, the group had a fresh understanding of the foundation and promise of God.

¹⁰ John Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* (Waco: Word Books, 1974), 78-79.

Project Conclusion

In my own teaching and mentoring ministry, I am now comfortable with the different ways that a group-based approach can help people through the sorrow and pain that accompany death. My curriculum should provide a setting for sharing in-process grief and a way to access theology that can support the journey of a Christian community. The leader's willingness to be a non-anxious presence in the church during the intervention process provided safe space for ongoing conversation and support. By continually making this kind of dialogue available, the church can prune away unhelpful theology about the soul's journey toward heaven and focus on bodily resurrection hope.

It is my contention that sharing resurrection hope to the dying is the ultimate form of ministry. The future begs for caregivers who are courageous enough to step into this role of sharing resurrection hope. There is an observable, although subtle, shift taking place in the mindset of hospice and palliative care workers, and this project has argued that the words of God throughout scripture can provide a roadmap and guarantee for hope. By creating a path to spiritual growth and a set of new behaviors, Christian caregivers can greatly increase the hope they have for dying loved ones as they still live and when they die.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more . . . for the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
SYLLABUS AND CURRICULUM

Christian Hope when Life is Hard
Syllabus and Readings - Curriculum by Sally Lombardo
Week 1 - Introduction

*Give us, O Lord, steadfast hearts that cannot be dragged down by false loves;
Give us courageous hearts that cannot be worn down by trouble;
Give us righteous hearts that cannot be sidetracked by unholy or unworthy goals.
Give to us also, our Lord and God, understanding to know You,
Diligence to look for you, Wisdom to recognize You,
And a faithfulness that will bring us to see you one day face to face.*

—Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471)



Welcome to *Christian Hope When Life Hard*, a course to help participants walk through seasons of in-process grief with God's hope through the promises of resurrection life. Whether you are caring for a family member in decline or have provided care in the past, course readings are intended to support your journey and give you peace as you companion a person in crisis.

The central theme of the course is that Christians can be equipped to support loved ones and communicate hope in times of crisis and grief. Not all churches provide full pastoral care for families in-process with grief, yet such crisis times of physical and mental decline are golden opportunities to reinforce the message of Christian hope. This course purposes to support caregivers in the crisis time of death and in addition, it can help participants examine their own views on mortality. Seasons of suffering shed light on a Christian's relationship with God and act as windows into the quality of our family dynamics. As hard as such times can be, they can also provide opportunities to examine heartfelt needs and see how God meets those needs in his word and in Christian theological writings. As caregivers learn to trust God in the process of loved ones dying, they can encourage them die in the Lord's comfort and in the knowledge of resurrection hope.

Week 1 — Introduction to the Curriculum

You are engaging in a curriculum that is fundamentally biblical, historical, and based on the ways that Christianity has managed death through the ages. Whether you have read and prayed over Paul's teaching on the resurrection and Christian hope, meditated on the Psalms for comfort, studied the book of Job, or read theologians of the past, it is my hope this experience will help you move forward in faithfulness and joy. Each week will be a part of the journey towards deeper understanding of resurrection hope. The group will begin with a Bible passage or poem and end with a concluding prayer.

The eight-week course begins with Introductory session, includes six subsequent sessions with a theme reflecting Christian dying, and ends with a follow up session for reflection:

I. Resurrection Hope - Week 2

- A. Paul's teachings on resurrection and grief in 1 Thessalonians
- B. Paul's teachings on hope in the resurrection as fundamental - 1 & 2 Corinthians
- C. Theological reflections by N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* and Nicholas Kalantzis, *On Christian Dying*
- D. What do you believe about the bodily resurrection?

II. History of Christian Dying - Week 3

- A. John 11- Jesus's raising of Lazarus and encounter with Martha on the road: "I am the Resurrection and the Life."
- B. The medieval tradition of "dying well"—*Ars Moriendi*,
- C. Theological reflections: Sermons of Martin Luther, "Sermon on Preparing to Die;" Kathryn Paul, "A Practical Approach to Dying Well"—modern reflection on the *Ars Moriendi* and its relevance to today.
- D. What about our present-day theology has changed with regard to living and dying? Do you see a need for clergy and the church to be part of Christian dying?

III. Forgiving others through Reconciliation - Week 4

- A. Jesus forgives the Penitent thief - story in Matthew 27
- B. Paul's counsel in 2 Corinthians 5 - "We are crushed but not destroyed."
- C. Excerpts from chapter on "Extreme Unction" in Brian Brewer, *Martin Luther and Seven Sacraments*
- D. Theology on Christian dying—Mark McMinn, *Care for the Soul*
- E. How do you see that Christ has conquered death? How can you communicate this to your loved one who is facing death?

IV. Theodicy - Where is God when we Suffer? - Week 5

- A. Paul's counsel in Romans 5
- B. Bible passages on suffering - Job's Lament, Psalms of Lament
- C. Theological Reflection on suffering: CS Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*; John Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*
- D. How do you feel about the mystery of theodicy and your mortality?

V. The Bodily Resurrection - Week 6

- A. Romans 6 - Dying with Christ in resurrection hope
- B. Theology - N. T. Wright passages from *Resurrection of the Son of God*
- C. Revelation 21, Ezekiel, Daniel passages on New Heaven and New Earth
- D. Where do you stand now on the bodily resurrection?

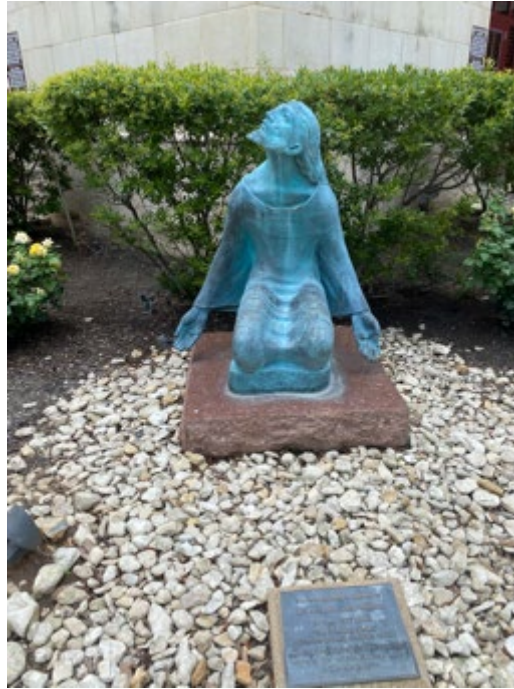
VI. Contemporary Reflections on Facing our Own Deaths - Week 7

- A. Henri Nouwen, *On Caring and Dying*; Dwight Judy, *Discerning Life Transitions*.
- B. Readings from Douglas McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*

VII. Review of Material and Questions - Week 8

- A. Post-course questionnaire distributed

Christian Hope when Life is Hard



Week 2: What is Resurrection Hope?

I. Preparing for Learning

The Bible passage today is taken from our focus, resurrection hope. Following this, the group will have a few moments of quiet.

John 6:38-40 - To be read aloud. *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me, that I should lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”*

Time of silent reflection.

II. Voices from the Bible

1 Thessalonians 4:3-14 - *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: ...For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. . . . And we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sister, about those who have died (Gk. fallen asleep), so that*

you may not grieve as others do who have not hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.”

Paul addresses the ongoing commitment of Christians to live out the calling to be *saints* of God, living lives that honor Him. Paul’s euphemistic phrase for those who have died in Christ is “those who have fallen asleep,” since Paul believes those who have died will awaken again at the final resurrection. In the face of death and loss, grief is appropriate, but for Christians, grief must be seasoned with hope because death brings us to God in the end.

1 Corinthians 15:1-22 - *“I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed, which you in turn received, in which you also stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed...Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection? If no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and our faith has been in vain... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But if, in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.”*

Early Christians, and many Jews, held the view that at the end before final judgment that God would raise all the righteous, restoring bodies and rewarding them in the afterlife for their faithfulness. Paul notes here that Christ is a second Adam, and his work in being raised from the dead has implications (like the fall of Adam, and our own fallen state) for the whole human race. 1 Cor. 15:45-49 reads, *“As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust (Gen. 2:7). . . . Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”* What a privilege this is.

In this passage, Christ is the anti-type of Adam, who undoes man’s unrighteous deeds of sin by defeating death, which would be *endless separation from God*. This eternal separation is the crucial reason we must believe in Christ’s resurrection as it put the powers of life in motion over the powers of death. These evil powers—including illness, suffering and death—are still at work and will not be completely subdued until

the end of time, so Christians must learn to navigate them in the assurance of a resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:14-5:1 - *“For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. . . . So, we do not lose heart! Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what can’t be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what can’t be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*

Paul believed in faithful suffering in affliction; he did not ask us to deny the suffering we face on earth or downplay its arduous nature, but he stands on the fact that suffering can strengthen our trust. In this passage, Paul states that renewal of our inner person enables us to endure things without losing heart. The phrase ‘weight of glory’ indicates our transformation into the likeness of Christ, who was raised into God’s image. The down-payment we have of the Spirit who lives in our hearts guarantees that one day we will see God in bodily resurrection, a “building from God.” This is not a house in heaven, as has been interpreted, but the resurrected and new ‘self’ God has prepared for us to be on a new earth, the full weight of glory.

III. Discussion of Scriptures and Resurrection Hope

- A. What have you believed about these verses from 1 and 2 Corinthians in the past?
What about after our reading and reflection?
- B. What keeps you steady as you care for your family member?
- C. What questions do you have for God about the duress you’ve been under?

IV. Theological Reflections/Readings

- **NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.**

According to N. T. Wright, Christians need to understand their God-given goals and the promised new creation of Christ. The New Testament insists that one of God’s

purposes is re-creation of the cosmos. Believers can understand Christian destiny by grasping its mission—that the whole point of being ‘saved’ now is so we can play a vital role, as “fellow workers with God,” in the larger picture of God’s work. Instead of focusing solely on our own destiny or happiness in life, we should be asking, “How will I contribute to the promised renewal of creation and to the projects and plans God is launching into His new world? How can I better reflect God’s love in a redemptive and healing kind of way?” Whether one is going to heaven or hell is not the final question; instead, one should ask how living and dying can be holy examples to people we love. Christians can participate in reconciling the love of God to each other and to the purposes of Christ.¹

• **Douglas McKelvey - *Every Moment Holy***

Author McKelvey has written a beautiful collection of prayers in poetry form, intended for the families of those who are suffering and in decline. The prayers can help you craft your own supplications and questions, or act as a bridge between the earthly struggle you feel and the peace and assurance that God provides.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 184-5.

Week 3: What is the History of Christian Dying?



There is much to learn from those who came before us.

I. Preparing for Learning:

As we repeat this scripture together, please be praying for openness *“Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the sound of my pleadings. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults...He is the strength of his people, the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them forever.”* Psalm 28:6-9

Time of silence and reflection before we begin.

II. Voices from the Bible

Read John 11 - *“When Martha heard Jesus was coming, she went and met him, saying ‘Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that God will give you whatever you ask of Him’...Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Martha, do you believe this?’ (vs. 21-26).*

Mary subsequently approaches Jesus and kneels at his feet. *“‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews*

who came with her, he was greatly disturbed and deeply moved....and began to weep” (vs. 32-35).

Just as in Paul’s letter, ‘sleep’ reinforces the idea of temporary death. Jesus’s answer to both women shows the compassion of God for the human stronghold of death, a sentence that Jesus has triumphed over through his resurrection promise. Human life and physical death, just as the life and death of Lazarus, are the great paradox of God’s plan. Thankfully, for Christians, God has another promise beyond human existence. The fact that Jesus was recorded as being “deeply moved” by Lazarus’s death shows his great compassion and love for his followers.

How do we see this renewal from death into life play out in our lives today?

III. Tradition of the *Ars Moriendi* - “The Art of Dying Well”

The *Ars Moriendi* is a document written in 1415 for the dying person and his or her family during seasons of impending death. The original treatise is assumed to have been written by Matthaeus de Cracovia and subsequently circulated widely in Europe. This was comprised of 6 full chapters that acted as a Christian guide for the man at his death. In the mid-1500’s, a shorter, illustrated version with woodcuts illustrated the temptations common at the hour of death. The woodcuts helped people who had trouble reading or were illiterate. Each of the eleven temptations are also the temptations common to us in moments of despair.

The dying man is careful not to follow the temptations, but he needs the strength of the angels and saints who watch over him. This tradition would be followed for 200 years.

IV. Theology of the Church

• Martin Luther, “Sermon on Preparing to Die” from *Martin Luther as Comforter*.

In May, 1519, Luther’s friend George Spalatin asked the Reformer to help him face his own distress about death. Luther was preparing for a debate and suggested he read a *The Imitation of the Willing Death of Christ* by John Staupitz. The book traced the tradition that Luther would eventually write on and follow. Later Luther agreed to his friend’s request and began to prepare a sermon, shifting from religious debate into a pastoral role. The entire sermon echoes his experience as a pastor who came in contact

with men and women who were terrified by traditional church practices. The sermon describes the several stages of preparation for death, but unlike the *Ars Moriendi*, it strengthens the sufferer's conscience against the temptation to despair because of sin. Although he still believed in the church's sacrament of extreme unction and in prayers to Mary and the saints, Luther stands on personal faith in Christ, and this is what became his new theology in a Christian approach to death.

The family of the dying person is not part of Luther's sermon, except in his focus on making amends in his Section 2. Instead of being full of remorse, Luther suggests meditating on one's sin during one's lifetime rather than dwelling on hell when death is imminent. "Christ is nothing other than sheer life," Luther says, "and his saints are likewise;" Death and hell are overcome in Christ, and through confession, absolution, eucharist and extreme unction, one is made one with Christ.² In order to find peace about your own death, you must look away from self and your own anxiety and onto Christ and his death. This change in perspective would become Luther's unique message to the world, and one we can still follow today.

Kathryn Paul, "The *Ars Moriendi*, a Practical Approach to Dying Well"

Kathryn Paul says the 21st century is a "death-denying age," where dying may mark the end of life but is often not treated as a spiritual, physical and emotional process. Dying in our era has been replaced by the medical idea of sickness, and people often die in the hospital. Paul's observations about dying well emerged from her own experience in hospice and chaplaincy.

She suggests that the church can offer more than outsourcing death experience to hospital chaplains and offers five themes: First, education about the dying process helps people cope; second, dying involves stages of emotional struggle; third, the dying person must feel connected to others; fourth, the person needs a sense of hope; fifth, he or she needs to know what is coming and let go of worldly concerns and regrets.

² Neil LeRoux, *Martin Luther as Comforter, Writings on Death and Illness* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Pub., 2007), 53.

Liturgy from “The Burial of the Dead, Rite Two in the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1789.

The Rite for Burial in the Anglican Church is taken from Jesus’s self-proclamation to Martha as narrated in John 11 and from Job’s honest confession about the Lord as his true and only Redeemer, whom he will one day see in the flesh, from Job 19:25:

I am the Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord. Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he die. And everyone who has life, and has committed himself to me in faith, shall not die forever. As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth. After my awaking, he will raise me up; and in my body I shall see God. I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him who is my friend and not a stranger. For none of us has life in himself, and none becomes his own master when he dies. For if we have life, we are alive in the Lord, and if we die, we die in the Lord.³

³ “Liturgy for Burial of the Dead, Rite II,” *Book of Common Prayer*, 1789.

Week 4:
Jesus and Forgiveness: Am I to Reconcile with Others?



I. Preparing for Learning

This week we will read a prayer about finding peace with God through words of reconciliation, love, forgiveness and grace. We will learn to accept both the good and the difficult times God has in store, knowing He is with us in it all. Jesus's intent on the cross was to reconcile man back to the Father God, and this would be no different for the penitent thief.

Speaking of Meaningful Things While there is Yet Time

Give us grace, that in moments of doubt, fear, confusion, or dismay, that we might know your peace, your presence, your calm. Comfort us, O Holy Spirit. Give us grace to see the hope of resurrection as a beacon, burning ever brighter, even as moral life dims.

*Indeed, if there are words of conviction, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness, fondness, gratitude, appreciation, honor or love yet unspoken, let us freely speak them now. Amen.*⁴

⁴ Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy: Vol 2, Death, Grief and Hope* (Nashville: Rabbit Room, 2021), 85.

A time of silence is kept. What words might you need to say to those you love? What aspects of this prayer draw out your own emotions?

II. Voices from the Bible

Psalm 56:3-8 on fear of one's enemies - How can we shift our perspective during seasons of loss and grief to see them as opportunities for healing old wounds, restoring friendship or offering forgiveness? What may God be trying to teach us as we navigate a difficult journey with a loved one? I believe that Jesus mandates forgiveness, but we must be willing to walk humbly, with a teachable spirit. Maybe the only real way to forgive is to know we are protected by God. Psalm 56 speaks to this undergirding protection:

"When I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me? They twist my words all day long; all their thoughts against me are evil. . . . You, Yourself have recorded my wanderings; Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in Your records? Then my enemies will retreat on the day when I call. This I know: God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:3-11).

When God protects us, we can safely forgive and be assured that we are also loved as we do so.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 - Paul explains the need to forgive based on the mandate in Scripture to offer a ministry of reconciliation to those we love. We are instructed to live as ambassadors for Christ in a healing way of renewal.

"We no longer see anyone from a human point of view, but if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us". (2 Cor. 5:16-20).

Forgiveness and restoration come in many forms. Sometimes caregivers carry resentment or fear when an illness or a mental state alters life. How can God help us when we are facing these demands? What might change for you as you see someone 'no longer from a human point of view'?

III. Theological Writings

- Seibold, Myrla. “When the Wounding Runs Deep” in Mark McMinn, Ed. *Care for the Soul: Essays on Psychology and Theology*. Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Forgiveness has been often pushed by the church, when some of the situations can be soul damaging. It is often presented as an amorphous concept, without looking at the person’s experience and possible victimization. There is more to this complex issue, and for people who are severely offended, even killed in some instances, forgiveness cannot be equated with reconciliation.

As you read this selection, what comes to your mind about a time you were asked to forgive when it just wasn’t humanly possible? Can you rely on God to forgive for you?

Stairs, Jean. “Contemplative Living” chapter in *Listening for the Soul*.

Jean Stairs’ book on pastoral care of crisis situations examines how to offer others what you sometimes do not even understand yourself. This chapter talks about the condition of our souls as we care for people in need, and Stairs gives examples of how to live the contemplative life of prayer and focus on the presence of God. We see the face and presence of God in others, and this is how we allow ourselves to forgive and move on.

As you read this passage, what draws you to God in a contemplative lifestyle? Do you feel more fully alive when you are bound with others, or when you are on your own?

IV. Closing Prayer

“Now guide us tenderly, Jesus, that journeying together this last sweet mile, we might be present to love and to serve one another in throughout humility and in a dignity of grace. Let our right grief mingle freely with the leavening hope of eternal glory.”
Amen

Week 5:

How do we Reconcile our Suffering with a Good and Holy God?



I. Preparing for Learning

To follow you, Jesus, has been to learn how I must repeatedly die to my own plans and ambitions, that I might walk in your will instead. Our dying, then, plays out as one more step in the steady vocation of a disciple. Death is no surprise to us, as all along we have been learning to crucify our ambitions, dying daily to our own plans and desires, so we might follow wherever Christ would lead. We are but repeating that familiar rhythm, relinquishing the last of our dreams and submitting instead to your will. Let us rest in the knowledge that our journey was always going to pass this way, before opening again into glorious life.⁵

II. Voices from the Bible. How do we find peace with God despite suffering?

Romans 5:1-5 is Paul's cure for anxiety and depression. Throughout most of Paul's letters, he explains how he can rejoice in suffering in his life with Christ. This is a mystery, but we continue to have faith that God entrusted his truth to Paul, and we can follow.

"Since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have also obtained access to him by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only

⁵ McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*, 84.

that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (Rom 5:1-5)

We are promised hope will not disappoint us. Maybe faith is believing that our greatest hope is in God's promises and the example of Jesus, our resurrection life.

- What are some ways you can testify that hope has not disappointed you? What is something you hope in on a daily basis? Hope applies to a good outcome, while expectation applies to a specific outcome. This week in session, we will discuss our human hope and God's plan.

Romans 8:18-26 — The sufferings of our lives are not even comparable to the glory that will be revealed by Christ's indwelling presence. Even the creation is in the bondage of corruption, groaning to be set free. Paul says we eagerly wait to be adopted and redeemed. "*In this hope we were saved,*" he concludes. We have explored together what this kind of steadfast hope is all about. What new meaning can you attach to this word today?

III. Suffering as part of God's Love

- Claypool, John. "Life as Gift" in *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Waco, Texas: WORD Books, 1974.

In his beloved work about the decline and death of his daughter Laura Lue, Claypool explains the way he finally reconciled his sorrow. This section presents Claypool's discoveries as he trudged through the season of death. He outlines three different roads that help lead Christians out of the darkness, finally centering on one.

In the first path of resignation, he concludes "there is more honest faith in our acts of questioning than in the act of silent submission"⁶ The second road, that of intellectual understanding also proved to be a dead end for Claypool. He concluded we cannot solve all the intellectual issues of life with godlike understanding, or by abandoning our faith. If so, darkness swallows up the light. The only road is the path of gratitude, reflected in

⁶ John Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* (Waco: Word Books, 1974), 74.

Abraham's confession when Issac is saved. In doing so, one can discover that Life itself, is a gift.

- If you have resigned yourself to a hopeless situation, does this book provide a way out?

CS Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. New York: HarperOne, 1996.

We will look at two sections of CS Lewis' great proposal for why there is pain and suffering in the world. He will present his theory— that Love is God's concern for our welfare, not a "senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happily upon your way"⁷ God's love is jealous for our love and worship; it is not a trivial kind of love that hopes for the best and woos us with flattery. God's love involves his intelligence, his searching for us as loved ones, and his molding us to be like Christ. Receiving this love may mean accepting His Divine Omnipotence as a road to peace. God's intent is for our welfare, no matter how that may appear.

- How would you explain finding peace through suffering?
- What do you think of CS Lewis' statement that pain is "God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world"?

IV. Closing Prayer - From *Every Moment Holy*, p. 119.

Leaning into Hope when Life is Hard

*In my remaining days, O God, reveal yourself to me more perfectly,
that in my hour of passing it would seem but a movement of degrees:*

deeper into wonder and delight,

further into joy,

and nearer, even nearer,

to the beating heart of Christ.

Go before me, my God.

Lead me, shield me, hold me, surround me.

*Teach me to trust you more, even now, even in the midst of circumstances as
discouraging as these. You are my rock, O Christ. Steady now the ground beneath my
feet.*

⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 39.

Week 6

Do I Believe in the Bodily Resurrection?



I. Preparing our Hearts

In a chapter called “*Resting in the Peace of Jesus*,” the author talks about living well with the attitude of embracing God’s 3-part action of love—Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption. We are reconciled sinners, and even death is redeemed by Jesus. On earth, life has boundaries, but in the promised resurrection, we move to a life that is genuinely new.

I know of a peaceful eventide;

And when I am faint and weary, at times with the journey sorely tried,

Through hours that are long and dreary,

Then often I yearn to lay me down, and sink into a blissful slumber.⁸

What words or phrases can you relate to in this hymn? Can you use this as a type of prayer back to God about what you are longing for, or what you have experienced?

⁸ Stanza from Martin Luther’s translation of Magnus Landstad’s hymn “I know of a sleep in Jesus name.” From George Kalantzis, ed., *On Christian Dying*.

II. Finding Hope in the Bible

Psalm 139 — Faith believes that God is at work for our good and has an ultimate plan. Notice the words in the psalm that describe boundaries, limits, territories and God's power.

You hem me in, before and behind, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful...Where can I go from your Spirit? If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast...Surely the darkness will not be dark to you, and the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful (vs. 13-14).

Revelation 21:1-5 — New Heaven and New Earth

Then I saw "a new heaven and new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. . . He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away". . . . He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

Isaiah 65:17 — *"See, I will create new heavens and new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."*

Scripture tells us that God is making all things new, even our bodily existence and the earth we will inhabit.

- What have you concluded about the bodily resurrection? How does Scripture help you?

III. Theological exploration of redemption

- **Matthew Levering**, *"The Unbearability of Annihilation: Job's Challenge to His Creator,"* in *Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*, ed. George Kalantzis. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

The author explores the doctrine of God and earthly suffering by looking at Job's lament and the absurdity of loss, decline, grief and death. Job poses the question we often ask: Who is my redeemer, and will he "stand on the earth with me at the last?" (Job

19:25). Our common sharing of the experience must be placed against God's continued presence. As Psalm 139 repeats so beautifully, God's light is brighter than darkness. See attached reading.

• **Henri Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift: On Dying and Caring*** (NY: Harper One, 1994)

Nouwen explores the mystery of Jesus—that he was born in dependence and returned to his state of glory as a “passive victim of others’ desires,” yet his willing submission made our redemption possible. Jesus had a sense of safety and a divine dependence upon God for all things. If we know that God holds us in a secure future, we have ultimate freedom.

- What feelings does this bring to mind for you? What does it mean to be dependent upon God and upon his word for your future?

IV. Closing Prayer - *Every Moment Holy*: *Let this loss-hollowed day arrive in years to come as the kindling of a fire in my bones, spurring me to seek in this short life that which is eternal. Let wound and its memory push me to be present with you, God, in ways I was not before.*

Week 7: Facing our Own Mortality



I. Preparation for Learning

For this last week of learning, let's prepare by opening our hearts to all we have discussed and ways we have changed. We will read Job's confession at the end of his testing and sorrow:

Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore, I have uttered what I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." (Job 42:1-3).

- What things have been made clear to you this week—things "too wonderful to know?"
- Does it seem that Job's confession is true, that even God's purpose in our suffering and death "cannot be thwarted," because they accomplish God's ultimate reason for us to live and follow him with fulness of heart?

II. Voices from the Bible

2 Corinthians 4:16 - *“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”*

If we believe this as Christians, we can endure what comes in life because we know that we do not see all that is ahead. The resurrection of Christ prepared for him and for ourselves an “eternal weight of glory,” but how do we find solace in such glory in crisis times when life is hard? Paul gives further advice about accepting the destruction of the “earthly tent.”

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 - *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”*

- As Christians, we know that life on earth is temporary, but it is hard to find hope when people become sick and die. We resonate with Paul’s statement: “We groan under our burden,” which is a great weight of disappointment and fear. When we choose to believe God and set our hearts on his promises and hope that guarantees life, even when death is near, we are changed.

II. Theology on Mortality and Hope

Andrew Purves, *The Resurrection of Ministry: Serving in the Hope of the Risen Lord* (NY: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

Pastor Andrew Purves says that we often live in the “in between” of Jesus’s life on earth and full presence, and his resurrection self. He states that we live on Holy Saturday, before Christ is risen and before the Holy Spirit arrives. Somehow, we get

stuck on the day that's "in between." In order to change this, Christians have to embrace the promise of Jesus's resurrection and our own resurrection to new life with God, and then we can "receive power when the Holy Spirit comes" (Acts 1:8). Purves writes in *The Resurrection of Ministry*:

Ministry in the mood of Holy Saturday has lost some vital elements—the power of 'encounter' with Christ and the hope that Jesus' ministry from heaven is fully in his flesh as a life-giving spirit. Ministry in resurrection power gives us hope to survive even suffering and pain, and understanding the fundamental connection between the continuing ministry of Jesus in the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the church is vital to the work of the church.⁹

Purves explains his main ideas: the resurrection was only the beginning of Jesus's reign, which continues today; the Lord still encounters us as He did in the Ascension; we must be able to minister in joy and hope by offering a resurrection existence; and the heart of Christian prayer must be trinitarian and include the existence of the Spirit. "Ministry must exist at the horizon of hope," Purves continues; it must point to a fulfillment that is yet realized but fully anticipated. Our life on earth is the beginning of a glorious and resurrected life with God

IV. Reflecting on your own perspective of hope.

Pause a moment and consider where you stand on the idea of a resurrection with Jesus in bodily form, as Jesus was on the Emmaus Road. Consider the joy this will bring. How can you better communicate this to your loved one in crisis? Listen to this final passage about Jesus in his resurrected body:

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. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. . . . Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures" (Luke 24:13-27).

Reflect on all this means and how you can believe all that Jesus offers.

⁹ Andrew Purves, *The Resurrection of Ministry: Serving in the Hope of the Risen Lord* (New York: IVP Books, 2010), 59.

Week 8: Surveys, Recap and Questions

Christian Hope when Life is Hard



Questions for Discussion in Final Session:

- I.** What am I feeling now about Resurrection Hope? How can I best communicate this to people I love?
- II.** What did I gain from participation in the class, and how has this changed my form of caregiving and my beliefs?
- III.** What were my favorite readings and Scriptures, and how do I feel encouraged by these? Please complete the following questions:

Follow up questions for Participants in Hope and Healing Course

Thank you for your unique contribution to our group. I hope you have found the readings and our discussion helpful, and will continue to, as you navigate a difficult season in your life. When you have a moment, please fill out this form by either printing and editing online, then scan and return to me at shlombardo@gmail.com.

1. Given your family situation, what was your past role and now present role (if any) in caring for the person you have loved?
2. What are your feelings about this shift in role? How has God cared for you and provided for your heart during this difficult transition?
3. What support, if any, did you find in the Bible passages that we read together?
4. What insights did you gain from our various readings, including past and present theology about pain and suffering?
5. Do you foresee finding healing for any old wounds you have struggled with, based on what we discussed and read? Healing takes time, but hopefully words of encouragement we shared can be a start.

*Please list any other comments below, and thank you for your help.

APPENDIX B:

IRB Approval

Please note that Baylor University Institutional Review Board has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1926519-1] Hope and Healing in Times of Decline
Principal Investigator: Sally Lombardo, DMin

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: June 10, 2022

Action: RESEARCH - NOT HSR
Effective Date: June 10, 2022
Review Type: Administrative Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Matthew Gaynor at matthew_gaynor@baylor.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.irbnet.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7Csally_lombardo%40baylor.edu%7C649df5f5658a4825b35208da4b248917%7C22d2fb35256a459bbcf4dc23d42dc0a4%7C0%7C0%7C637904917546927868%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=qxa0NL3amhe%2FR1sHRLlyH2EvEESoglVgmcfx6COUcnU%3D&reserved=0

Hi Sally,

IRBNet # 1925666 was withdrawn because you re-submitted your F-16 in IRBNet # 1926519. IRBNet # 1926519 was signed by your faculty advisor. A not human subjects determination letter was issued for # 1926519. No further action is needed and you may begin your project.

Best,
Matthew

First email from the IRB Board

Please note that Baylor University Institutional Review Board has taken the following action on IRBNet:

Project Title: [1925666-1] Hope and Healing in Times of Decline
Principal Investigator: Sally Lombardo, DMin

Submission Type: New Project
Date Submitted: June 9, 2022

Action: WITHDRAWN
Effective Date: June 10, 2022
Review Type: Administrative Review

Should you have any questions you may contact Matthew Gaynor at matthew_gaynor@baylor.edu.

Thank you,
The IRBNet Support Team

https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.irbnet.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7Csally_lombardo%40baylor.edu%7Cee87f4636bbc45e1c21308da4b18cebd%7C22d2fb35256a459bbcf4dc23d42dc0a4%7C0%7C0%7C637904867175849030%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=jglMi5Usg%2Bslq29i9jTQLUpEY4TjPVijT6%2FYjhb4Q%3D&reserved=0

APPENDIX C:

Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

August 1, 2022

Hope and Healing When Life is Hard is a research intervention group that is to be conducted under the authority and permission of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Baylor University in 2022. My intervention group is also approved by the George W. Truett Theological Seminary. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of a church-based course that will offer scripture and theology to help support and explore questions that arise during times of decline and death for families who care for loved ones. You have accepted the offer to take part in this course of study because you have found yourself in a situation that is causing your family suffering and pain, through no fault of your own. By expressing interest, you have shown you are a person who is willing to share and help support others who are on similar journeys.

If you choose to participate in this group study, you will be asked to meet for two interviews, the final one being the longer. You will be exposed to material on the art of dying well, from the 16th century to the present time; you will be reading deep theological writing that addresses our need for God in times of death. Scripture will be provided that addresses all these same needs. Some of the interview and survey questions may cause discomfort or anxiety, and some will evoke memories that are painful and hard. Hope, however, will be offered at every turn. You do not have to answer any question that is too painful or hard, and you can let the researcher know that the course is just too much.

As part of the research, all of the intent for data collection will be explained to you at the outset of the course. The interviews will be qualitative and ask for responses and suggestions for improvement, not for quantitative data. The questions will not be formed in the manner of, "on a scale of 1 to 10, how do you describe your experience?" You will not be paid for taking part in our small group, but neither will you be charged for reading material or purchases. The benefits inherent in your participation will be foremost that others will benefit in the future from information that is learned.

One of the risks in partaking in this study is the possible loss of confidentiality or sharing of some information in the community of the church. We will all agree to promise confidential behavior, but nothing is guaranteed. This researcher will protect your privacy and your name will be hidden in all reporting or assessment of data.

Please feel free to call Truett Seminary with any questions or concerns about the group intervention or the summary questions. Contact persons will be the following:

Dr. Preben Vang: preben_vang@baylor.edu

Dr. Brian Brewer: brian_brewer@baylor.edu

Sally Lombardo: sally_lombardo@baylor.edu

If you need to speak with someone on the review board not directly involved in this study, contact the Baylor University Institutional Review Board in the office of the Vice Provost for Research at (254) 710-1438. They will be happy to discuss: 1) Your rights as a subject of a research project; 2) Your concerns about the nature of the research; 3) Any complaints about the way the research was done.

By continuing with the research and completing the questionnaires, you are providing your consent to be a part of *Hope and Healing When Life is Hard*.

Name: (please print) _____ . Date: _____

Signature: _____

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agnes, Michael, ed. *Webster's New World Dictionary*. Cleveland, OH: Wiley, 2002.
- Anselm, Saint. *Proslogion*. Edited by M. J. Charlesworth. Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1979.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Edited by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Clairmont, CA: Coyote Canyon Press, 2010.
- Arbesmann, Rudolph, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, trans. "Tertullian: Apologetical Works." In *Fathers of the Church*. Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 1950.
- Athanasius, Saint. *The Complete Works of St. Athanasius*. Translated by Phyllis Schaff. Amazon.com: Kindle, 2016.
- Atkinson, David William, ed. *The English Ars Moriendi*. New York: P. Lang, 1992.
- Augustine of Hippo, Saint. *The City of God*. Edited by Paul A. Böer, Sr. Amazon.com: Kindle, 2012.
- Bailey, Kenneth E. *The Good Shepherd*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014.
- Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Corinthians*. The New Daily Study Bible. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Barnard, L. W. "Is the Epistle of Barnabas a Paschal Homily?" In *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.
- Beaty, Nancy Lee. *The Craft of Dying: Literary Tradition of the 'Ars Moriendi' in England*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970.
- Bettenson, Henry. *The Early Christian Fathers*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Blomberg, Craig. *I Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Book of Common Prayer, The (1789)*. New York: Church Publishing, 2016.
- Brent, Allen. *Ignatius of Antioch: Martyr, Bishop, and the Origin of Episcopacy*. New York: Continuum, 2009.
- Brewer, Brian. *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.

- Brooks, David. "Tim Keller's Life and Message." *New York Times* (May 23, 2023).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Spirituality of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.
- Bucer, Martin. *Common Places of Martin Bucer*. Translated and edited by D. F. Wright. Appleford, UK: Courtney Library of Reformation Classics 4, 1972.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. XX*. Library of Christian Classics. Edited by John T. McNeill. London: SCM Press, LTD, 1960.
- Claypool, John. *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler*. Waco: Word Books, 1974.
- Coogan, Michael, ed. *New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV*. London: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Covatch, Samson. "Anselm's Concept of the Resurrection to Perfect Eternal Happiness for Believers and the Resurrection to Complete Misery for Unbelievers." *The Theology Pit, A Christian Education Ministry* (May 7, 2018). Accessed July 18, 2023, <http://thetheologypit.com/new-blog-1/23p9gpe6kjgw53mhjf8c34atscz2s9>.
- Cressy, David. *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*. London: HarperOne, 2011.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2022.
- de Boer, Erik. "The 'Comfort for the Sick' as *Ars Moriendi*." In *Church History and Religious Culture* 102, no. 3-4 (2022): 517.
- Derry, Ken. "One Stone on Another: Towards an Understanding of Symbolism in the Epistle of Barnabas." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 4 (1996): 515-28.
- Drobner, Hubertus R. *The Fathers of the Church*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007.
- Dugdale, Linda. *The Lost Art of Dying*. New York: HarperOne, 2020.
- Dykstra, Robert, ed. *Images of Pastoral Care*. Grand Rapids: Harper One, 2008.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.
- . *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2001.
- Fersko-Weiss, Henry. *Caring for the Dying*. Newburyport, MA: Canari Press, 2017.

- Filson, Floyd V. *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10. Edited by George Arthur Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- Freedman, David Noel, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Garland, David E. *2 Corinthians*. New American Commentary, vol. 29. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999.
- . *Mark*. The NIV Application Commentary. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Gaventa, Beverly R. *First and Second Thessalonians, an Interpretation*. Louisville: John Knox, 1998.
- Glimm, Francis X., Joseph M. F. Marique, and Gerald G. Walsh, trans. *The Fathers of the Church: The Apostolic Fathers*. Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 1947.
- Gossip, Arthur John. *Exegesis: The Gospel According to St. John*. The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 8. Edited by George Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- Green, Bradley G. *Shapers of Christian Orthodoxy: Engaging with Early and Medieval Theologians*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Gregory Nazianzen, Saint. *Select Orations of Saint Gregory*. Amazon.com: Aeterna Press, 2016.
- Gregory of Nyssa, Saint. *Select Works of Gregory of Nyssa*. Amazon.com: Kindle, 2016.
- Hafemann, Scott J. *2 Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Hagner, Donald A. "Gospel, Kingdom and Resurrection in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Life in the Face of Death*. Edited by Richard Longnecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Harris, Murry J. *2nd Corinthians*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 10. Edited by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. et al. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.
- Harrison, Everett F., and Donald A. Hagner. *Romans*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11. Edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Hazlett, W. Ian P. *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland*. London: T&T Clark, 2005.

- Holman Bible Publishers. *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010.
- Holmes, Michael, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers in English*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- . *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. The NIV Application Commentary Series. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
- Irenaeus, Saint. *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*. Edited and translated by Joseph P. Smith. New York: Paulist Press, 1952.
- Janz, Denis R., ed. *A Reformation Reader: Primary Texts with Introductions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Janzen, J. Gerald. *Job*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Edited by James Luther Mays. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973.
- Kalantzis, George, and Matthew Levering, eds. *Christian Dying: Witnesses from the Tradition*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.
- Kalina, Kathy. *Midwife for Souls*. Boston: Pauline Press, 2007.
- Keble, John, trans. *Five Books of St. Irenaeus of Lyons*. Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1972.
- Larchet, Jean-Claude. *Life after Death According to the Orthodox Tradition*. Edited and translated by John Champoux. New York: Holy Trinity, 2021.
- Leithart, Peter J. *Athanasius*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Leroux, Neil. *Martin Luther as a Comforter: Writings on Death and Illness*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Pub., 2007.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: HarperOne, 1996.
- Liefeld, Walter L., and David W. Pao. *Luke*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed. Edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2007.
- Lightfoot, J. T., ed. "The Didache: Teaching of the Apostles." In *The Apostolic Fathers: Early Christian Writings of Church Leaders*. Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2020.

- Longnecker, Bruce, and Todd D. Still. *Thinking Through Paul*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition, vols. 56–82. Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes. St. Louis: Concordia, 2009.
- . *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. Edited by Timothy F. Lull. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.
- . *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*. Edited by John Nicholas Lenker. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.
- . *Luther's Works*. American Edition, vols. 31–55. Edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999.
- . *Luther's Works*. American Edition, vols. 1–30. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76.
- McKelvey, Douglas Kaine. *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, and Hope*, vol. 2. Nashville: Rabbit Room Press, 2021.
- McKim, Donald K., and Jim West. *Martin Bucer: An Introduction to his Life and Theology*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2022.
- Mitchell, Kenneth R. *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1983.
- Moloney, Francis J. *The Gospel of John*. Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 4. Edited by Daniel J. Harrington. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Romans*. The NIV Application Commentary. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Nouwen, Henri. *Our Greatest Gift: Meditation on Dying and Caring*. New York: HarperOne, 1994.
- O'Collins, Gerald. *Saint Augustine on the Resurrection of Christ*. London: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- O'Loughlin, Thomas. "The Missionary Strategy of the *Didache*." *Transformation* 28, no. 2. New York: Sage, 2011.
- Osborn, Eric. *Irenaeus of Lyons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Parsons, Mikeal C. *Luke*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

———. *Acts*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

Paul, Kathryn. “The *Ars Moriendi*: A Practical Approach to Dying Well.” *Modern Believing* 56, no. 2 (2015): 210-11.

Purves, Andrew. *The Resurrection of Ministry*. Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2010.

———. *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.

Reid, James. *II Corinthians*. The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 10. Edited by George Arthur Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.

Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to 325 AD*, vol. III. Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887.

Robertson, Archibald. *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*. Edited by Samuel Rolles Driver and Alfred Plummer. Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1982.

Rolle, Richard, of Hampole and His Followers. *The Crafte of Dying*. Suffolk, England: D. S. Brewer, 1999.

Sampley, J. Paul. *First Letter to the Corinthians*. The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 10. Edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. *The Complete Works of St. Athanasius*. Translated by Phyllis Schaff. Amazon.com: Kindle, 2016.

Schaff, Phyllis, trans. *The Complete Works of St. Athanasius*. Amazon.com: Kindle, 2016.

———, and Henry Wace, eds. *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.

———, and Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4. Edited by Archibald Robertson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.

———, and Henry Wace, eds. *Against Eunomius*. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd series. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.

———. *The Middle Ages: Gregory VII 1049 to Pope Boniface VIII, 1294*. In *History of the Christian Church*, vol. V. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907.

- Scherer, Paul. *The Gospel According to St. Luke*. The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 8. Edited by George Buttrick. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.
- Schoedel, William R. *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters*. New York: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Shriver, Maria. *What's Heaven?* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Sloyan, Gerard John. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973.
- Smith, Abraham. *The First Letter to the Thessalonians*. The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, vol. 11. Edited by Leander E. Keck. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.
- Smith, Joseph P., trans., ed. *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1952.
- Stairs, Jean. *Listening for the Soul*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Staniforth, Maxwell, trans. *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers*. New York: Dorset Press, 1986.
- Talbert, Charles H. *Matthew*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Edited by Mikael C. Parsons and Charles H. Talbert. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Taylor, Jeremy. *Holy Dying*. New York: Mershon Co., 1900.
- Tucker, W. Dennis, and Jamie A. Grant. *Psalms*. The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 2. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Verbrugge, Verlyn D. "I Corinthians." In *Romans–Galatians*. Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11. Edited by David E. Garland and Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Vine, W. E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- Walton, John H. *Job*. The NIV Application Commentary. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Ward, Benedicta. *Anselm of Canterbury: His Life and Legacy*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2009.
- . *Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1973.

Wells, Samuel. *Incarnational Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

Wood, Adam. "My Soul Is Not Me; Thomas Aquinas on Humanity and the Afterlife."
Biola: Center for Christian Thought, The Table (September 26, 2016).

Wright, N. T. "Acts: New World, New People." Summer Intensive Conference. Houston:
South Main Baptist Church, April 4, 2023.

———. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: Harper One, 2008.

———. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.