

All of Scripture points to one grand promise: Heaven. So glorious are its rewards, all the treasure of this world pales in comparison. Yet most of our lives are driven by what our eyes can see and our hands can hold. We know little about Heaven and think little about it. You may have heard the expression: “He (or she) is too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good!”

☞ Do you believe that statement is true or false? Why?

God’s Word would emphatically answer “False!” It actually instructs us to set our hearts and minds *completely* and *continually* on things above (1 Peter 1:13; Colossians 3:1-2). The result, it claims, is a life filled with hope, joy, peace, contentment, freedom, purpose, and courage. We are exhorted to not be “ignorant” or “uninformed” of what awaits us after deaths, for our own encouragement and for that of those we love (1 Thes 4:13).

There could be no question more worth answering than “Is there eternal life?” If the answer is *yes*, more important questions follow: “What is it like?” and “What, if anything, must I do now to prepare?”

☞ Have you ever been tempted to read the end of a novel first? To take a peek if the novel has started out a bit slow?

☞ If you were to read the end of a novel first, how would it change your experience of the book?

When we know a book ends well, we’re not tempted to rush through it. We’ll persevere through the difficult and laborious chapters. We have courage through the nail-biting episodes and hope in the heart-wrenching ones. We become secure through the twists and turns of the unfolding drama—unafraid of any temporary setbacks. We’re free to enjoy the journey!

A series of children’s mystery books was written which allows the reader to choose the ending. After each chapter, two options are given in solving the mystery. Your choice determines which chapter you read next. The ending changes according to the choices you make while reading.

Isn’t that how life is? We make decisions that affect the next chapter of our life. We even make decisions that determine the “ending” to our life’s story. That is an enormous responsibility! But God has good news for us. He has written a *fabulous* ending to the human story, which really isn’t an ending at all! The *last* page of our earthly story will be the *first* page of a heavenly story—“the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”¹ Knowing the “ending” to our life’s story will give us strength in difficult times, courage in fearful times, hope in painful times, and security in uncertain times. *It will free us to fully enjoy our lives.*

C. S. Lewis wrote:

Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live forever, and this must be either true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only seventy years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live for ever.¹

☞ Does the truth that you will live forever impact your daily living and decisions?

Jesus taught that there are two eternal destinations: Heaven and Hell. Some “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). We choose *where* we reside forever, but not *whether* we reside forever. *Every soul is eternal*. Unfortunately, we often forget this all-important reality.

This 8-week series will explore what Scripture reveals about life after death. Today we’ll begin by discovering *why* we need to know about Heaven.

📖 The apostle Paul had a life-changing glimpse into the beauty of Heaven, described in **2 Corinthians 12:2–4, 7**. Let’s start by reading his vision.

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know-- God knows.

3 And I know that this man--

4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh

🔗 How does Paul describe Heaven? (answers in the scripture on next click)

Scripture claims Paul “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) as he traveled from place to place with the message of eternal life. History proves it to be true. His letters in the New Testament have extended his influence throughout the ages and have led countless numbers to faith in Christ. Think about his visit to Heaven described in this passage.

🔗 What impact might it have had upon his life?

Undoubtedly, the vision that Paul had of Paradise had much to do with his unwavering dedication to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. He caught a glimpse of a future life that compelled him to spend every ounce of his energy telling the world how to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He undoubtedly replayed the heavenly vision over and over in his mind, most especially while he was imprisoned.

📖 Read his words written from a jail cell in **Philippians 1:21–24**.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

🔗 How did he describe departing to be with Christ in Heaven versus remaining on Earth? (answers in the scripture on next click)

🔗 What caused Paul to choose Earth over Heaven? (answers in the scripture on next click)

The goal of this study is to replace any fear of death and doubt of Heaven’s existence with a faith and confidence like Paul’s. We will learn what Heaven is like, what we will do there, what our new bodies will be like, and how we will interact with others. We will study the Judgment Seat of Christ, what rewards are

promised, and how to earn them. We will determine how we live our lives on Earth will affect how we enjoy Heaven. So often we hear “I don’t care if I am in the lowliest part of Heaven or not, just as long as I’m there.” Well ... is that really the way we will feel when we get there?

Like Paul, the more we know about Heaven, the more passionately we will live on Earth. Scripture testifies to the many benefits in knowing God’s truths concerning Heaven— faith and love, for starters:

(1) Faith and love...spring from the hope that is stored up for you in Heaven. (Col 1:5)

Who would like more faith? Or love? Paul claims both increases proportionately to our hope in Heaven. Biblical hope differs in meaning from our typical use of the word. We often use the word “hope” for something that may or may not happen. In contrast, the Greek word for hope is defined as “a sure expectation or confidence; to anticipate with pleasure.” Biblical hope is a sure thing! Its focus is not on what *might* happen but rather what *must* happen. It’s a future happening, but a *sure* happening.

Our courage for this adventure on earth so often falters because we’ve lost our hope of Heaven. If we live as though this life is our best shot at happiness, as if this is as good as it gets, we will live as desperate, demanding, and eventually despairing men and women. Deep down inside we *know* we were made for something more! Eccl. 3:11 says of God: **“He has set eternity in the hearts of men.”** God has planted inside each of His creations a longing for eternity, for Heaven, for our real home.

CS Lewis wrote:

(2) If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so... I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.²

St Augustine agreed: **(3) “The whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing.”**

☞ Is the desire or longing for Heaven alive in you?

You and I were made for another world. Once upon a time we lived in a garden; we lived in the place for which we were made. It was a place without death, a place where we could walk with God in the cool of the evening. God has pressed His eternal image on our souls and placed us in a world that testifies of our infinite heritage.

Yet sometimes our understanding of Heaven is so distorted we have little desire for it. There is a story about a young boy who hated the idea of Heaven. He would puzzle his Sunday school teachers by stating quite boldly that he didn’t want to go to Heaven. Finally someone asked him why. He answered, “I don’t like peas.” He had heard the Christmas carol “Silent Night” and thought the refrain “sleep in heavenly peace” was actually “sleep in heavenly peas.” No wonder Heaven was unappealing! Who would want to sleep in peas?

Our images aren’t much better. People have very different concepts of Heaven. Some are valid differences based on how one interprets Scripture. But some of our ideas aren’t based on what the Bible says, or even on the character of God. Opinions are often formed from movies, television, comments made at funerals, and personal wish lists.

☞ What are some popular images of Heaven?

We've all seen the pictures of Heaven with seemingly bored saints lying around on clouds, strumming a harp every now and then. We fear singing 5000 rounds of *Amazing Grace* every day in Heaven, grimacing at the thought of an endless worship service. How could anything keep our attention *forever*, after all?

Peter Kreeft writes in *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven*:

Our pictures of heaven are dull, platitudinous and syrupy; therefore, so is our faith, our hope, and our love of Heaven. Dullness, not doubt, is the strongest enemy of faith, just as indifference, not hate, is the strongest enemy of love.³

Kreeft tells a story of an English vicar who was asked what to expect after death. He answered, "Well, if it comes to that, I suppose I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects." When turning forty or fifty years old, people often tease saying "It's better than the alternative!" All joking aside, do you hear the implication? Do we really think life on Earth surpasses life in Heaven? Even in jest, we are a far cry from Paul's statement "to depart and be with Christ is better by far."

If we have incorrect images of Heaven, we may only desire Heaven because the alternative seems worse. We need a vision, like Paul. Scripture gives us one!

📖 Read [Matthew 13:44-46](#).

44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his (4) joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

🔗 What does Jesus communicate about the Kingdom of Heaven?

The Kingdom of Heaven is a treasure beyond measure. Surely if it were an earthly place we would all want to live there. We would most certainly seek to know about it and save our money to go there. Yet most of us spend more time researching our vacation destinations than we do our eternal one. Descriptions of Heaven are scattered all over God's Word, waiting for us to gather up and cherish. They are hidden *for* us, not from us! Jesus claims our discovery will be incomparable JOY! Not fear, not boredom or passivity! How often do we rejoice because our "names are written in Heaven" (Luke 10:20)? It's hard to rejoice over a place that we know little about.

Scripture insists we focus upon eternity: [1 Pet 1:13](#)

(5) "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It's easy to see what is available to us on Earth, but to focus our lives on things unseen we must be intentional, giving our hearts *completely* to its promise.

📖 In a similar passage in [Col 3:1-2](#), Paul commands us to set our minds on things above continually:

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.

2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

In verse one, Paul uses the Greek word *zeteo*, which means “to seek; to inquire; to earnestly covet.” It implies a search for something hidden, an activity that requires dedication and single-minded devotion. The verb tense indicates a command to do something in the future involving *continuous* action.

Verse two repeats the exhortation, underscoring its importance. It, too, indicates continual action and could read, “set your minds and *keep* them set.” In this verse, the Greek word *phroneo* is used, which means “to exercise the mind, to entertain, or have a sentiment or opinion; to interest oneself with concern or obedience; to savor.” Do you get the message? You are to have an opinion; you are to concern yourself with Heaven. It is something to be *consumed* with, to seek after, to *investigate*, and eagerly long for!

Most of us plan for our future: we set aside money for retirement and college for our kids; we work hard now in the hopes of a little time off near the end of our lives. But we have no guarantee our children will go to college; we have no guarantee we will be alive to spend our retirement---but we know it is wise to plan. Eternal life is guaranteed. We who believe on the Lord Jesus have a reservation in Heaven! How much more we should plan for Heaven while on this Earth.

☞ Let’s take a quick look at a few Scriptures that encourage us to “get our heads in the clouds!” We’ve already seen the promise of joy. That alone would be worth the search! But there is so much more:

1) **Matt 6:19-21**

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

(6) Fixing our hope on Heaven will keep **Jesus first** in our hearts.

2) In **Luke 12:33-34** Jesus says: "

Sell your possessions and give to charity and make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven."

☞ What could possibly motivate me to give away that for which I work so hard to gain?
Greater treasure in Heaven!

(7) Fixing our hope on Heaven will make us **generous** on Earth.

3) **Rom 8:18**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

(8) Fixing our hope on Heaven will bring us **comfort and purpose** in trials.

4) **Luke 6:22-23**

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy...

☞ WHY? Why in the world would I be glad when people hate me for Jesus’ sake?
“...for behold, your reward is great in heaven.”

(9) Fixing our hope on Heaven makes us **God-pleasers** on Earth.

5) Heb 11:24-26

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

☞ Moses could turn down the greatest riches, the ultimate power and ego-trip, the pleasure of sin for ill-treatment and poverty---HOW? He was looking to the reward of eternal life with Christ!

(10) Fixing our hope on Heaven is the secret to overcoming sin on Earth.

6) The apostle John gives us a similar message: I Jn 3:2-3:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope {fixed} on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

(11) Fixing our hope on Heaven will make us holy and pure on Earth.

The undeniable truth is that God uses the promise of Heaven to motivate us while on Earth. Even secular self-help books promote the belief that successful people know where they are headed. *They begin with the end in mind.* **(12) How we live now will matter in eternity. And how we view eternity will effect how you live now.**

The goal of this study is to paint a picture of Heaven that will energize our faith, relieve our fears, and enliven the way we live and love. Surely a mystery will remain; we will undoubtedly be surprised in a multitude of ways when we arrive in Heaven. But we will live this life in greater victory, knowing as Paul, that to depart and be with Christ is *better by far!*

☞ Are you willing to read the end of your novel?

Perhaps John Wesley can persuade you:

(13) For what end is life bestowed upon the children of men? Why were we sent into the world? For one sole end, and for no other, to prepare for eternity. For this alone we live...

Note:

☞ Questions for class are underlined.

Highlighted portions correspond to the text on PowerPoint.

Underlined and **bold** text corresponds with the () numbered blanks on the handouts.

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¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (HarperCollins Edition 2001), 74.

² Ibid, (HarperCollins Edition 2001), 136.

³ Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Heaven* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 19.

Unless otherwise indicated, definitions of Greek and Hebrew words are taken from *Strong's Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible*, James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, World Publishing)