

# ***Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life***

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## **Resolutely Hopeful**

How does the resurrection change your relationship to Jesus?

In what ways does His promise of your resurrection change how you live today?

How does the promise of another's resurrection affect your relationship with that person?

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** – <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### **I) Can You Hear Him Now?**

Humanity is fascinated with what it is to live. Philosophers, writers, thinkers have worked with this material since ancient times. Conscious or not, we continue to use their ideas in choosing how to live our daily lives. God has been calling out to His people since the beginning to live His ideas rather than our own. His loudest, clearest call to us is what we celebrate today – Easter, the day of Jesus's resurrection, the pinnacle of His gracious offer of Hope.

♦ **Timely Answers:** The question what it is to live resolves into a question of purpose. If there is purpose, what is it and how does one

fulfill it? If not, do we create our own? We may ignore this question, deciding life is to be lived, not contemplated. What, then, when a loved one dies or we near our natural end? Those without answers “grieve as others do who have no hope (1 Thes 4:13).” Countless are the stories of people listing regrets as they prepare to cross life’s threshold. Without firm Hope, despair sets in.

♦**Go to the source:** The question cannot be taken seriously without first establishing how life came into existence. Big bang? YOLO. Toys for some gods? Conform or rebel, knowing the whims of the gods control your fate. That’s terrifying. A Loving Creator? Receive His love and love Him back. For Christians, “since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died (v14).” Jesus is God’s love expressed perfectly, which includes the way into the eternal presence of our Loving Creator God. Receiving God’s love is receiving Jesus, and reflecting His love is to live as Jesus did. We too express His love as best we can and offer the way into God’s presence to those around us.

## II) Do You Hear Him?

Some act as though the purpose of life in Christ is to express belief in acknowledgement while muddling through like everyone else. Others a disconnected life of suffering now while waiting on a better experience in the next age. The True Hope of Easter comes through a close reading of this passage. Life is infused with meaning now because of the Hope of resurrection in Jesus.

♦**Follow me:** The purpose of life as revealed in Jesus, that “He is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15).” He resolutely represents God despite other possibilities. Never serving Himself, He represents God in His love of others because of His total Hope in His Father to sustain His life. Our purpose is the same. We are created in His image, the freely chosen expression of His being in creation. Accepting this purpose, revealed and enabled by Jesus, we “will be with the Lord forever (1 Thes 4:17).”

♦**Don’t just sit there:** Talk is cheap. It is easy to think or say what we would do without actually doing anything. This is the purpose in death. It is the only way in which any of us can become one fully entrusting ourselves to God. Until that point, we only *imagine* ourselves willing to trust Him with our life. Jesus’s death is a blessing to us in what it makes possible, also it is the only way He could fully express the trustworthiness of His Father. For this reason, those who have not committed themselves fully to God through death “will be no

means precede those who have died...the dead in Christ will rise first (v15-16).” They will receive the promise of His Hope, the assurance of life eternal, and the experience shared with Jesus of utter dependence on His Father.

## III) Now Tell Others...

If we accept that what it is to live is to be God’s image, His expression in creation, we cannot help but love others. Loving others is the intentional act of seeing the image of God that remains in them, seeing past their wounds and scars to the perfected image of God in them, and living in the way that brings forth that image. We are to be so fully convinced of our Hope in Jesus that we cannot help but encourage others to share in it. Easter expressed as Mary who “ran to tell the disciples (Mt 28:8).”

♦**Share freely:** We need not experience our own death for the opportunity to develop intense Hope rooted in God’s faithfulness. Similar work is performed as we share the burden of the dying. Christians are uniquely capable of bringing Hope and Peace to that moment. Standing on the resurrection of Christ, we share a unified future. We commit those we love to the promise that “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 (1 Thes 4:16-17).” Our separation in body is temporary, reunion the promise of the Lord’s resurrection. This Truth is universal, available to all, as evidenced by Jesus’s commitment to the dying criminal, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).”

♦**Urgent Hope:** What it is to live is to embrace a dual reality, one physical and spiritual, one on earth and the kingdom of heaven. Each layer transcends the other and carries its seed forward by the grace of God. Once our spirits were dead, resurrected by baptism in the Holy Spirit. Sometime our bodies likewise will be dead, then resurrected by the return of Jesus. Thereafter we will inhabit the fullness of both body and spirit as God purposed at creation, to “be with the Lord forever (1 Thes 4:17).” If the spirit remains dead in rejection of Jesus, what then? Our Hope is urgent, potent to save now with no guarantee of tomorrow. “Therefore encourage one another with these words (v18).” Easter is the celebration of God’s impossible faithfulness, His undying and undeserved love for us, and our call to urgently encourage others to share our Hope.