

Where is heaven?

What happens when you die?

DYING TO KNOW

What difference does it make?



A course exploring the Christian hope of resurrection and life after death.

Preface

This course comes out of our conversations over coffee and the odd sandwich. As ministers of Anglican and Baptist churches in the northern town of St Helens, England, we wanted to make the theological insights found in Tom Wright's *Surprised by Hope* accessible to the people of our communities. What we believe about God has a profound affect on how we live and our intention was to inspire people to live lives shaped by a clearer understanding of Christian hope.

We simply offer this course, having seen it spark a passion in our own communities, hoping it will help bring clarity to people's thinking in your setting too.

We hope too, that the course might grow with you and encourage you to send us any additional feedback, comments and content that comes out of your own use.

John Draycott & Tim Hyde

Find us on the Web

Updates to this course and additional resources will be published on our website:

talk2.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Tom Wright for writing *Surprised by Hope* and all his other works with such clarity. Without him and people like him, we couldn't do what we do week by week.

Unless otherwise stated or in error!, bible references are quoted from the TNIV:

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Introduction

This course aims to help people explore the theme of Christian hope. It comes out of a desire to make the teaching found in Tom Wright's book, *Surprised by Hope*, accessible to church communities. It is based on group discussion and bible study, aided by references to material from popular culture.

Structure of course

Each of the seven sessions includes leader's notes and a handout, which may be copied and given to each participant.

We refer often in the leader's notes to *Surprised by Hope* and believe those running this course will find that book an essential companion to the course.

The course runs over 7 sessions and does seem to take people on a journey of understanding. The structure of the course follows that of *Surprised by Hope*. In the first couple of sessions, some of the variety of beliefs that exist in our culture and amongst Christians are uncovered. This can be a little unsettling at first for some who attend, but as each session leads to the next, we found the course helped people piece together a more biblical and practical understanding as the course went on. The final sessions aim to inspire people to living lives shaped by hope.

Each session includes:

- some kind of icebreaker
- movie clips or other cultural references
- small group discussions
- a core bible reading and group bible study
- plenary and teaching elements hosted by course leader(s)

Movie clips and other material

The course uses numerous video clips and music tracks as well as other material from our culture. These are items that were known to the authors and their communities, so you are encouraged to use your own alternatives, if you can. The internet is a rich source of illustrative material, whether it be lyrics to popular songs or some mash up on YouTube.

Many of our clips were found on WingClips (www.wingclips.com), a site providing clips from popular movies, with permission granted legally ready for use in church settings.

Planning your group

Of course if you are going to run a course, you need people to come, someone to lead it and place to meet.

The course is aimed primarily at Christians, but it is a subject that does attract attention. You can download a poster from our website that you can use to promote the course. (<http://talk2.org.uk/>)

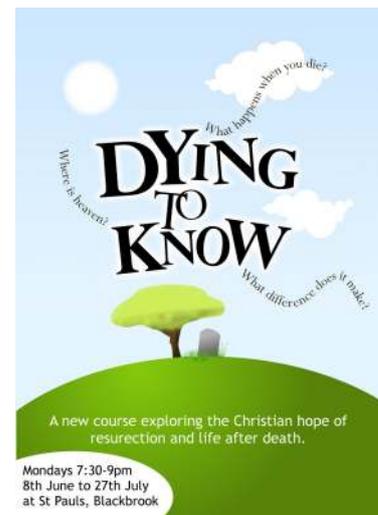
You will obviously need at least one leader, often a minister, but someone who has at least read *Surprised by Hope* and has a sufficiently broad understanding of the Christian faith and theology to field the many and varied questions and comments that this course will provoke.

The numbers of people attending may vary from church to church. It is possible to run with large numbers as long as you break into smaller groups for the discussion based activities.

Support & Feedback

We hope this course will grow with you and so value all comments and feedback via our website:

<http://talk2.org.uk/>. This site will also include links to online resources and additional material other people find useful for the course.



Bibliography and Further Reading

You would expect the bibliography to be at the back? Well, we don't think you can host this course unless you have read a couple of books. Here are a few that you might find helpful:

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007)

Stephen Holmes & Russell Rook (eds.), *What are we waiting for? -Christian hope and contemporary culture 2008* ISBN-13: 978-1842276020

Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: v. 2 (Christian Origins & the Question of God) (Paperback)
by N.T. Wright (Author)

Stephen Travis, *End of Story End of Story: What Jesus Said About the Future of the World* (Paperback) 1997

The Theology of the Book of Revelation (New Testament Theology) by Richard Bauckham (Paperback - 4 Mar 1993)

The Coming of the Son of Man: New Testament Eschatology for an Emerging Church (Paperback)
by Andrew Perriman (Author)

Course Sessions

Confused by Hope

This first session aims to explore some of the popular beliefs about life after death. It is important to allow people freedom to express popular held beliefs without criticism and for healthy group dynamics to be established in this first introductory session. All discussion questions are on the session handout.

Icebreaker

As this is the first time this group has met together, it is probably worth letting members of the group introduce themselves to one another. At the same time get the group to come up with suggestions for their answers to:

What two items would you take on a desert island?

Get the group to share some of their answers and reasons for their choices.

Introduction to Course & Session 1

Spend some time introducing the content of the course, explaining that the subject of life after death is not a regular topic of conversation in our culture, even in church. Suggest we intend to answer questions like: “What is the ultimate Christian hope?” and “What hope is there for change, rescue, transformation and new possibilities within the world in the present?” (*Surprised by Hope* p5)

Explain that this first session explores some of the common held beliefs, superstitions and romance about death and life after.

Pick up on the icebreaker by explaining that in modern times in the west people often place objects like those from the icebreaker in people's coffins. Share some of the following examples that have been found (see handout).

How do these compare to the answers that the group gave?

Discussion in groups or pairs

In groups try to identify as many different understandings, rituals, superstitions associated with death you can think of? *What do some of the world religions believe? What do colleagues and friends believe?*

NOTE to leader: You may want to have a read up yourself on what other religions believe. The entry on Wikipedia is as good a place as any to get a start.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afterlife>)

Summarise what the groups come up with. If groups have focussed on Christian beliefs, try to fill in some of the gaps by summarising the different beliefs of other faiths and cultures. Explain that there is a lot of variety of belief and confusion about death and the after life, even amongst Christians.

In the Movies

Use a clip from the film *Gladiator* from near the end of the film (Scene 27), where the main character goes off into “heaven”. And then show the “funeral blues” clip from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Scene 12). Draw out the contrast between the two and what they seem to be saying about the after-life and death.

In the Bible

Read John 11:25-26

Then in groups/pairs again ask: *Do you believe this? What is the Christian hope in death and after-life? What does it mean to believe in resurrection?*

What do you make of the poems and hymns on the handout?

It is important here that people are free to say what they believe without correction or criticism. This should be true for the whole course.

Explain, that amongst Christians there is actually a great deal of confusion and difference in people's understanding about death and after life.

- Heaven and hell
- No hell
- Purgatory or other versions of journeying after death
- Universalism (that everybody in the end succumbs to God's love)
- Romantic pictures of heaven
- New heaven and new earth?
- Second coming

Sum up

Explain that over the next few weeks we'll be exploring some of the key questions that Tom Wright explores in his book. What does the bible, reason and tradition teach on this? Do we have an immortal soul? How do we understand the resurrection of Jesus and how was it understood by the disciples? What is the Christian hope for the world, judgement, resurrection and eternal life?

Next Time

We explore the biblical background and setting for hope in resurrection.

Close in Prayer

Close the session with a prayer.

Confused by Hope

What two items would you take on a desert island?

10 Things People Were Buried With

1. Sir Walter Raleigh - his favorite pipe and a tin of tobacco.
2. Wild Bill Hickok - his Sharps rifle.
3. Rudolph Valentino - a slave bracelet.
4. Bela Lugosi - his Dracula cape.
5. Humphrey Bogart - a small gold whistle.
6. Elvis - a diamond ring.
7. Frank Sinatra - a flask of Jack Daniels whiskey.
8. Sandra Ilene West (California socialite) - her 1964 Ferrari.
9. Princess Diana - a set of rosary beads given to her by Mother Teresa
10. Andy Warhol - a bottle of Estee Lauder perfume.

(Source: <http://www.mentalfloss.com/>)

What do some of the world religions believe about life after death? What do colleagues and friends believe?

John 11:25-26:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

What do you think Christianity teaches about death and after-life? What do you think it mean to believe in resurrection?

How are popular beliefs expressed in poetry?

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep -
He hath awakened from the dream of life -
'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,

And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings. -We decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

--From *Adonais* by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourn of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

From Tennyson's, In Memoriam

Or in this sermon by Canon Henry Scott Holland

“Death is nothing at all, I have only slipped away into the next room. I am I, and you are you; whatever we were to each other, that, we still are. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way which you always used, put no difference in your tone, wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we shared together. Let my name ever be the household word that it always was. Let it be spoken without effect, without the trace of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was. There is unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just around the corner. All is well.”

Or in hymns

Till in the ocean of thy love
We lose ourselves in heaven above
John Keble

Awhile his mortal blindness
May miss God's loving kindness
And grope in faithless strife;
But when life's day is over
Shall death's fair night discover
The fields of everlasting life.
Paul Gerhardt, 1648

Is this what hope in resurrection means?

Biblical Hope

This second session aims to explore and establish the importance of physical resurrection to a biblical understanding of Christian hope. This session focusses on material in Chapters 3 & 4 of *Surprised by Hope*.

Icebreaker

Since this session explores some of the biblical settings to the belief in resurrection, get the group(s) to share what their favourite parts of the bible are?

Get the group to share their answers and comment of general patterns that emerge.

Introduction to Session 2

Introduce the theme of this session, explaining that resurrection is fundamental to the Christian faith. Explain that this session aims to visit some of the biblical content relating to resurrection in anticipation of the sessions to follow. Explain that it is important that we get our ideas about faith from scripture.

Also give time for any questions/comments arising from the first session.

In the Movies

Use a clip from a movie to illustrate that people don't come back from the dead, ordinarily.

In *Pirates of the Caribbean, Dead man's chest* - there is a clip on WingClips.com that shows Jack Sparrow locking himself in a coffin to escape imprisonment.

Or from *Lost* - there was an Episode "Dead is Dead" showing at time of writing. Somebody even put it on YouTube [here](#).

Discussion in groups or pairs

Get people to discuss the following questions, in groups/pairs:

Do you believe in a physical resurrection? What do you think it means to believe in resurrection? And does it really matter?

Draw out the fact that if resurrection wasn't physical, then death has not been conquered.

In the Bible

Read 1 Cor 15:1-34

Draw out how Paul makes resurrection fundamental to Christian faith. Explain also that resurrection was not invented by Paul but was a Jewish belief at the time of Jesus.

The theme of this whole passage is resurrection - the resurrection of Jesus and the

future resurrection of those who believe in Jesus.

Jesus rose according to the scriptures (vs 4). He appeared to many witnesses (4-11) including Paul himself. Paul's gospel is that a new world has begun in Jesus. Jesus' resurrection was real, even if some denied any kind of resurrection (12). It is only the resurrection that makes sense of the crucifixion. Paul counters pagan belief in no resurrection with his arguments. Resurrection proves Jesus to be the Messiah. A new world has begun in which sin and death no longer has the last word. Paul explains the order of things (20-28). Christ is king and has been raised. The coming of God's kingdom has started and come to total fulfilment in the future. Resurrection isn't the immediate future of those who die, it is what happens when Jesus comes again.

Resurrection didn't mean just some disembodied life after death, but a return to an embodied life. To believe in resurrection of the dead is to believe in "life after the life after death" (Tom Wright *Surprised by Hope*).

You may also want to look at John 11:24 for the story of Lazarus. Also when the Sadducees come to quiz Jesus about marriage in Mark 12:18-27 there is an assumption about a physical resurrection.

In Groups/Pairs

Take some of the gospel resurrection stories. You could use the excellent BBC Drama *The Passion* along with bibles to discuss the nature of Christ's resurrection. *What do these tell us about the nature of Jesus' resurrection body? How does this relate to the general hope of resurrection in the New Testament?*

You might like to end the session with the clip from BBC's, *The Passion*, where Peter is tending a sick man by a pool, when Jesus appears. Note the ordinariness of this appearance of Jesus. (Title 2 ch 4 25:25)

Next Time

We explore the what Christians believe about hope for the future.

Close in Prayer

Biblical Hope

What is your favourite bible passage (if you have one) and why?

Do you believe in a physical resurrection? What do you think it means to believe in resurrection? And does it really matter?

What does Paul say about the nature and importance of bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15? Note some of the specifics of Paul's argument against those who deny resurrection.

1 Cor 15:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born....

...But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all others. ...

... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a human being. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But in this order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Resurrection was a Jewish belief - it wasn't a Christian invention:

John 11:24:

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Also in Mark 12:18-27

**To believe in resurrection is to believe in
"life after the life after death".**

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

What do the gospel resurrection encounters tell us about the nature of Jesus' resurrection body?

How does this relate to the general hope of resurrection in the New Testament?

Future Hope

In this third session we aim to explore God's plan for the world, exploring the biblical image of New Creation. This session focusses on material in Chapters 5, 6 & 7 of *Surprised by Hope*.

Icebreaker

To get this session started, break into groups and share answers to the question:

If the world was to end in 5 minutes, what would you do?

Allow time for feedback.

Introduction to Session 3

Recap from the last session and explain that this third session explores God's plan for the future of the earth.

In the Movies

There are endless movies about “*the end*”, use one of them to begin this session.

We used *I am Legend* which was at hand at the time of writing.

Available on WingClips: [I Am Legend - Day 1001 \(1:21\)](#)

Discussion in groups or pairs

Break into groups and consider: *How does the clip we just watched and other popular movies portray the destiny of the world and human kind? What do you think? How do they compare to “Christian” hopes?*

Or consider songs, like Woodstock by Joni Mitchell?

Explain

Draw on some of the comments from the discussion. Then using some of the material in *Surprised by Hope* explain the two views of evolutionary optimism and souls in transit (found in chapter 4). The first is the utopian dream of progress. The second tells us the world is a wicked place and we need to escape it - a view that entered Christian thinking early on as gnosticism. They believed like Plato that the material world was evil, inferior and some were called out to a spiritual existence. Many hymns wander into the kind of just passing through kind of spirituality. You end up with the purpose of being a Christian to be to “go to heaven when you die”. This world, this life even, no longer matters!

What is the danger of these two views in Christian living?

Marx said that religion is the people's opium. Was he right?

In The Bible

Using some of the bible references (Revelation 21-22:6, Isaiah 65:17-25, 1 Cor 15:24-28, Romans 8:19-25) break into groups to ask:

What is the world waiting for? What do you think New Creation is? Where will it be?

Explain

Share together the findings of the groups and spend some time underlining the following points:

That God's creation was made good and his plan is to redeem it, liberate it.

God will be all in all.

Heaven and earth will be merged in God's new creation

That new creation is here on a *renewed* earth. (cf picture of new Jerusalem coming down)

Discussion in Groups or Pairs

How different is this biblical picture to the movies you saw earlier? What difference do you think it make to life now?

In the Movies

You could finish with a clip from Narnia - the snow melting scene. (scene no...)

Next Time

We explore the subject of the second coming.

Close in Prayer

Future Hope

If the world was to end in 5 minutes, what would you do?

How do popular movies portray the destiny of the world and human kind? What do you think? How do they compare to "Christian" hopes?

Or what about in Songs?

"We are stardust
Billion year old carbon
We are golden
Caught in the devil's bargain
And we've got to get ourselves
back to the garden "
Joni Mitchell, Woodstock

What is the world waiting for? What do you think New Creation is? Where will it be?

Check out what the Bible says in Revelation 21-22:6, Isaiah 65:17-25, 1 Cor 15:24-28, Romans 8:19-25.

Revelation 21:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. '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!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

1 Corinthians 15:

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Romans 8:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

“What creation needs is not abandonment on the one hand, nor evolution on the other, but redemption and renewal; and this is promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the whole world is waiting for.”

N T Wright *Surprised by Hope*

How different is this biblical picture to the movies you saw earlier? What difference do you think it make to life now?

The Second Coming and all that

In this session we aim to explore what the bible says about the second coming of Christ, subject that people let their imaginations run away with. This session focusses on material in Chapters 8 & 9 of *Surprised by Hope*.

Introduce the session

Having thought about what God's plan for the world might be, this week we look at another subject that has tended to capture peoples imaginations. We are going to consider what the bible teaches about the second coming.

But first...

In the Movies

We found a the clip from Heroes on [YouTube](#). First exiting flying scene that shows a Congressman being taken off up into sky. Break into groups and get them to ask:

Is this how it happened? Where is Jesus now?

Explain

Of course this is something that has occupied theologians for centuries. You might explore some of the options - up above? In the clouds? Some scholars suggest the risen ascended Jesus is somehow temporally located - outside time. We don't really know, only that the New Testament says he will return (though Jesus never mentions it! - see p137-138 of *Surprised by Hope*). He did rise from the dead and he did return to be with the Father - he is reigning as King. (Eph 1:20-23) (See also p120-128 in *Surprised by Hope*).

Discussion in groups or pairs

The bible is full of metaphor and picture language. In groups, take a look at some common metaphors from everyday conversation and get them to discuss their meanings. Can they think of any others?

Come back together and discuss how reading the bible can sometimes be difficult when we come across images we don't understand.

In the Movies

Show film clip from *left Behind* (available on [WingClips](#)) where people are on an aeroplane and suddenly all those who are "Christians" disappear.

Is this how the second coming will happen?

(Note: we do not agree with the Left Behind series interpretation of how things might happen, in case you were wondering.)

In The Bible

Read 1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, Philipians 3:20-21, Colossians 3:

What do you make of the language in these and other passages about the “second coming”? Make comparisons and try to resolve what Paul is trying to say through the images he uses.

Explain

The bible actually uses a variety of imagery to express the idea that Jesus and his people will be personally present to each other.

Parousia (vers 1 Thess 4:15) usually translated “coming” but literally means presence - i.e presence as opposed to absence. One meaning of this word is about a royal presence, when a king or emperor visits part of their empire.

Paul draws on metaphor of trumpets, clouds etc. Trumpets sounding - is an allusion to Moses coming down the mountain. Clouds - draws on Daniel 7 and Jesus' application to himself in the gospels. But the point Paul is making is that having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him into his domain. (Not to find themselves in clouds to be taken out of world). The language of citizenship in Philipians adds to the overall picture.

The picture Paul paints is born out of the idea that Jesus is already the true Lord (and not Caesar!). “Rapture theology avoids this confrontation, because it suggests that Christians will be miraculously removed from this wicked world” (*Surprised by Hope*).

In Colossians Paul simply says “appear” - the same event from a different angle and steers us away from the idea that he'll come like some object from outer space.

(See *surprised by hope* p136-158 for a more thorough discussion of these texts.)

In Music

A popular artist Larry Norman's songs are often based on the idea of the second coming. Listen to *An unidentified Flying Object*. You should be able to find on the internet.

In groups ask:

What is he saying? Is it helpful?

In the Movies

Use the clip from I am Legend, available on WingClips : [I Am Legend - God's Plan \(1:08\)](#) .

This clip is a challenge to some Christian understandings of this subject.

Close in Prayer

The Second Coming and all that

What happened when Jesus ascended into heaven? Where is he now?

Ephesians 1:20-23

he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

What do we mean? - when we say things like:

- “I’m working up the ladder”
- “I was waiting hours for bus”
- “He is my knight in shining armour”
- “She has a mouth like a gorilla’s arm pit”
- “he has a heart of stone “
- “She ran like the Wind“
- “It is raining cats and dogs“

Read the passages below. What do you make of the language in these and other passages about the “second coming”? Make comparisons and try to resolve what Paul is trying to say through the images he uses.

1 Thess 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Compare with:

Phil 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

1 Cor 15:51-54

Colossians 3:1-3

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

1 John 2:28 & 3:2

What do you make of Larry Norman's song in light of what you have read?

He's an unidentified flying object
you will see Him in the air
He's an unidentified flying object
you will drop your hands and stare
you will be afraid to tell your neighbours
they might think that it's not true
but when they open up the morning papers
they will know they've seen Him too

He will come back like He promised
with the price already paid
He will gather up His followers
and take them all away

He's an unidentified flying object
He will sweep down from the sky
He's an unidentified flying object
some will sleep but will not die
He's an unidentified flying object
coming back to take you home
He's an unidentified flying object
He will roll away your stone

and if there's life on other planets
then I'm sure that He must know
and He's been there once already
and has died to save their souls

He's an unidentified flying object
you will see Him in the air
He's an unidentified flying object
you will drop your hands and stare
He's an unidentified flying object
coming back to take you Home
He's an unidentified flying object
He will roll away your stone

Larry Norman 1976

Final Destiny

In this session we aim to explore what the bible says about our final destiny, after death and the theme of judgement. This session focusses on material in Chapters 10 & 11 of *Surprised by Hope*.

Icebreaker

Ask people to get into groups and ask them to think about:

Who, now dead, would you most like to have a conversation with?

In the Movies

Show a clip from the *Sixth Sense*, where the boy Cole, tells the Malcolm Crow that he sees ghosts all the time.

Discussion in Groups or Pairs

Following on from the clip get groups to think about:

So what do you think does happen when you die?

Explain

Paul, while believing in resurrection is certain that after death he will be with Christ. Jesus also promises the thief on the cross a place in paradise. Jesus speaks of paradise and of “rooms” prepared (the word means temporary dwelling though!). In 1 Thess 4 the word sleep is used to refer to the body dying. Though the word heaven is rarely used to describe the immediate state after death.

It is important to underline the clear Christian hope that life beyond death is one where we will be in the conscious presence of Jesus. But it is also clear that there is an ultimate hope of resurrection.

The central promise is of being with Jesus after death, “my desire is to depart, and be with Christ” writes Paul. But our language of heaven needs to be shaped by the ultimate hope of bodily resurrection.

In the Bible

Read 2 Cor 4:7-18, John 5:25-30; 2Cor 3:12-15

How do you see judgement? What about heaven, hell, purgatory? Do we have an immortal soul?

In the Movies

Show clip *Pirates of Caribbean* where Jack Sparrow buys back his soul with 100 souls.

On WingClips.com : [Pirates: Dead Man's Chest - 100 Souls \(1:14\)](#)

In the creed

See handout.

Explain

This is chance to try and discuss some of the material from Chapters 10 & 11 of *Surprised by Hope* which is essential reading for Leaders at this point. One of the big ideas here is whether we believe the bible teaches that we are created immortal or whether this is a gift from God.

John 5 points us towards the idea that all will be raised to judgement.

1 Tim 6:16 suggests that immortality is something that only God possesses and is therefore a gift. We do not have an immortal soul!

The new testament speaks often in terms of reward. It isn't so much about gaining payment for a good job done, but more about working at a relationship in order to enjoy the other persons company more fully.

The ultimate hope is not going to heaven when you die but being raised bodily into the likeness of Jesus.

Purgatory - actually this life is meant to be a purgatory. All the Christian departed are in the same state. Sometimes described as 'sleep' but that doesn't mean an 'unconscious state'. The body is asleep, the person continues in the conscious love of God. We can call this heaven, though the NT never calls it that. The word Heaven is used for other purposes.

And what about hell? We need to overcome the caricatures of medieval creation. When Jesus used the word Gehenna, often translated as hell, he was not teaching about hell. Gehenna was a local rubbish dump.

Judgement is about God putting the world right in the end.

Eternal punishment rests on the idea of immortality of the soul. Annihilation then seems to be a possibility. Others opt for universalism (Rom 11:32,5:18). Common view is separation that relies heavily on Jesus sayings that most likely are not about eternity.

Next Time

The question to ask is not about our personal destiny, but God's; how will God's new creation now come? How will humans contribute to that final renewal?

Close in Prayer

Final Destiny

Who, now dead, would you most like to have a conversation with and why?

So what do you think does happen when you die? You might like to contrast the two bible verses below.

Psalm 6:5

Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?

Philippians 1:23

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

How do you see judgement? What about heaven, hell, purgatory? How do they fit in? What does the bible say?

Do we have an immortal soul?

2 Cor 4:7-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Cor 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Romans 14:10-12

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat your brother or sister with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

" 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' "

So then, we will all give an account of ourselves to God.

John 5:25-30

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgement is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

In the Nicene Creed:

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

Rethinking Faith

In this session we aim to think about what salvation means in light of the hope of resurrection. It is important in this session to get across the idea that “salvation” is as much about life now as it is about life after death and that is about mind, body and spirit. This session focusses on material in Chapters 12 & 13 of *Surprised by Hope*.

Icebreaker

Ask people to get into groups and ask them to think about:

What do you most value about being human?

Allow some time for feedback and try to summarise what your group value most.

In Music

Play a couple of clips from songs that use the word “salvation”. Examples include *Patience* by Take That and *Angels* by Robbie Williams. We noticed that lots of songs use this word, but what do we mean by it?

Discussion in Groups or Pairs

What does Salvation mean? What do the songs say it means?

In the Bible

Read Mark 5:24-34

In what ways was this woman saved? Is there more than one meaning to salvation? What other stories do you know of how someone has been saved?

There maybe people in the group willing to share their own story. The emphasis here is on being able to see how being saved is all encompassing.

Explain

Salvation is about whole human beings, present not just future, God working through us. (See p 213 in *Surprised by Hope*.)

Referring to 1Cor. 15:58, encourage the understanding of how kingdom values continue into eternity.

In the Movies

Use a clip of Sand painting or an artist painting. You'll find some on YouTube like [this one](#).

Use to explain that we have difficulty discerning the picture until the artist has completed it.

Discussion

The Christian Aid motto is “we believe in life before death”. How does what we have learnt about Christian hope inspire such living?

See handout illustrations of Tom Wright and Quote from Michael Angelo. Do these help?

End with the quote in handout from Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (page 220), because we couldn't put it any better!

Rethinking Faith

What do you most value about being human?

What does Salvation mean? Many pop songs use the word too, what do the songs say it means?

Just have a little patience
I'm still hurting from a love I lost
I'm feeling your frustration
Any minute all the pain will stop.

Just hold me close inside your arms tonight
Don't be too hard on my emotions.

'Cause I
Need time
My heart is numb, has no feeling
So while I'm still healing
Just try and have a little patience.

I really wanna start over again
I know you wanna be my **salvation**
The one that I can always depend.

I'll try to be strong
Believe me I'm trying to move on
It's complicated but understand me.

'Cause the scars run so deep
It's been hard but I have to believe
Just have a little patience [x2]

Have a little patience
My heart is numb, has no feeling
So while I'm still healing
Just try and have a little patience
Patience by Take That

Read Mark 5:24-34

So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

"You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

In what ways was this woman saved? Is there more than one meaning to salvation? What other stories do you know of how someone has been saved?

Matthew 10:7

As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'

Matthew 6:10

Pray...

"your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

It is often not easy to guess what an artist is creating until either the work is almost complete or the creation is finished. Do the illustrations below help in regard to our role in the whole scheme of God's work?

The image I have often used, in trying to explain this strange but important idea, is that of the stonemason working on part of a great cathedral. ...

...They may not have seen the complete architect's drawing of the whole building with 'their bit' identified in its proper place. Nor may they live to see the completed building, with their work at last where it belongs. But they will trust the architect that the work they have done in following instructions will not be wasted. They are not, themselves, building the cathedral; but they are building for the cathedral, and when the cathedral is complete their work will be

enhanced, ennobled, will mean much more than it could have meant as they were chiselling it and shaping it down in the stonemasons' yard.

Michael Angelo looked at hundreds of blocks of marble before he decided on the right one. When asked how he was going to create such a fine figure such as King David out of such an enormous chunk of marble; his answer was "That's easy. All I have to do is chip away everything that is not David.

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (page 220)

The **Christian Aid** motto is "we believe in life before death".

How does what we have discovered about Christian hope inspire such living?

But what we can and must do in the present, if we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, and if we are indwelt, energized and directed by the Spirit, is to build for the kingdom...

...Every act of love, gratitude and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings, and for that matter one's fellow non-human creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed which spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honoured in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God. God's recreation of his wonderful world, which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world. In fact, it will be enhanced there.

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (page 220)

Shaped by Hope

In this final session the focus is on how Christian hope in resurrection might shape and inspire our living today.

Icebreaker

Ask people to get into groups and ask them to think about:

Who was the greatest human being since Jesus?

Teaching

Based on material around p255 in *Surprised by hope*, make the following points:

- that a risen Jesus, is a Jesus who lives and reigns as King.
- that the resurrection points to the fact that God's new world has begun
- to be a follower of Jesus is to be an ambassador of the king

The imagery used in the new testament is to compare being a citizen of heaven to that of Rome. Caesar isn't king, but Jesus is. The rule of Rome would have been enforced by presence of ambassadors, laws and culture. As citizens of heaven we are to make the rule of heaven a reality on earth.

This is the kind of thing Jesus was interested in: *read the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-10 or Jesus' manifesto in Luke 4:18-19*. The emphasis of Jesus was on life now, not simply a ticket to heaven.

In History

Use some examples of great human beings who provide examples of making the rule of heaven a reality on earth.

Stories from Make Poverty History campaign, the film *Amazing Grace*, Mandela, or some of Martin Luther King's speeches would be suitable.

On WingClips: [Amazing Grace - Trailer \(2:51\)](#)

On YouTube: [Martin Luther King "I have a dream"](#)

In the Bible

Read Colossians 3:1-17

How does this passage suggest the reality of Jesus' reign and the new world shape our lives?

How is church to be shaped by the hope we have exploring in this course? What is the practical outworking? What will you do differently?

Discussion

Summarise some of the suggestions from the groups and then go on to summarise the course.

We have seen that a biblical Christian hope is rooted in the physical resurrection of Jesus which in turn is the first fruits of a hope in the resurrection of the dead. Our beliefs about death and the after life are to be shaped by this hope. This had led us to see how God's plan for the cosmos involves a renewing of creation where heaven and earth are brought together. It has implications on how we see the world and what it means to be saved. It has profound consequences on how we live now.

In Music

Use the Where is the love? From the Black-eyed peas. There are lots of video based version of this song.

On vimeo : [Where is the love?](#)

Prayer

Finish by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

Shaped by Hope

Who was the greatest human being since Jesus?

What was Jesus' agenda when he came announcing the Good news of the kingdom?

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' Manifesto in Luke 4:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the Lord's favour has come.

Read Colossians 3:1-17

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander,

and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How does this passage suggest the reality of Jesus' reign and the new world shape our lives?

How are our lives and how is church to be shaped by the hope we have been exploring in this course? What is the practical outworking?

What will you do differently tomorrow?

“Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth to heaven, but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That after all, is what the Lord's prayer is about. “

Surprised by Hope p305

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.