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A Meaningful Life

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

A few years ago I read a fascinating study about caterpillars and butterflies. Scientists have long marveled at the metamorphosis these creatures undergo—at the way their entire substance seems to break down and form into something totally new. This particular study discovered that caterpillars that were trained to avoid certain smells retained that training even after their complete transformation into butterflies. In other words, the caterpillars gained experience and formed habits that had enduring value. What happened to them in their immature state was meaningful for their life as mature creatures. In this study we'll discover that in the resurrection the same is true for us.

Group Discussion. Describe an event or experience from your childhood that continues to shape who you are as an adult today.

personal reflection. What have been some of the most meaningful experiences of your life? How would you be a different person without them?

The apostle Paul begins his extended reflection in 1 Corinthians 15 on the significance of Christ's resurrection by recounting the tradition about the bodily resurrection of Jesus that had been passed

down through those like himself who personally encountered the risen Christ (vv. 3-11). He then addresses a number of questions and misunderstandings that had arisen in the Corinthian church about the implications of Christ's resurrection for the rest of us. *Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.*

1. We get the sense from verse 35 that some of the Corinthian believers were struggling to wrap their minds around Christian teaching about life after death. When you picture the afterlife, what do you see?

2. What three analogies from the natural world does Paul use to help us understand about various types of bodies (vv. 36-41)?

3. What is the main point of each of these analogies?

4. Paul contrasts two types of bodies in particular: "natural" and "spiritual." What are the characteristics of each type of body (vv. 42-44)?

5. What is the point of Paul's comparison of the "first Adam" and the "last Adam" (vv. 45-50)?

6. What "mystery" is revealed in verses 51-53?

7. How does this mystery bring about the fulfillment of the saying, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (v. 54)?

8. Paul bursts into praise of God (v. 57) after contemplating this mystery. How do you react to this mystery after reflecting on it?

9. What overall conclusion does Paul draw from this discussion of resurrection (v. 58)?

10. Why does Paul draw a conclusion focused on this present world when his whole discussion has been oriented toward the future?

11. Why is our work in the Lord "not in vain" (v. 58)?

12. How might you devote yourself more fully to your own “work of the Lord” (v. 58)?

As you reflect on the great mystery of transformation, offer praise to God who gives you victory over death through Jesus Christ your Lord. Ask God to strengthen you to devote yourself fully to the work of the Lord that will never fade away.

Now or Later

It can be a bit mind bending to ponder what life will be like in a transformed body. Since Jesus Christ is the only one so far who has gone through this human metamorphosis, it’s worth exploring what we know of his post-resurrection experience. Read and reflect on John 20 - 21. What similarities do you see in how Jesus looks, behaves and interacts with others as the risen Lord compared with before he died? What differences do you see? How do these post-resurrection stories of Jesus help shape the way you understand your own future and the future of God’s world?