

The Power of Christ's Resurrection



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Corinthians 15; Luke 24:44–47; Rev. 20:5, 6; Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Thess. 4:13–17.*

Memory Text: “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. . . . And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (*1 Corinthians 15:14–17, NKJV*).

How fascinating that, even in his time, Paul had to deal with those who denied the resurrection of the dead. After all, people back then saw what death did to the human body. They knew how the corpse liquifies, then dries up into dust, and then becomes almost nothing. And they knew that people have been dead for a long time, too. In fact, most people have been dead a lot longer than they were alive.

The resurrection of the dead seemed no more plausible to them back then than it does to us now, at least from a human standpoint. And that must have been an issue that Paul was addressing.

And it was crucial, too. If Jesus is not risen, He is not who He said He was, the Cross had no effect, and our sins have not been paid for. Despair is really all we would have remaining. But our Lord is risen, ascended into heaven, and will return to take us home!

This week we will focus on 1 Corinthians 15 and its teaching on the resurrection of Christ. Influenced by the surrounding pagan worldview, some in Corinth were saying that there is no resurrection. In response, Paul affirms the resurrection of Christ as our only hope of salvation.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 22.

Proclaiming the Resurrection of Christ

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 15 by focusing on the gospel. He speaks about the gospel: (1) *which* he preached to the Corinthians; (2) *which* they received; (3) in *which* they stood; and (4) by *which* they were saved (*1 Cor. 15:1, 2, NKJV*). This opening prepares the reader for what comes next in the chapter and shows how essential Christ's resurrection is for our salvation (see also *Rom. 10:9, 10*). His resurrection is such a vital part of the gospel message that denying it contradicts one's faith in Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Luke 24:44–47, and Romans 1:1–4. What do these passages have in common?

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, one can find a summary of Paul's message. Whether the phrase "according to the Scriptures" refers to particular Old Testament passages or to the Old Testament as a whole doesn't matter. Jesus' death and resurrection fulfill God's promises found in the Old Testament.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:2, 11. Why do these verses place the concepts of believing and preaching side by side? What is the relationship between the two?

All who proclaim that Christ is risen must first believe that His resurrection is a historical event. In this case, 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 plays a critical role in the New Testament. This passage provides solid scriptural evidence that Christ was seen by numerous people after His resurrection, many of whom were still alive by the time Paul wrote the letter (*1 Cor. 15:6*).

Basically, Paul is saying, *Go ask them for yourselves what they saw*. That is how confident he was in the reality of Christ's resurrection.

These people were eyewitnesses. They were what Jesus said they would be, namely, "witnesses of these things" (*Luke 24:48*).

What reasons do we have for believing in Christ's resurrection? Also, what other things, secular or sacred, do we believe even if we haven't seen them ourselves?

The Risen Christ, Our Only Hope!

In 1 Corinthians 15:9–19, Paul explains how severe and dreadful the consequences of denying the Resurrection are. Without the Resurrection, believers have no hope in the present, much less in the future.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:9–19. What do we lose if Christ has not been raised?

By and large, ancient pagans did not believe in resurrection, especially in the Greek world, with its belief in body-soul dualism (at death the soul soars off to wherever the souls of the dead supposedly go). Paul begins the paragraph in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 with a rhetorical question that shows his deep bewilderment: “What? How can some of you say that there is no such thing as the resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. 15:12, author’s translation). For Paul, disbelieving in the Resurrection is inconceivable, especially because there were so many eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:5–8). But even worse, without the Resurrection, their hope is built on a lie, and they are still in their sins.

He says, in fact, that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then (1) Christ has not been raised (1 Cor. 15:13, 16); (2) our preaching is empty (1 Cor. 15:14); (3) our faith is also empty (1 Cor. 15:14); (4) we are false witnesses (1 Cor. 15:15); (5) our faith is futile (1 Cor. 15:17); (6) we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17); and, obviously, (7) those who have died are no more (1 Cor. 15:18).

Without the Resurrection, both preaching and faith are empty (1 Cor. 15:14). The Greek term rendering the word “empty” is *kenos*. This is a good translation, but it is too broad. Interpreters debate whether *kenos* means “empty” in the sense of lacking truth (so, “untrue”) or lacking results (so, “without result or effect”) or lacking purpose (so, “without purpose,” “in vain”).

Whatever the specific meaning, in a scenario in which resurrection does not exist, faith is portrayed as futile, from the Greek *mataios* (1 Cor. 15:17). Although *mataios* is not much different from *kenos*, the idea is that if Jesus is not alive, faith is fruitless, a delusion, because our sins have not been forgiven (1 Cor. 15:17). We would be false witnesses, deceiving and being deceived (1 Cor. 15:15).

How does one make sense of 1 Corinthians 15 if the dead soar off to heaven (or to hell) immediately? Why, then, is understanding that the dead sleep such an important teaching?

Christ, the Firstfruits

If Jesus were not alive, any expectation about the future would be only delusion (*1 Cor. 15:12–19*). “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead” (*1 Cor. 15:20, ESV*). His resurrection is a historical event. Consequently, we can be sure that all who have died in Christ will be resurrected at His coming (*1 Cor. 15:20–23*).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20–23. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the “firstfruits”?

The end of the present evil age will be marked by the bodily resurrection of those who died in Christ (*1 Cor. 15:22, 23; Rev. 20:5, 6*). As the last Adam, Christ will deliver the kingdom back to the Father by bringing the rulership of this world back to Him (*1 Cor. 15:25–28*). Christ’s subjecting Himself to God (*1 Cor. 15:28*) must be understood in terms of how Adam and Christ are depicted in relationship to each other. As the ultimate Adam in the plan of redemption (*1 Cor. 15:45*), Jesus submits Himself entirely to the will of the Father, something that the first Adam failed to do.

In 1 Corinthians 15:29–34, Paul resumes his thought about the foolishness of denying Christ’s resurrection. He uses the illustration of baptism because it is itself a symbol of a believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection (*Rom. 6:3, 4; Col. 2:12*); it makes no sense to deny the reality of the Resurrection. What is difficult to grasp, however, is what Paul meant by the expression “baptized for the dead” (*1 Cor. 15:29*).

“Different suggestions have been offered, but it is better to interpret the expression as referring to the decision of some to be baptized so that they would be able to be reunited with dead loved ones at the resurrection. It could also be that the decision to be baptized was a response to the exemplary life of those who had died in Christ. This case would refer to people not being baptized in place of the dead but because of the dead.”—Carl P. Cosaert, “1 Corinthians,” *Andrews Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2022), p. 1652.

Second, risking death would be pointless if there were no resurrection (*1 Cor. 15:30–32*). It would be better, instead, to delight in the pleasures of this world (*1 Cor. 15:32*).

Reflect on Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 1:12. How could he be so sure about the future? How can we?

The Resurrected Body

In 1 Corinthians 15:35–39, Paul turns to a brief discourse on the resurrected body. He begins this section by posing two questions: “‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’” (1 Cor. 15:35, *NKJV*). These questions are answered in 1 Corinthians 15:36–49.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:36–41. How does this passage answer the questions in 1 Corinthians 15:35?

Paul applies three analogies to help his readers understand what happens in the resurrection. The first analogy (1 Cor. 15:36–38) remarks that the body is like a seed that must first die (or cease to be a seed) in order to miraculously become a plant. The teaching is clear: resurrection is a miracle of God. Second, the analogy of the bodies (1 Cor. 15:39, 40) highlights that, in this world, God provided different types of bodies for animals and for humans appropriate to the current environment. Likewise, our bodies will be suitable for the new circumstances in the heavenly world. This idea is taken a step further with the third analogy of a glorious body (1 Cor. 15:40, 41), which emphasizes that the glory of the resurrected body enormously exceeds that of the body that came before, our earthly fallen ones.

This idea can also be seen through four contrasts between our earthly body here and now, and the resurrected body. The former is terrestrial, perishable, weak, and natural. In turn, the latter is heavenly, imperishable, powerful, and spiritual (1 Cor. 15:40–44). This does not mean there is no continuity between the two. Paul’s use of the Greek term *sōma* (“body”) for both the buried body and the resurrected body shows continuity. Conversely, the four contrasts above also show discontinuity. Our new bodies will not be the same as the decaying ones we have now (thank the Lord).

Paul does not relate the term “spiritual” to an immaterial existence. Elsewhere, he says that Jesus “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21, *ESV*). We will have real bodies, but they will not wear down or decay. Because all we know now is decay, sickness, and death, it’s hard to imagine life without these things, but that is what we are promised in Jesus.

How does the assurance that our bodies will be transformed into perfection help us be resilient regarding our physical limitations today?

Final Victory Over Death

Read 1 Corinthians 15:54–57. What does this passage tell us about our ultimate victory over death?

Paul begins the last paragraph in 1 Corinthians 15 with an intriguing statement: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (*1 Cor. 15:50, NKJV*). Many Bible readers use this declaration to say that Paul defends an immaterial existence in heaven. But the context indicates otherwise. The parallelism of 1 Corinthians 15:50 suggests that “flesh and blood” is in parallel with “corruption,” such as “the kingdom of God” is in parallel with “incorruption.” Just as happened in 1 Corinthians 15:42–49, here, as well, Paul is contrasting the body now (or even the corpse) to the resurrected body. The buried body is marked by corruption and mortality, whereas the resurrected body is characterized by incorruption and immortality (*1 Cor. 15:50, 53, 54*). Simply put, Paul is saying that our bodies need to undergo a radical transformation in order to inherit heaven.

In short, Paul uses the ideas of corruption and mortality to refer to our sinful nature. In Jewish writings, “flesh and blood” is a phrase for fallen humanity, which is why our bodies must be transformed and purged of all imperfection at His return.

Only when our sinful nature is removed (*1 Cor. 15:54*) and we go through the experience of glorification (*1 Cor. 15:51–53, 1 Thess. 4:13–17*) will the proclamation “‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ ” (*1 Cor. 15:54, NKJV*) be fulfilled. Then, this bold and defiant hymn will be sung: “ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ ” (*1 Cor. 15:55, NKJV*). This all will take place at the second coming of Christ (*1 Cor. 15:51, 52*).

Think about it: we close our eyes in death, and the next thing we will experience is the second coming of Jesus, when He raises us from the dead. No matter when a believer died, even thousands of years ago, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” they will be made alive “at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (*1 Cor. 15:52, NKJV*).

Who hasn’t bemoaned how quickly life passes us by? In our own experience, that’s how quickly the second coming of Jesus will seem. Perhaps our first thought at His return will be “Wow, Lord, Your coming really was soon!” How does this idea help us better come to terms with what is seen as “the delay”?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “God’s People Delivered,” pp. 635–652, in *The Great Controversy*.

“The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life. ‘He that believeth in Me,’ said Jesus, ‘though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?’ Christ here looks forward to the time of His second coming. Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

“The earth mightily shook as the voice of the Son of God called forth the sleeping saints. They responded to the call and came forth clothed with glorious immortality, crying, ‘Victory, victory, over death and the grave! O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ (See 1 Cor. 15:55.) Then the living saints and the risen ones raised their voices in a long transporting shout of victory. Those bodies that had gone down into the grave bearing the marks of disease and death came up in immortal health and vigor. The living saints are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up with the risen ones, and together they meet their Lord in the air. Oh, what a glorious meeting! Friends whom death had separated were united, never more to part.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 411, 412.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about those who were eyewitnesses to Christ’s resurrection (*Acts 1:22, Acts 2:32, Acts 3:15, Acts 4:33, Acts 5:30–32*). How can we, about two thousand years after that event, be “witnesses” of His resurrection?
- ❷ The resurrection of Christ is an integral part of the gospel message (*1 Cor. 15:1–4*). Without the Resurrection, the proclamation of Christ’s death would be irrelevant (*1 Cor. 15:14*). The death of Christ itself would be irrelevant. Why? What does your answer to this say about the power of Christ’s resurrection?
- ❸ Think a bit about Paul’s intriguing statement “If the dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’ ” (*1 Cor. 15:32, NKJV*). What is the point?
- ❹ In class, talk about the state of the dead. Why does 1 Corinthians 15 make no sense if, at death, the saved are immediately taken to heaven?

Spirit-led Encounters

The names of the author, characters, and location have been withheld.

My wife and I prayed earnestly that God would help us establish a home church in the veiled country where I serve as a witness. We knew only foreigners would attend initially, but we had faith that God would send us local people whose hearts He had been working on. It took some time, but He provided!

I met Salman one day when I ordered a taxi service. As he drove me to my destination, we started a conversation that soon diverted to religious topics. He shared that he had become a Christian two years ago after searching online for answers to his spiritual questions.

Salman and I slowly formed a friendship. One time, I asked him whether he was part of a community of believers or had Christian friends. I was shocked when he said he had never met a Christian before! My wife and I felt compelled to invite him to our home worship gatherings, and he began attending regularly. We were delighted that when he married, he brought his wife, and she, too, fell in love with Jesus.

One day, Salman decided to tell his brother Faisal about his love for Christ. To his surprise, Faisal told him he was already a Christian! He explained that he also sought answers to spiritual questions online and gave his heart to Jesus.

Salman told Faisal about our home church, and Faisal joined our group. He had no doubt that God had brought us together. He had recently visited a church seeking Christian fellowship, but the leader told him not to return because it was forbidden for people of Faisal's faith to be there. We praised God for helping us provide a place of belonging for Faisal.

After two years of silence and prayer, Salman and Faisal decided to tell their family about their newfound faith. By the grace of God, their parents accepted their decision, but other family members turned their backs on them.

Please pray that Faisal and Salman and his wife will continue to grow in their relationships with Jesus and that my wife and I will experience many more Spirit-led encounters with God's children in this closed country.

We call a country veiled when we have withheld its name to protect the lives and ministry of frontline workers serving there. To learn about Global Mission's church-planting ministry, visit bit.ly/GMPioneers.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *1 Cor. 15:14–17*

Study Focus: *1 Corinthians 15.*

Introduction

A little girl was watching her grandma plant tulip bulbs in the garden. Confused, she asked, “Grandma, why are you burying perfectly good onions?” Grandma laughed and said, “They’re not onions—they’re tulips! You bury them now, and in the spring, they come back beautiful.” The girl squinted at the bulbs that her grandmother was burying. “Those ugly things die and then come back *fancy*?” “Exactly,” said Grandma. The little girl thought for a moment and then asked, “Is this what happens to us when Jesus wakes us up from the dead? Do we come back . . . fancier?”

That’s not a bad way to put it, actually—and Paul would probably smile at the little girl’s fanciful turn of phrase. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says something radical: the resurrection is real, and our broken, “ordinary” bodies will be raised up glorious—transformed, perfected, and better than we could ever imagine. That’s the Christian hope: death isn’t the end. For the believer, death is only the waiting period or winter sleep before the great transformation.

Lesson Themes

First Corinthians 15 is theologically one of the richest chapters in the New Testament. It focuses primarily on the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of believers at Jesus’ second coming. This lesson will look at four main themes in this chapter:

- 1. The Resurrection of Christ.** Paul starts by affirming the historical reality of Christ’s resurrection, citing eyewitnesses (*1 Cor. 15:1–11*). This affirmation is foundational to the gospel message and essential to Christian faith.
- 2. The Resurrection of the Dead.** Paul argues that if Christ rose from the dead, then believers also will be raised (*1 Cor. 15:12–34*). He counters claims that there is no resurrection, explaining their fallacious implications: without bodily resurrection from death and the grave, faith is futile, and believers are still in sin.
- 3. The Nature of the Resurrection Body.** Paul then explains what kind of body the dead will be raised with (*1 Cor. 15:35–49*). He uses metaphors (such as a seed becoming a plant) to show the transformation from a perishable body to an imperishable, glorified one.

4. Victory Over Death. The climax of this chapter is a triumphant declaration that death has been defeated through Christ (*1 Cor. 15:50–57*). “ ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’ ” (*1 Cor. 15:54, ESV*) is a key line—resurrection transforms human destiny. Paul ends with encouragement (*1 Cor. 15:58*): because the resurrection is real, believers should stand firm and know their labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Part II: Commentary

1. Background: The message of 1 Corinthians 15 stands in sharp contrast to prevailing pagan beliefs in first-century A.D. Corinth, which was a culturally Greek, yet philosophically diverse, city. Paul’s teaching of the resurrection clashed with the surrounding worldview.

Greek (especially Platonic) thought saw the body as inferior, or even a prison for the soul. Salvation, in this view, meant escaping the material body and entering a purely spiritual bodyless existence. Paul, however, insists on a bodily resurrection—not just a spiritual continuation, but a transformation of the physical into something imperishable. This idea would have been radical, even repugnant, to many in the Corinthian intellectual scene.

Many Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, but not in a resurrection. To them, resurrection of the body sounded like regression, not liberation. Paul says the opposite. He underlines a wholistic biblical view of humans as whole beings, not as beings with souls that can exist without bodies. For Paul, the resurrection is the final victory, where even death itself is defeated—not by escape but by transformation of the whole person.

In wider Greco-Roman paganism, views on the afterlife varied. Some minds were skeptical or agnostic; others believed in vague or shadowy existences after death (such as Hades). In contrast, Paul’s teaching is hopeful and confident: the resurrection is certain, glorious, and physical. It was rooted in Christ’s own resurrection, which was witnessed and proclaimed. Pagan views often led to a sense of fatalism—death was final, or life after death was unclear and powerless to affect daily life.

Paul ends the chapter by urging steadfastness and purpose, reminding his audience that “in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (*1 Cor. 15:58, ESV*). The resurrection gives meaning, hope, and motivation for living faithfully. Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 was countercultural—a bold confrontation with the intellectual assumptions of Corinth. Instead of disembodied souls floating off nebulously into the ether, Paul paints a picture of a new creation in which death is defeated and in which the people are redeemed.

2. The Resurrection of Christ: First Corinthians 15:1–11 is a foundational passage wherein Paul sets the stage for the entire chapter. This

section is both personal and theological, as Paul reaffirms the gospel message and emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus as its core. He begins by reminding the Corinthians of the gospel they already know. He's not introducing something new but reconnecting believers to that from which they were at risk of drifting away. He stresses the notion that belief must be steadfast—not just a brief moment of acceptance but a continual trust. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, we find one of the earliest summaries of Christian beliefs in the New Testament, based on the following four key historical elements:

1. *Christ died.* His death was not just a martyrdom but *for our sins*.
2. *He was buried.* His burial confirms that He truly died.
3. *He was raised.* His resurrection is the central miracle.
4. *All these events happened in accordance with the Scriptures.* Thus, Christ's death, entombment, and resurrection were God's plan from the beginning.

Christ's death and resurrection were not opinion or philosophy—these events are actual history, anchored in Scripture and prophecy. The Resurrection was public, physical, and verifiable. In 1 Corinthians 15:9–11, Paul uses his life story as an example of resurrection power at work, demonstrating that the resurrection is not only a doctrine to believe; it's a transforming power that reshapes lives.

3. The Resurrection of the Dead: In 1 Corinthians 15:35–49, Paul tackles a major question the Corinthians, influenced as they were by Greek philosophy, likely had about the resurrection. “Although bodily resurrection has been the issue all along, the term ‘body’ appears for the first time in this chapter and becomes the dominant focus of 15:35–49.”—Mark Taylor in *The New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen et al. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014), p. 401.

Paul begins by using an agricultural metaphor to confront a worldview that looks down on the physical body. The metaphor is that of a seed that must “die” to bring new life. Resurrection doesn't mean that God recycles the current body—it means He transforms it into something glorious. Pointing to God's creative diversity, Paul assures the readers that God can give us new bodies. He directly contrasts our current bodies with our resurrected bodies. We now bear the image of the earthly man (Adam), but we will bear the image of the heavenly Man (Christ). Just as we inherited Adam's broken body, we will inherit Christ's resurrected, glorified body. Ultimately, we will look less like Adam and more like Jesus—in glory, strength, and a Spirit-filled life.

4. Victory Over Death: After explaining the nature of the resurrected

body, in the last part of the chapter (*1 Cor. 15:50–58*) Paul proclaims the ultimate victory over death and the hope that flows from it. The “flesh and blood” in verse 50 refers to our current, decaying human condition—not that bodies are bad, but they need transformation.

This transformation happens at the return of Christ, at which time believers, both dead and living, will be instantly transformed. Paul then uses a clothing metaphor, stating that we must be “dressed” for eternity. Resurrection means being clothed in immortality, not just surviving death, but being made gloriously whole. Combining partial quotes from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, Paul shows that death is swallowed up—not just wounded, but completely consumed—by Christ’s resurrection. The “sting” of death is like a bee; it hurts, but Christ has removed its venom.

First Corinthians 15:56 can prove challenging on first reading, with the power of sin being connected to the law. As noted by New Testament scholar Mark Taylor, “Paul does not elaborate further on the relationship between the triad of death, sin, and the law. Undoubtedly the Corinthians ‘would understand this theological shorthand’ based on prior instruction. The details are worked out and preserved for us in other texts, especially Romans 5–7. Even though Paul’s derision of death and his assertion of victory is in the present tense, the final victory awaits the return of Christ when those who belong to him will be raised (15:23). In other words, Paul contemplates death’s defeat in the light of resurrection day.”—Taylor in *The New American Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, p. 415. Paul makes the point that the law revealed sin and so showed that humanity was condemned, thus giving sin its power. Without Christ, sin leads to death and judgment. With Christ, sin is forgiven, and death is defanged. The resurrection isn’t just theology—it’s a reason for worship, for hope, and for fearless living.

Part III: Life Application

First Corinthians 15 represents a crucial chapter in Paul’s thinking about the resurrection of believers at the second coming of Christ. The following questions are intended to spark both theological reflection and personal application:

- 1. Why does Paul place emphasis on the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection?**
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2. How would you explain the importance of the resurrection to someone questioning the Christian faith?

3. How does Paul's personal story (*1 Cor. 15:9, 10*) add weight to his message?

4. What are the implications, according to Paul, if there is no resurrection (*1 Cor. 15:14–19*)?

5. Are there ways that modern culture reflects similar doubts about the resurrection that the Corinthians had?

6. How does the resurrection shape your understanding of life, death, and what comes after?

7. How do the metaphors Paul uses (such as a seed becoming a plant) help you to understand the idea of transformation?

8. How does this passage encourage you when facing grief or loss?

9. How can belief in the resurrection give purpose and foster a spirit of perseverance and fortitude in everyday life?
