

THE FAITH AND APOLOGETICS SERIES

# DEATH & HEAVEN

*The Doorway to Your Destiny*



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# INTRODUCTION

When I first heard the phrase “terminal illness”—death in six months or less—the prognosis seemed impossible. No, not my mother. And that single word “inoperable”—surely not! I had been present for all of her surgeries, and they had always been successful. But this time, success was not meant to be.

I knew life without her would create a huge hole in my heart—but also in the hearts of many others. Often strangers would stop and ask, “Do you know what your mother did for me?” My response was always the same, “No, I had no idea. She never shared that with me.”

Candidly, I knew people who were not close to their own mothers, yet were drawn to mine for multiple reasons. Her compassionate care for the hurting, her anonymous gifts to the needy, her volunteer work at the hospital, her endearing cards of kindness, her little books of inspiration, her open home to ministries, her Christ-like heart of forgiveness—“looking beyond the fault to see the need” . . . especially of those who hurt her the most.

Early mistakes in her life caused her continual shame. But after she fully yielded herself to the Lord, oh, what a change! Her life resembled a little rosebud that bloomed into beauty. Then one fall day, this fragrant flower died.

In retrospect, my most painful time as her eldest daughter was *prior to her death*—grieving my impending loss of her life. Yet, to my surprise, after she went home to be with the Lord, I felt a complete sense of peace. Not that I didn’t miss her immensely—for indeed, I did . . . daily! Then, why the abiding peace? From where did it come?

My answer is solid and secure: The moment Mother breathed her last breath, based on the Bible, she was “*absent from the body . . . present with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8 KJV). And today, I know she is face-to-face with Christ her Savior, “kneeling at the feet of Jesus.” (I had these words engraved on her tombstone, surrounded by roses.)

But what about those of us still here on earth, grieving the loss of our loved ones—even though we know they have a new home in heaven?



The Word of God has given us wisdom on this. (Although I knew this truth in my head, it wasn't in my heart until my mother died.) Yes, I grieved. However, as a Christian, I did *"not grieve like people who have no hope"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NLT).

Of course, I grieved our separation, but I also knew it wasn't permanent. While some people have no hope of eternal life in heaven, I have a guaranteed hope based on God's promise for all true believers—for those who have given Christ control of their lives. This is why we can experience *"the peace of God that surpasses all understanding"* (Philippians 4:7 NET).

Death is not a popular subject for casual conversation. Yet, are we prepared to face the finality of our mortality? Can we afford to ignore the consequences of this eternal reality? There is the reality of finality: Ecclesiastes 3:1–2 says, *"There is a time for everything . . . a time to be born and a time to die."* In light of this inescapable truth, where do we place our hope?

One day, a dear friend made this unforgettable observation: "June, I watched how you cared after your mom—you were so very close to her. I became concerned about the impact of her death upon you. Yet, after she died, you weren't distraught with grief. You were the same 'you.'" Then my friend, who was totally dedicated to her mother, made this comparison: "Watching you gave me hope. So when my mom died, I knew I wouldn't be overwhelmed with grief."

How interesting and how true. While we both felt natural grief as a normal part of life, my friend and I did *"not grieve like people who have no hope."*

Periodically when asked to sing and speak at a funeral service, I love to share a picturesque "prose poem" as a unique description of life after death. . . . I pray it gives you comfort as you contemplate death and heaven and the peace of God that passes all understanding.

June Hunt  
*Founder, Hope for the Heart*

## **Gone from My Sight\***

I'm standing on the seashore.

A ship at my side spreads her white sails  
to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean.

She's an object of beauty and strength.

I stand and watch her until, at length,  
she hangs like a speck of white cloud  
just where the sea and the sky  
come down to mingle with each other.

And then I hear someone at my side saying,

“There, she's gone.” Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all.

She is just as large in mast and hull and spar  
as she was when she left my side.

And she is just as able to bear her load of living freight  
to the place of destination.

Her diminished size is in me—not in her.

And just at the moment when someone says,

“There, she's gone;” there are other eyes watching her coming,  
and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout,

“Here she comes!” And that is dying.

\*Variously attributed to Henry Scott Holland, Henry Van Dyke, and Luther F. Beecher; source uncertain.





# DEATH & HEAVEN

## *The Doorway to Your Destiny*

*Eternity is too long to be wrong!*

Whatever you may think about your death and ultimate destination, please give this statement serious consideration: *Eternity is too long to be wrong*—too long to be wrong about the meaning and purpose of your life . . . both your present, temporal life and your future, eternal life . . . and about the God who created you to experience them both to the fullest.

God earnestly desires that you live the abundant life He created for you to experience on earth and that you will join Him to enjoy the glorious eternal life He has planned for you in heaven. And this abundant life God wants for you is found in Jesus Christ alone.

This is precisely why we need to ask the right questions about death and receive the right answers—*the truth*.

Throughout the ages people have asked, “Is death the final end or is there something more?” From the ancient world to today, all cultures have created customs and established laws to accommodate their predominant views of death—although some of their varied views stand in stark contrast with each other.

None of us will ever face a more significant reality. The consequences of death make all other concerns pale in comparison.

And if you have any doubt about the significance of death, spend some time with someone who's terminally ill, attend a loved one's funeral, or talk to parents who've just lost a child. You will quickly recognize an urgent need to know *the truth* about death . . . and your eternal destiny. For indeed, *eternity is too long to be wrong*. Jesus said . . .

*"You will know the truth,  
and the truth will set you free."*

(JOHN 8:32)

# DEFINITIONS



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*“Death does not  
have the final word  
over our lives—  
Jesus does.”*



Death is not a common topic for casual conversation or academic debate, especially among those focused on facing the day-to-day concerns of life. Daily, we're bombarded with information about how to lose weight, make money, or prepare for a potential disaster. But facing and preparing for the reality of death is a subject most people would rather avoid.

Yet can any of us afford to ignore the eternal consequences of this ultimate reality? We *know* this reality is coming and can occur at any moment with little or no warning. We each have an unavoidable appointment with death. Are you prepared to face the finality of death when it's your time to die?

*“There is a time for everything, and a season  
for every activity under the heavens:  
a time to be born and a time to die.”*  
(ECCLESIASTES 3:1–2)

## What Are the Different Meanings of Death?

For realists, death is literally *inescapable*. For idealists, they act like they'll never die. However, death offers no exceptions to the fragile, finite lives we lead. And yet, as definitive as death is to all living creatures, there is also guaranteed hope for eternal life beyond the grave for all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

*“We have this hope as an anchor  
for the soul, firm and secure.”*  
(HEBREWS 6:19)

**Physical death** is the end of life—the permanent (and irreversible) cessation all vital bodily functions.<sup>1</sup> Historically, death has been determined by examining one's heart (pulse), lungs (breathing), and pupils (responsiveness).<sup>2</sup>

**Clinical death** is a phrase used to refer to the cessation of vital bodily functions such as heartbeat (blood circulation) and respiration (breathing). However, medical technology can keep many vital bodily functions going despite a person being clinically dead.<sup>3</sup>

**Cognitive death** is a persistent vegetative state of the body in which intellect, memory, speech, and awareness of self and the environment are lost. However, only part of the brain is destroyed, not the brain stem. A person in a persistent vegetative state remains capable of reflex functions such as breathing, sleeping, and digesting food, but is incapable of thought or awareness.<sup>4</sup>

**Brain death** refers to the cessation of activity in the central nervous system—the brain and spinal cord.<sup>5</sup> In brain death, no part of the brain functions, and it cannot be restored. The body can be maintained artificially for a few hours or days until the heart stops.<sup>6</sup>

When God made Adam, the first human being, the Bible says, “*The LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being*” (Genesis 2:7). God’s Word connects breathing with life and elsewhere connects the loss of breathing with death.

*“When they breathe their last, they return to the earth.”*

(PSALM 146:4 NLT)

## What Is the Biblical Perspective on Death?

“*You will certainly die*” God said to Adam, warning him about the consequence of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17).

But the serpent contradicted God by saying to Eve, “*You will not certainly die*” (Genesis 3:4).



Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with God—they walked and talked with Him, and He took care of them. He told them they could eat from any tree except for one, or they would die. Yet they still chose to eat the forbidden fruit. Their bodies didn't die immediately, but later. However, they did experience immediate spiritual death. They were separated from God, banished from the Garden of Eden and from the perfect fellowship they had with the Lord. The prophet Isaiah would later say, *"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you"* (Isaiah 59:2).

Today, as descendants of Adam and Eve, all people are born with this same spiritual condition—they are spiritually separated from God—spiritually dead.

*"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world.  
Adam's sin brought death,  
so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned."  
(ROMANS 5:12 NLT)*

The Bible speaks of death in a number of different ways. **Death is . . .**

### **The physical end of life**

*"Then he [Isaac] breathed his last and died at a ripe old age"* (GENESIS 35:29 NLT).

### **The inescapable grave for everyone**

*"Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave?"* (PSALM 89:48).

### **The separation of the body and spirit**

*"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead"* (JAMES 2:26).

### **The absence of spiritual life/separation from God (spiritual death)**

*"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins . . . But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead"* (EPHESIANS 2:1, 4–5 NLT).

### The doorway to your eternal destiny

*“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”*  
(HEBREWS 9:27).

### The result of sin—violating God’s will (exercising your own will independent of Him)

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

### The price Jesus Himself paid for our sins and to provide eternal life to all who place their trust in Him for salvation

*“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* (ROMANS 4:25)

### The last enemy to be destroyed by God

*“The last enemy to be destroyed is death”* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:26).

## Second Death

**Question:** “Why does the Bible talk about a ‘second death’ and what does it mean?”

**Answer:** The “second death” is the final destination of the lost—the eternal state of those who reject Christ. The Bible refers to the second death as the “lake of fire” or the “fiery lake of burning sulfur.”

*“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire”*  
(REVELATION 20:14–15).

*“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death”* (REVELATION 21:8).

It is a “second” death because it occurs after physical death. The second death serves as a strong warning to turn to Christ now—*today*—for salvation.

*“Now is the time of God’s favor,  
now is the day of salvation.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 6:2)

## Where Do People Go after They Die?

That’s the age old question—what happens after we die? Some speculate. Some say the answer is unknowable. However, the Bible provides clear answers about the afterlife. Only God’s Word contains the truth about what happens after we die. . . .

*“Your word is truth.”*  
(JOHN 17:17)

### Old Testament Terms

The Bible uses different terms in both the Old Testament and New Testament to describe the places people go after death.

**Grave** is the physical place where a dead body is placed, but the physical grave is not the final end of the soul.

*“I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave”* (PSALM 88:5).

**Sheol** is sometimes translated “grave” or “realm of the dead” in the Old Testament to describe a place for the dead, both good and bad. All souls went down to Sheol, a place containing two separate chambers. The Bible says, *“Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death”* (Proverbs 7:27). The righteous were placed in one chamber and the unrighteous in the other.

- **The righteous dead** (when Jacob was told his son Joseph had died): *“All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, ‘No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning’”* (Genesis 37:35 ESV).
- **The unrighteous dead**: *“The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God”* (Psalm 9:17 ESV).

## New Testament Terms

**Hades** is a Greek word in the New Testament that corresponds to the Hebrew word *sheol*, similarly referring to the realm of the dead.

Jesus told a story of two men who die and both go to Hades, but do not reside in the same place or situation (see Luke 16:19–31). In the story, Abraham explains to the rich man in anguish that there is a chasm in Hades separating the righteous from the unrighteous:

*“Between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us”* (LUKE 16:26).

- **The righteous dead** (Lazarus, the poor beggar, went to “Abraham’s side”): *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side”* (Luke 16:22).
- **The unrighteous dead** (the rich man went to a place of “torment” in Hades): *“The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side”* (Luke 16:22–23).

**Paradise**—departed saints (or the righteous dead) enter directly into the presence of Christ, sometimes referred to as *paradise*. While many people use the phrase “going to heaven” when they die, the Bible refers to this as being with the Lord in paradise.

- Theologians sometimes refer to paradise as the “intermediate” or “present” heaven—in contrast to the “new heaven and new earth,” which God will create at the end of time. The apostle Paul said he was once *“caught up to the third heaven”* which he also calls *“paradise”* (see 2 Corinthians 12:2–4).

- This is where believers go when they die. It is a beautiful place of blessing, joy, and peace in the presence of Jesus. Believers in Christ are with the Lord in spirit but have not yet received resurrected bodies. Jesus said to the repentant thief on the cross:

*“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (LUKE 23:43).*

Most people commonly use the terms “heaven” and “hell” to describe the places people will go when they die. Generally speaking, these terms are accurate, in that heaven is a place of blessing in the Lord’s presence, and hell is a place of punishment away from the Lord’s presence. However, God’s Word uses a variety of terms about the afterlife and the realm of the dead (For a helpful breakdown of the terms, see the chart in Appendix B.)

The important issue is what you do with Jesus before you die. Those who accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior will go immediately into His presence when they die and will not face condemnation. Those who reject Christ as their personal Lord and Savior will be separated from God and will face condemnation and judgment when they die. The Bible says . . .

*“Whoever believes in him is not condemned,  
but whoever does not believe  
stands condemned already  
because they have not believed in  
the name of God’s one and only Son.”  
(JOHN 3:18)*

## Purgatory after Death

**Question:** “Does the Bible teach that after I die I will first go to purgatory?”

**Answer:** Millions of people believe that purgatory is a middle state of temporary punishment for those who have died in venial (lesser) sin or for those who have not satisfied the justice of God for sins already forgiven. They believe time in purgatory may be shortened through financial gifts or services rendered by the living on behalf of the dead.

In the orthodox versions of the Bible:

- **Hell, Hades** and associated names are mentioned 99 times.
- **Heaven** as the dwelling place of God, where believers will live, is mentioned 230 times.
- **Purgatory** is not mentioned one time.

Additionally, purgatory was not declared a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church until 1439.<sup>7</sup> Scripture clearly teaches that *only one sacrifice removes sin*—not the sacrifice of money or of service, but the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. The Bible says, “*When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. . . . ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.’ And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary*” (Hebrews 10:12, 14, 17–18).

On the cross, Jesus fully paid the price of punishment for our sins, so no more punishment is needed for those who accept His sacrifice as payment for their sins. Therefore, purgatory is an unbiblical doctrine that does not exist. If you believe in Christ, you will go immediately into His presence when you die. The apostle Paul, speaking of his death, said . . .

*“I desire to depart and be with Christ,  
which is better by far.”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 1:23)

## What Does the Bible Say about Heaven?

Throughout God’s Word, there are hundreds of references to heaven. However, the Bible uses the term heaven in a number of ways.

The apostle Paul, for example, explains an unforgettable encounter he had with heaven. He describes the experience as “*visions and revelations from the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 12:1 NLT). Paul writes . . .

*“I was caught up to the third heaven . . .  
Whether I was in my body or out of my body,  
I don’t know—only God knows. . . .  
But I do know that I was caught  
up to paradise and heard things  
so astounding that they cannot  
be expressed in words,  
things no human is allowed to tell.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 12:2–4 NLT)

### Three Realms of Heaven

Paul said he went to the “third heaven,” which implies a “first” and “second” heaven. Although God’s Word typically just uses the term “heaven,” the Bible speaks about three realms of heaven. The reference may differ depending on the context of the passage.



**The first heaven**—the sky, clouds, and general atmosphere above the earth.

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (GENESIS 1:1).

**The second heaven**—outer space including the moon, stars, planets, and galaxies.

*“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?”* (PSALM 8:3–4).

**The third heaven**—the spiritual realm where God lives along with other spiritual beings. The apostle Paul used the terms *“third heaven”* and *“paradise”* interchangeably (see 2 Corinthians 12:2–4). When people speak of “going to heaven,” this is typically the place they are referring to—going to be with God in heaven.

*“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him”* (PSALM 115:3).

## Other Uses of Heaven

**Heavenly realms**—similar to the “third heaven,” the Bible uses the phrase “heavenly realms” to speak of the spiritual realm in which the activity of God, Christ, angels, and demons take place. The Bible says that God has *“blessed us in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 1:3), yet also says, *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (EPHESIANS 6:12).

**Kingdom of heaven**—synonymous with the “kingdom of God”—the kingdom of heaven can be a reference to the millennial kingdom Christ will establish on earth, the rule of God in the hearts of His people, or generally speaking, the sovereign rule of God over all things.

*“From then on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near’”* (MATTHEW 4:17 NLT).

**New heaven and new earth**—the new world God will create at the end of time in which believers will live forever with God in physical, resurrected bodies.

*“Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . . 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’” (REVELATION 21:1, 3).*

The heavens are vast, beautiful, and exciting to imagine. Even more remarkable, the Bible says that God’s love for you is greater than the heavens.

*“Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;  
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.”*

(PSALM 36:5 NLT)

## What Does the Bible Say about Hell?

Hell is not a subject people like to discuss. Yet, Jesus talked more about hell than He did heaven. The Lord repeatedly warned people about the reality of eternal condemnation and punishment. Hell is real, Jesus warned, and it is not just a place for the “worst of the worst” sinners. Jesus went so far to say that even being angry with someone puts you in danger of the judgment of hell.

*“But I say, if you are even angry with someone,  
you are subject to judgment!*

*If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger  
of being brought before the court.*

*And if you curse someone, you are  
in danger of the fires of hell.”*

(MATTHEW 5:22 NLT)

## Two Terms for Hell

**Hell**—The New Testament uses the Greek word *gehenna* to describe hell. Gehenna is a translation of the Hebrew word *hinnom* and refers to the Valley of Hinnom, an actual place in biblical times.<sup>8</sup>

- In the Old Testament, the Valley of Hinnom was a place where great evil occurred, such as child sacrifice. The Bible says that King Manasseh . . .

*“ . . . burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger”* (2 CHRONICLES 33:6 ESV).

- The Valley of Hinnom was later renamed the Valley of Slaughter and became a garbage dump where all kinds of trash, sewage, and corpses were taken to be burned (see Isaiah 30:33; Jeremiah 19:6). Given its dark and disgusting history, Jesus appropriately used this repulsive place to describe the horrific realities of hell. . . .

*“If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched’”* (MARK 9:47–48).

**Lake of fire**—This phrase is used several times in the book of Revelation to describe the final place of eternal punishment for the wicked (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14–15; 21:8). Jesus used the phrases “*eternal fire*” and “*fire of hell*” to describe hell (Matthew 18:8–9), so the lake of fire seems to be synonymous with hell—the final destination of unbelievers, those who reject Christ.

*“Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire”* (REVELATION 20:15).

## Hell Is . . .

**A physical place** where unbelievers exist after death.

Some jokingly equate hell with their circumstances in life here and now, but Scripture places great emphasis on the reality of God's judgment on sin and the physical existence of eternal punishment.

*"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire" (MATTHEW 18:8).*

**A place of separation** from the person and the presence of God.

Hell is a place of eternal grief and regret for the willful rejection of the gift of God's salvation through Christ. The apostle Paul said of Jesus . . .

*"He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 THESSALONIANS 1:8–9).*

**A place of eternal punishment** for failure to achieve the standard of God's righteousness and holiness, which can only be gained through faith in Christ. Hell is a place of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual torment. It is a place of fire without light, a place of eternal punishment.

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' . . . they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life" (MATTHEW 25:41, 46).*

On one occasion, furious with the Pharisees for their sins and hypocrisy, Jesus asked them, *"How will you escape being condemned to hell?"* (Matthew 23:33). That question is not just for the Pharisees, but for every single living person. How do you avoid the judgment of hell? The Bible tells us plainly. . . .

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."*  
(ACTS 16:31)

## What Does the Bible Say about God's Judgment?

“It’s not fair!”

Siblings shout these words over the slightest infractions—toys taken away, snacks unevenly distributed, or bogus rules of a board game. These words take on deeper meaning in adulthood—when a colleague takes credit for your work, when others seem to get away with lying or worse, when a spouse cheats, or a horrific crime occurs.

As image-bearers of God, we crave justice when we see things go wrong. We hate injustice, and we long for wrongs to be made right. In fact, the Bible repeatedly shows God’s people crying out for His judgment when they see wickedness . . . *“Rise up, O God, judge the earth”* (Psalm 82:8).

If as His image-bearers, we long for justice over wrongdoing, how much more does God—the source of righteousness and holiness—demand and deserve justice? Indeed, God cannot look at sin and evil with indifference. Though many don’t like to think about God’s judgment, the Bible says that God will judge all sin and evil with perfect justice, He will right every wrong, and we will each face His judgment when we die.

*“God will judge us for everything we do,  
including every secret thing, whether good or bad.”*

(ECCLESIASTES 12:14 NLT)

### Two Judgments

The Bible says every person will face one of two judgments. One is for believers, and the other is for unbelievers.

### The Judgment Seat of Christ:

- Determines the eternal rewards of believers

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:10).*

- Examines the *works*, not the *sins* of believers—their works are tested by fire

*“Their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work” (1 CORINTHIANS 3:13).*

- Determines the believer’s rewards or loss of rewards in heaven

*“If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames” (1 CORINTHIANS 3:14–15).*

God’s Word says that believers in Christ are not judged for their *sin* because they accepted Christ’s death as payment for their sin. Jesus said . . .

*“Whoever hears my word and believes  
him who sent me has eternal life  
and will not be judged but has  
crossed over from death to life.”  
(JOHN 5:24)*

### The Great White Throne Judgment:

- Refers to God’s final sentence upon unbelievers

*“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life” (REVELATION 20:11–12).*

- Judges unbelievers for their rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

*“He [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [Jesus Christ]. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (ACTS 17:30–31).*

— Results in unbelievers being thrown into the lake of fire

*“The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. . . . Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (REVELATION 20:12, 15).*

The Bible repeatedly reminds us of the reality of God’s judgment and how to escape His wrath—through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible says . . .

*“Anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life.  
Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son  
will never experience eternal life  
but remains under God’s angry judgment.”*  
(JOHN 3:36 NLT)

## What Is God’s Heart on Death and Heaven?

Before Jesus walked out of His tomb, He stood at the tomb of a friend. Lazarus had been dead for four days and was already buried. When the Lord arrived at the tomb, He asked that the stone be rolled away. Then, after praying, *“Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”* (John 11:43).

*And he did.*

Death does not have the final word over our lives—Jesus does. He holds power over death, and He conquered death by His resurrection. Through Christ, God has removed every obstacle for people to avoid His judgment, escape hell, and experience the everlasting joy of being with the Lord in heaven. Our part is to believe and entrust our lives to Jesus, who said . . .



*"I am the resurrection and the life.  
The one who believes in me will live,  
even though they die;  
and whoever lives by believing  
in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?"  
(JOHN 11:25–26)*

**God lives in heaven**, ruling all things from His heavenly throne.

*"The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all"  
(PSALM 103:19).*

**God destroyed death** through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*"It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 TIMOTHY 1:10).*

**God offers eternal life** to everyone through faith in Jesus Christ.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (JOHN 3:16).*

**God will judge** each person after they die.

*"Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment"  
(HEBREWS 9:27).*

**God promises** believers they will be with the Lord when they die.

*"As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord . . . we are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 CORINTHIANS 5:6, 8).*

**God will resurrect** everyone on the last day—believers to eternal life in heaven and unbelievers to eternal punishment in hell.

*"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (DANIEL 12:2).*

**God does not delight** in the death of the unbelieving.

*“Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign LORD. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live” (EZEKIEL 18:23 NLT).*

**God will make** a new heaven and new earth at the end of time.

*“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (ISAIAH 65:17).*

**God promises** that heaven will be free of suffering and death.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).*

**God wants** you to focus on the realities of heaven.

*“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” (COLOSSIANS 3:1–2 NLT).*

**God wants** you to encourage others with the hope of eternal life with God.

*“We want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died . . . Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–14, 17–18 NLT).*

**God wants** you to share the gospel and lead people to their eternal home in heaven.

*“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:20).*

## Hope to Inherit Heaven—Part I<sup>9</sup>

Taken from: HOPE FOR YOUR HEART  
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**NOTE:** The first person voice (“I, me, my”) in this story refers to June Hunt, founder of Hope for the Heart.

In *Our Greatest Gift*, Henri Nouwen presents a fascinating parable of hope. He tells about twins, a brother and sister, talking to each other in their mother’s womb.

The sister says to the brother, “I believe there is life after birth.”

Her brother protests vehemently, “No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us.”

The little girl insists, “There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move.”

But she cannot convince her twin brother.

After some silence the sister says hesitantly, “I have something else to say, and I’m afraid you won’t believe that either, but I think there is a mother.”

Her brother becomes furious.

“A mother!” he shouts. “What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let’s be content.”

The sister is quite overwhelmed by her brother's response and for a while doesn't dare say anything more. But she can't let go of her thoughts, and since she has only her twin brother to speak to, she finally says, "Don't you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They're quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful."

"Yes," he answered. "What's special about them?"

"Well," the sister says, "I think these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don't you think that's exciting?"

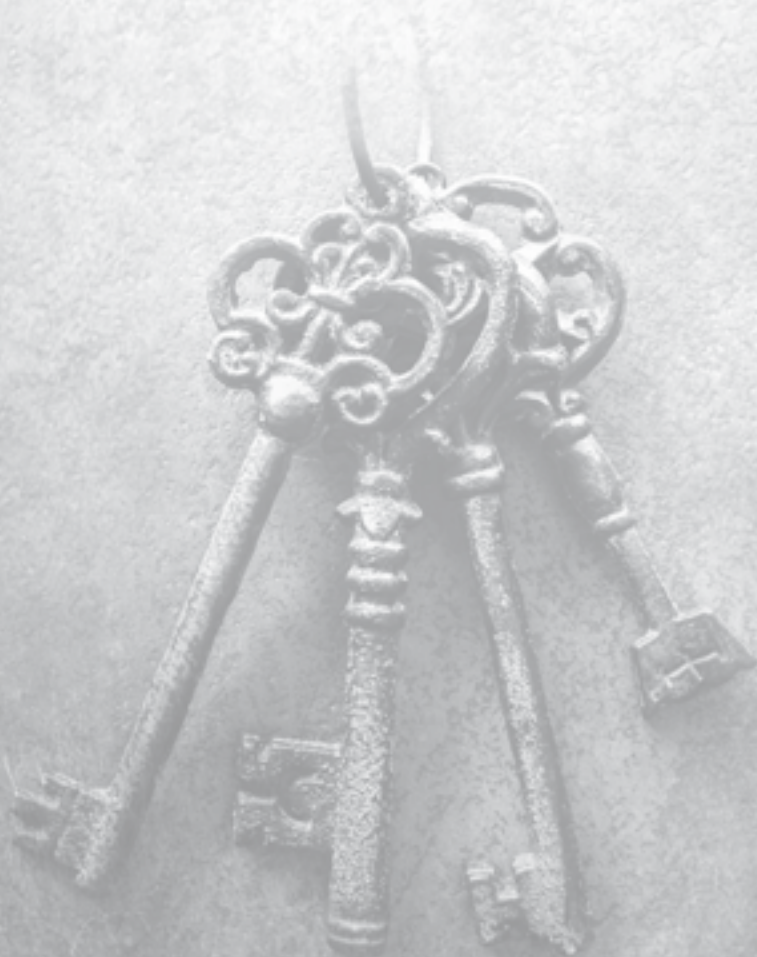
The brother doesn't answer. He is fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and feels the best thing is simply to ignore her and hope she will leave him alone.<sup>10</sup>

I love that phrase, "I think these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this." Many of us do, in fact, feel squeezed and squelched and squashed. Life has a way of tightening its grip to the point of making us feel suffocated and smothered.

What we are being prepared for, of course, is the world beyond this one. We are being made ready for our eternal home in heaven. The Bible clearly presents the promise of heaven and the transition from here to there: "We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Looking forward to our eternal home should bring light to even the darkest of circumstances. This is one of the greatest sources of comfort and hope we have, as we cling to the promise of an extraordinary life beyond this life. For the Christian, we know that once we are "away from the body," we will be "at home with the Lord," the apostle Paul tells us (2 Corinthians 5:8).

# CHARACTERISTICS



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*“Eternity is  
too long to  
be wrong.”*



Some statistics are memorable. Yet the following fact is unforgettable. George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright, put it this way, “The statistics on death are quite impressive: one out of one dies.” Yet death is certainly not our *final act*. Rather, we should view death as the final curtain on this life and the opening of a new production . . . called *Eternity*!

This kind of attitude about death could be considered unthinkable—much too cavalier. Indeed for some, the thought of death is a dark cloud hovering over their lives, diminishing their enjoyment, even their very existence. For others, death enhances their existence as they anticipate entering eternity, ready to experience a new beginning. For the believer, death is a vanquished enemy. . . .

*“When the perishable has been  
clothed with the imperishable,  
and the mortal with immortality,  
then the saying that is written will come true:  
‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’”  
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:54)*

## What Is the Dying Process Like?

Popular movies and TV shows (especially crime shows and scary movies) usually depict death as occurring instantly and often unexpectedly. Few feature the lengthy process of people dying of old age or a terminal illness that they’ve battled for months or years. Because of this, many don’t know what death is actually like.

Additionally, with advances in modern medicine, palliative care, and hospice care, the process of dying looks much different than it has historically. Still, if you’ve never known anyone who has died, you may not know what to expect. The words of the psalmist echo the prayers of many in their final days. . . .



*“Have compassion on me, LORD, for I am weak.”*

(PSALM 6:2 NLT)

## Physical Signs of End of Life

Following are common physical signs when someone is nearing the end of life:<sup>11</sup>

**Changes** in breathing pattern

**Changes** in skin color (discoloration)

**Changes** in consciousness (unresponsive, not fully aware, disoriented)

**Coughing** or loud breathing

**Decreased movement**/mobility

**Decrease** in speaking/responding

**Decrease** in temperature and blood pressure

**Decrease** in going to the bathroom; incontinence

**Difficulty swallowing**

**Possible** delusions, illusions, or hallucinations (not all experience this)

**Sleeping more**, drowsy, lethargic

**Uninterested in eating**, drinking

**Uninterested** in surroundings and normal activities (withdrawn, detached)

**Weight loss**

If you’ve known someone who has died, then you know the process of dying can be overwhelming. Take comfort in this: The Lord is with you, and He will help and uphold you in your grief.

*“So do not fear, for I am with you;*

*do not be dismayed, for I am your God.*

*I will strengthen you and help you;*

*I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

(ISAIAH 41:10)

## What Concerns Do People Have about Death?

When you imagine death, you may picture an ominous, shrouded figure looming in the shadows, eager to end your time on earth. But such gruesome imagination only masks the underlying emotions that cause concerns about death and dying.

As we near our life's end, we reflect on our existence and wonder what legacy we leave behind. Did we show our loved ones how important they were to us? Did we make a meaningful impact through our life? How will we be remembered? *Will* we be remembered?

In truth, these are questions we should ponder long before we face the end of our days on earth. When we lose a loved one to death, it should prompt us to examine our own life from the perspective of eternity.

*“Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”*

(PSALM 139:23–24)

### Concerns about Death

Concerns people have when facing the end of their life include:

**Regrets**—unreconciled relationships, missed opportunities, past mistakes, or a general sense of “I wish I would have done more” (people often regret what they *didn't* do rather than what they did do.)

**Process of dying**—concerns about whether dying will be painful or whether you will lose mental or bodily functions; concerns about where you will die or if loved ones will be by your side

**Leaving loved ones behind**—spouse, children, grandchildren, extended family, friends; concerns about being able to say goodbye and how everyone will cope after you die

**Legacy**—concerns about the impact of your life on others and on the world, how you will be remembered

**Financial concerns**—getting your legal will in order; deciding how your money, home, belongings and other assets will be handled; possible concerns about the financial well-being of your heirs

**Personal/logistical concerns**—concerns about funeral arrangements; deciding what to do with your body (organ donation, burial, cremation) or where you want to be buried or where you want your ashes to be placed

**Afterlife**—concerns about what to expect after you die, what exactly happens the moment you die, whether you will go to heaven or hell

It's understandable to have some fears and worries about dying. But know that God cares about your concerns in life *and* in death. The Lord promises to care for you and carry you safely home.

*"I will be your God throughout your lifetime—  
until your hair is white with age.  
I made you, and I will care for you.  
I will carry you along and save you."  
(ISAIAH 46:4 NLT)*

## How Does the World Regard Death and the Afterlife?

If you were to survey 100 people, asking them what happens after we die—you're certain to receive a variety of answers. Some think this mortal life is all there is—that when people die, they cease to exist. Others believe in some form of afterlife, though they may not know exactly how to “get there.”

Beliefs about the afterlife are as varied as they are ancient. It seems that every culture, religion, and worldview that has ever existed has had something to say about the afterlife. Which is right?

God knows the truth and has revealed the truth. The Bible says, “*all your words are true*” (Psalm 119:160). And whether it is about life or death, we can trust what He says.

*“The testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple.”*  
(PSALM 19:7 NASB)

### Cultural and Religious Views of Death

Look at the various views of the afterlife in light of God's Word to see the truth with greater clarity. Some believe that death is . . .

**The rebirth** into another life-form through reincarnation (Hinduism)

The Bible says: “*Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him*” (Hebrews 9:27–28).

**The unconscious state** of the soul (Intellectualism)

The Bible says: “*Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt*” (Daniel 12:2).

**The state of being absorbed** into the “cosmic consciousness” (Buddhism)

The Bible says: *“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed”* (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

**The doorway to eternal bliss** for everyone (Liberalism)

The Bible says: *“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”* (Matthew 25:46).

**The end of all existence** (Atheism)

The Bible says: *“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 of mankind, who have no hope. For 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”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14).

**The vaporization of the spiritual body** (Jehovah’s Witness)

The Bible says: *“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body”* (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

**The Telestial/Terrestrial/Celestial Kingdoms** (Mormonism)

The Bible says: *“This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:49–50).

**The marriage to 72 maidens through martyrdom** (Islam)

The Bible says: *“At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven”* (Matthew 22:30).

## Worldly Approaches to Death

**Denial:** Believing that even though others are dying around you that you will somehow elude death

**Fear:** Dread of the known and of the unknown—fearing what dying will be like and what happens after

**False hope:** Thinking that you will automatically go to heaven because that's expected or because you're a "good" person

**Uncertainty:** Not understanding or having no concept of the afterlife or believing you cannot know anything about what happens after you die

If you don't have a biblical perspective on death, you won't be prepared for it—though death could come at any moment. Knowing God's Word and knowing Christ allows you to face death with hope, faith, confidence, and certainty that you will be with the Lord.

*"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather  
to be absent from the body  
and to be present with the Lord."  
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:8 NKJV)*

## What Is the Christian's Hope in Death?

"What is your only comfort in life and death?"

This question begins the famous Heidelberg Catechism, which has offered Christians biblical truth and instruction for centuries. The catechism has a simple question and answer format, with the answers including citations from Scripture. Of all the questions that could be asked to begin a book on instructing believers about their faith, it starts with a question about *death*.

The question cuts right to the heart of human experience and confronts death directly. The answer provided reveals comforting, hope-filled biblical truth: “That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

When facing *death*—which might come at any moment in *life*—there is hope and comfort. And it is found in Jesus Christ—in belonging to Him. The Bible says . . .

*“If we live, we live for the Lord;  
and if we die, we die for the Lord.  
So, whether we live or die,  
we belong to the Lord.”*  
(ROMANS 14:8)

## Reasons to Have Hope When Facing Death

For those who believe in Christ, there are many reasons to have hope even in the face of death, many reasons to be comforted even when you’re dying.

### **You will continue to live.**

*“Jesus told her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying’”* (JOHN 11:25 NLT).

### **You will be with the Lord.**

*“We would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord”* (2 CORINTHIANS 5:8 NLT).

### **You will see Jesus face to face.**

*“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads”* (REVELATION 22:4).

### **You will be rewarded by the Lord and share in His joy.**

*“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”* (MATTHEW 25:21).

**You will be reunited with loved ones.**

*“For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. . . . Then we will be with the Lord forever” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:14, 17 NLT).*

**You will never again experience suffering.**

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain” (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).*

**You will be resurrected—given a new, imperishable, physical body.**

*“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (ROMANS 6:5).*

**You will worship the Lord with all His people.**

*“All nations will come and worship before you” (REVELATION 15:4).*

Those in Christ have great hope in the face of death. Because He lives, you will live. You will see your redeemer face to face and be able to thank Him for His love and grace.

*“I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.  
<sup>26</sup>And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;  
I myself will see him <sup>27</sup>with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!”  
(JOB 19:25–27)*

**How Does the Bible Describe Heaven?**

The Bible uses beautiful metaphors and has many descriptions about heaven. Just as people plan for destination vacations and imagine the wonderful experiences to be had in exotic locales, Christians can eagerly anticipate the exciting reality of our ultimate destination, which is our heavenly home!



*“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined  
what God has prepared for those who love him.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 2:9 NLT)

## Heaven Is . . .

**Paradise** (the same word as Eden)—Heaven will be what God intended in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. He recreates our flawed and perilous world in Revelation chapters 21 and 22 into a perfect and peaceful place. Man is not destined to “float on a cloud” in some ethereal out-of-body experience. The redeemed will have an eternal existence on a new perfected earth, a restored Eden.

*“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. . . . 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” (GENESIS 2:8; REVELATION 21:1).*

**A wedding feast**—Heaven will provide a time of joyful fellowship with all who have placed their hope in Jesus throughout the ages. There will be the renewing of old acquaintances and the making of new ones as we feast and fellowship with the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus.

*“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (REVELATION 19:7).*

**Rest**—Heaven is not a state of eternal sleep. Rather, it is an existence with no more pain and no more tears. The children of God will be finally and fully enabled to “enter into His rest” and to experience the perfect peace that comes with being with God Himself.

*“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”’ (REVELATION 21:3–4).*

**The house of God**—Heaven is not a coliseum meeting with millions present, but a dwelling place—a home. No one will get lost in the crowd. There will be a sense of belonging and intimacy even in the midst of multitudes of people.

*“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (JOHN 14:2).*

**The Holy City** *shining brilliantly*—Heaven will be a place of visual beauty with pleasure in that beauty—the beauty of His presence and of His creation. All that He has planned is beyond the imagination of finite human beings, but it will be seen for the first time with perfected eyes and unencumbered comprehension.

*“He carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal” (REVELATION 21:10–11).*

**A better country**—Heaven is a promise yet to come as we see in the book of Hebrews. These giants of the faith saw off in the distance what God had promised, and they accepted the reality that they were transients in this world. Yet they kept their eyes on what was still to come—their true home, a better country—heaven.

*“They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one” (HEBREWS 11:16).*

## The Holy City—The New Jerusalem

**Question:** “What is the New Jerusalem?”

**Answer:** The New Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21–22, is the city where believers will dwell with God in the new heavens and new earth for all eternity.

- It will be a stunning city, shining with the glory of God, like a crystal jewel, coming down from heaven. The Bible describes it as having 12 gates, each made of a single pearl and the wall of the city has 12 foundations, decorated with every kind of precious stone.
- God’s Word describes the city as a massive cube-like structure—being 1,400 miles long, 1,400 miles wide, and 1,400 miles high! And, the great street of the city will be *“gold, as pure as transparent glass”* (Revelation 21:21).
- There will be no curse, no death, no sorrow or suffering in this beautiful city, and best of all, the Risen Lord will be there.

*“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,  
coming down out of heaven from God,  
prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband . . .  
No longer will there be any curse.  
The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city,  
and his servants will serve him.”*  
(REVELATION 21:2; 22:3)

## How Does the Bible Describe Hell?

When someone commits a crime, especially a serious crime like murder, it’s expected that they go to prison to pay the penalty for their crime. Jails and prisons serve as a means of justice, punishing those who do wrong. It’s hard to find a society throughout history that does not have some kind of prison or jail for criminals. As image-bearers of God, we want our communities kept safe from those who seek to harm others and we want justice to be served. So how much more does God—the very source of righteousness— desire, demand, and deserve justice?

In a similar, but much more serious way, hell is like a prison. It is a place of punishment for those who do wrong—who sin against God. It is a place where God’s justice is served for all eternity. In speaking about fallen angels, the book of Jude uses the picture of prison to describe hell. . . .

*“God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness,  
waiting for the great day of judgment.  
And don’t forget Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns,  
which were filled with immorality and every kind of sexual perversion.  
Those cities were destroyed by fire and  
serve as a warning of the eternal fire of God’s judgment.”*  
(JUDE 1:6–7 NLT)

The Bible uses numerous terms and metaphors to describe the awful reality of hell:

**Fire**—The Bible frequently uses the images of fire and burning to refer to hell, using phrases such as “*eternal fire*” (Matthew 18:8; 25:41), “*unquenchable fire*” (Mark 9:43 ESV), “*fiery furnace*” (Matthew 13:42, 50 ESV), “*fire of hell*” (Matthew 18:9), and “*the punishment of eternal fire*” (Jude 1:7).

**Darkness**—Jesus referred to hell as a place of “*outer darkness*” (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 ESV). Elsewhere, the Bible refers to hell as the “*blackest darkness*” (Jude 1:13). The apostle Peter mentions that God sent fallen angels to hell and put them “*in chains of darkness to be held for judgment*” (2 Peter 2:4).

**Suffering**—The Lord frequently used the phrase “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50) to describe the torment of hell. Gnashing of teeth was a common phrase used to indicate a person grinding their teeth in anger, pain, or anguish.

**Destruction**—The apostle Paul used the phrase “*everlasting destruction*” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and simply “*destruction*” (Philippians 3:19) to describe hell.

**Separation**—The Bible says that people will be “*shut out from the presence of the Lord*” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Jesus also warned that He will say to some on the last day, “*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire*” (Matthew 25:41 ESV), indicating hell as being an eternal separation from God.

Some believe that the biblical descriptions of hell are just metaphors and that hell isn’t really “that bad.” Even if they are just metaphors . . . the metaphors still have a literal referent that describes the literal reality of hell that is truly frightening and terrible.

The language and metaphors of Scripture do not lessen the horrors of hell. Instead they make the reality of it known to human experience. We know what it is like to be in the dark and unable to find our way. We know the feeling of being too close to a fire or being burned. We understand the experience of weeping or being in so much pain that we clench, grind, or gnash our teeth. We know the experience of being separated from loved ones or of something being destroyed. Scripture’s portraits of hell serve as a dire warning so that people can choose to come to Christ to receive salvation and eternal life.

*“For God so loved the world that  
he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall  
not perish but have eternal life.”*

(JOHN 3:16)

## Is Hell Unfair?

**Question:** “It seems unfair that people, who live for a relatively short amount of time, should be punished for all eternity for a finite amount of sin. How is that fair?”

**Answer:** On the surface, hell might seem “unfair” in some ways. But consider:

**The nature of God:** Many countries enact stronger punishments based on who the crime was committed against. For example, you would face a much greater penalty for shooting the President of the United States than you would for shooting a stranger. From a legal standpoint, lying to a judge is a bigger deal than lying to your friend. The issue is not that we have sinned in general or sinned against some stranger, but we have sinned against Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, our Maker and sustainer, the source of all goodness and justice, and the Judge of all the world. Sinning against an eternal God carries eternal consequences.

*“The LORD is slow to get angry, but his power is great, and he never lets the guilty go unpunished” (NAHUM 1:3 NLT).*

**The nature of sin:** We tend to minimize the seriousness and offensiveness of sin. We have not made minor mistakes against God, but we have *rebelled* against Him and *rejected* His laws—often willingly and deliberately. The cost of our reconciliation required the death of the eternal Son of God. If that was the cost of redemption, then how great is our sin in the eyes of God? Satan’s lie to Eve—*“you will not surely die”* (Genesis 3:4 NKJV)—was to downplay the seriousness of sin and the severity of God’s judgment, and he continues to spread that lie today. We need to see sin as God sees it.

*“Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just” (PSALM 51:4 NLT).*

The question shouldn’t be “Why do people deserve to go to hell?” but rather “Why should sinners ever be allowed in heaven?” Truthfully, it is “unfair” for sinners to go to heaven. If we wanted God to treat us in total fairness, *everyone* would be in hell. But thanks be to God, He is gracious and does not treat us as our sins deserve.

*“The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love. . . .  
he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.”*  
(PSALM 103:8, 10)

## **What Are Myths and Truths about Heaven and Hell?**

It bears repeating—*eternity is too long to be wrong.*

Misconceptions abound about heaven and hell. Many people believe that everyone goes to heaven or that hell is reserved only for the worst of the worst sinners. Some believe that heaven and hell don’t even exist.

God has not left us in the dark about the realities of the afterlife. We don’t need to guess about what heaven and hell are like. We can look to God’s Word to find answers, to distinguish right from wrong, and to be equipped to live in light of His truth.

*“All Scripture is inspired by God  
and is useful to teach us what is true  
and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives.  
It corrects us when we are wrong  
and teaches us to do what is right.  
God uses it to prepare and equip his people  
to do every good work.”*  
(2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17 NLT)

## Myths and Truths about Heaven

**Myth:** All religions lead people to heaven.

**Truth:** No. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible is clear that . . .

*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

**Myth:** You cannot know for sure whether you will go to heaven.

**Truth:** Jesus told the repentant thief on the cross, *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). He assured Martha, *“Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying”* (John 11:25 NLT). You can know for sure that you will go to heaven. Jesus says that those who believe in Him already have eternal life. . . .

*“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life”* (JOHN 5:24 NLT).

**Myth:** Heaven will be boring.

**Truth:** Heaven is a place of unending joy, peace, and blessing. Jesus described the joy of feasting in God’s kingdom, saying, *“Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 14:15). Elsewhere, the Bible describes the joy of being in God’s presence. . . .

*“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand”* (PSALM 16:11).

**Myth:** Heaven will be unending choir practice.

**Truth:** Indeed, heaven will be filled with wonderful music and worship. The Bible also describes heaven as a place of feasting (Luke 14:15), serving and reigning with Christ (Revelation 22:3–5), and living in the most beautiful, magnificent city—the New Jerusalem—with God forever (see Revelation 21–22).

*“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever”* (REVELATION 22:3–5).



## Myths and Truths about Hell

**Myth:** Talking about hell is “unloving.”

**Truth:** Warning someone of certain danger is actually a very loving act. Jesus speaks more about hell than anyone else in the Bible, and He provides the only hope of escaping the certainty of hell. Why would anyone not sound the alarm if they also knew the only way of escape?

*“Serve the LORD with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, or he will be angry and your way will lead to your destruction, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (PSALM 2:11–12).*

**Myth:** A loving God would never send anyone to hell.

**Truth:** Rather than sending people to hell, our loving God offers opportunities to avoid the judgment of hell, through the redemption offered in Christ. Since God is a just and righteous and holy God, the penalty for sin must be paid. Jesus paid the penalty for all sin, but we must accept His merciful gift. If anyone does not accept that free gift of salvation, that person has already been condemned by their own sin and will face God’s judgment.

*“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell” (LUKE 12:4–5).*

**Myth:** Hell won’t be so bad—all the “fun” people will be there to party.

**Truth:** Hell is not a place of celebration. No, the Bible describes it as a place of torment—a place of isolation from God, absent of all things good, where its inhabitants are thrown into utter “darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

*“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (MATTHEW 13:41–42).*

**Myth:** Hell won’t last forever—eventually the punishment of hell will end.

**Truth:** God’s Word says there will be no end—literally—to the torment of those who inhabit hell. Jesus said hell is a place of “eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41) and “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46).

*“They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power” (2 THESSALONIANS 1:9 NLT).*

## What Assurances Do We Have of Going to Heaven?

Every single day, we trust others to get us where we’re going. We trust taxi and bus drivers to get us to work. We trust pilots to fly us hundreds of miles across land and sea—thousands of feet in the air! We even trust machines, such as elevators and escalators to take us from one floor to another.

Yet when it comes to heaven, we often have doubts about “getting there.” How can we *know* we’ll go to heaven when we die? What assurances do we have? Thankfully, God does not leave us second-guessing our eternal destiny—we can look forward to our future and *know* where we will be for all eternity. . . .

*“I write these things to you who believe  
in the name of the Son of God  
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”  
(1 JOHN 5:13)*

### Assurances of Heaven

You can be assured of heaven because of . . .

**The resurrection of Jesus**—When the Lord rose on the third day, He conquered death and showed beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is life beyond the grave. The foundation of Christian faith rests on the historical fact of Jesus’ resurrection. The Bible describes Jesus’ death and resurrection as *Good News* . . .

*“He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News” (2 TIMOTHY 1:10 NLT).*

**The promises of God**—Every promise of God is true and comes to pass. There are numerous promises in God’s Word confirming that we will be with Him in heaven when we die (see Luke 16:22; 23:43; John 11:25–26; 14:1–3; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Just as you trust drivers and pilots to get you to your destination, you can be confident that God will get you to your eternal destination.

*“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 1:6).*

**The presence of the Holy Spirit**—The Bible teaches that when you believe in Christ, you are given the Holy Spirit. The Spirit acts as God’s seal of approval or guarantee that *you are His* and you will be with the Lord for all eternity.

*“When you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people” (EPHESIANS 1:13–14 NLT).*

**The faith of the believer**—God extends salvation and opens the door to heaven for all who will put their faith in Christ. Biblical faith does not rest on you or your good works but on Christ, who died and rose for your salvation—and has prepared a place for you in heaven.

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” (JOHN 14:1–2).*

God has done everything to ensure that you can be forgiven, have a relationship with Him, and spend eternity with Him. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in making sure you will spend eternity in heaven. Jesus’ resurrection is sure, God’s promises are true, and the Holy Spirit’s presence seals the deal. You can trust the Lord. Jesus said it plainly,

*“Because I live, you also will live.”*

(JOHN 14:19)

## Hope to Inherit Heaven—Part II<sup>13</sup>

Taken from: HOPE FOR YOUR HEART  
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**NOTE:** The first person voice (“I, me, my”) in this story refers to June Hunt, founder of Hope for the Heart.

When you have an endearing relationship, the thought of losing that loved one can be painful. And then when that loved one is no longer living, sometimes the words spoken aren’t accurate.

When my “you-light-up-my-life” friend Sue breathed her last breath, I heard the words “We’ve lost her.” The truth is, Sue wasn’t *lost*. Sue knew exactly where she was—she had arrived at the port of paradise . . . she was experiencing the splendors of heaven.

But as believers we must always remember, God is moving us along to our final destination—heaven. What we are being prepared for in this life is the next life.

Those who have the blessed hope of heaven know unfalteringly that death is not the end—it is a transition into an eternal beginning. Some years ago I discovered a wonderful word picture in the poem “Gone from My Sight” [as quoted on page 3 and repeated on page 102 for easy reference].<sup>14</sup>

We can look ahead with great eagerness to the day when we shall arrive at the shores of heaven, and at long last see the Lord Himself . . . our Anchor. To those who have served Him faithfully, He will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matthew 25:21).

It is hard to imagine more meaningful words than those, nor could there be a more blessed reward than spending eternity with our Master, who no longer will need to anchor us through the storms of life because in heaven there are no storms.



# CAUSES

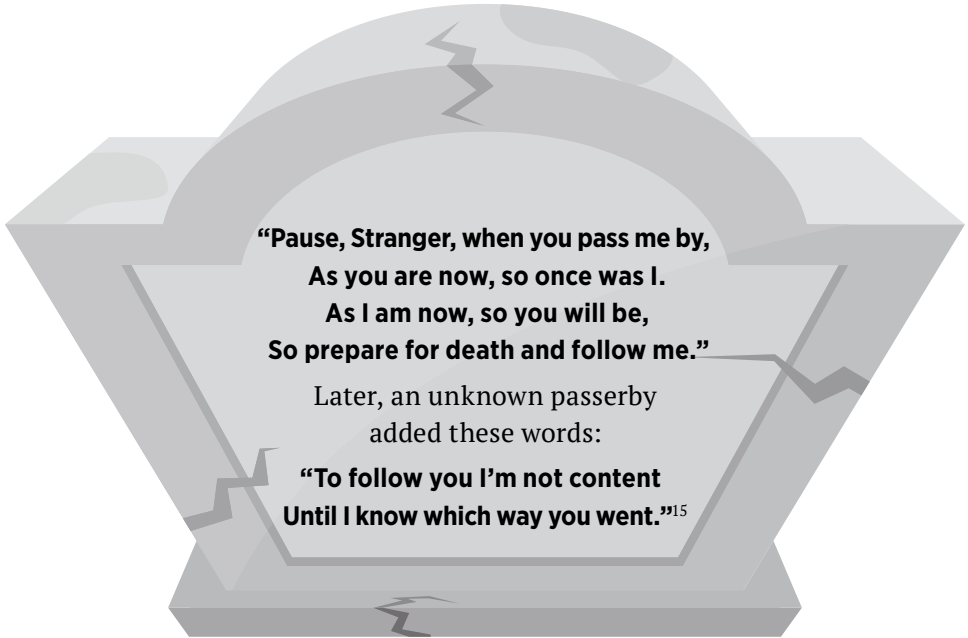


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*“Perhaps the most  
universal fear is  
the fear of death.”*



## Written on a Tombstone



For most people, death is an evil event, a frightening experience to be avoided at all costs. Yet we cannot have a proper view of death without first possessing a proper view of life. Many try to avoid thinking about this inevitable event and, consequently, face eternity unprepared.

Viewed with a proper perspective, both life and death can be affirmed and embraced. A meeting has a beginning and an ending. A drama has a first act and a final act. A race has a start and a finish. We who have placed our faith in Christ need no longer be enslaved to the fear of death. While death is not removed, it is rendered impotent. As Christians, we have been adopted by God, been made children of God, been made heirs of God. As a result, we face our fear with faith . . . and are set free of fear.

*"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves,  
so that you live in fear again; rather,  
the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.  
And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"  
(ROMANS 8:15)*



## Why Do People Die?

Death can seep into our lives slowly or strike suddenly. Yet, over time, death spreads its sorrow evenly, claiming the lives of both young and old, rich and poor, weak and strong—striking anyone, anywhere, at any time.

Although there are different types of death, this tragedy is the most unwelcome intruder. The Bible gives this graphic description:

*“Death has climbed in through our windows  
and has entered our fortresses;  
it has removed the children from the streets  
and the young men from the public squares.”*  
(JEREMIAH 9:21)

### Physical Causes of Death

Some of the ways in which people die include:

- |                             |                                       |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| — Natural causes            | — Violence/murder                     |
| — Old age                   | — Suicide                             |
| — Terminal illness          | — Euthanasia/Assisted suicide         |
| — Accidental death          | — Miscarriage                         |
| — Hazardous duty casualties | — Abortion                            |
| — Martyrdom                 | — Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) |

*“For he [the Lord] knows how weak we are;  
he remembers we are only dust.  
<sup>15</sup> Our days on earth are like grass;  
like wildflowers, we bloom and die.  
<sup>16</sup> The wind blows, and we are gone—  
as though we had never been here.  
<sup>17</sup> But the love of the LORD remains forever  
with those who fear him.”*  
(PSALM 103:14–17 NLT)

## Spiritual Cause of Death

While there are many ways people die physically, there is only one true cause of death—sin. The Bible says, “*When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned*” (Romans 5:12 NLT). God warned Adam of the consequence of death if he disobeyed Him (Genesis 2:17). The natural result of walking away from God, the source and sustainer of life, is death.

*“Once you were dead because of your  
disobedience and your many sins . . .*

*<sup>4</sup>But God is so rich in mercy,  
and he loved us so much, that even  
though we were dead because of our sins,*

*<sup>5</sup>he gave us life when he raised  
Christ from the dead.”*

(EPHESIANS 2:1, 4–5 NLT)

## Why Do People Fear Death?

Perhaps the most universal fear is the fear of death. We may not think about death all the time but when we fall extremely ill, when someone we love gets a terminal diagnosis, when we get a devastating phone call about a bad accident . . . the fear of death grips our hearts. *I don’t want to die*, we think. *I don’t want my loved ones to die*. As image-bearers of God, who is the source of life, we recognize on some level that life is a good gift and death is not right. In fact, the Bible even refers to death as an enemy:

*“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 15:26)

## Reasons People Fear Death

Some of those reasons include:

**Cultural depictions**—movies, TV shows, stories, books, etc. that depict death as terrifying, horrifying, and grim can instill a sense that death is to be feared

**Denial**—refusing (often continually) to think about the reality of death or being unwilling to believe that you will die one day

**Grief**—having lost loved ones and not wanting to lose more; not wanting to say goodbye

**Pain**—being afraid of the potential pain involved in the process of dying

**Lack of control**—knowing that death could come at any moment and that there's nothing you can do to ultimately stop death

**Lack of hope**—having no hope or certainty that there is life beyond the grave

**Lack of information**—having little to no knowledge about death and the afterlife because it isn't discussed in your family, school, work, culture, or circle of friends

**Trauma**—having a near-death experience or other traumatic event (to you personally or a loved one) that leads to a fear of dying

**Uncertainty**—not knowing when you or your loved ones will die, not being sure of what to expect about the process of dying, or feeling unsure of what happens after you die

**Unfulfilled dreams**—fearing that you will not have time to do the things you've always wanted to do or have been looking forward to experiencing

The Bible says that Jesus came to . . .

*“ . . . set free all who have lived their lives  
as slaves to the fear of dying.”*

(HEBREWS 2:15 NLT)

## Why Don't People Prepare for Death and the Afterlife?

In many ways, the modern world has pushed death out of sight. Advances in medicine continually increase the human lifespan. Cemeteries are often on the outskirts of a city. Compared to 100 years ago, let alone hundreds of years ago, most people don't see death up close. Death happens "out there"—in hospitals, on TV, on the news, or maybe just happens to really sick people or the aged.

Consequently, we don't contemplate, much less confront death. It's out of sight, and out of mind. We don't have to think about it. However, there is great wisdom to be found in considering the reality of death. The Bible says . . .

*"It is better to go to a house of mourning  
than to go to a house of feasting,  
for death is the destiny of everyone;  
the living should take this to heart."  
(ECCLESIASTES 7:2)*

### Reasons People Don't Prepare for Death

Common reasons people don't prepare for death and the afterlife include:

**Fear**—being afraid of dying and afraid about what may or may not happen after death

**Avoidance**—simply not wanting to think about death and the finality of it; not wanting to think about saying goodbye or getting their affairs in order

**Pain**—too painful to think about dying and the potential physical pain involved; the pain of saying goodbye, not seeing loved ones

**Misguided beliefs**—thinking you have more time than you actually do, or that preparing for your death means you’ve “given up” on life

**Resistance**—loved ones don’t want to talk about it so you never prepare properly or engage in end-of-life discussions

**Busyness**—not having dedicated time or space to think about death and the afterlife because of the responsibilities of life, church, work, school, parenting, caring for others, etc.

**Worldly desires**—pursuing the things of this world instead of eternal matters. Jesus explained that the truths of God’s Word can be “*crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things*” (Mark 4:19 NLT).

**Love of money**—like the rich man who walked away from Jesus (see Mark 10:17–25), the love of money can blind us from addressing our ultimate eternal destination

**Logistical concerns**—not knowing where to go or what to do about various end-of-life matters (i.e., legal will, hospice, funeral preparations, taking care of house and belongings, financial concerns and decisions, notifying friends, family, and organizations)

**Spiritual concerns**—not having assurance of salvation or generally unsure about what happens after you die

There are many real concerns people have about dying, the greatest often being what happens after death. God’s Word makes this wonderful promise:

*“God will redeem me from  
the realm of the dead;  
he will surely take me to himself.”*  
(PSALM 49:15)

## What Causes Confusion and Doubts about the Afterlife?

What is the first thought or image that comes to mind when you think of heaven? Is it clouds? Angels? Maybe it's the common (yet somewhat odd) images of pudgy babies strumming harps.

What about hell? What comes to mind? Common depictions of hell include everything from demons and monsters to wild parties or terrible torture. There are many common depictions of heaven, hell, and the afterlife—and also many differing beliefs about what happens after death. Is it any wonder people have questions, doubts, and confusion about the afterlife?

With so many views, beliefs, and images of heaven and hell, it can be difficult to sift through the chaos and the contradictions to find out what's true and what's not. We need to look into God's Word and ask Him for discernment and understanding to discover the truth.

*"I am your servant; give me discernment  
that I may understand your statutes."  
(PSALM 119:125)*

### Causes for Confusion and Doubts

Reasons people have confusion and doubts about the afterlife include:

**Differing views**—general confusion or not being able to discern what is accurate from all the different religious and cultural views about the afterlife

**Undiscussed topic**—you have simply never really given serious thought to death and the afterlife

**Trust**—not knowing who to trust to provide sound, accurate information and guidance about eternal matters; not trusting the Lord with your eternity

**Lack of knowledge**—having little to no knowledge about the afterlife or what the Bible says about death, heaven, hell, eternity, etc.

**Lack of faith**—not having personal, saving faith in Christ

**Lack of assurance**—unsure if you are truly forgiven or saved; believing that you can lose your salvation

**Works-based religion/mentality**—never being sure that you’ll go to heaven because you haven’t “done enough” or been “good enough”

You need not live in confusion about what happens when you die. Look to God and the counsel of His Word to find answers about your eternal destiny.

*“For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 14:33 ESV)

## What Is the Root Cause of Our Fear and Aversion to Death?

What is it about death that causes us to have such a fear and aversion to it? Consider this: Death not only ends everyone’s life, but it severs our earthly means of meeting our basic needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding love, death takes away our loved ones or takes us away from them. With respect to significance, death puts a period on everything we’ve worked toward in life—on all our plans and projects and hobbies and activities that give our life meaning. They all come to an end. In terms of security, death strips us of any illusion of control over our lives because death could come at any moment and it definitely comes for us all.

All of this may sound quite grim and depressing. However, at the root of our aversion and fear of death is a mistaken belief—that death is the ultimate end and nothing can be done about it. But the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus proves otherwise.

*“The Son also became flesh and blood.  
For only as a human being could he die,  
and only by dying could he break the power of the devil,  
who had the power of death.”*  
(HEBREWS 2:14 NLT)

### 3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>17</sup>

**Love**—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (JOHN 15:12).

**Significance**—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”*  
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

**Security**—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

*“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge”* (PROVERBS 14:26).

### The Ultimate Need-Meeter

**What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?**



God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn't need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*"The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail."  
(ISAIAH 58:11)*

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

**Love**—*"I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (JEREMIAH 31:3).*

**Significance**—*"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (JEREMIAH 29:11).*

**Security**—*"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).*

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *"My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."*

Long before physical death occurs, we experience spiritual death—separation from God. The enemy of our souls would like nothing better than for us to believe the lies that our lives have no meaning and that this mortal life is all we have. But we must know the truth that sets us free through the resurrected Christ.

*“Though you have made me see troubles,  
many and bitter, you will restore my life again;  
from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.”*  
(PSALM 71:20)

**Wrong Belief:** “Death is the end, and there is nothing anyone can do about that. There is no life and no hope beyond the grave.”

**Right Belief:** “Death is not the end. Jesus broke the power of death by His resurrection. God offers eternal life to everyone through faith in Christ. Because I have put my faith in Him, I have the hope-filled promise of heaven—I know I will be in heaven with God when I die. Only Jesus holds power over death.”

*Jesus said, “I am the living one. I died, but look  
—I am alive forever and ever!  
And I hold the keys of death and the grave.”*  
(REVELATION 1:18 NLT)

## How Can You Know for Sure You Will Go to Heaven?

It’s often been said that everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die! The truth is, all of humanity has experienced spiritual death due to sin, and for that reason, heaven is not our default destination when we physically die. We are all destined for hell unless God changes our course.

God has a plan—one that enables us to *know* with absolute certainty that we will go to heaven and live with Him for all eternity.

*“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God  
so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*  
(1 JOHN 5:13)

## 4 Points of God's Plan

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*

(JEREMIAH 29:11)

### 1. God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

## 2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *"Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (ROMANS 6:23).

## 3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"* (ACTS 16:31).

## 4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your "good works" as a means of earning God's approval. The Bible says, *"It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast"* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you've humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way  
instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for my sins.  
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross  
to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
Change me from the inside out and make me the person  
you created me to be.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

### **What Can You Now Expect?**

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*  
(JOHN 5:24)

## Hope to Inherit Heaven—Part III<sup>18</sup>

Taken from: HOPE FOR YOUR HEART  
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**NOTE:** The first person voice (“I, me, my”) in this story refers to June Hunt, founder of Hope for the Heart.

Those with only a vague sense of what heaven will be like and a hazy image of what awaits them often lack a proper perspective of their lives here on earth. The difficulties of life weigh them down because they’re focused on the *here and now* and give little thought to the *there and then*.

Conversely, those who have spent considerable time pondering heaven, meditating on it, and formulating a clearer picture of it recognize the thin veil between life below and life above. They acknowledge the Scripture that states, “What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). They also understand more fully that their troubles here on earth are inconsequential compared to the glories and delights we’ll enjoy forever in heaven.

The apostle Paul assures us, “We do not lose heart. . . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

Does this mean those who live in eager expectation of heaven are able to smile their way through the storms of life? No. No one enjoys pain. But when you know for certain you’re headed for that final home in heaven, your clear view of eternity gives you a proper perspective for your temporary trials.

When your hope is in heaven, your earthly suffering, though very real and painful, does not become all-consuming to the point of hopelessness. You know that soon enough your tears

will be wiped away and your sadness will turn to joy. As the psalmist says, “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5 NIV 1984).

Over the years, I have sung at numerous funerals . . . some victorious and some tragic. Of all the songs I have sung and heard others sing, one grips my heart like no other. Apart from the haunting melody, the words of the chorus capture for me what death is like for the child of God. It paints perfectly the picture of what it is like to reach the shores of heaven.

A dear family friend sang this song at my mother’s memorial service (and I have requested it for my own). These words touch my heart and stir my hope.

### **Finally Home<sup>19</sup>**

When engulfed by the terror of tempestuous sea,  
Unknown waves before you roll;  
At the end of doubt and peril is eternity,  
Though fear and conflict seize your soul.

#### **Chorus:**

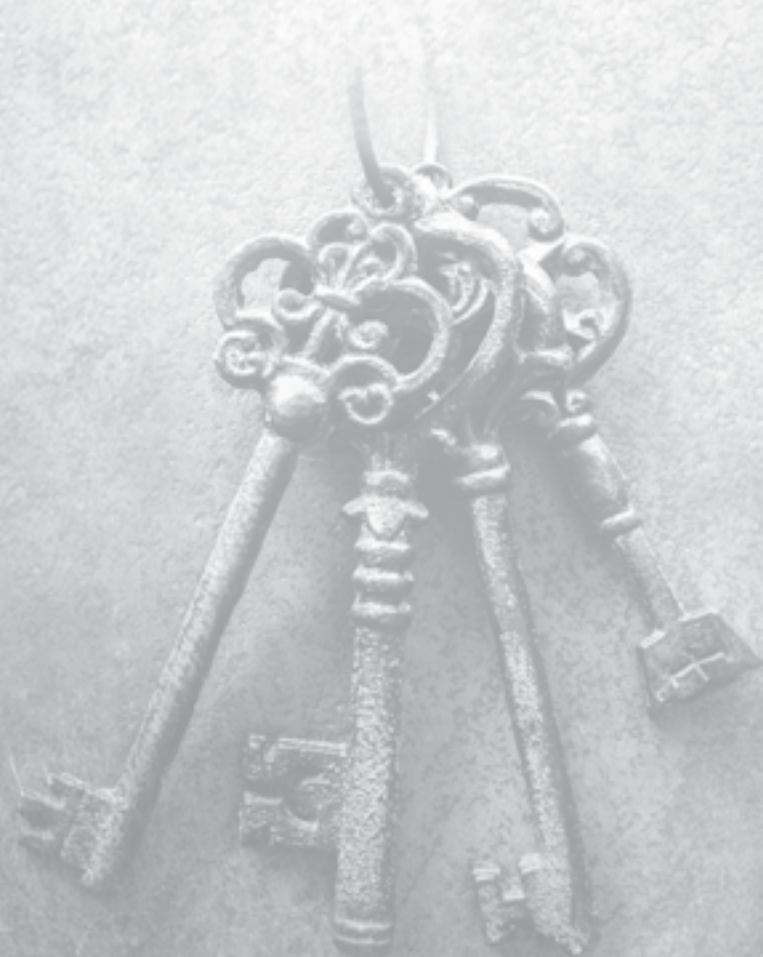
But just think of stepping on shore and finding it heaven!  
Of touching a hand and finding it’s God’s!  
Of breathing new air and finding it celestial!  
Of waking up in glory and finding it home!

When surrounded by the blackness of the darkest night,  
O how lonely death can be;  
At the end of this long tunnel is a shining light,  
For death is swallowed up in victory.

#### **Chorus:**

But just think of stepping on shore and finding it heaven!  
Of touching a hand and finding it’s God’s!  
Of breathing new air and finding it celestial!  
Of waking up in glory and finding it home!

# STEPS TO SOLUTION





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*“Because of  
the resurrection  
of Jesus,  
death is defeated.”*



It is impossible to experience life without tasting death—to know the heights of life’s pleasures without dealing with the depths of death’s despair, to feel the fullness of joy in being joined to the heart and soul of another without experiencing the breaking of the heart in being separated from them in death.

But the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that He has conquered death, displacing death’s despair and promising us the joy of being reunited with those we love. The love of Jesus holds us secure, making it impossible for even death to separate us from Him.

*“We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

*<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life,  
neither angels nor demons,  
neither the present nor the future,  
nor any powers,*

*<sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,  
will be able to separate us from the love of God  
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

(ROMANS 8:37–39)

## Key Verse to Memorize

The Author of Life stood before His beloved friend, Martha, and being moved with compassion at seeing her grief and anguish, He felt her pain and wept with her. But that is not all He did. He gave her truth that changed her perspective on death and He invaded her sorrow with hope.

*“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.*

*The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.”*

(JOHN 11:25)

Key Passage to Read

Among the most quoted and memorable passages of Scripture is Psalm 23. For thousands of years, this psalm has comforted millions as they face discouragement, despair, and death. Commonly read in hospital rooms and at funerals, Psalm 23 has encouraged people in their final days and brought solace to those left behind. And for good reason. Like the shepherd in the psalm, this passage provides everything needed to bring peace and comfort in the face of death.

Psalm 23 (ESV)

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name’s sake.  
<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

- The Lord provides** what I need. ....v. 1
- The Lord gives** me peace. .... v. 2
- The Lord restores** me to Himself. .... v. 3
- The Lord leads** me along the right path. .... v. 3

<b>The Lord is with me</b> as I face death, so I need not fear. ....	v. 4
<b>The Lord comforts</b> me with His protection and guidance. ....	v. 4
<b>The Lord's grace and generosity</b> toward me are abundant. ....	v. 5
<b>The Lord's goodness and mercy</b> are always with me. ....	v. 6
<b>The Lord's house</b> is where I will live forever. ....	v. 6

## How to Have a Transformed Life

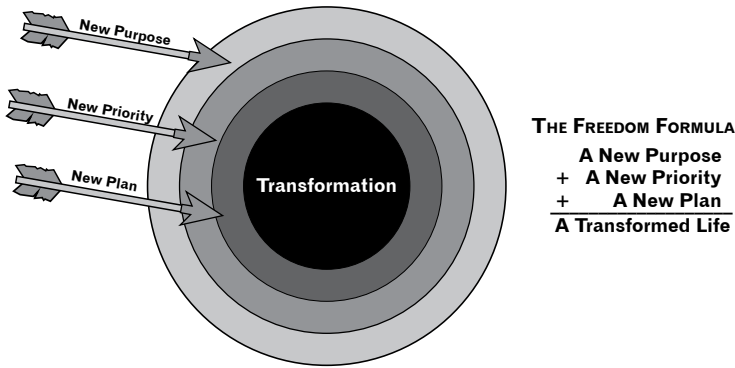
The apostle Paul had a revolutionary perspective on life and death. Living was not about pursuing our dreams, goals, plans—and dying was not an end to be feared and avoided. To Paul, life and death were both all about Christ. Writing from a jail cell, facing the prospect of death, Paul pens . . .

*“I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. <sup>21</sup> For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. <sup>22</sup> But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don’t know which is better. <sup>23</sup> I’m torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. <sup>24</sup> But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. <sup>25</sup> Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith” (Philippians 1:20–25 NLT).*

For Paul and for all believers, life and even death is all about knowing Christ and making Him known—being made like Him and bringing honor to Him.

*“If we live, it’s to honor the Lord.  
And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord.  
So whether we live or die,  
we belong to the Lord.”*  
(ROMANS 14:8 NLT)

## Reaching the Target: Transformation!



### Target #1—A New Purpose

**God's purpose for me** is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

*"Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ROMANS 8:29).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ."

### Target #2—A New Priority

**God's priority for me** is to change my thinking.

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (ROMANS 12:2).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God's thinking."

### Target #3—A New Plan

**God's plan for me** is to rely on Christ's strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).*

— "I'll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength."

## My Personalized Plan

The hope of heaven makes all the difference in the world. It is a hope stronger than death, more sure than the grave. It provides comfort when I suffer, clarity when I'm lost, and courage when I'm afraid. I can live gratefully and fearlessly for the Lord because He has given me this secure hope in Christ.

*"You will be secure, because there is hope."*

(JOB 11:18)

As I seek to honor the Lord in my life and in my death . . .

**I will consider** my own death and take seriously my own mortality.

*"Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is" (PSALM 39:4).*

**I will address** and take care of end-of-life matters.

*"This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die" (2 KINGS 20:1).*

**I will honestly evaluate** my life and legacy.

*"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD" (LAMENTATIONS 3:40).*

**I will accept** the sovereignty of God over my life and death.

*"You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (JAMES 4:15 ESV).*

**I will live** with the hope of heaven—even when I'm suffering.

*"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (ROMANS 8:18).*

**I will tell others** about Christ and how they can have eternal life.

*"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (JOHN 3:36).*

**I will seek** to honor God in my life and in my death.

*“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:9).*

## How to Live with an Eternal Perspective

How differently would you live if you knew you were going to die next month? Would you rush to fulfill your “bucket list”? Would you call an old friend or relative you haven’t spoken to in years? Would you be quick to make amends and reconcile broken relationships? Would you express your love and gratitude to someone special if you knew you only had a few weeks to live?

The truth is, none of us know when we will die. It could be next month or tomorrow or even today. When you’re confronted with the reality of death, you can choose to ignore it—but death remains a reality for everyone. Or you can choose to be prepared for it—to allow the reality of *death* to change how you *live*.

*“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”*

(EPHESIANS 5:15–16)

### Living with an Eternal Perspective

If you are living with an eternal perspective, you will . . .

#### Remember your days are numbered

*“Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (PSALM 90:12).*

#### Reflect on the reality of heaven

*“Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” (COLOSSIANS 3:1–2 NLT).*

### **Live to please God**

*“We urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God”*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:1 NLT).

### **Pray for the lost**

*“My heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved”*  
(ROMANS 10:1 ESV).

### **Steward your resources well**

*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share”*  
(1 TIMOTHY 6:17–18).

### **View your suffering in light of eternity**

*“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 CORINTHIANS 4:16–18).

### **Love others deeply**

*“The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply”* (1 PETER 4:7–8).

### **Take time to enjoy life**

*“So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God”* (ECCLESIASTES 2:24 NLT).

When you get to heaven, how long do you think it will take before all the trials of your life seem to melt away in light of the glory of heaven? A few days, hours, or maybe just a moment? How many seconds will it take you to gain perspective on all that the Lord was doing in your life when you didn’t understand and couldn’t clearly see His plan for you?



Living in light of eternity doesn't mean you avoid pain or have all the answers now. It's about living for the Lord, trusting that your questions will be answered in time, and that the sacrifices you've made will have been worth it when you finally meet Him face to face.

*“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face.*

*Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,  
even as I am fully known.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 13:12)

## How to Prepare for Death and End-of-Life Matters

Have you ever heard someone describe a favorite vacation spot this way: “It was like heaven on earth.” . . . or “I felt like I woke up in paradise.” . . . or “It was a slice of heaven.”?

Indeed, God's Word describes heaven as a place of comfort (Luke 16:25), feasting (Luke 14:15), and as a “*paradise*” (Luke 23:43). Truly, the greatest joys on earth are but a small glimpse of the joys of heaven.

But like any trip to any destination, you need to prepare for it. As you look forward to your heavenly home, don't neglect, ignore, or avoid making preparations while you are here on earth. Several important to-do items will help you and your surviving loved ones prepare for the end of your life.

*“This is what the LORD says:  
‘Set your affairs in order,  
for you are going to die.’”*

(ISAIAH 38:1 NLT)

## Important End-of-Life Preparations

To prepare for the end of your life, or to help another prepare for theirs, consider the following areas:

### Spiritually

- **Make peace with God.** Receive God's free gift of salvation through faith in Christ if you haven't already. Share your joys and concerns with the Lord as you reflect on your life, death, and the life to come.
- **Tell others about Christ.** Tell your loved ones and caretakers about the Lord. Reach out to lost friends and relatives to share the hope of heaven with them.

*"As for me, I will always have hope . . . even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come" (PSALM 71:14, 18).*

### Logistically

- **Decide on health care and end-of-life matters.** Make decisions and complete any documentation for advance directives, living will, POLST (physician orders for life-sustaining treatment), DNR/DNI orders (do not resuscitate/do not intubate), power of attorney, organ donation preferences.
- **Decide on after-death matters.** Make decisions and complete any documentation for funeral and burial preferences, last will and testament, life insurance (name beneficiaries), digital assets and access to various online accounts, other personal and financial records.

*"Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you" (PSALM 37:5 NLT).*

### Relationally

- **Spend time with loved ones.** Share memories, look through photos, and enjoy the moments God gives you with them.
- **Make amends where needed.** Reach out to any estranged relatives or friends to seek forgiveness if necessary, make peace with them, and say goodbye.

*“Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. . . . Live in harmony with each other. . . . Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone” (ROMANS 12:10, 16, 18 NLT).*

### Emotionally

- **Talk with someone about difficult feelings.** Process any fears, regrets, or grief you’re experiencing.
- **Express your love and appreciation.** Tell your friends and family how much they mean to you; record any special messages to loved ones through a written letter or recorded video.

*“I thank my God every time I remember you” (PHILIPPIANS 1:3).*

As you near the end of your life, you hopefully will be able to look *back* and see God’s grace toward you—and look *forward* to His promise of eternal life.

*“The LORD always keeps his promises;  
he is gracious in all he does.”*

(PSALM 145:13 NLT)

## When Your Loved One Is Dying

**Question:** “My loved one is dying and I feel like there’s nothing I can do about it. I also don’t want to waste what remaining time we have together. What can I do?”

**Answer:** You may not be able to save them physically, but there are many meaningful things you can still do to comfort them spiritually and emotionally.

- Spend time with them, even if you’re just sitting together.
- Share your favorite memories together.
- Read comforting passages of God’s Word, such as Psalm 23, John 14:1–3, or Revelation 21:1–5.

- Share God’s plan of salvation with them if they don’t know the Lord (see “How to Present the Plan of Salvation” on pages 96–98 for help in doing this).
- Pray with them, thanking God for their life and for the hope of heaven.
- Tell them what they mean to you, expressing your gratitude for your relationship. (Even if they are in an unresponsive state, share your heart with them. They might still hear and understand you even if they are unable to respond.)
- When you’re ready, say goodbye . . . and trust the Lord that their life is in His hands.

Don’t underestimate the comfort and power of just being present with your loved one. God often uses people—just like you—to bring comfort to others. And remember, the Lord cares about your heart too and wants to comfort you as well.

*“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . .  
comforts us in all our troubles,  
so that we can comfort those in any trouble  
with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4)

## How to Overcome the Fear of Death

*Lifelong slavery.*

That’s how God’s Word describes humanity living with the fear of death (see Hebrews 2:15 ESV). What a powerful image . . . held in bondage, kept in captivity, chained to an inescapable fate—for an entire lifetime. But it’s not simply *death* we’re enslaved to—it’s the *fear of death*.

Now notice how God's Word describes death in reference to Jesus Christ. The Bible says Jesus "*destroyed death*" (2 Timothy 1:10). Other translations say He "*broke the power of death*" (NLT) or "*abolished death*" (ESV). Right now, the risen Lord Jesus "*hold[s] the keys to death and the grave*" (Revelation 1:18 NLT). And one day, death will be "*swallowed up in victory*" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, death is defeated. It holds no power over Christ and those in Christ. He is able not only to give you eternal life, but also to set you free from the fear of death.

*"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood,  
he himself [Jesus] likewise partook of the same things,  
that through death he might destroy the one  
who has the power of death, that is, the devil,  
and deliver all those who through fear of death  
were subject to lifelong slavery."*

(HEBREWS 2:14–15 ESV)

## Overcoming Your Fear

When the thought of death brings fear to your heart, incorporate these action steps into your life . . .

### Remember God's promises

The Bible says that God has "*given us his very great and precious promises*" (2 Peter 1:4). The promises of God are the most sure thing in all the universe. What He says, He will do. Everything He promises comes to pass. He promises peace in the midst of our pain, His presence in the midst of our fears, and the hope of eternal life as we draw our final breath. Jesus said it plainly, "*Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying*" (John 11:25 NLT). Fight your fears with faith in His promises.

*"I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people"*  
(PSALM 85:8).

### Reflect on heaven's joys

When the fear of death grips your heart, remember where you're going. Death brings you straight into the presence of Christ, which the Bible says is *"far better"* than life on earth (Philippians 1:23 ESV). You will see Jesus face to face. You will be reunited with loved ones in Christ. You will be free of sin and suffering. You will be with the Lord in all His glory, taking in the unspeakable beauty of heaven with unshakable joy and unparalleled peace in your heart. Think about it . . . *that is your future!*

*"Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory"* (COLOSSIANS 3:2–4 NLT).

### Rest in God's sovereignty

Some people fear death because they don't know how it will happen or when it will occur. But God knows all your days before you were even born . . . *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be"* (Psalm 139:16). He is sovereign and in control over every day of your life, including the day you die. As King David said, *"My times are in your hands"* (Psalm 31:15). Your death will not happen one moment later or one moment sooner than what God has already ordained—your life and your death are secure in His hands.

*"But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge"* (PSALM 73:28).

### Rejoice in your salvation

God didn't just save you to avoid hell, but to experience eternal life and everlasting joy in His presence . . . *"You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever"* (Psalm 16:11 NLT). Your salvation means that you have much to rejoice in—God chose you, set His love on you, pursued you, forgave you, adopted you, and secured your unending joy and eternal home in heaven. When you feel the fear of death, remember the eternal joy that is yours in Christ.

*“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (ISAIAH 61:10 ESV).*

### **Reach out to others**

God often uses the people in your life to bring guidance, wisdom, and comfort. As you think about your own mortality, talk with a trusted friend, family member, pastor, or counselor about any fears or concerns you have. Find someone who can give you godly guidance and remind you of God’s promises.

*“In an abundance of counselors there is safety” (PROVERBS 11:14 ESV).*

With God, you never have to face your fears alone—even the fear of dying. He is always with you.

*“For I am the LORD your God  
who takes hold of your right hand  
and says to you,  
Do not fear; I will help you.”  
(ISAIAH 41:13)*

## **How to Handle Regrets in Life**

Often when people draw near to the end of life, they look back and many experience regret. Maybe they’ve said or done something that has haunted them for years, and they have never been able to come to terms with it. Or it could be the things they *didn’t* do that cause regret—places they’ve never visited, dreams they never fulfilled, activities and projects they never tried, or relationships they never pursued or reconciled.

If you are experiencing regret, even feeling like you’ve wasted your life, know that you can have hope. The Lord still loves you and can redeem your remaining time, relationships, and life.

*“Put your hope in the LORD,  
for with the LORD is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.”*

(PSALM 130:7)

## Removing Regrets

To address any regrets you may be experiencing, consider the following . . .

### Address guilt

If you’re experiencing guilt because you hurt someone in the past or have another sin issue, confess it to the Lord.

*“I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’ And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone” (PSALM 32:5 NLT).*

### Seek forgiveness

Do you need to apologize to someone? It could be for something recent or something from a long time ago that was never settled. As you’re able, call them or send a message asking for forgiveness. And if there’s something you’ve done that you’ve never confessed to God, seek His forgiveness as well.

*“O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help” (PSALM 86:5 NLT).*

### Make peace

If you have a broken or estranged relationship, there’s no time like the present to mend it. The Lord often uses the end of life to prompt healing and reconciliation. Reach out to that person and seek peace.

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace” (ROMANS 14:19).*

### Receive God’s grace

The Lord is “*full of grace*” (John 1:14). Any wrongs you’ve done, any relationships you’ve broken, any regrets you have . . . He offers you grace. No one is perfect. God Himself gives you grace, so accept it and share that grace with others.



*“God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 CORINTHIANS 9:8 ESV).*

### **Remember your hope**

The Bible says *“to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21). The places you never visited on earth, the dreams you never pursued, the unfinished plans and business you had . . . will all pale in comparison to what’s coming. When you get to heaven, you won’t be thinking about everything you’ve lost but about all you’ve gained in Christ. You have not only a living hope but a heavenly inheritance waiting for you!

*“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 PETER 1:3–4).*

### **Share your story**

The lessons you’ve learned from your life, even your regrets, can help others. The Lord can use your story to help someone avoid the same pain, mend a relationship, or impact someone for Christ. Pray and ask the Lord how He can use you and the lessons you’ve learned to help others.

*“Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul” (PSALM 66:16 ESV).*

The experience of regret can create intense emotions and be difficult to handle. In addition to seeking the Lord, talk with someone you trust to help process your thoughts and emotions.

*“Where there is no guidance the people fall,  
But in abundance of counselors there is victory.”*

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

## How to Respond When a Death Has Occurred

Many feel awkward and unsure about what to say or do when someone they care about experiences a loss. It can be difficult to push past any unease, but your mere presence can provide comfort and support to those in need.

*“All his brothers and sisters  
and everyone who had known him before  
came and ate with him in his house.  
They comforted and consoled him.”  
(JOB 42:11)*

### Offering Help in the Immediate Aftermath

You can help those grieving in the immediate aftermath of a death by . . .

**Acknowledging** their loss immediately (call, text, or visit them personally)

**Reaching out** with affection (give them a warm hug or handshake)

**Not worrying** about what to say (your presence lets them know you care)

- Simply say you are sorry for their loss

**Adapting your communication** to what the bereaved person needs

**Offering to help** with funeral details:

- Notify extended family, friends, schools, pastor
- Contact the family attorney
- Contact the funeral home
- Locate their existing will
- Apply for a death certificate, which can take a number of weeks to receive
- Locate all insurance policies and bank accounts
- Contact their insurance companies

- Contact the Social Security office
- Check existing retirement funds

**For the “Why?” questions** . . . avoid giving pat answers, like: “God wanted him home in heaven.” (You can say, “I really don’t know, but I’m here for you—however I can help.”)

**Praying** for the family and their loved ones (privately or publicly)

*“Be sympathetic, love one another,  
be compassionate and humble.”*  
(1 PETER 3:8)

### **Offering Help Inside the Home**

Depending on your relationship and accessibility to the family, you can . . .

**Answer the door and phones** for a period of time—record all calls, visitors, gifts, etc.

**Place a writing tablet near the front door** to record all visitors, flowers, and gifts

**Bring food in disposable serving dishes**, especially easy-to-handle snack foods

**Buy bottled water**, beverages, ice (possibly in an ice chest)

**Purchase** disposable plates, cups, eating utensils, napkins, paper towels, plastic wrap, and trash bags

**Help organize a schedule** to provide meals, coordinating with friends, neighbors, and coworkers

**Do minor household chores and repairs:** replace light bulbs, sweep/vacuum floors, mow the lawn, clean out refrigerator, etc.

**Spend focused attention** talking/playing with the children, providing transportation to and/or from school or other obligations

**Take pets for walks**

**Give a monetary gift** or set up an online fundraising page to help with medical, travel, or funeral expenses

Often it is not just “grand gestures” that are remembered and appreciated, but the myriad of little kindnesses that render help and ease the stress of a difficult time. Sometimes it’s just having tissues available or a pen and paper to jot down a name or phone number. Your kindness and compassion will reflect the Lord’s love and care to your friends and family experiencing loss.

*“How kind the LORD is! How good he is!  
So merciful, this God of ours! . . .  
The LORD cares deeply  
when his loved ones die.”  
(PSALM 116:5, 15 NLT)*

## Dos and Don’ts for Helping the Grieving

A comforting truth about the Lord is that He is *“always ready to help in times of trouble”* (Psalm 46:1 NLT). As image-bearers of God, we also want to help those in trouble—the grieving, the hurting, and those devastated by a recent loss. However, sometimes we just don’t know what to do. And other times, our help may not be all that helpful. That’s why it is very important to distinguish what to do from what *not* to do.

As you learn how to help those facing a loss, the Lord can use you to show His love and comfort to them.

*“But God, who comforts the downcast,  
comforted us by the coming of Titus.”  
(2 CORINTHIANS 7:6)*

**Don't** stay away for fear of what to say.

**Do** provide companionship.

*"Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words"* (JOB 2:13 NLT).

**Don't** over quote Scripture or give platitudes.

**Do** listen and provide emotional support.

*"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak"* (JAMES 1:19).

**Don't** wait to be asked to help.

**Do** look for needs and meet them.

*"Serve one another humbly in love"* (GALATIANS 5:13).

**Don't** tell those with tears not to cry.

**Do** encourage the expression of emotions.

*"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep"* (ROMANS 12:15 ESV).

**Don't** exclude the one in grief from activities.

**Do** invite them and keep them involved.

*"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another"* (HEBREWS 10:25 NLT).

**Don't** ask, "Is there anything I can do?"

**Do** be specific.

*"Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth"* (1 JOHN 3:18).

The loss of a loved one is a difficult experience, but you can bring relief and shoulder the burden of those in grief.

*"Carry each other's burdens,  
and in this way you will  
fulfill the law of Christ."  
(GALATIANS 6:2)*

## How to Plan a Funeral

Planning a funeral can be difficult for many reasons. The grieving family is often emotionally overwhelmed and possibly in shock by the death of their loved one. Planning anything in that state of mind is hard, but a funeral involves a number of logistical obstacles involving communication, finances, finding needed items, coordinating schedules, arranging housing, childcare, and so much more. Additionally, some people have never planned a funeral so they don't know what to do or expect.

You may feel overwhelmed and brokenhearted, but the Lord is near.

*"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

(PSALM 34:18)

### Helping with Arrangements

Depending on your relationship to the family, you could offer to help make arrangements . . .

#### For the Funeral:

**Contact** the pastor or person who will be conducting the funeral service and discuss the desired plans.

**Select** a funeral home and cemetery and set an appointment with the funeral director to discuss arrangements.

- Select the date of funeral/memorial and burial as well as casket, burial plot/vault/urn
- Help write the obituary
- Select clothing for the deceased
- Provide the funeral home with recent photographs of the deceased to help with hair arrangement and makeup
- Choose pictures for the obituary, funeral home visitation/wake

- Select music to be played, including pre-service music and congregational songs
- Schedule the order of service
- Choose and contact pallbearers or honorary pallbearers
- Prepare a printed memorial for the funeral, including pictures, dates of birth and death, order of service, biography, words to songs, favorite Scripture, invitation for greeting family afterward
- Inquire if the service can be recorded
- Put together a slideshow with special songs as a “Celebration of Life”

**Call** the newspaper(s) to obtain a listing after funeral arrangements have been finalized (looking at other obituaries for further ideas you may want to use)

**Post** funeral arrangements online to social media accounts, providing a link to the obituary and funeral plans

**Talk** through and arrange for the practical needs of those attending (for example, hair appointments, clothes for the funeral, laundry/dry cleaning, polishing shoes)

**Arrange** for transportation (airport/carpool/bus)

**Provide** a spare vehicle, if possible, for out-of-town guests

**Arrange** rooms and hotels for out-of-town guests

**Consider** asking someone trustworthy to stay at the house while the family is at the funeral (burglars look at obituaries to learn times of funerals, assuming no one will be at home)

### **For the Burial:**

**Special** items can be placed in the casket (for example, personal messages from loved ones, poems, favorite items)

- Jewelry can be removed just prior to burial

**For a military burial**, contact a service organization or veterans office to make military arrangements

*"By faith Joseph, when his end was near . . .  
gave instructions concerning  
the burial of his bones."  
(HEBREWS 11:22)*

## The Purposes of a Christian Funeral<sup>20</sup>

**Question:** "What is unique about a Christian funeral?"

**Answer:** A funeral centered on Christ and His great love offers comfort and hope for family and friends in their grief. A Christian funeral where a believer's testimony is shared provides a means for unsaved family and friends to hear about the gift of salvation offered to anyone who will humble their heart and accept it.

*"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people" (TITUS 2:11).*

The purposes of a Christian funeral are to:

- Provide a turning point to deal with the reality of death
- Enable the bereaved to begin facing the rest of their lives
- Encourage openness to God's love
- Provide a bridge over the fear of death to the hope of eternal life
- Affirm belief in the resurrection of Christ and of all believers
- Provide comfort after the loss of the person who has died
- Encourage people to examine their own life and mortality
- Offer a significant occasion for an encounter with God



A funeral, though sad and solemn, provides a meaningful time for people to also consider their own life, death, and relationship with God. It can serve as a testimony of Jesus' love and faithfulness. The Lord often uses the *death* of a loved one to bring people to eternal *life*.

*"This is the testimony:  
God has given us eternal life,  
and this life is in his Son."  
(1 JOHN 5:11)*

## How to Present the Plan of Salvation

If your friend or relative is dying, and you know a major spiritual void exists, leading your friend into a life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ is your top priority. God can prepare your heart—and theirs—and help you sensitively share what it means to trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Realize, those who are close to death are often more receptive to spiritual truth, thus opening the door for *you* to be the one God uses to bring people to Himself.

*"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors,  
as though God were making his appeal through us.  
We implore you on Christ's behalf:  
Be reconciled to God."  
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:20)*

## Presenting the Plan of Salvation

Familiarize yourself with the following steps so you are ready to share the plan of salvation with ease if an opportunity presents itself:

**Start with** prayer for God's blessing on your time together.

*"Salvation belongs to the LORD; may your blessing be on your people"*  
(PSALM 3:8 CSB).

**Spend time** alone with the person who is dying.

*"When he [Jesus] was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything"*  
(MARK 4:34).

**Speak directly** about judgment and eternal life.

"Imagine that I have the cure for your illness. Yet I refuse to share it with you because I'm afraid you won't believe me or that you might even reject me. If I don't share the truth, that means I'm not a real friend. Because I am your friend, out of love and care for you, I must share a type of cure—a spiritual cure—with you because eternity is too long to be wrong. First let me ask, if you were to die tonight, are you ready to face God? Do you know for sure that you would go to heaven?"  
*"People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment"* (HEBREWS 9:27).

**Share** the problem of sin in simple terms.

"Like a stray arrow, every person has missed the target of God's holy standard. We have willfully chosen what we knew was wrong. We have also failed to do what is right. God calls our wrong attitudes and actions sin."

*"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (ROMANS 3:23).

**State** the consequences of sin.

"You deserve a salary for your work. These wages are your deserved payment. God says because of our sin, we deserve death, which means eternal separation from God."

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (ROMANS 6:23).

**Show** God's solution to sin.

"If someone could exchange his healthy body for your sick body, what would happen? He would die, and you would live! Jesus Christ did that for you—He took the punishment for sin that you deserved. He paid the penalty of death, dying in your place for your sins, so that you could live with God forever."

*“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (ROMANS 5:8).*

**Single out** Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved.

“Imagine there was only one medicine that could cure your illness and save your life—and it was 100% effective for everyone who used it. You wouldn’t bother looking into other treatments or medications. You would use the only life-saving medication available. Salvation is like that. There is only one way to be saved, only one way to go to heaven, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.”

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (JOHN 14:6).*

**Specify** exactly *how* to be saved.

“Imagine someone puts this life-saving medicine into your hand but instead of taking it, you only mentally believe it will work. If you never take it, you will not be saved. To believe in Jesus means not just mental agreement but the biblical meaning of ‘believe’ means ‘to rely upon, to trust in.’”

*“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (ACTS 16:31).*

**Suggest** a prayer of salvation.

“Because the Bible says, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus’ and because Lord means ‘master, ruler, owner,’ . . . you must rely on Jesus to be the Master, Ruler, Owner of your life. Would you like to receive Jesus Christ right now as your personal Lord and Savior through prayer—giving Him control of your life?”

## Prayer of Salvation

“God, I admit that I’m not perfect and that I have sinned.  
Many times I have gone my own way instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for all of my sins.  
Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross  
to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and Savior.  
Take control of my life and  
make me the person you want me to be.  
Thank you, Jesus, for loving me  
and giving me the hope of eternal life in heaven.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

*“Yet to all who did receive him [Jesus],  
to those who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God.”  
(JOHN 1:12)*

**Death is the doorway to your destiny.  
When you trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior,  
you will spend eternity in heaven with Him.  
But if you refuse God’s gracious gift of salvation,  
you reject heaven as well.  
And eternity is too long to be wrong.**

**—June Hunt**

## Hope to Inherit Heaven—Part IV<sup>21</sup>

Taken from: HOPE FOR YOUR HEART  
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On the last page of the final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some of the children who have gone to Narnia lament that they once again must return to their homeland, the Shadowlands. But Aslan, the lion who represents Jesus, has the best news of all for them.

Speaking to the children, he said, “You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.”

Lucy said, “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.”

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

“There was a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over, the holidays have begun. The dream has ended; this is morning.”

And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story.

All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth had read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.<sup>22</sup>

We can't fully know what eternal life will be like or what wonders heaven will hold. But we can be assured that one delight after another awaits us. And there will be no more stormy times . . . only serenity. Truly our hope is in the promise of heaven.



### **Gone from My Sight\***

I'm standing on the seashore.

A ship at my side spreads her white sails  
to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean.

She's an object of beauty and strength.

I stand and watch her until, at length,

she hangs like a speck of white cloud

just where the sea and the sky

come down to mingle with each other.

And then I hear someone at my side saying,

"There, she's gone." Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all.

She is just as large in mast and hull and spar

as she was when she left my side.

And she is just as able to bear her load of living freight

to the place of destination.

Her diminished size is in me—not in her.

And just at the moment when someone says,

"There, she's gone;" there are other eyes watching her coming,

and there are other voices ready to take up the glad shout,

"Here she comes!" And that is dying.

\*Variously attributed to Henry Scott Holland, Henry Van Dyke, and Luther F. Beecher; source uncertain.

# APPENDICES







## APPENDIX A

### Common Questions about Death and Heaven

Few realities raise more questions than death and heaven. Following are common questions along with answers from God's Word about the end of this life and the experience of the next.

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

#### Questions about Heaven

**Question:** “Is heaven a physical place?”

**Answer:** Yes. Jesus described heaven as a physical place, as a house with rooms: *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”* (John 14:2). This “present” or “intermediate” heaven may be invisible to our senses but God’s Word nonetheless refers to it in physical terms. The “present” heaven differs from the “new heavens and new earth” which God will create at the end of time, which will be physical.

*“We are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God’s righteousness”* (2 PETER 3:13 NLT).

**Question:** “Will we recognize our loved ones in heaven?”

**Answer:** Yes. The Bible contains multiple accounts of those who died and were recognized both by those on earth and by those in the realm of the dead. The disciples recognized Moses and Elijah during Jesus’ transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, 3). The rich man who died recognized both Lazarus and Abraham. . . .

*“In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side”* (LUKE 16:23).

**Question: “Will there be animals in heaven?”**

**Answer:** Many people wonder about animals in heaven, especially beloved pets. The Bible reveals God’s love and care for animals, as He created them (Genesis 1), sustains them (Psalm 104:27–28), and even chose to save the animals from the flood (Genesis 6:19). Given this, it seems likely that there would be animals in heaven. Of course, animals don’t have souls like people, but God could certainly re-create or restore a beloved pet if He chose to do so. And wouldn’t it be just like a gracious God, who lavishes love, to give good gifts to His children? Many scriptures strongly suggest that animals will also enjoy a redeemed earth.

*“‘The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD” (ISAIAH 65:25).*

**Question: “Will we eat and drink in heaven?”**

**Answer:** Yes. Jesus ate with His disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24:42–43; John 21:12–14). Jesus also referred to a feast in God’s kingdom, *“Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 14:15). The book of Revelation also refers to the wedding supper of the Lamb. . . .

*“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!”* (REVELATION 19:9).

## Questions about the Body

### **Question:** “In heaven, will we have physical bodies?”

**Answer:** When believers die, their spirit goes to be with the Lord in the “present” heaven (paradise) while their physical body remains on earth, returning to dust (Luke 23:42–46; 2 Corinthians 5:6–8; Philippians 1:23). Currently, believers who have died *do not* have a physical, resurrected body in heaven. When the Lord returns, He will give believers their new, physical, resurrected bodies which they will have for all eternity in the new heavens and new earth.

*“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”* (PHILIPPIANS 3:20–21).

### **Question:** “How do we know we will have physical, resurrected bodies?”

**Answer:** Our resurrection is sure because of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead with a physical, resurrected body. He walked and talked (Luke 24: 15–17); He was recognizable (Luke 24:35); He had His crucifixion scars (Luke 24:39); He ate food (Luke 24:42–43). He even said to His doubting disciple Thomas, “*Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have*” (Luke 24:39). The resurrection of Jesus is a promise and a proof of our future resurrection. The Bible says,

*“We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us . . .”* (2 CORINTHIANS 4:14 NLT).

### **Question:** “What will our resurrected bodies be like in heaven?”

**Answer:** Our resurrected body will be like Christ’s. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:42–43 that our resurrected bodies will be imperishable, glorious, and powerful—no longer subject to sickness and death. The Bible says,

*“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power”* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:42–43).

## Questions about Babies

**Question:** “Where do babies go when they die, including those who are stillborn, miscarried, or aborted?”

**Answer:** All babies, unborn or born, go directly into the presence of the Lord when they die. The Bible says that life begins at conception (Psalm 139:13–14), so the Lord considers the unborn to be a real, living person. Scripture explains King David’s hope of seeing his deceased child again one day. . . .

*“Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me” (2 SAMUEL 12:23 NLT).*

**Question:** “How can babies who die be saved from the penalty of ‘original sin’?”

**Answer:** The Bible does teach that everyone inherits sin: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). However, Scripture illustrates that those who cannot make moral judgments are not judged as those who can.

This principle is revealed when the Lord told the Israelite scouts to take possession of the Promised Land. All but Caleb and Joshua refused to step forward in faith. Therefore, the Lord prohibited that generation—except these two men—from entering the Promised Land, a picture of heaven. The Lord made one other exception: children “*who did not yet know good from bad*” could enter. . . .

*“The little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land” (DEUTERONOMY 1:39).*

## Questions about Death

**Question:** “Do Christians lose their salvation if they die by suicide?”

**Answer:** No. The Bible says that when you believe in Christ, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior, you are given the Spirit of God, who dwells in you and seals your salvation. The Holy Spirit is the promised *guarantee* that you will inherit heaven and live eternally in the presence of God.

*“You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession” (EPHESIANS 1:13–14).*

**Question:** “Does the soul ‘sleep’ after we die? What is meant when the Bible refers to one who is dead as being asleep?”

**Answer:** No. The concept of “soul sleep” is not biblical. In 2 Corinthians 5:6–8, Paul says that when believers are absent from the body, they are present with our Lord. When the Bible refers to those who have died as being “asleep,” this does not mean literal sleep. Rather, it is a way to describe death because the body gives the appearance of being asleep.

From other passages of Scripture (such as the story of the rich man and Lazarus) we see that the souls of both believers and unbelievers are conscious between death and the resurrection. Unbelievers are in conscious woe and believers are in conscious bliss (see Luke 16:22–25). When Jesus tells His disciples that their friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, the Bible says . . .

*“Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep” (JOHN 11:13).*

**Question:** “Is praying for the salvation of the dead biblical?”

**Answer:** No. The Bible never gives any example of a believer praying for the dead, never instructs how to pray for the dead, never records a prayer for the dead, never refers to an offer of salvation for the dead, and never encourages people to pray for the dead.

Rather, when Jesus taught about two men who died, He painted a picture of death with clear-cut words that those who desire to move from Hades to paradise are unable to do so: *“Between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us”* (Luke 16:26).

The Bible says that the unbelieving dead are resigned to wait until the final judgment: *“The Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while keeping the wicked under punishment until the day of final judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9 NLT). The free gift and hope of salvation is offered to those who are *living*. . . .

*“Anyone who is among the living has hope”* (ECCLESIASTES 9:4).

**Question: “Are séances to communicate with the dead biblical?”**

**Answer:** No. There is one major problem with attempting to consult the dead, which the Bible addresses in two different ways:

All efforts to consult the spirits of the dead are occult practices, forbidden by the Lord. The word *occult*, which means “hidden,” is used to describe any attempt to gain supernatural power or knowledge *apart* from the God of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> If we put our faith in any person or practice other than the Lord, we have misplaced faith. We must go to God for His wisdom, lean on the Lord for His understanding, and trust in Christ for His will.

*“When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?”* (ISAIAH 8:19).

Spiritists conducting séances, mediums practicing necromancy, channelers speaking for the dead—all are of the occult. God’s Word forbids all these practices and states they are *“detestable to the LORD.”*

*“Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you”* (DEUTERONOMY 18:10–12).

**Question: “After death, can a person become an angel?”**

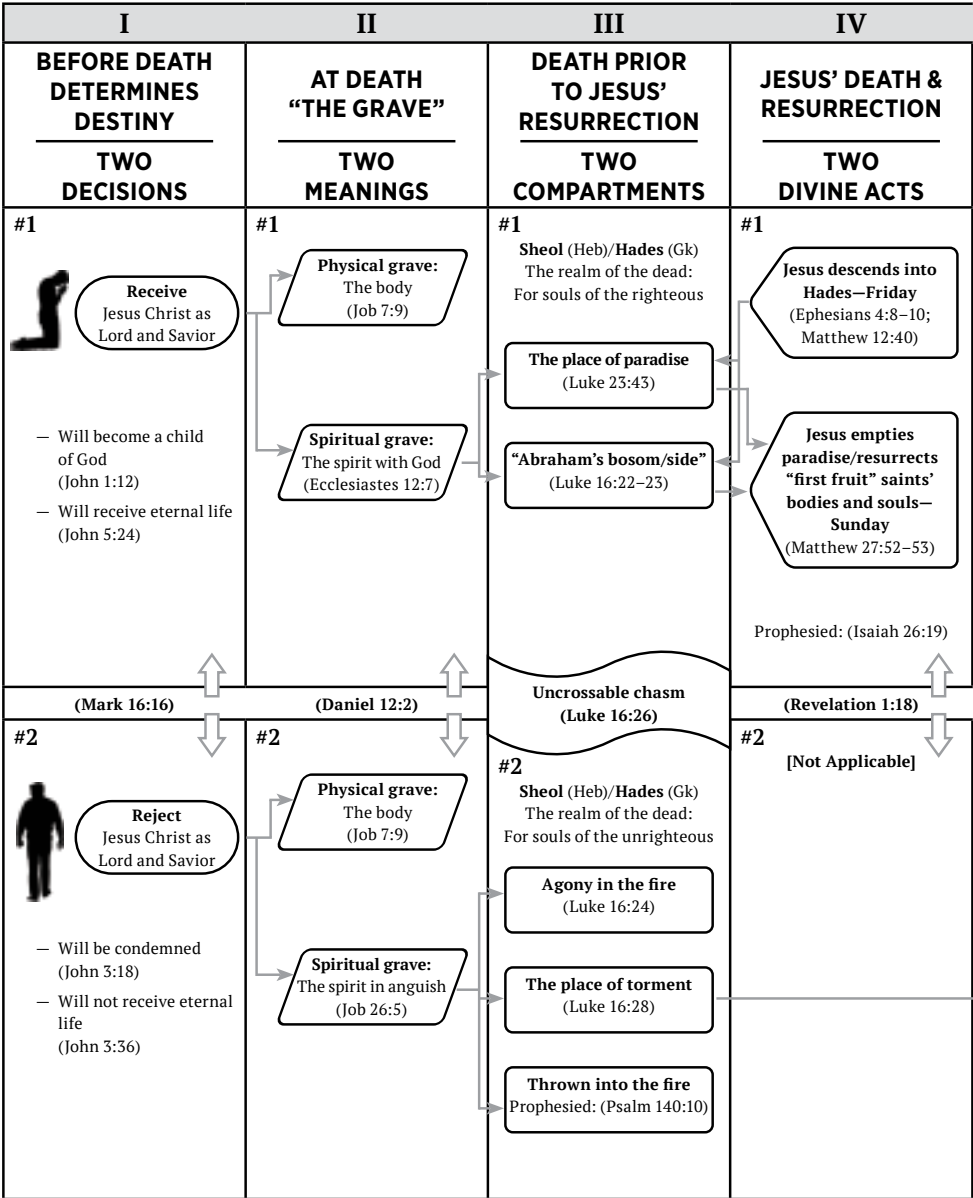
**Answer:** No. The Bible teaches that angelic beings were created before the human race. Many people hope or believe that a deceased loved one, such as a young daughter or son, has been transformed into an angel and now watches over them. No biblical basis exists for such a belief. While this belief may seem comforting, our comfort and hope needs to come from the Lord and be based on truth.

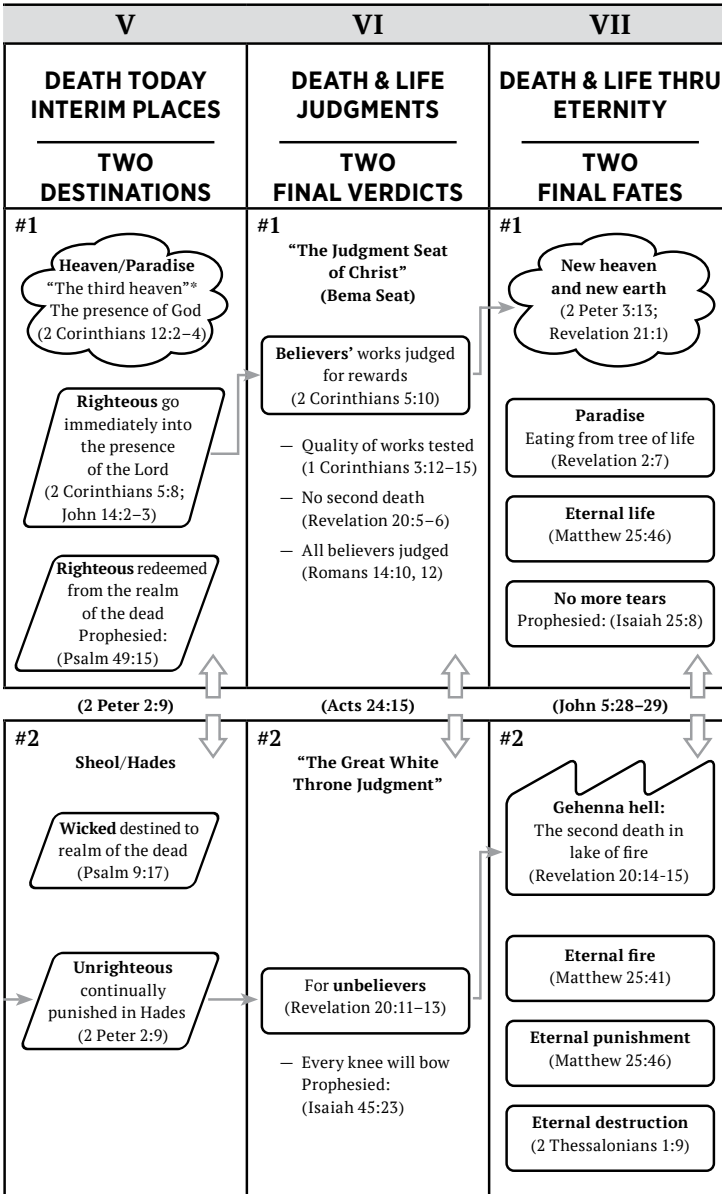
Our hope is not that we become *angels*, but that we become more and more like *Christ*. Realize, it is humanity, not angels, that have an unparalleled position in the universe. God made humanity, not angels, in His image (Genesis 1:26–27). The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh—and will forever be fully God and fully *man*. And one day, we will be like *Him*. The Bible says . . .

*“We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. . . . For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son”* (ROMANS 8:23–24, 29 NLT).



**APPENDIX B**  
**Two Choices**  
**Life vs. Death—Heaven vs. Hell**





## Notes on 1st and 2nd Heavens

**1st heaven (clouds/atmosphere)**

**Genesis 7:11:** "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life . . . the floodgates of the heavens were opened."

**Genesis 27:28:** "May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness."

**2nd heaven (sun/moon/stars/space)**

**Genesis 2:1:** "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array."

**Deuteronomy 4:19:** "When you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven."

## SCRIPTURES FROM CHART

### Section I

**John 1:12:** *“To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

**John 5:24:** *“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*

**Mark 16:16:** *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

**John 3:18:** *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”*

**John 3:36:** *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”*

### Section II

**Job 7:9:** *“As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so one who goes down to the grave does not return.”*

**Ecclesiastes 12:7:** *“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”*

**Daniel 12:2:** *“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”*

**Job 26:5:** *“The dead are in deep anguish.”*

### Section III

**Luke 23:43:** *“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’”*

**Luke 16:22–23:** *“The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.”*

**Luke 16:26:** *“Between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”*

**Luke 16:24:** *“So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’”*

**Luke 16:28:** *“I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”*

**Psalms 140:10:** *“May burning coals fall on them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise.”*

## Section IV

**Ephesians 4:9–10, 8:** *“(What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens . . . ) ‘When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’”*

**Matthew 12:40:** *“As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*

**Matthew 27:52–53:** *“The tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”*

**Isaiah 26:19:** *“Your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy . . . the earth will give birth to her dead.”*

**Revelation 1:18:** *“I [Jesus] am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”*

## Section V

**2 Corinthians 12:2–4:** *“I know a man in Christ who . . . was caught up to the third heaven. . . . caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.”*

**2 Corinthians 5:8:** *“We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*

**John 14:2–3:** *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”*

**Psalms 49:15:** *“God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself.”*

**2 Peter 2:9:** *“The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.”*

**Psalms 9:17:** *“The wicked go down to the realm of the dead.”*

## Section VI

**2 Corinthians 5:10:** *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

**1 Corinthians 3:12–15:** *“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved— even though only as one escaping through the flames.”*

**Revelation 20:5–6:** *“(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

**Romans 14:10, 12:** *“We will all stand before God’s judgment seat. . . . So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.”*

**Acts 24:15:** *“There will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.”*

**Revelation 20:11–13:** *“I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.”*

**Isaiah 45:23:** *“Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.”*

## Section VII

**2 Peter 3:13:** *“We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”*

**Revelation 21:1:** *“Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”*

**Revelation 2:7:** *“I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

**Matthew 25:46:** *“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

**Isaiah 25:8:** *“He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth.”*

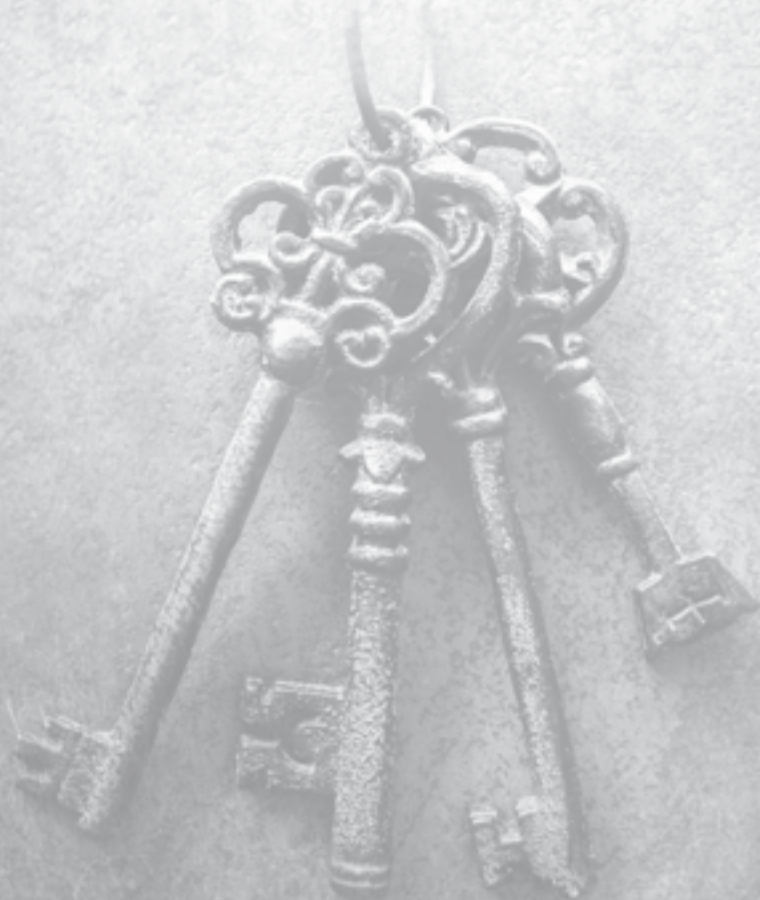
**John 5:28–29:** *“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”*

**Revelation 20:14–15:** *“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”*

**Matthew 25:41, 46:** *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ . . . Then they will go away to eternal punishment.”*

**2 Thessalonians 1:9:** *“They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”*

# SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE





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*“First seek the counsel  
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

What truth can **comfort me** when I **fear death**?

*“Even though I walk through the valley  
of the shadow of **death**,  
I will **fear** no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they **comfort me**.”*  
(PSALM 23:4 ESV)

With all of the **death** and **crying** and **pain** I've experienced,  
what can I look forward to in heaven?

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
There will be no more **death** or  
mourning or **crying** or **pain**.”*  
(REVELATION 21:4)

How should I live, knowing my **days** are **numbered**?

*“Teach us to **number** our **days**, that we  
may gain a heart of wisdom.”*  
(PSALM 90:12)

How does knowing **Christ** change the way I **live** and **die**?

*“For to me, to **live** is **Christ** and to **die** is gain.”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 1:21)

**Even though** I will **die**, what must I  
**believe in** to have eternal **life**?

*“Jesus said . . . ‘I am the resurrection and the **life**.  
The one who **believes in** me will live,  
**even though** they **die**.’”*  
(JOHN 11:25)

Will I really have to **face judgment** after I **die**?

*“People are destined to **die** once,  
and after that to **face judgment**.”*  
(HEBREWS 9:27)

What does God say about the **death**  
**of His faithful servants**?

*“Precious in the sight of the LORD is  
the **death of his faithful servants**.”*  
(PSALM 116:15)

Who is able to **rest in peace when they die**?

*“Those who follow godly paths will  
**rest in peace when they die**.”*  
(ISAIAH 57:2 NLT)

When Jesus returns, what will happen  
to **our weak, mortal bodies**?

*“He will take **our weak mortal bodies** and change  
them into glorious bodies like his own . . .”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 3:21 NLT)

As Christians, when we die, can we be **confident**  
that we will be **at home with the Lord**?

*"We are **confident**, I say, and would  
prefer to be away from the body  
and **at home with the Lord.**"*

(2 CORINTHIANS 5:8)





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(Jeremiah 29:11)*

**June Hunt, M.A.**, is the Founder and Chief Servant Officer of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide counseling and caregiving ministry that offers biblical hope and practical help in more than 60 countries and 36 languages. The *Keys for Living Library* provides the foundation for the ministry's award-winning, live, call-in counseling radio program, *Hope in the Night*. Her passion to help others through biblical counsel is fueled by her joy in seeing a life changed through Christ. As an accomplished author, speaker, and musician, June provides God's truth for today's problems. See more at: [www.junehunt.org](http://www.junehunt.org)

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