



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Living without hope is like sailing on the open ocean with no wind. It's hard to get going with nothing driving us toward our destination.

Thankfully, as believers we have a hope that doesn't leave us adrift: God's error-free, inspired Word. As we face an increasingly hostile world, not to mention the normal trials of life, there's nothing we need more than hope. And not the kind of false optimism that clings to comfort and material ease but hope that transcends our earthly limitations and that leads us through death's door to resurrection!



Getting Started: God's Greatest Gift

Every New Year, many of us hang a new calendar on the wall, with no marks except for special holidays preprinted for convenience. The remaining white space is left to be filled in with events that have not yet occurred. The same is true of the future. We simply do not know what tomorrow holds. Yet the Word of God encourages us to face that uncertainty with a hope-filled confidence in God's preordained plan. We call that simply walking by faith and not sight. The twin ingredient of faith is hope. And that's no truer than in Paul's words about the future found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Turn to that passage in the New Testament, and take a few minutes to read through 1 Thessalonians 4.

Though the word *rapture* never occurs in the Bible, it comes from the phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 translated "caught up." And though the rapture hasn't occurred yet, Paul made clear this significant event could happen at any moment.

If you have a Bible dictionary, look up the word *rapture*. How would you explain this biblical event to your ten-year-old son or daughter? (Hint: You'd want to explain it in a way that instills hope not fear.)

Quotable

*There is
nothing, I mean
NOTHING,
like good theology
to take away
your fears.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



THE GREATEST WORDS

Believers' Greatest Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Write down at least three ways your hope in the rapture can affect your daily life. Look closely over the verses from 1 Thessalonians 4 to help you frame your response.

Turn to John 14:1–3, paying close attention to Jesus' words. Remember: Reading a few verses at the end of the preceding chapter often provides helpful insight on the context of the new chapter's theme. Take a few minutes to review the end of John 13. What clues do you find that help you understand John's emphasis on hope at the beginning of chapter 14?

Based on John 14:1–3, who will experience the hope of heaven? How can your hope in Christ's coming equip you to encourage others who grieve the deaths of Christian loved ones?

Read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. Think about it! Isaiah foretold the birth of Christ approximately 700 years beforehand. What can you conclude about the accuracy and reliability of God's Word? Can you trust what Scripture says about the rapture?



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Your Turn in the Scriptures

Before you dig into 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, look at James 4:13–16. Write down your observations about this passage. How does James 4 relate to 1 Thessalonians 4?

What does James 4:13–16 reveal about human nature? How about the nature of God?

Correlating passage:

How does Luke 12:13–20 relate to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18? How does Luke develop the theme of the problem of pride?

Reread James 4:13–16 slowly. Before you do, ask the Lord to examine your heart. Describe how you go about making important decisions for you or your family. To what degree do you rely upon the supernatural resources of prayer and searching the Scriptures to help guide your plans? Try to be as specific and transparent as possible in your response.

Keep in mind, the more personal and transparent your reflection is on your own approach to life, the more pointed and practical your ministry will be when given the opportunity to teach others from this passage.



THE GREATEST WORDS

Believers' Greatest Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Now pause to reflect on James 4:15–16. Think of a time when your plans didn't work out the way you had envisioned. How did you react? How were others in your life impacted by the results?

Now, back to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. The apostle Paul wrote his letters, recorded in the New Testament, for several reasons:

- To share theological teaching with new believers
- To help Christians apply those teachings to their lives
- To correct wrong beliefs about God and His Word

In the case of this passage, Paul felt compelled to correct erroneous teachings regarding believers who had died prior to Jesus' return.

Take some time to slowly read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Write down some observations about the sequence of events in this passage.

Read verse 14. What event grounds your confidence in your future resurrection and the resurrection of all believers? Why?



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1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

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How did Paul connect the grief that accompanies death with our hope as believers? In other words, what does it mean to grieve with hope? What awaits those who have “fallen asleep in Jesus”?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. How do these verses make you feel about death? Write down several phrases to capture your feelings.

Correlating passage:

How does this passage relate to 1 Thessalonians 5:10–11?

What principles from this study can you apply to your life this week?

In 1 Corinthians 15:51–55, the apostle Paul reminded his fellow believers (including us!), dearly loved by God, that we have hope beyond death. Paul passionately explained that at the rapture God will exchange our old, earthly bodies for new, heavenly ones, and that we will live in the Lord's presence forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Such a wonderful message of hope we have to share!



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1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

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STUDY

Write down the name of a believer who needs to hear the encouragement Paul offered in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Pray for this believer, and commit to share with him or her what you have learned. Send this person a text or a Facebook message reminding him or her of your prayerful support.



A FINAL PRAYER

Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the hope in the rapture. Use the space below, or write your prayer in your journal.



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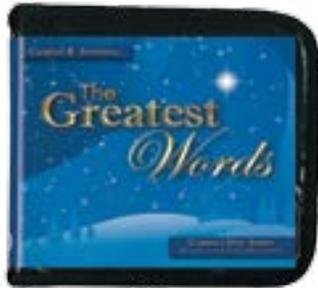
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

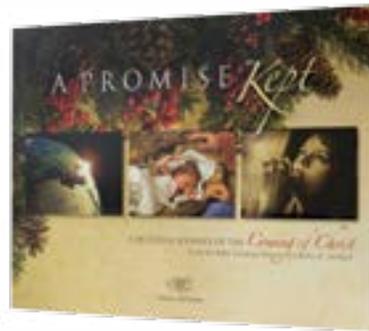
STUDY



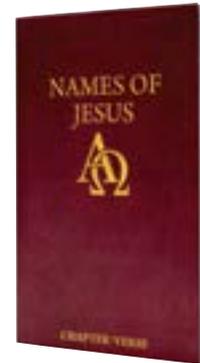
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2016 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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