



# PEACE ON EARTH

A DEVOTIONAL FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

2022



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Every year I tell myself, “This Christmas is going to be different. This will be the year I slow down and really enjoy it. I’m going to take some time to reflect on all that I have.” And before I know it, it’s December 26, and I’m taking down the Christmas tree and pulling the lights off of the house.

Wait a minute... take down the Christmas tree on December 26? I know, you think I’m some kind of Scrooge. But December 26 means Christmas is done – the tree has got to go! Let me guess, you’re one of those weirdos who leaves your lights up until March?

If you’re like me, you intend to slow down and really appreciate things around Christmas. The birth of Jesus, my family, the good ways God has shown up in my life during the year. After all, the word Christmas literally means “a celebration of Christ.”

Yet, even around Christmas, I find myself thinking, “what’s next?” It’s probably why I take down my tree on December 26. It’s not that I don’t love Christmas. I do – but once it’s over, why linger? What’s next?

This year, I think I found a way that we can look back, *and* ask, “what’s next?” Looking back on the birth of Christ, celebrating all that God has done in our lives is a great thing. But the Bible teaches that we should also *look forward*. As incredible as it is that Jesus wrapped Himself in flesh and took on the manger and the cross, there’s still more.

The Bible says a day is coming when Jesus will return and all of this will go away, and “what’s next” will be a present reality. For followers of Christ, “what’s next” is a place called heaven.

I wrote this devotional in hopes that this Christmas, you’d look back, but also look forward. Throughout the Bible, God drops in sweet little glimpses of what we can expect heaven to be like. Each day you’re going to read a passage that gives a glimpse into that world. It’s perfect there. Jesus is there. It’s your home. And with each day, you’ll be challenged to think about how you can experience the goodness of heaven even now.

I should tell you – this is not a theology book. One of the great mysteries in the Bible is the distinction between the current Heaven and the one day to come New Heavens and New Earth. This daily walk does not try to solve that mystery. Instead, my hope is that you would breathe in a little heaven each day. That while you look back and celebrate the coming of Jesus, you would also look forward to when He comes again. Because then, all will be right. And we’ll never have to wonder, “what’s next?”

Merry Christmas!

*Pastor Brad*

## BEYOND WHAT CAN BE SEEN

**Genesis 1:1** – In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

The mysteries of the world intrigue us. Where does outer space end, and what's there? What creatures in the deepest parts of the ocean are we yet to find? What about lands we're yet to explore? And who makes those weird crop circles?

When Moses penned Genesis 1, scientific knowledge was not what it is today. There were no telescopes, no pictures from space exploration. There was only what the eye could see. And yet, even the earliest human beings knew there was something else, something beyond this world. Their science said they lived on a flat earth with something like a non-solid dome over the top of them – what they called the firmament. We call it the sky.

But Moses knew there was something even beyond the blue sky above. When he wrote that God created the 'heavens,' that word can mean different things. It can refer to the visible sky, but it has another meaning. He likely had in his mind the spaces beyond, where the celestial formations existed, and the things of his dreams came to life. More than that, heaven is the place of God – where He lives. Moses didn't have words for it, but he believed there was something beyond the inhabited world, something beyond what his eyes could see.

Modern human beings know the same. We've tried to explain it. The most brilliant scientists in the world have acknowledged the existence of other dimensions. Even children have attempted to understand the mysteries of life and the universe by staring at the stars and dreaming of what's beyond their sight.

This intrigue is not an accident. It was placed in us long ago. We know there is more, something beyond what we can see. King Solomon says that God wrote eternity on our hearts.

God's children are supposed to be curious. You're invited to wonder about, dream about, and long for what's beyond this world. You know there's more. God placed that mystery in your heart.



**Don't become so focused on this world that you forget  
there is more.**

**When you consider the mysteries of the world  
and beyond, does it make your view of God  
smaller or bigger?**



## EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK

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**Isaiah 6:1-4** – In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

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**M**ore than 700 years before the first Christmas, the prophet Isaiah had a vision of heaven. Like other prophets, he saw mysterious creatures, and all of heaven was praising God. There was power in their worship. But one little detail is almost shocking.

God’s robe, a garment that signifies royalty, was filling the temple. How could this be? At the time, God only dwelled behind the curtain in the temple, above the ark of the covenant. His glory and presence could only be encountered by the High Priest. But in Isaiah’s vision, God’s robe fills the temple. Meaning, His glory had broken loose from its perceived boundaries. God’s goodness and presence were everywhere. This is what it’s like in heaven.

Centuries later, Jesus said something like, “The kingdom of heaven is here.” Connect the dots. God’s presence is here with us. It’s everywhere you look. The doorposts and thresholds shake with His praise. His goodness is with you right now. He wants to overwhelm your life with glory and peace.

And yet, how often do you feel that God is distant? So why is that? There could be many reasons. Maybe you need to ask God to open your eyes to see Him. Maybe you’re not in the company of people who help you see God’s goodness and peace. Maybe, like Isaiah, there is sin in your life that’s preventing you from fully engaging in the glory of God.

He wants to fill your life with His goodness and presence. He wants you to see His glory and love everywhere you look.



**God’s presence and glory are *everywhere*.**

**What is preventing you from seeing God’s glory  
in your life?**



## A RESCUE STORY

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**1 Thessalonians 4:16-17** – For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

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**I**n 2010, a collapse in a Chilean mine left 33 men trapped 2,300 feet underground. These miners would remain underground waiting to be rescued for more than two months. Though they have agreed not to share all the details of what happened during their crisis, one message they sent to the surface described their mindset: “We’re fine, waiting for you to rescue us.”

The miners say that while there were moments of chaos and conflict, for the most part, they found peace. As a group, they worked together to do what they needed to survive. Brotherhood and a shared mission held them together. Each day, the men went through their routine: eat, sleep, exercise, finding ways to pass the time. After all, the world continued to turn.

But survival wasn't what drove them, was it? It was the hope of rescue. And not just the actual rescue, but what awaited them after the rescue. A good meal, a hug from their wives, parents, or kids, fresh air, life.

Two things emerge from Paul's words to the Thessalonians. One is that our rescue is coming. In a flash, Christ will appear, and this world will fade away, and we will be where we belong. We'll no longer be trapped in this world. We'll be home. And two, once we've been rescued, we will be with Jesus forever.

Imagine if the miners had stopped hoping for rescue and decided that a dark, hot tunnel with a couple of benches 2,300 feet underground was all that there was. Imagine if they took their eyes off of being rescued.

Don't take your eyes off of rescue or off of the Rescuer. Your life right now may be tough, or it may be great. But don't forget, it's little more than an underground tunnel compared to what awaits.



**Jesus is our rescuer, and our rescue is coming.**

**Is your life built only to survive,  
or are you prepared to be rescued?**

## WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?

**Colossians 3:1** – Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.

A recent study says that the average American checks their phone up to 352 times a day or once every three minutes. How do you compare? A similar study says that we check our email every six minutes. Maybe those numbers sound a little extreme to you, but the data confirms something: we use a lot of time and brain power to stay connected.

In the ancient world, they obviously didn't have cell phones and email, but they had lots of other distractions. And the Apostle Paul seemed to key in on something – that the things we spend most of our time thinking about are earthly. Not that they're unimportant things – after all, we need to work, eat, clean the house, buy groceries.

He's talking about using everything to pursue a deeper knowledge and intimacy of Christ. It is not separate from working, eating, cleaning the house, or even buying groceries. He's trying to help us see that we can invite Christ into everything. To start thinking about things like, "How can I represent Christ in my workplace?" "How would He want me to handle myself in this next meeting?"

Have you ever thought like this? How can I glorify God and gain a deeper knowledge of Christ by how I clean my house or even make my bed?

Here's an example. A monk named Brother Lawrence lived in the 1600s. His job at the monastery was to wash dishes. He said that some of his closest times with God were while he was scrubbing away, washing silverware to the glory of God. There are so many distractions in this world, and they are not inherently bad. Being attentive employees who regularly check their email can be a good thing, and like everything good, it can be done to the glory of God.

The next time you're washing the dishes, taking out the trash, or walking the dog, ask yourself: "What am I thinking about?" Set your mind on heaven, where Christ is seated as King.



**Do everything to the glory of God.**

**What things are currently distractions that you could start doing for the glory of God?**



## LIVE FOREVER

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**John 3:16** – 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.

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**J**ohn 3:16. Everyone knows it exists. Many can quote it. There’s always some guy who thinks he represents Jesus by taking his shirt off at a football game in the middle of a snowstorm, hoping the TV cameras will see that he wrote John 3:16 on his belly with a Sharpie. It’s everywhere. Christians got real fired up when Tim Tebow wrote it on his eye-black.

But what does it say about heaven? Well, look at it again. Heaven is eternal. The next verse is important, too. It says that God sent His Son into this world, to save us from this world, and into the next world. And, again, the next world is eternal.

We don’t often use the word eternal, or forever, in a positive way. Kids complain to their parents that grocery shopping is “taking forever.” But when it comes to heaven, forever is awesome! Imagine the best moment of your life, not just the circumstances, but the feelings – now, imagine that kind of feeling lasting forever. It’s good, right?

John is telling us that in heaven, goodness never ends. For example, we never die. Never. Not physically, not emotionally, not spiritually. There is no death. There is just life. Forever.

In our world, nothing lasts forever. Even this Christmas season will end. Before you know it, the decorations will be put away, the big family meals will be over, the presents will run out, and you will have to go back to work. And in a sense, we spend our lives knowing that everything good is going to come to an end.

But in heaven, the good life never ends. When we wake up in heaven on day two, there will still be life, and it will be better than day one. John 3:16 is more than a bumper sticker or a catch phrase. It's the entire promise of Jesus wrapped up in a few words. In heaven there is life, and it lasts forever.



**If you believe in Jesus, you have eternal life.**

**How does the knowledge of eternal life change how you live today?**



## LIFE'S NOT FAIR

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**2 Peter 3:13** – But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

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“**B**et used to it, life’s not fair!” No doubt you’ve heard those words before. Perhaps as a child, when your older sibling got to do something you didn’t, or your friend got a bigger slice of cake than you did. Maybe the circumstances were more serious though, and you were hurt or wronged.

Peter had a front row seat to life not being fair. He watched an innocent man die on a cross. He witnessed the persecution of many Christians and would himself be killed, all for the crime of trying to bring hope and light to the world.

Certainly you’ve seen examples where life isn’t fair. Where people cut corners and there’s no justice. Where someone gets hurt, perhaps you, and there seems to be no consequence for the offender. Even the Old Testament prophets acknowledge that life isn’t fair. Job and Jeremiah both say something like, “Why do the wicked prosper?” The Psalmist goes so far as to say, “maybe living rightly isn’t worth the trouble.”

But God showed Peter that there is a place where there are no more wrongs. A place where everything is made right. Where righteousness dwells. Where people aren't mistreated only to be told, "life's not fair." Heaven is the place where everything is right.

What would that even look like? A place with no schoolyard bullies, a place where disease doesn't win, a place where relationships and trust aren't broken, a place where goodness and godliness are rewarded. Our hearts long for such a place.

Maybe you've been mistreated. Maybe you've been told, "Suck it up. Life's not fair." Your heavenly Father sees you. He knows. And there is a place waiting for you where everything is simply right.

When Jesus prays to God, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven," that's what He's praying for – that the same rightness that exists in heaven through Christ and now through His people has begun to take place here and now.



**When you are mistreated or an injustice occurs,  
God sees you. He'll make it all right.**

**How do you play a role of bringing the rightness of  
heaven into your world?**



## FULLY ALIVE

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**Isaiah 26:19** – But your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise – let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy – your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead.

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**I**n recent years, there's been a fascination with zombies. Zombie movies, zombie costumes, a zombie show that went on for way too many seasons. People often jokingly refer to preparing for the zombie apocalypse. Why all the zombie talk?

Maybe it has something to do with our desire for resurrection. Somewhere, somehow, we want to believe that death is not the end. Ironically, Scripture tells us that very thing. But it looks much different than a zombie apocalypse. The Bible promises a resurrection of Christ followers. And it's more than a spiritual transportation to some ethereal land. It's physical, where the dead have actual bodies.

We don't become mindless sleepwalkers. When we're resurrected, we're more fully alive than ever before. This gave Old Testament Jews and early Christians incredible hope. Not only did it mean that life on earth wasn't the end, but it meant that their family members who had died before them would be seen again. Although we put people in the ground, they rise again.

If you've lost someone you love to death, you understand the hope that this brings – the hope that you will one day be reunited. And in case we might think this is beyond God's power, He did that very thing with Jesus. They put His body in a tomb, and He came back. And He wasn't a ghost. He was Jesus.

He was Jesus, but Jesus with a new body. One that wouldn't die. One that wouldn't break down. One that couldn't wake up with a stiff neck because He slept funny. And the promise of the resurrection is that when you die, you will rise again. Body and all. The same body, but new. Never to die again. Praise God who can raise the dead to life.



**Heaven is a physical place where you will have a new body that will never die.**

**How does the resurrection of believers give you hope?**



## HOME COOKING

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**Luke 22:16** – “For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of heaven.”

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There’s something about a home-cooked meal that’s better than dinner at a Michelin-rated restaurant. If you’re from the South, maybe it’s collard greens or grits. In the Pacific Northwest, it’s fresh seafood. In the Southwest, it’s homemade tamales.

It’s not just the taste that makes a home-cooked meal so good, it’s the love. It’s the memories of eating it while laughing with family. It might be something simple like a Fourth of July barbecue where you had a watermelon seed-spitting contest, but home-cooked meals are the best.

The last time Jesus ate with His friends before His death, He made them a promise. That the next time they ate together, it would be in heaven. The entire family of God will gather for a feast. And it’s not any regular feast. This is a home-cooked meal to celebrate the wedding of Jesus Christ and His bride.

Can you imagine the flavors? Can you picture the atmosphere? What is it like? Probably lots of laughing, sharing memories, being with the people you love. We think of heaven as something out of this world, and it is, but

maybe it's also the best version of things we love here on earth. Things like a home-cooked meal.

And how incredible that Jesus, the Creator of all things, wants to dine with you! He doesn't say that when we're in heaven, we'll be His servants or that we'll have to perform arduous tasks for Him, though He's deserving of that. He says you're going to pull a chair up to His table, that He's made your favorite foods, and that He wants to eat together.

There's nothing like the fellowship shared around a meal. And Jesus is as excited as you are to share together in that meal.



**Jesus wants to spend time with you, to eat and laugh together, as a family.**

**Why do you think Jesus wants to have a meal with you?**



## THE PERFECT FLOOR PLAN

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**John 14:2** – “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?”

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**P**acking boxes, purging old clothes, getting your friends to help you load that heavy dresser into the truck – everyone claims to hate moving. But apparently, we love moving. On average, Americans move residences more than eleven times in life. Compare that to Europeans who move only four times.

And why do we move so much? You might think it’s driven by major life change such as relocating for a new job, because we get married, or because we retire. But the top reason Americans move is so we can have a newer, bigger, or better house. We want more square footage and a bigger yard.

So then two important things stand out when Jesus speaks in John 14, where He’s talking about heaven, the place where God dwells. The first is that in God’s house, there’s plenty of space. While Jesus is talking specifically to His twelve disciples, He’s talking to all of His followers for all of time. Imagine the billions of people God has made room for in His house. That must be a really big house! It says something about God’s

heart. In His kingdom, no one is homeless. If you want a room, there's plenty of space for anyone who will follow Jesus.

The second thing is that Jesus promises to go and prepare a place for you. Have you seen those home makeover shows where the show hosts get to know the people and then make a place that suits their needs and matches their style? If contractors and interior designers on earth can create these perfect custom spaces, imagine what Jesus might prepare for you!

A room with your name on the door. Why? Because you belong there. A room that fits your style. Again, why? Because Jesus knows you better than you even know yourself.

You might be tempted to think of heaven as a sterile place, full of robotic angelic beings who float about as faceless automatons. But that's not what Jesus describes. It's a place where there's room for everyone. The more the merrier. And a place that your King, your Friend, has made special for you.



**Imagine the great space God is creating for you, His son or daughter.**

**How great is God's love if there is room in His house for all who would follow?**



## AN OPEN DOOR

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**Revelation 4:1-2** – After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.

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**I**n the deserts of Nevada, the government has secret underground labs and bunkers. Occasionally, travelers will catch glimpses of some clandestine testing. Surrounding these areas are miles and miles of fencing with signs that read, “Authorized Personnel Only.” If you weren’t fascinated enough, those signs only add to the mystery. What’s going on in there? What cool tech do they have? Is that where they’re keeping aliens? Only the people with the proper clearances will ever know.

Early in John’s vision of heaven, he throws in a couple of words that are easy to miss. When he sees the throne room of Heaven, the place from which the God of the universe reigns, the door is open. There’s no sign that reads, “No Entry beyond This Point.” There’s no security guard.

When Jesus died, rose again, and went back to heaven, He left the door to God wide open. Someday when we're in heaven, we'll humbly walk into the presence of God without fear. We won't need to present a badge or key because Jesus is the key that opens the door.

But so often, we forget that even right now, that door is open. We have full access to God. In the Old Testament, God dwelled behind a curtain, and only one person on the whole planet was allowed in there. But now there is no curtain, no barrier. The only fence is belief. If you believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, you have full access. You're allowed in there – always.

So why do you live as if God is distant? Why do you believe that you don't have the necessary clearances to get to Him? His door is wide open. If you need something, ask. If you want to talk to Him, do it. If the weight of the world is on your shoulders, lay it down at His feet. The door is open.



**Jesus is the key that unlocks the door to God.**

**Do you live like you have full access to God?**

## WHAT THE WHAT?!

**Ezekiel 1:4-9** – I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. All four of them had faces and wings, and the wings of one touched the wings of another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

The prophet Ezekiel introduces himself to the world with his crazy vision of heaven. Creatures with four faces, wings, and bronze legs. His ministry was full of fantastic descriptions. Many chapters later, he'll describe a field of bones that comes to life and becomes an army of warriors.

It's weird. But consider for a minute the human imagination; it's incredible. Walt Disney imagined a land of intrigue, wonder, and joy. J.R.R. Tolkien got so lost in his stories about hobbits that he created a whole other language for them to use. The Wright Brothers envisioned a vehicle that could fly through the sky.

But as creative as their imaginations were, what if Ezekiel's vision points us to an even more creative mind, the mind of God. He is, after all, the Creator of creativity. If those brilliant, yet finite minds could create Disneyworld and *Lord of the Rings*, is it possible that heaven is more inventive, more creative, than human words can capture?

The creativity of the heavens points to the capacity of God. He can do anything. Maybe today you feel like you're stuck. You want to believe that God is for you, but you can't see how things will ever change. Slow down for a second. If God is capable of creating a world of glowing, winged creatures, can't He author a redemption story in your life?

Choose to trust Him. Choose today to believe that nothing is impossible for God.



**God is the Creator of creativity.**

**How can you ask God today to help you get unstuck  
from your rut?**

## NO DUAL CITIZENSHIP

**Philippians 3:18-20a** – For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.

The citizenship test that immigrants take to become U.S. citizens is no joke. Many have suggested that most natural-born Americans couldn't even pass this test. How do you think you would do? You'd probably do all right naming the branches of government, and you probably know who the Vice President is. But do you know how many amendments the Constitution has? Can you name the states that border Canada? What did Susan B. Anthony do?

When the Apostle Paul says that your citizenship is in heaven, he means a few different things. First, he means that you belong there. You don't have to prove yourself. God doesn't check your ID at the door. You're known, you're loved, and you have access to everything that belongs to heaven.

He also means that citizens live for the sake and cause of that to which they belong – in this case, Heaven. Consider his words. Some people live for earthly things, like food, material possessions, their own agenda. But that's not the life of God's people, those who have citizenship in heaven. They live for heavenly things.

When you become a citizen of heaven, you give up your citizenship on earth. You don't focus on the pursuit of earthly things anymore. That means acknowledging that the decisions you make have a lasting impact. It means that Christ reigns over your life, that there is no area of your life into which He doesn't speak.

Are you trying to maintain dual citizenship between heaven and earth? It's not possible. When you became a citizen of heaven, you gave up your earthly citizenship. You're just a visitor here now. So, which kingdom do you really live for?



**If you have a relationship with Jesus, your citizenship  
in heaven is secure.**

**Today, will you live for heaven or settle for earth?**

## READ THE REVIEWS

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

For booking vacations, sites like Airbnb and VRBO have become a common method. Homeowners list their properties with the typical stats: number of bedrooms and bathrooms, the layout of the property, whether or not pets are allowed, etc.

But the real information is found in the reviews of prior guests. Consider these real reviews of available properties:

- “There was no running water in the house.”
- “There were dirty dishes in the sink.”
- “The owners had pet rats that they asked me to feed.”

Before you book a vacation, you should probably check out the reviews of people who have previously stayed there. So, why not do the same with heaven? How can we know what it’s like there? Let’s ask someone who has been there.

Jesus says to the criminal on the cross next to Him that He would take him to “paradise.” Though this word is not used often in the Bible, it was used in other cultures, and it referred to a place that is beautiful, shady, and well-watered. It’s a place of peace and of pleasure.

Consider what else Jesus says: “you will be with Me.” The primary reason heaven is paradise is because Jesus is there, and you will be with Him. According to Jesus, those who have a relationship with Him will immediately be by His side, just after they take their last breath on earth.

So here is Jesus’ review on what heaven is like, as someone who has actually been there:

1. It’s paradise.
2. Jesus will be there with you.

There comes a day when we will see Jesus face-to-face and forever be in His presence. Since He is the only one who has been there and has come to earth to tell about it, we can take Him at His word. But also remember that today you’re not alone. While Jesus awaits you in paradise, He says that He’s here with you now and to the end of the age.



**Heaven is paradise because Jesus is there.**

**What would you do or say to Jesus if you could see Him right now?**



## A FRIEND

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**Acts 7:56** – “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

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**M**aybe the best thing on the internet is those videos of soldiers surprising their families when they come home from deployment. Sneaking up on mom or dad in a restaurant, bringing flowers to a spouse at work, or hiding in a mascot costume to surprise them after being gone for so long. It’s impossible to watch those videos and not get excited. There is an incredible sweetness in the reunion of family and friends.

When we last saw Jesus, He had ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of His Father. But when Stephen catches a glimpse of heaven, right before His death, Jesus is standing. He doesn’t remain seated as if a king lording over his subject, but stands, as if to welcome home a friend.

Do you know that Jesus considers you a friend? What does that mean? Well, the Bible says that a friend loves at all times. It says that a friend pleads with God on your behalf. A friend forgives and never withholds kindness. This is the kind of relationship Jesus has in His mind towards you. Yes, He’s Savior, King, a sacrifice, but He’s a friend.

When you have a flat tire, He's the friend who speaks encouragement to you. When you get into a fight with your spouse, He's the friend who sits the two of you down to restore peace. When you're lonely, He's the friend who listens. No friend you have is closer than Jesus.

Jesus wants to be friends, but what kind of friend are you to Jesus? Are you the kind that shares your life with Him? Do you talk to Him, tell Him about what's going on, seek His counsel? Or do you only call this friend when you need something? When He gives advice, do you trust Him and take it? Or is He simply a means to an end?



**Jesus calls you His friend.**

**How is your relationship with Jesus like  
a true friendship?**



## OPEN MY EYES

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**1 Corinthians 2:9-10** – However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” – the things God has prepared for those who love Him – these are the things God has revealed to us by His Spirit.

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**H**ave you ever opened a Christmas present, and you weren’t sure what it was? Maybe it was wrapped in an old box, and that threw you off. Or maybe it’s something you’ve just never seen before.

The Apostle Paul says that the things of heaven are beyond even our imagination. Things that no eye has seen nor ear has heard. Later, he has some sort of a vision of heaven, but again, he says what he saw is indescribable in human words. Heaven is mysterious.

And yet, if all we read was verse 9, we might be disappointed to think it’s beyond our sight. But consider the next part – “these are the things God has revealed to us by the Spirit.” It seems like what he means is that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there are some things we can understand.

And that's true about lots of things in life. We can look through our own eyes and completely miss what's there – but if we ask God to help us see through His eyes, it's like a whole new world.

Do you look at your life through your eyes, or do you ask God to help you see through His? When you do, He shows you all kinds of ways that He's moving. You see His goodness, where before you only saw pain. You see His plan start to unfold, where before you only saw chaos.

Many people miss what God's doing because they don't rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal these things. Maybe this is true about heaven, as well. Maybe there are ways that heaven leaves its fingerprints on earth, and if we only see with our eyes, we miss it. Today, God is working in your life. Are your eyes open to see it?



**God reveals things through His Spirit and Word.**

**Have you asked God to open your eyes and show you  
what He's doing in your life?**



## BE LIKE HIM

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**1 John 3:2** – Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

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Everyone has a hero. Someone they want to be like. Maybe as a kid, it was mom or dad. Maybe a sibling, a teacher, or coach. As you get older, maybe it's a classmate or coworker. You see something in that person that you admire, and you try to copy what you see.

John says that in heaven, we will be like Jesus. Now that doesn't mean we'll be all-knowing and all-powerful. It means we'll exhibit the character of Christ. We'll be sinless. We'll be loving and pure. Physically without ailment and always completely full of the Holy Spirit.

But go back to the analogy. John says that right now we are like children. What do we know about healthy children? They're growing, right? They're growing and transforming into a more developed version of themselves. If we are like children, and Christ is who we are to copy, then right now, we should be growing into the image of Christ.

Can you live a fully sinless life now and always follow the guidance of the Spirit? No. But you can try! And the longer you walk with the Lord, the

more you can become like Him. What are ways you try to emulate Jesus in your life now? Are you loving? Do you pursue purity? Are you trustworthy and kind? Full of grace?

On the other hand, are there areas of your life where you're not trying to be like Christ?

You don't have to wait until heaven to be like Christ. As you go about your day, pursue Christlikeness, child of God.



You are a child of God.

How are you growing to be more like Jesus?

## SOMETHING BETTER

**Hebrews 13:14** – For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

**T**he theme of the book of Hebrews is “something better.” And that something better is Jesus. So in the Old Testament, there was a priest, but Jesus is a better priest. In the Old Testament, there was a sacrifice, but Jesus is a better sacrifice. In the Old Testament, there was a temple, and once again, Jesus is a better temple.

In the Old Testament, there were cities, and cities mean safety. A city had gates to keep out the bad guys. It had a watchtower, where guards could make sure that no one unwanted sneaks in to their town. If you lived inside a city, you were safe. People put their hope in a city.

But throughout history, even the most fortified cities have been destroyed. Ancient Babylon is now mostly a pile of sand in the desert. Even Jerusalem, the city where Jesus walked and taught, now lies under many feet of centuries of destruction.

The writer of Hebrews says there’s something better. There’s another city. And why is this city better? Because it lasts forever. One of the hardest things about life is that everything is always changing. Just when you think

you've made sense of things, just when you're starting to get ahead, here comes your old, looming friend named "change." Sometimes change is fine, but usually it's disruptive and leaves us confused.

But there's something better. Imagine a world where everything is good, and it never changes. That's the city we've been promised. Jesus and His promises won't change. He can't change! God's love and promises today will not be gone tomorrow. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you're waiting for the other shoe to drop, for Jesus to let you down, stop waiting. Jesus is here. His city is coming. And everything about it is better. Better than what? Better than everything.



**Jesus is better.**

**In what aspects of life does that knowledge  
give you hope?**



## LOVE NOTES

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**Revelation 5:6-8** – Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.

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**B**efore there were texts, DMs, and Snaps, kids gave each other handwritten notes. Passing notes in school was a major no-no, but it was the only way to talk, so it was worth the risk. As a teenager, there was nothing better than getting a note from your crush. You didn’t just read it, you held onto it like a piece of their heart.

Do you know that God keeps your prayers like love notes? Think about all the times you’ve prayed. Long, lengthy prayers and short “help me” prayers. He’s heard them all, and He’s saved them like a teenager saves a note from their love.

Why does He save these prayers? Because He loves them. Your heavenly Father loves hearing from you. He loves when you share your thoughts, your needs, your wants with Him. He cherishes those words so much that He's been storing them your entire life and will until you see Him face-to-face.

Sometimes we think we shouldn't pray until we have the right words to say or that we shouldn't take our simple prayers to God, when He has much bigger problems in the world to tackle. But that's simply not in the Bible, and it's simply not the character of God. He wants to hear from you, because He wants to have a relationship with you. He's storing your prayers in heaven.

Maybe it's been a while since you've talked to Him. That's OK. God is like that friend who you don't talk to in a while, but when you do, you can pick back up right where you left off, as though no time has passed. Don't be afraid to talk with Him today. He's listening, and He wants to hear from you.



**God wants to hear your thoughts, your needs,  
and your wants.**

**Is there something you need to talk to God  
about today?**



## GOD WITH US

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**Revelation 21:1-3** – 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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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.”

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**I**f all we had were the first three chapters of the Bible and the last two, we’d be missing a lot of information. But one thing would be absolutely clear: God wants to be with His people. The Bible begins with the creation of the Garden of Eden, a place He could be with His people. The Bible ends with a new Eden, that is a new Heaven and a new Earth. Again, it’s a place where God will be with His people. And because of sin, all the pages in between these chapters are the story of God making a way to be with His people again.

What’s incredible is that in both scenes, we see God moving towards His people. It’s not a cosmic game of hide-and-seek where God says, “Come find Me.” Instead, He moves towards us. Why? Because when you love someone, you want to be with that person. And God loves us deeply.

But God doesn't wait until the final scene for us to be together. The pages of Scripture are filled with the story of God moving towards us. He called His Son Immanuel, which means "God with us." Are you picking up on a theme? It doesn't take a scholar to see what's going on here.

And what does it mean that God is with us? There's a clue in verse 1. It says, "there was no longer any sea." This doesn't mean there won't be large bodies of water. After all, the sea is beautiful. But in John's day, the sea meant danger, storms, and chaos. For John, who was writing this while exiled on an island, it meant separation. So what does it mean that the sea is gone? Peace. God's presence means peace.

Today, and fully in heaven, God is with us. There's no chaos, no danger, just peace. Forever.



Immanuel means that God is with us.

How does God being with you change  
how you live today?

## THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT

**Revelation 21:4** – “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.”

In a sense, one might argue that heaven is not all that different from earth. There are people there. There is food and laughter, seasons, and tasks. Of course, God is there, but the Bible is clear that God has always been with us. But something is entirely different. It’s the same, but it’s not.

At the end of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis tries to explain the difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia, a metaphor to the New Heaven and New Earth. He says:

“It is as hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia as it would be to tell you how the fruits of that country taste. Perhaps you will get some idea of it if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking-glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking-glass. And the sea in the mirror,

or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different – deeper, more wonderful, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know. The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that: if you ever get there you will know what I mean" (Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

In heaven, the old order is gone. The old order is what we're living in now, a place affected by death, sadness, and pain. Heaven is the way our hearts long for this world to be, but everything this world can't ever be.

But what's more, heaven isn't just a place where these things don't happen. Look again at what John says. It's a place where God wipes away the tears from our eyes. He heals what's been broken. He's the salve that soothes our soul and whispers to us that those things that hurt us can't ever happen again.



In heaven, there is no sadness, no sickness,  
and no death.

How does this picture of heaven bring you peace?



## GOLD RUSH

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**Revelation 21:21** – [Of the New Jerusalem] The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

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**I**n the mid-1800's, the population of California skyrocketed. People not just from across America, but from across the world, flocked to the west coast with one thing on their mind – gold. Many people died in the process. Most went broke. All to chase that shiny metal.

Gold is the most precious, most desired asset in history. King Solomon covered his palace and the temple in gold. Ancient Chinese cultures used gold in medicine. Today, there is a temple in India not only made of gold, but said to contain a trillion dollars in gold.

In heaven, we will walk on streets of gold. There are a few possible reasons why. Perhaps God is demonstrating His wealth and His rule over all other kingdoms. It could also be because the city is adorned as a bride for Christ. Certainly, Christ is worthy of a city paved in gold. Or more likely, heaven is such an incredible place where everything else is so great, that the seemingly least important thing, the streets where we walk, are covered in the most precious earthly material.

If that's true, imagine the splendor of heaven. Where gold is as common as dirt roads and asphalt. The very thing this world desires most is the place we put our feet. Kind of puts things in perspective, doesn't it? Gold is so common, God builds streets with it. Jewels so abundant, He builds gates with them.

So, what resource does God not have? What can't God do? Here's what you need to understand: He has so much authority and power that He paves streets with gold. Seems like you could trust a God like that. Seems like whatever you're facing, you can take it to Him and believe He has the resources and power to help.



The greatest thing this world offers is but a surface to walk on in heaven.

How have you underestimated God's power and resources to help you and guide you?



## YOU WILL LAUGH

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**Luke 6:21b** – “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

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**H**ave you ever heard a baby laugh? Not that little tee-hee that babies do, we’re talking that big belly laugh. The one where no one really knows what they’re laughing about, but the whole room starts cracking up, and you never want it to end.

Is heaven a place of laughter? It seems like it. When the family of God sits down for a feast, what will we do? We’ll do what families are supposed to do. We’ll laugh.

If you can imagine the people Jesus is talking to when He says this, you can appreciate the magnitude of what He’s offering. Most of these people are poor. They live each day wondering how they’ll feed their families. These people are oppressed. If scholars are right and this carpenter from Galilee starts a ministry primarily to Jewish peasants, these people live in fear. The Roman authorities are not only heavy-handed in their taxation and treatment, but each day, they present a threat to the Jews’ safety and well-being.

The point is that Jesus is talking to people who don't have a lot of reasons to laugh. Their lives are filled with hardship. Weeping is a well-known companion. So, when He promises laughter, you can imagine they want what He's offering.

Maybe you're in a season that doesn't give way to much laughter. Sometimes our lives become so difficult and our hearts so weary that the sound of laughter is painful. But Jesus promises laughter. And laughter means joy. There is a day coming in heaven when you will laugh. Like a baby that can't stop. Not because it's silly or funny, but because you will be so full of joy that you can't not laugh.

You should laugh today. If you don't have anything to laugh about, laugh because one day you will. Laugh because that's what your heavenly Father wants for you.



God loves when you laugh.

Can you smile and laugh today  
because heaven awaits?



# SING!

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**Revelation 15:2-4** – And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

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**B**ad news. There’s research that suggests only about 2% of the world’s population is capable of being a really great singer. You’re probably not in that 2%. But amongst the 98% of us who aren’t very good, most of us still like to sing. At least in the car or in the shower.

Every week, across the globe, people gather in churches and one of the things we do is sing. Why? Because we’re modeling heaven. Apparently when you’re in God’s presence, mere words aren’t enough. They need melody.

The Bible celebrates music and its connection to our relationship with God. Genesis mentions a man named Jubal, naming him as the father of music. When the Apostle Paul and Silas are in prison, what are they doing? Singing. Because in their misery, they are rehearsing the glory of what lies ahead in heaven.

This is why a good song is more than words. It touches your heart because music taps into something deep and soulful inside of us. And when those words and melodies are about our great God, it becomes more than music. It's praise.

If you find yourself tapping your toe to a song, it's a glimpse of heaven. When music brings peace and stillness to your mind, it's a glimpse of heaven. And when you sing, you rehearse the glory of heaven. So, what's stopping you? You're in the 98%, aren't you? Sing about God. Make music for Him. It's a little glimpse of heaven on earth.



**When we sing, we model heaven.**

**Along with music, what are other ways you can  
rehearse heaven today?**



## “I AM COMING SOON”

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**Revelation 22:12-13** – “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

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**W**hile the promise of heaven awaits, and we should long for all it provides, Christ’s long-awaited return and the completion of all the Bible foretells, isn’t really about us at all. Yes, by His own words, Jesus will reward His people, and we will celebrate in His presence for eternity. That life will be full of joy and wonder that transcends what we can yet comprehend. We will, for eternity, enjoy life as it was designed to be, in a way that overflows our souls.

But the completion of this story is about Jesus. Heaven is a marriage of Christ and His bride. Heaven is the fulfillment of God’s story, not ours. Remember how the story starts, “In the beginning, God...” There was an immeasurable amount of time that we weren’t even part of this story. It was just God. This story is about Him.

Yes, God gives us a role in the story, yet we are barely extras, and it's His story. After all, we were created why? To be the image of God in this world. Our very existence depends on our purpose to glorify Him. And when all is made right and we are restored to the presence of our Father in heaven, that is the very thing we will do: spend eternity glorifying Him.

As you make your final preparations for Christmas, you should celebrate. Your Father wants you to enjoy this. You should worship Him for sending His Son Jesus into the world to save us. But don't forget, it's not really about you. This is *His* story. He will write the final chapter, and we will be with Him. Forever and ever. Amen.



The promises of heaven await.

How can you be more intentional to remember that this is God's story, and you're made to glorify Him?



Merry Christmas!