

# Heaven: Life Is Short. Forever Is Long.

*A Devotional to Help Us Think About Heaven This Summer*

I'm praying that as you go through this devotional over the next two months by yourself or with family and friends, that you will become so heavenly minded that you will do great earthly good.

"The way you live now is completely controlled by what you believe about the future."— Tim Keller<sup>1</sup>

"Most anxiety isn't merely about tomorrow. It's about not knowing the story we're living in."— Maurice Roberts in *The Happiness of Heaven*

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## Part 1 — Longing for Heaven

### Theme:

Human restlessness, heavenly desire, and learning to think eternally.

This opening section introduces the reader to the Christian hope and explains why human beings ache for something beyond this world.

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Keller, "*The New Heaven and New Earth*" (sermon podcast), Redeemer Presbyterian Church, April 12, 2009.

## Day 1 — Setting Your Mind on Heaven

“The life of a Christian is wondrously ruled in this world by the consideration and meditation of the life of another world.”— Richard Sibbes<sup>2</sup>

“Why doth God reveal these things in the word? That we should oft meditate of them, and study them, that we may be heavenly-minded.”— Richard Sibbes, *A Glance of Heaven*, p. 30.

Colossians 3:1–4; Romans 8:16–17

Have you heard the saying, “You are so heavenly minded you are no earthly good?” There is a real danger of having a kind of faith that is disconnected from the world in which we live. True faith moves from the mind to the heart to the hands. This repetitive exercise—mind, heart, hands—strengthens spiritual vitality.

But, if I’m honest, I face a greater danger—being so earthly minded, I’m no heavenly good. Which danger do you struggle with most?

I sense most people spend far more time thinking about today than the last day. Heaven can quickly get squeezed out of our hearts by earthly concerns and interests.

Schedules, bills, careers, sports, politics, vacations, retirement, and endless daily responsibilities flood our minds. None of those things are necessarily wrong. But when earthly concerns dominate our attention completely, our hearts slowly become trapped beneath the horizon of this present world.

That is why the apostle Paul repeatedly calls Christians to lift their eyes higher—to heaven where God is.

Paul says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” (Colossians 3:2)

Paul does not mean believers should ignore earthly responsibilities or become detached from everyday life.

Christians are called to love neighbors, work faithfully, serve families, pursue holiness, and engage the world around them.

But believers are meant to live from heaven downward rather than from earth upward.

Heavenly mindedness, when it stirs the heart, changes how Christians endure suffering, resist temptation, handle money, love people, and think about the future.

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Sibbes, *A Glance of Heaven*, 25.

The Bible tells us about a future that ought to reshape how we face today. Paul says believers are children of God and “fellow heirs with Christ.” That means the future glory awaiting Christians is not uncertain or imaginary. It is secured through union with Jesus Himself.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote:

“Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”

Lewis understood something many modern Christians forget.

People who think deeply about eternity are often the very people most useful in the present world. Hope in heaven produces courage, generosity, sacrifice, endurance, and joy.

Christians throughout history who changed the world often did so precisely because they believed this world was not ultimate. Let this awe-inspiring reality set in— “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3)

You are in Christ. Christ is in Heaven. That means your truest identity is already secure in Christ. You have access to heavens resources even now in Christ. Let me encourage you to read *The Heart of Christ* by Thomas Goodwin to consider more about the rich resources available to you in Christ today.

For now, live in this hope. One day,

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4)

The Christian story ends in glory.

So, learn to think often about heaven.

Not to escape earthly life, but to live earthly life with eternal perspective.

The more clearly you see where the story ends, the more faithfully you will live today.

## Discussion Questions

- What earthly concerns most compete for your attention and affection?
- What does it mean practically to “set your mind on things above”?
- Why is heavenly mindedness often misunderstood?
- How does future glory reshape present priorities?
- What would change in your life if eternity became more central to your thinking?

## Day 2 — Hungry for Home

Philippians 3:20

"Our greatest affliction is not anxiety, or even guilt, but rather homesickness—a nostalgia or ineradicable yearning to be at home with God."—Donald Bloesch<sup>1</sup>

Everyone knows what homesickness feels like.

Students feel it during their first semester away at college. Travelers feel it after long stretches away from family. Soldiers feel it while deployed overseas. Something deep inside longs for the comfort, familiarity, and belonging of home.

The Bible says Christians experience a kind of spiritual homesickness too.

Paul writes:

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20)

Notice Paul does not say believers merely hope to visit heaven someday.

He says heaven is already their true citizenship.

Christians live on earth, but they ultimately belong to another kingdom.

That explains why faithful believers often feel out of place in this world.

The values of heaven increasingly clash with the values of earth. Christians hunger for holiness in a world celebrating sin. They long for truth in a culture of confusion. They ache for justice in a world filled with corruption and suffering.

Even the best moments of earthly life carry a strange incompleteness.

Vacations end. Weddings conclude. Children grow up. Celebrations fade. Human beings experience joy, but never perfect satisfaction.

Our worst days make us long for another world. But our best days remind us that this world cannot fully satisfy.

We are like a baby in the womb that cannot begin to imagine what awaits outside—oceans, mountains, sunsets, friendship, laughter, hugs and kisses. That baby may fear leaving the only

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Bloesch, *Theological Notebook* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1989), 183.

world he or she has known. Birth is not merely the end of something familiar; it is the beginning of something greater. And for the Christian, death is not the loss of life, but the entrance into the life for which we were made.

That longing for home is not accidental.

God created believers for eternal fellowship with Himself.

C.S. Lewis wrote:

“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

Christians often try to sedate and silence this longing by filling life with distractions, possessions, entertainment, success, or comfort. But here’s the surprising reality: some longings are gifts from God. They remind us that this world is not our home.

And nothing in creation was designed to carry the weight of ultimate satisfaction.

Only God can do that.

Paul says believers “await a Savior.” Christianity is not ultimately about escaping earth, but about the return of King Jesus who will fully redeem His people and renew his creation.

One day Christ will return.

Bodies will rise.

Creation will be restored.

And every restless longing believers carry now will finally find fulfillment in the presence of God.

The homesickness Christians feel today is not weakness.

It is evidence they were made for another country, another kingdom, and another home.

So, when you feel that holy longing, don’t ignore it. Fan it into flames.

Let it lift your eyes to Christ and the home he is preparing for his people.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do Christians often feel spiritually out of place in the world?
2. What earthly things do people commonly use to satisfy deeper longings?
3. How does heavenly citizenship reshape Christian identity?

4. Why is homesickness for heaven actually a healthy spiritual sign?
5. How does the return of Christ give hope to weary believers?

## Day 3 — The Ocean Beyond Our Imagination

1 Corinthians 2:9–11

“The things that are most excellent of all they are above sight and beholding and hearing and conceit, that the soul cannot wholly compass and reach them.”— Richard Sibbes<sup>1</sup>

Gia and I once planned a special trip to Saint Thomas for our son’s graduation.

Gia organized an entire surprise reveal for the kids. Once they realized we were taking them to an island, excitement exploded throughout the house. But alongside the excitement came confusion.

They had never visited an island before.

They tried asking questions:

1. What does the ocean really look like?
2. What does it feel like?
3. What’s it like to stand on a beach?

But there are some experiences difficult to explain until you actually see them yourself.

The apostle Paul says heaven is like that.

He writes:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. —these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

What comes to mind when you read that verse? Perhaps you think, "Heaven must be completely unimaginable." There is some truth in that. The fullness of what awaits God's people is beyond our present experience. How could we fully grasp a world without sin, death, sorrow, or separation from God?

Human beings naturally struggle to imagine the glory God has prepared for His people.

We know suffering.

We know disappointment.

We know temporary joys mixed with frustration and loss.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Sibbes, *A Glance of Heaven*, 29-30.

But heaven belongs to an entirely different category of experience.

Paul says God reveals these realities through the Holy Spirit.

Left to ourselves, we would never discover the glory God has prepared for his people. But through His Word and Spirit, God gives believers genuine glimpses of the world to come. He reveals enough to awaken our hope, strengthen our faith, and stir our hearts towards him.

Heaven is not ultimately discovered through speculation, philosophy, or imagination. Christians understand eternity because God graciously reveals truth through His Word and Spirit.

And even then, believers only see glimpses.

Scripture gives previews of glory:

1. resurrection bodies,
2. a restored creation,
3. no more death,
4. no more tears,
5. perfect righteousness,
6. eternal joy,
7. and unhindered fellowship with God.

But the full experience still stretches beyond present comprehension.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote:

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us... like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.”

Lewis understood how easily people settle for tiny earthly pleasures while ignoring eternal joy.

Human beings cling to mud pies because they have never seen the ocean.

Christians often do the same spiritually.

We become consumed with temporary comforts, achievements, entertainment, possessions, and distractions while barely thinking about the glory awaiting us in Christ.

But the Holy Spirit awakens longing for something greater.

Deep down believers' ache for beauty untouched by decay, joy untouched by sorrow, and love untouched by sin.

One day faith will become sight.

The ocean of God's glory believers can barely imagine now will become eternal reality in the presence of Christ.

Until then, let's avoid two mistakes. The first is thinking we can fully comprehend heaven. We cannot. The second is thinking we can know nothing about heaven. Scripture gives us far more than silence.

The Bible is filled with images of a garden, a city, a kingdom, a wedding feast, a restored creation, and the very presence of God. These pictures invite us to meditate on the world to come and to let our hearts long for it.

Heaven will be better than we can imagine—but not less than God has revealed.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is it difficult for human beings to imagine heaven?
2. What does Paul teach about the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding eternal things?
3. How do earthly pleasures sometimes distract people from eternal joy?
4. What does Lewis mean by “mud pies in a slum”?
5. How does the promise of heaven awaken longing for Christ?

## Day 4 — Belly Gods and Better Joy

Philippians 3:19

"The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied."—Jonathan Edwards

Human beings are worshipers.

Everyone builds life around something they believe will bring satisfaction, security, meaning, or happiness. Some worship success. Others worship relationships, comfort, pleasure, money, achievement, appearance, politics, or approval.

The problem is not merely that people sin.

The deeper problem is that sinners continually look to created things to provide what only God can give.

Paul describes unbelievers this way:

“Their god is their belly.” (Philippians 3:19)

Paul is not only talking about food.

The “belly” represents uncontrolled appetites and desires. Human beings naturally turn desires into masters.

John Calvin famously wrote:

“The human heart is an idol factory.”

That factory never stops producing substitutes for God.

Some idols look obviously sinful. Others appear respectable.

A career can become an idol.

Family can become an idol.

Comfort can become an idol.

Even ministry can become an idol if it replaces delight in Christ Himself.

The danger of idols is not merely that they are morally wrong.

The danger is that they cannot satisfy the soul.

People spend enormous amounts of money, energy, and time chasing pleasures that promise satisfaction but never fully deliver.

Sin always overpromises and underdelivers.

John Owen warned:

“We are never nearer Christ than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at His unspeakable love.”

The soul was made for something infinitely greater than temporary pleasures.

That is why earthly idols always leave people restless.

Heaven exposes how small our idols really are.

The pleasures of this world can be enjoyed, but they were never meant to bear the weight for ultimate happiness. Every created joy is a faint reflection of the Creator Himself.

C.S. Lewis compared earthly pleasures to “mud pies in a slum” when infinite joy at the sea is offered.

Christians often settle for mud pies.

We become consumed with comfort, entertainment, achievement, and distraction while forgetting the eternal joy awaiting us in Christ.

But the gospel does not merely command believers to reject idols.

The gospel offers better joy.

Jesus is not trying to steal happiness from His people. He is leading them toward fullness of joy in the presence of God.

One day every counterfeit pleasure will disappear.

And believers will discover that the deepest longings of the human heart were always meant to find fulfillment in Christ alone.

Let us say with Samuel Rutherford:

"O my Lord Jesus Christ, if I could be in heaven without Thee, it would be a hell; and if I could be in hell, and have Thee still, it would be a heaven to me, for Thou art all the heaven I want."<sup>1</sup>

That is the true hope of heaven—not merely a better place, but the presence of a better Person.

### Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of idols most commonly compete for people's hearts today?
2. Why do earthly pleasures ultimately fail to satisfy completely?
3. What does Calvin mean by calling the heart an "idol factory"?
4. How does heaven expose the smallness of earthly idols?
5. Why is Christianity ultimately about better joy rather than mere rule-keeping?

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, January 17, Morning Reading.

## Day 5 — Heaven Creates a Loving Family

1 John 3:11–18

Loneliness is everywhere.

People live surrounded by crowds yet still feel deeply unknown. Families fracture. Friendships drift apart. Churches experience conflict. Social media promises connection while often producing isolation.

Human beings were created for love and belonging, yet sin continually disrupts relationships.

This loneliness and isolation echo something of Hell. In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis pictures Hell as Grey Town, a place that stretches endlessly because its people continually move farther and farther away from one another. Rather than forgive and reconcile, they simply leave and build a new house farther out. The farther they move from God, the farther they move from one another. Independence leads to isolation, which results in loneliness.

Heaven is quite different. As people draw nearer to God, they draw nearer to one another, discovering the fellowship and joy for which they were created. Jonathan Edwards understood this when he preached, “Heaven is a world of love!” at the funeral of his 18-year-old daughter, Jerusha, just months after losing David Brainerd to tuberculosis. What comforted him in such grief? The certainty that a greater communion awaited them in God’s presence.

That is why the gospel does more than prepare believers for heaven someday.

The gospel creates a new family now.

A local church is a suburb of heaven—a colony of the coming kingdom where believers begin learning the language of heaven, love, that will fill eternity.

The 59 one anothers of the New Testament describe how Christians love other Christians as Christ first loved them—sacrificially. We find one of those one anothers in 1 John 3:11:

“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”  
(1 John 3:11)

Christian love is not optional spiritual extra credit.

It is one of the clearest evidences believers truly belong to Christ.

John contrasts two spiritual families throughout this passage.

Cain belonged to the world of hatred, jealousy, and self-centeredness. Christ creates a people marked by sacrificial love.

That means heaven begins reshaping relationships long before believers arrive there.

The church is not merely a gathering of religious individuals attending weekly services.

It is a preview of the coming kingdom.

Every act of forgiveness, hospitality, generosity, encouragement, patience, and sacrificial care reflects the character of heaven itself.

Ray Ortlund writes:

“The gospel creates a culture of grace.”

That culture should make the church feel radically different from the world.

The world often operates through comparison, performance, pride, bitterness, and division.

But Christians belong to a kingdom where grace changes people.

John points believers to the cross as the ultimate picture of love:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16)

Christian love is not merely sentimental affection.

It is costly.

Patient.

Forgiving.

Self-sacrificing.

Jesus did not merely talk about love. He demonstrated it by giving Himself for sinners.

And John says believers should increasingly reflect that same kind of love toward one another.

Many Christians long for heaven while neglecting the relationships God has already placed around them.

But preparation for heaven includes learning to love God’s people now.

Every act of love in the church is preparation for eternity. Every meal shared, burden carried, sin forgiven, prayer offered, and sacrifice made for another believer teaches our hearts the language of heaven. One day every believer will stand together before Christ as one redeemed family from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

No division.

No jealousy.

No bitterness.

No loneliness.

Just perfect love flowing from the presence of God forever—and all of it centered on Christ, who loved us first!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why does loneliness remain such a deep struggle in the modern world?
2. How should the gospel reshape relationships within the church?
3. Why is sacrificial love central to Christian identity?
4. What does it mean that the church is a preview of heaven?
5. How can believers grow practically in loving one another more faithfully?