

## Introduction

Good morning! It's great to see you this morning. We are continuing on in our series entitled "Advance." We're talking about how the Kingdom of God moves forward. As part of this series, we're studying a Book out of the Bible called 1 Thessalonians. So if you are with us today and you have a Bible with you, I want to invite you to go ahead and get that out and open it up with me to the Book of 1 Thessalonians. If you don't have a Bible with you, but you've got a smart phone or a tablet, you can certainly use a Bible app that's on that. If you don't have any of that with you, you can just simply follow along on the screens here in a few moments as we have the Scripture come up there. We want you to know, though, that as we study this, that we believe that the Scripture shows us how we can understand God more, so that's why we study it together, as we go into this series. Last week we talked about the fact that the reason that the Kingdom of God is on the move and the reason that we talk about Jesus with other people is because we love them. Love is what motivates us to do that.

Today, I want to actually go a little bit deeper, a little bit beyond that, and talk about something that's much more pressing and really something that we don't really talk about a whole lot... some of these big questions. One of the things that separate being a human, apart from being any other part of the animal kingdom, is the fact that we deal with ultimate questions that other animals do not. We wonder. If you live long enough, you will wonder and ask these things: "What is the meaning of life?" "Why am I here?" "What is the significance of me being alive today?" Then there's the big one: "What happens after I die?" We don't talk about this a whole lot because it's kind of awkward, and we really don't have an answer. There's really no way that we could know definitively how it is and what happens after we die. So what do we do? Well, we kind of ignore it. Some of us just choose to say, "Well, you know, whatever happens will happen at that point." Others of us, we like to make fun of it or laugh at it.

Did you like the comic strip "The Far Side"? Do you guys remember "The Far Side" by Gary Larson? I love that comic strip. One of my favorite things about "The Far Side" was that he would do a lot of comic strips about the afterlife... about heaven and hell. It was just good to laugh about those things sometimes, even though it was kind of ridiculous and preposterous, the things that he was saying. I just happened to bring a few of them with me today. I just want to show these to you. This first one here, I love this... "Welcome to heaven; here's your harp... Welcome to hell; here's your accordion." (Laughter) No offense to any accordion players who might be in this room. I just thought that was pretty great. This second one here... a little bit different; it shows a painter working in hell. The painter is standing there with Satan looking menacingly at him with his hands on his hips. Then he says, "Well, I'll be; I must have been holding the dang work order like this..." He had it upside down. Instead of "666," he got "999"... I think my personal favorite is this third one here. I love this: One demon is talking to another demon, and they see a snowball flying by... and he says, "Look, Sid... another snowball. I tell you, this place is slipping!" (Laughter) Good stuff.

Now, we know that's not really real. I mean... you know... that kind of stuff isn't going to happen. That sort of thing is preposterous, but Gary Larson, in writing those comic strips, tapped into something that every person who's sitting here today has struggled with and wondered about at some point: "After I breathe my last breath, will anything else happen? Or... is that it?" Now, if you're in this room today and you're a believer, you already know the punchline to this story; but if you're here today and you're not a believer or if you have never been to a church that has talked about this before, you might be wondering what's about to happen next. I'm going to just go ahead and give it away for you. Christians believe that something happens after you die. We want to talk today about what it is that Christians do indeed believe.

Whenever I was first diagnosed with heart failure back in the year 2000 and 2001, I found myself, in February, in Baylor Hospital in downtown Dallas. I was about to get a pacemaker/defibrillator implanted into my chest. I was probably one of the few people under the age of 60 that was on that entire floor at the time. I was 25 years old. That night Joy and I were in the hospital; I was really ill. Ben was about 2 months old. It was kind of a tender and difficult place for us as a family at that time. In the middle of the night, about 2 a.m., we were awakened by a sound that I had not heard before. The person in the room next to mine died in the middle of the night. The person who was there with him... I don't know if it was a spouse or a daughter... but it was a woman... I know that. She let out a shriek... a cry... that was visceral. It was guttural and it was the sound of hopelessness. For her, whoever it was that she loved, that she had just lost... that was the last time that she would ever see them. It pierced my heart and I will never forget it.

As we think about those who deal with hopelessness, I want us to understand then why this next passage in 1 Thessalonians is so essential for those of us who are believers because Paul exhorts us to not be people who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13: *"But we do not want you to be uninformed..."* (The literal word there is "ignorant") *"...brothers, about those who are asleep, 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 fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.*

*"Now, concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."*

### 1. Don't be ignorant. (v.4:13)

Paul tells the believers not to be ignorant... not to be uninformed. Why? ...Because in Paul's day, as in our day, many of us choose to ignore death. You know, we kind of have these sayings... folktales that we pass down from one another... completely, entirely based on ignorance. Right? We'll say things like, "You know, after you die it's sort of like this physics class... your energy is just absorbed back into the energy of the universe." I think that's a fancy way of saying, "You're going to decay." Right? (Laughter) Or we'll say something like, "Go into the light." What if that's the incinerator? Has anybody ever wondered that? (Laughter) I mean, I wonder... That's how weird I am... I think about that kind of stuff sometimes. "What if the light is bad? What if it's a trick?" Why do we say those sorts of things? ...Because I think that we have this moment where we just want to comfort each other and have something to say. But that isn't what Paul says.

In Paul's day, the pagan religions of the day really had no hope. In fact, John Lightfoot who is a British scholar at Cambridge, who worked a lot in ancient archeology and anthropology, discovered a papyrus in Ancient Egypt that was written about the same time as this letter. It's a letter written from one mother to another, comforting her in the moment of losing her young son to death. These are the words of comfort that she writes: "There is nothing we can do about such things." Do you ever go to a funeral and you just sense that resignation: "Well, it's happened; there's nothing else that we can do." There's no hope because there is nothing left to hope for.

Paul wanted the pagan religions of his day, the believers of his day, to understand, "You can have hope but you will believe something entirely different than everyone else believes." So if you don't want to be ignorant... as Paul exhorts us not to be... we must see what he says so we can get informed. Because this is the truth: Your response in the face of death... listen to me... your response in the face of death tells you immediately in that moment what you believe about eternity. Whenever someone that you know or loved dies, however you respond to that, you are immediately awakening your heart to what you ultimately believe about eternity. So Paul says, "Look, I don't want you to be ignorant... I want you to be informed, so therefore I want to teach you about some reasons you might have hope."

## **2. ...About the Resurrection. (4:14)**

So, what are those reasons? Verse 14: *"For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep."* Paul's first admonition: "Don't be like those who grieve with no hope." The reason is because we believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus conquered death. Easter matters but it's even more than that. It's not just a resurrection of Jesus... skip down to verse 16: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God..."* (are you ready for this?) *"...And the dead in Christ will rise first."* The Scripture teaches that not only did Jesus Christ rise from the dead, but also everyone who has died in Christ will also be resurrected. You thought the walking dead was weird... (Laughter) No, literally, Christians believe that Jesus came back to life, and there will be a day when all of those who have died in Christ will be raised from the dead. That is a bizarre belief, but it is also a belief that brings hope because it tells you that this life is not the only thing that matters.

Think about this: "If this life is the only thing that there is... if when we die we're simply done... that's it... the power button is switched off... it's over." If when that happens, that's all there is, why would you ever have any hope? There is nothing to hope for. I'll go you one more: "Why would you ever be kind? Why would you ever sacrifice for someone else?" If this is all that there is, you would get all that you can as fast as you can and enjoy it as much as you can because you have a very limited amount of time. But... if there is something else, you might be motivated to love, to sacrifice, to care, to be kind. You might do those things because you believe that there is something beyond that is guiding, that is founding, that is doing something behind the scenes that we can't quite see, and you would believe that that thing matters a great deal. You see, many people have tried to explain away or allegorize or make the Resurrection into a metaphor. They would say, "Of course Jesus is alive today. He's alive in the hearts of His believers." But that is not what Paul means. He doesn't mean that this is a metaphor; he doesn't mean that this is an allegory... He literally means that Jesus Christ's body came back to life. Listen... the stone moved out from the door. That matters... right? If it was just His Spirit... you know, Casper the Friendly Ghost... he can just float on wherever. But if it's the body, we've got to move the door. Right?

Then here's the crazy thing. Orthodox Christian theology maintains that right now Jesus is still incarnate. He is still in flesh. Like if you had this picture in your mind that Jesus ascended into heaven and said, "Alright, I'm done with this thing," and cast His body off to the side. Guess what? That's not what Scripture says. The reason that our bodies will be resurrected... the reason that Jesus Christ's body was resurrected... are you ready for this? It is because God is not done with the physical world. Now that's kind of crazy. But that is indeed what Scripture says.

### 3. ...And the return. (4:17)

Paul reminds us that there is a resurrection, and so death is now dead for those who are in Christ. Jesus is embodied, we are embodied... our bodies will be resurrected, perfected, and glorified... and this matters because there is something else to come.

The Christian artist Gungor wrote a song called, "This is Not the End of This." They say, "Our eyes will open wider, our mouths will open wider, we will see, we will breathe, because this is not the end of this." There is more to come. There is something else that will take place.

Paul says, *"Those who are asleep..."* Did you ever wonder why he says "asleep" and not "dead"? What happens when you go to sleep? What do you eventually do? You wake up. Did you know that the word that we use in English for cemetery is derived from the Greek word that means "dormitory"? It's just a place where you go to sleep. When you go by the cemetery and you look out there... this will freak you out... are you ready for this? (Laughter) You just go by there and you think "all those people, they're just asleep right now, and there's going to come a moment where they're going to come out." That's like a crazy thriller video happening right there in that moment... (Laughter) I mean, everybody coming back to life in that moment. But Jesus said it in the Gospel of Matthew... remember the young lady who had died, and He said, "She is not dead; she is merely sleeping." And He brought her back to life. That was whenever Jesus brought Lazarus back to life as well. Over and over, it's this idea that people are simply asleep and through the Resurrection were brought back to life. Here's the funny part: The news media... they're out there going, "Let me tell you why these Christians are crazy... Because they have this really conservative social view on whatever particular issue that is." And you think **that's** crazy... (Laughter) "We think there's going to be a mass resurrection one day." That doesn't ever make the nightly news. They don't even know what to do with that. It's kind of nuts over there. We don't really know what to do with that. But it matters because if you want to have hope you must believe, indeed, that there is actually something more... that there is a resurrection. I know what some of you are thinking. "Steve... seriously. A resurrection? You honestly believe that there's going to be a literal resurrection one day?" Well hold onto your hats because it's about to get a whole lot weirder than that.

Because Paul doesn't simply say that there's going to be a resurrection... He then says this in verse 17: *"Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..."* Uh huh... I don't think you read that. (Laughter) *"...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..."* You always wanted to fly like Superman, right? This is a crazy verse. What is it saying? This is where that word... you may have heard Christians use before... "Rapture" comes from. It doesn't mean "rapturous delight" or "pure joy" or "a great feeling." It actually comes from the word there, "caught up together." The Greek word there "caught up"... do you know what the literal translation of it is? It's "snatched." You'll be snatched. It sounds a little violent, "You'll be snatched up." What happens? You get snatched up to meet the Lord in the air. The Latin word there is "repair" which turns into "rapture." So that's what it means to get caught up, to be snatched up in the air. But you don't

get snatched up in the air to go very far. You go to meet the Lord "in the air." Now, this isn't like you're going to a conference call; this isn't a meeting to meet Him there in the air. Actually, that word "meet" is very specific. The Greek word there for "meeting" is essential because it is "hapantasis." Okay... I want you to hear this: "Hapantasis"... this Greek word means this: Whenever an ancient dignitary would come to a town, the city would want to show glory and honor to the dignitary that was coming to town, so they would "hapantasis" him whenever he would come to town. What would they do? They would go outside the town to meet him. Then do you know what they would do? They would have a procession and a parade, and they would walk into town with him and take him right to the city center and put him right there in the ruling spot... on the throne of town... and they would have a festival for him.

Do you remember in the Gospel of Matthew... it's that passage that you read on Palm Sunday when Jesus is coming in on the donkey and everyone is waving the palm branches? You're reading about a "hapantasis" right there because Jesus went straight to his ruling throne as well. No, no, no... not to the governor's house. He went to the temple and He cleaned it out. He kicked everybody out and He said, "My Father's House is intended to be a House of Prayer." Listen guys. There's going to be, according to Scripture, a time when those who are in Christ will be snatched up to meet those who have been resurrected and to meet the Lord... to "hapantasis" Him in the air. Do you know what that means? You're going to meet Him in the clouds so that... guess what? ...you can come down with Him and say, "We have been waiting for you. Welcome." ...and usher him into this place. And that is when, in that moment, that Jesus Christ will come and will set everything right. It's in that moment that John sees Revelation 21... He saw a new heaven and a new earth and the New Jerusalem descending down from the sky. It's that idea that all of the things that are good and pure and beautiful out there in heaven, wherever they are, that they will one day eventually descend and join with the earth, and then all of the earth will be redeemed. You see, there's not simply a Resurrection, but there's also a redemptive return where Jesus Christ returns in order to make Creation as it was intended to be. Everything that is broken... everything that's crooked... all of the disease... all of those things that drive you insane... all of that kind of stuff is going to be set right in that moment because Jesus Christ will establish His rule, and His people will come with Him and say, "Lord Jesus, now make this place the way that it's intended to be."

That's why Romans chapter 8 says that Creation groans, as in childbirth. It's why whenever you see something on the news and you feel it right there in your heart and you say, "Why is it like that in the world? I hate that. Why does there have to be injustice like that?" Those little things that gnaw at you, that bother you... all of those little things. Do you know what that is? That is the Holy Spirit convicting your heart and grieving your heart for the brokenness of the world so that you will one day understand that Jesus Christ will one day set all things right... so that you will feel it and know it within your heart that there will indeed one day be a world that is purified and set and made perfect. All of that matters because of this... that it creates for us a time and a place and a life of hope.

#### **4. So you can have hope. (5:9-10)**

Chapter 5 verse 9... I think is the verse that turns everything: *"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ..."* ...Because Paul says that all of this is going to happen at a surprising time. Don't try and figure it out. You're never going to know when. People who sit around with their calculators and try and figure out when the end of the world is going to be... that's a waste of time... that's a sham. Don't buy into that kind of nonsense because that doesn't matter. Do you know what matters? He says, "Live a life of hope and faith." Let me tell you why to live a life of hope and faith. ...Because *"...God has not destined you for wrath but instead for salvation through our Lord Jesus."*

Here's the thing: A lot of people have this idea in their mind that there's going to be a Judgment Day. Whether they've heard it in the Bible or church or whether they've gathered it from some other sort of religion, they think there's going to be this moment of reckoning... when things are going to be judged. In fact, Revelation chapter 21 indeed tells us that there will be a Judgement. There will be books that will be opened, and people will see if your name is written in the Book. All that kind of stuff is indeed going to take place. But here's the thing: Whenever that kind of stuff happens, people wonder, "Why is it that some people are hopeful and joyful in the face of a Judgement and other people are scared to death?"

I will tell you why some people are scared. They're scared because they think that when they think of heaven they think of it kind of like the Far Side... those cartoons. I don't know if you ever saw it, but there was another one that I used to like. It was a man who was before the Pearly Gates talking to Saint Peter, and Saint Peter says, "Alright, nobody gets in here without answering a question: Train A leaves a station headed north at 55 miles per hour..." (Laughter) ...Then he says, "Hey, do you need some paper for this?" I think that what's funny about that is that there are many of us who have decided that we will only get into heaven if we pass the test... if we have the secret password... if we've done the things that we have to do. Listen to me... I want you to hear me. If you're new today or if you've not been to hear me preach, you may have not heard this... but listen... you are not granted entrance into heaven because you are a good person. You are not granted entrance into heaven because you have done many good things. You are not even granted entrance into heaven because you've done more good than bad. A lot of people think that. There's going to be this time where your good and bad are going to be compared... They're going to be weighed. No, it's not that. You're not going to be admitted into heaven because you are a good employee or because you have done very well at your job or because you've climbed the corporate ladder because you have great skills or because you're an incredible mother or an incredible father or because you have a great attitude or because your people around you would say, "You're a really good person." Those are great qualities to have and I'm glad that you have them, but none of those will get you into heaven. Now listen... this is where it gets really crazy. You thought the Resurrection and the return of Jesus was nuts? Well, really you're going to think I'm insane after this because do you want to know what the Bible says about how you get into heaven? It says that you can't do anything to get into heaven. It says that you can't do a single, blasted thing because there is nothing you can do; it's already been taken care of. You see, it's completely out of your power because God has already taken care of you getting into heaven. You say, "Well, what in the world does that mean?" Let me tell you.

My wife and I went on a date one night. I think it was our anniversary, and we went to one of those fancy steak houses... you know the kind where you have to pay for everything separately. Do you know what I'm talking about? We had saved our pennies for a long time so we could go to this and celebrate. We were young; we were poor... we were excited. So we show up and we were like, "You know what?... we're just going to go crazy tonight. Whatever we want... we're having it." So we started... you know. "Would you like some mineral water?" I was like, "Yes, we would. Bring it on out!" So they bring the mineral water. "Would you like an appetizer?" "Yes, two shrimp cocktails. Just bring them on over." "Salad?" "Oh, yeah; we're having it." Then, it's filet time. "We want a filet." "Put some crabmeat on top of it?" "You bet; put it on there. We want the twelve-dollar asparagus; yes, we want the fifteen-dollar mashed potatoes. You just go ahead and pile it on there." The whole time, I was tabbing this all up in my mind, and I'm thinking, "I do not have enough money in my wallet to pay for this." (Laughter) "Thank you, Jesus, for credit cards." That's what I'm thinking at that time. All this is kind of coming together. I'm excited about it. We have the dessert; we have the coffee. It has been an incredible meal. Our waiter comes over, carrying the little black folder, and you know what is in that black folder. (Laughter) He comes over and he says, "Sir... your meal

has been paid for?" I said, "What? What do mean, 'It's been paid for'?" He said, "Somebody has already taken care of it." I said, "Well, I mean, let me give you a tip..." He said, "No, no, no... Actually, I was told very specifically not to take any money from you for a tip as well." "You can't do that. Let me give you a little something." "No, no, no; if you do that, I'll get in trouble." He's putting his hands out and backing away from me. It was like I had a weapon or something. (Laughter) I probably just had a little crabmeat right there in my mouth. "No, you cannot give me anything." I don't know if you've ever been in that moment, but I felt so weird. I had lived it up. All night long, I was like, "Alright! I'm going to have..." (Laughter) I knew that there would be a moment where there would be a reckoning... a payment time. I knew it was coming... (Laughter) Then suddenly it was like, "Hey... all of this, you just get it for free."

Guys, listen to me. Many of us are living our life right now, and we have this sense there's going to be a reckoning... a moment of payment. Or we even kind of think in our minds sometimes that we don't really know how we're going to take care of it, but we're trying to figure out some kind of plan that maybe we can sneak something by... we really don't know what. We're just like, "It will all work itself out in the end." Let me tell you what. The bill has already been paid. (Clapping) ...and it's crazy... it's crazy because if you're here today you say, "Well don't I have to be a really good person to get into heaven?" No... you're not that good. You say, "Don't I have to do some really nice things so that God will let me into heaven?" No... you're not that nice.

Here's the thing. The reason that you get into heaven is because God gave Jesus anyway. You see, Scripture says this, and I don't understand it. Trust me... I don't understand it, but in a cosmic bookkeeping miracle, you owed everything... you deserved death. Chapter 5 verse 9 says, "You were not predestined... you were not designed for God's wrath." What does that mean? God's wrath is real but instead of getting pointed upon you, do you know where God's wrath got pointed? ...At the cross... on Jesus Christ. And in that moment, that cosmic bookkeeping miracle, Jesus Christ hung on the cross and all of your debt was placed upon His shoulders and He said, "It is finished." Literally, in Greek: "Paid in full." You don't owe another cent.

Now, here's the crazy thing... You're like me. You're standing there going, "I've got to do something." No you don't. "Well, I need to do something." No, you can't. "Well, what do I do?" You just say "Thank you"... "Hallelujah"... and "Glory." ...Because it was all given for you... (Clapping) ...in that moment.

Now, the reason that this matters then is this: It's that thing where you are given a gift that you do not deserve, in a way that you did nothing to earn it. It was just simply given. You didn't even know it was happening. Before you even knew to think about it, God had already taken care of it, through His Son Jesus Christ. That kind of surprising gift that's given to you freely... you did nothing to earn... Do you know what the Bible calls that? It calls it "grace" and "grace" is the currency that God deals in. Grace is the way He pays and it's a beautiful truth. Grace is the currency of our God. Paul says, "Now that you've heard this truth, now that you understand it... that the Resurrection gives you hope... that a redeemed Creation gives you hope... now that you understand that indeed you have been not destined for wrath but instead you have been destined to live a life of salvation with Jesus Christ.

Now that you know those things, what ought you to do about it?" Chapter 4, verse 18: *"Therefore, encourage one another with these words."* Chapter 5, verse 11: *"Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."* Do you know what you're supposed to do with these words? You're supposed to "parakaleo"... that's what "encourage" means: to call people out. Call them out. Not in a bad way; you know, we say that in our world now. "Oh man... he called you out." It's not a good

thing whenever that happens. This is what you do: You call them out into a status of encouragement in this truth. You let them know that you cannot do anything to earn God's love, but He loves you anyway. You do not deserve God's love, but He loves you anyway. You may not feel that you are worthy of God's love, but He has declared you worthy anyway. So what do we do? We talk about it... freely. That's what encouraging is. Right?

How does that work? You're talking with your friends; they're having trouble with their kid. There are basically two responses that the world has to a rebellious child. Number one is permissiveness: Just let them do whatever they're going to do. Number two: Hard-nose approach... break them down. Neither one of those is what Scripture talks about. Right? You say, "What if the way that we parented our children reflected the grace that God the Father had upon us?" They don't talk about that a whole lot, do they? That's different. What if whenever you talk to your friends about the trouble they're having with their kids and you could say, "I just want to model the grace that God gave me through my heavenly Father through Jesus Christ." Hmmm. What if your friends struggle in their marriage? They're saying, "Well, you know, if only he would do this or if only she would do that..." and you could say, "You know what? Marriage is not about a 'He doing this' or 'She doing that.' Marriage is actually something much more beautiful and much more complex. It's not about reciprocity. It's not about 'I do this and then you do this for me.' Instead it's this: 'I love you no matter what you do because marriage is a reflection of the love that God has for us in Jesus.'" People have never heard that before.

What if, instead of kids or marriage, people say, "Hey... what did you do this weekend?" You don't just say, "Well, I watched the football game" or "I cooked out" or "I cleaned the house" or "I ran some errands." ...whatever you did. What if you also said, "I went to church on Sunday. It was crazy." I know why you don't tell them. You're afraid they'll think that you're nuts. Right? But what if you said, "Hey, I went to church on Sunday, and we talked about something... I don't know. Tell me what you think about this." You "parakaleo" people whenever you call them out into this understanding and you encourage them. "Hey, what have you been up to?" "This morning I was reading my Bible. Let me tell you something that I read. Tell me what you think about this." There's a man in our church; his name is Kevin. He has an evangelism strategy: He talks to people and after he's visited with them a few minutes, he says, "Hey... do you mind if I ask you a big question?" He says, "If you were to die tonight, do you know that you would spend an eternity in heaven with Jesus Christ?" All of these things are little ways, little methods... little things where you can just "parakaleo"... encourage people to think about the eternity that God has placed before them in Jesus Christ. You don't have to be a scholar. You don't have to be a pastor. You don't have to be someone who has got all of these incredibly eloquent things to say. All that you have to do is encourage them to consider the ultimate question: The truth of eternity in Jesus Christ.

Church... I love being a pastor. I would say that I love standing before you more than anything else, so I leave you with this. If we believe that eternity is real, we have to act on it. If you don't believe that eternity is real, fine... You walk out these doors, do whatever you want to do with your life. But if you truly believe that there is a heaven and if you truly believe that Jesus has made a way for people to experience the love and the bounty of God, and if you truly believe 1 Thessalonians 5:9 that said that you were not designed for God's wrath but instead intended for salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord, why wouldn't you simply encourage people with that truth? Isn't that a great encouragement? "You were not designed to be punished. You were designed to experience salvation in Jesus Christ." Church... let us speak, let us encourage, whether through parenting, whether through marriage, whether through your job, whether through your life... in whatever way, let us find the words of life to speak truth into these who need to hear: "God loves you. He designed you, not for wrath but for salvation and eternity with Him."

**The Urgency Of Discipleship** | 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 | November 9, 2014  
By Dr. Steven Bezner. Part 5 in the series "Advance: The Kingdom On The Move."

Let's pray: "Lord, we love You. We thank You for Your goodness. God, we ask now simply this: 'Speak to our heart. Lord, we want to hear from You.' God, we pray that we would respond. Whatever it is that You have for us today, Lord, that we would say 'Yes' to it."