

LIFE AFTER LIFE

(A Study of Our Eternal Life with God)

Introduction

I want to begin our new study with a question. If you could have the answer to any one question that you asked, what would that question be? About ten years ago, in 1998, I passed out a survey in my Sunday school class that asked a series of questions. One of those was the one that I just asked you. If you could have the answer to any one question that you asked, what would that question be? One reply was given more than any other. That reply was, *"What happens to us after we die?"*

Eric Marshall and Stuart Hample compiled a revealing little book years ago titled *Children's Letters to God*. Some of the letters were quite cute. One little girl, for instance, wrote: *"Dear God: Is it true that my father won't get to heaven if he uses his bowling words in the house? Sincerely yours, Anita."* But others were quite serious. The most fascinating to me was this one: *"Dear God: What is it like when a person dies? Nobody will tell me. I just want to know. I don't want to do it. Your friend, Mike."*

People have asked me countless questions over the years about the ultimate issues of our lives. Probably the most frequently asked of those is little Mike's. What happens to us after we die?

There are two basic reasons that people are so deeply concerned about that. For one thing, life on earth is short. As the ancient Egyptians said it, *"We will be dead a lot longer than we will be alive."* For another thing, human beings are born with a fundamental longing for immortality. That's part of what Solomon meant when he wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:11, *"He (God) has also set eternity in their heart."* People want to know and even more importantly need to know what their ultimate destiny is.

I say "need to know" for two reasons, both of which the unexcelled mathematician, philosopher, and Christian, Blaise Pascal, identified.

First, we can only define our lives backwards. The meaning of our earthly lives now is largely a matter of what comes later, after they're over. Meaning is a "going beyond" so to speak. It's a transcendence of what is present toward what is future. It is always found, when it's found, in what comes later, after our earthly lives are over. The significance of the activities, experiences, and events that make up our lives is always found in what comes after those lives are over.

Second, the best way to live our lives is forwards. It isn't enough just to define our lives backwards. As Pascal said it, we must also live our lives forwards. We need to live now in light of later.

Preparing for a trip is a good analogy of this. Our destination determines how we prepare for it. I'm going to prepare quite differently to go to the desert than I'm going to prepare to go to the Arctic Circle for two months. The destination determines the preparation.

Albert Einstein and Carl Sagan believed that death is the end of us. We die and cease to exist. I believe that death is the beginning for us. We die and begin to live. If we're logical people who are thinking straight, what we believe in that regard will dramatically affect what we believe and how we live. It will dramatically affect how we perceive and interpret things.

I went with a lung cancer patient to an appointment he had with a pulmonologist. He had been taking several months of chemotherapy treatment and had hoped that it would cure his cancer. But the pulmonologist told him that the chemotherapy wasn't working and that the tumor was growing. The patient then looked at the pulmonologist and me and spoke these poignant words, "*I guess I'm doomed.*"

Do you see what he was doing. He was living life forwards. He apparently believed that death was the end of him or the beginning of a lesser life. He then interpreted what was happening to him now in terms of that.

I believe that death is gain for me, that the life that follows dwarfs this one in terms of love, peace, and joy. So, if I were him, I would have interpreted the pulmonologist's prognosis this way, "*I'm blessed.*"

My point is that we need to know, in detail, what our ultimate destiny truly is. That's because the wisest way to define life is backwards, the end first, and the wisest way to live life is forwards, with our ultimate destiny guiding us.

Today, we begin a study that reveals in detail what our ultimate destiny is. The title of our study is *Life after Life*. That title is a take off on a phrase that both Christians and non-Christians alike use. That phrase is "life after death." I myself use that phrase but only for purposes of communication. I say that because it is, in reality, not an accurate one. It implies that everyone dies but that isn't the case for followers of Jesus and I mean at all.

We see that in John 11:25-26. This chapter records one of the most well known stories in the Bible. Three siblings, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were close friends of Jesus. Well, Lazarus became seriously ill, motivating Mary and Martha to send for Jesus to come and heal him. But Jesus delayed and by the time that He got to Bethany where they lived, Lazarus was already dead and buried.

When He arrived in Bethany, Mary and other family and friends came to Him in verses 32-33 and were weeping and grieving. When Jesus saw them weeping and grieving, verse 35, the shortest in the Bible, says that He wept.

I have a question for you. Why did Jesus weep? The Jews, in verse 36, thought it was because He loved Lazarus and was grieved that He was dead. But is that a plausible explanation? After all, Jesus knew that He was going to raise Him. So why would He be grieved that He was dead.

I believe that He wept for a different reason. It was because He saw how misguided Mary, Martha, and their family and friends were. I mean misguided about the meaning and implications of death. They just didn't understand what He Himself had told Martha shortly before in verses 25-26.

Let's go to those verses now and see what that is. First, in verse 25, He says that anyone who believes in Him will live even if he dies. He then explains the clear implication of that fact in verse 26. Anyone who believes in Him will never die.

Hear that again and let it sink in for a moment. Anyone who follows Jesus will never die. Let's personalize it. If you're following Jesus, you will never die. I tell my wife that if I'm buried and have a tombstone, put the date of my birth and a dash but that's it. Putting a date after the dash implies something that isn't true – that I died, that my life ended. The truth is that it won't.

If you think that maybe Jesus just lost his head for a moment and didn't really mean what He said in verses 25-26, think again. I say that because He said essentially the same thing in John 8:51-52. He said twice in fact that if anyone follows Him, ***“he will never taste of death.”*** Let's personalize it again. If you're following Jesus, you will never experience death. Please understand that Jesus is speaking literally, not metaphorically here.

Most people clearly don't think in those terms. You know the old saying that all of us have used and heard and even ascribe to. We don't have to do anything but die and pay taxes.

But that isn't true. If we're going to be accurate and state things as they really are, then we need to say it this way. We don't have to do anything but pay taxes. That's because it's literally so that followers of Jesus never die.

And that's why I've titled this study what I have – *Life after Life*. It isn't life after death because there is no death. It is literally life after life.

What we're going to examine in our study, thoroughly and in detail, is the life of followers of Jesus after they take their last breath and their earthly body ceases to function.

Erwin Lutzer wrote a book titled *One Minute after You Die*. Let's put that in different terms. What about one second or one hour or one year or 100 years or 1,000 years or 1,000,000,000,000 years after you die?

That is worth contemplating. What happens to followers of Jesus when their life on earth ends. What will their experience be? This study will answer those questions for you – in detail.

The Continuum of Life

I necessarily begin our study with what I call "the continuum of life." I say "necessarily" because we need to understand this continuum of life in order to understand life after life itself.

We sometimes talk about not being able to see the trees for the forest. The truth of the matter is that we need to see both. We need to see the forest. That means that we need to get a view of the whole. We then need to see the trees. That means that we need to get a view of the details or parts that make up the whole.

Let's begin now by looking at the forest. In this case, the forest is the continuum of life that I've just mentioned. I believe that this continuum realistically represents the whole life of those who follow Jesus.

	Body	Jesus	
Conception	dies	comes	ad
		again	infinitem

Notice that there are three phases to the human life of those of us who follow Jesus.

The first is our life from the time that we're conceived until the time that we die. When I say "die" in this context, I remind you that I'm saying it that way for purposes of communication. I'm referring specifically to the death of our earthly body and not our person itself. I mean our earthly body ceasing to function. So, the first phase begins when we're conceived in our mother's womb and ends when we take our last breath on earth.

The second phase of life is our life from the time that we die, as I just defined it, until the time that Jesus comes again. Theologians and writers refer to this phase as *the intermediate state*. This is a second phase because our life is radically different in it than it is in the first and third stages.

The third phase of life is from the time that Jesus comes again "ad infinitum." The words "ad infinitum" mean "that never ends." Notice that there is no end to the line that I've drawn because the third phase is permanent. It lasts forever. It never ends.

I've drawn this continuum of life as a line because of the point it makes. We, as followers of Jesus, have only one life. That one life does change drastically two times – when our body dies and when Jesus comes again. It does change drastically but it is never interrupted. It isn't three lives but one life with three different phases.

That's why I call it a "continuum." It's one life that begins here, the moment we're conceived, and never ends. There is never even a split second when our conscious existence ceases. Once our consciousness begins, it never ends.

You can think of this in terms of your loved ones whose earthly life has ended. I watched my beloved mother take her last earthly breath. But as I told my brothers and sisters who were with me, her life didn't end. It just entered a new and as we'll eventually see, a far better phase.

You can see then why I've titled this study what I have, *Life after Life*. We will examine in it the second and third phases that occur after our life in the first phase is over.

How many of you believe what I have just said? How many of you believe that we'll never die – that we have one life that never ends? Let me ask you a related question. Why do you believe that?

I know why. It's because you're weakly cowards. That's what the skeptics say at least. I once discussed life after life with a law student who rejects Christianity as a system of truth. He said during our conversation that the only reason that Christians believe that they'll never die is because they need to. They can't bare the idea of ceasing to exist, so they believe that they won't. How would you respond to someone who says that?

My response in general and to him in particular is this. Just the opposite is true. I'll tell you what I told him. The only reason that you believe that you'll cease to exist is because you need to. My belief takes a whole lot more courage than yours.

C.S. Lewis is a classic case in point. Lewis was an atheist who became a Christian even though he didn't want to. One of the reasons that he didn't want to was because of the very belief that we're discussing now – that we'll never die.

Lewis claimed that one of the most comforting things about atheism is that there's an exit sign in the universe. We die and cease to exist. But once we believe the Bible, the exit sign is gone and there's no way out. We never stop existing and there's nothing that we can do about it.

Lewis isn't the only one who thought and felt that way. It's been a common theme down through the centuries. Many philosophies and religions have found relief in believing that we'll cease to exist. The Epicureans, for instance, were famous for stressing it. Then there's poet James Swinburne who wrote these words:

*"From too much of living,
From hope and fear set free,
We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever Gods may be,
That no life lives forever;
That dead men rise up never."*

I'll tell you who the courageous people are. It isn't the ones who believe that we cease to exist. It's the ones who believe that we don't. Think about it. We know that we're never going to stop living and there's nothing we can do about it, except make our future life as desirable as we possibly can. I don't know of anything that requires greater courage than that.

My point is this. I don't believe in life after life because I need to or want to. I believe in it because, as the old child's song says it, *"the Bible tells me so."* The Bible tells me that I have one life that never ends and because I believe the Bible I believe that.

Our View of Life after Life

Notice I said the Bible. The Bible is the primary and, as far as I know, only source for our belief about life after life. We have no firsthand knowledge about it because no one has ever died, experienced, life after life, been resurrected from the dead, and then told us about it.

So, most of us would agree that everything that we know about life after life comes from the Bible. That raises an issue though. How much about life after life does it tell us?

It might be helpful in answering that question to have you do something. Tell me one thing in particular that you know about life after life.

Together, you've given me quite a bit of information about this subject and that is my point today. The Bible, especially in the New Testament, teaches us a lot about life after life. It gives us a lot of details about it.

We need to do two things with those details. First, learn them and what they teach us about life after life. And second, deduce from them further details about it. We can take the mass of facts that the Bible reveals and infer another mass of facts from them. It's a simple matter of thinking logically. If these facts are true, then these facts must also be true.

That is in fact our procedure in this class. We will learn explicitly and implicitly what the Bible teaches about life after life. That in turn will help us develop a Biblical view of it.

Notice I said "a Biblical view" and those words capture the very problem that most professing Christians face. That problem is that they do not have a Biblical view of life after life. What they have instead is an uninformed or misinformed view of it.

First, some professing Christians have an uninformed view of life after life.

I'd like to make an observation and you can tell me if you agree or disagree. Professing Christians rarely think about or discuss life after life. Several secularists have told me that Christianity is a pie in the sky religion. They imply in doing so that Christians think too much about life after life. But that just isn't so. What is so is that they rarely think and talk about it.

I spent four years in a Christian college and three years in seminary. I never once heard a professor discuss it for more than a minute or so – even in eschatology classes. I also never once heard an entire sermon or Sunday school class, beside my own, devoted to the subject. Christians do emphasize and develop as a topic how we get eternal life. But they rarely emphasize or develop as a topic what the nature of that life is. It's beyond the scope of their understanding or concern.

Consider these facts. A celebrated theologian named Reinhold Niebuhr wrote an in depth two-volume set on that very subject, theology. Remarkably, he did not address at all the issue of life after life in general and heaven in particular. He wrote absolutely nothing about it. William Shedd wrote a three-volume work titled Dogmatic Theology. In it, he devoted 87 pages to eternal punishment and only two to eternal life. And finally Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote a 900-page treatise on theology that contains less than two pages on life after life.

We'd logically conclude from those facts that the Bible must teach very little about life after life and that is in fact what the vast majority of professing Christians believe. I've had several people, for instance, quote 1 Corinthians 2:9 to me in that regard, ***"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."*** They quoted that to me and concluded that we can't know much about eternal life. What they didn't grasp and what I pointed out to them is this. They quoted the verse out of context and distorted its meaning. The very next verse shows what Paul's point is. What we cannot know on our own, God has revealed to us. He has revealed much, far more than most know, about eternal life.

Most Christians don't realize that though. Author John Hicks speaks for most when he writes: ***"We know nothing concrete about the condition of our existence after death."*** That's what most Christians believe. We know little about our existence after death.

So that's one problem that many Christians have. Their view of life after life is uninformed.

A second problem that they have is that their view of it is misinformed. They perceive it incorrectly, in a way that denigrates it. They think wrongly about it to their detriment and harm.

Author Randy Alcorn believes that misconceptions of life after life are the work of Satan. John 8:44 says that Satan is the father of lies and one of the things that he lies about is life after life.

According to Alcorn, Satan slanders three things: God's person, God's people, and God's place, meaning heaven. Satan does one of two things in that regard. He convinces people that heaven doesn't exist or that it isn't a place worth going to if it does.

That really is what many people believe. Heaven isn't worth going to. In his book The Journey of Desire, John Eldredge writes: *"Nearly every Christian I've spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service . . . We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news? And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more 'spiritual.' We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can."*

Eldredge isn't exaggerating. So many people possess and articulate that perception of eternal life, as a sort of never ending worship service at best or a do-nothing kind of life at least. It's boring in other words. Gary Larson captures the essence of that perception in one of his *Far Side* cartoons. In it, a man with angel wings and a halo sits on a cloud, doing nothing, with no one nearby. We can tell from the expression on his face that he's totally bored like someone marooned on a desert island with nothing to do. One of those little cartoon balloons then shows us what he's thinking, *"Wish I'd brought a magazine."*

That cartoon does represent the perception of life after life that many people, including Christians, have. It isn't a perception actually. It's a misperception. They think inaccurately about it, taking it to be infinitely less than it really is.

The bottom line is that far too many people don't have a Biblical view of life after life. Their view is either uninformed or misinformed.

But so what? After all, thinking wrongly about life after death doesn't really matter that much does it? Yes, it does! Believe it or not Stevie Wonder himself makes that perfectly clear. He sang a song years ago that contained one of the most profound lines that a pop song ever has. He sang, *"When we believe what we don't understand, we suffer"* and that's exactly right with regard to everything. But let's make it more specific with regard to life after life itself. When we believe it but don't understand it, we suffer.

We discussed earlier the importance of understanding and believing in life after life to our living. But it's just as vital to our dying.

Dying well is important isn't it? Most of us want to end everything that we do well and that includes this one life that God has given us. I don't know about you but I want to end it well.

The Puritans did too. They talked about what they called "holy dying." The Bible calls us to live in a holy fashion. All of us know that. But the Puritans taught that we should also die in holy fashion. They also defined what that means. It means that we die in a way that glorifies God and increases the faith of others.

I can tell you from my own experience of ministering to terminally ill people that very few die that way. Almost every dying person that I have known did so with fear and/or regret. Many feared death. It was something that they dreaded. Others regretted death. They could hardly stand the thought of their beautiful world going on without them. Dying that way doesn't glorify God or increase the faith of others. It denigrates God and diminishes the faith of others instead.

There's a reason that people die that way. It's because, as Stevie Wonder, sang it, they don't understand what they believe. That's the condition or state of most professing Christians as they're dying. They believe what they don't understand. They do believe in the eternal life that they were about to enter. But they don't understand it. It's a mysterious, vague, and unknown life to them and so they either feared death or regretted it.

If you and I want to live and die well, we need to have a detailed understanding of life after life. We need to build a vision of it based on the explicit and implicit information that the Bible gives us about it. We need to perceive it thoroughly and correctly, as it really is.

If we do that, we'll believe what Paul did in Philippians 1:21, "***to die is gain.***" That phrase literally means that Christians are better off dead. But we'll not only believe that, we'll understand it. We'll know that the world and life we're going to enter is far, far, far, far, far, far, far, far, far, far, far, far, better than the world and life that we're going to leave behind and that isn't enough "far's."

We'll then die in the same holy fashion that Paul did if we do. Study Philippians 1:21-26 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8. Paul wrote the first passage while a prisoner in Rome and thought that the Romans might execute him. He wrote the second passage while a prisoner in Rome five years later and knew that the Romans would execute him. But notice how he approached death in both passages. He was excited about it. As he wrote it in Philippians 1:23, "***I am hard-pressed . . . having the desire to depart (die).***"

Paul was excited about the prospect of dying and we will be too if we believe and understand what he did, the nature of life after life.

Remember the analogy I used in the sermon several weeks ago. Suppose that you plan on going to the Columbiana street fair next Saturday. But on Monday morning, your boss tells you that he's giving you the next week off, in addition to your regular vacation, and sending your family and you on, all expenses paid, to Disney World – as a bonus. You'll stay in the hotels right in Disney World and go there for the week. But the rest of the week before you fly out on Saturday, instead of being excited about Disney World, you deeply regret that you're going to miss the street fair as a result. Would a right thinking person do that? Of course not!

The analogy is imperfect I admit, but it's the same way with a right thinking dying person, one who has a detailed and accurate view of life after life. They're so excited about what they're getting in the world and life that they're entering that they don't regret what they're giving up in the world and life that they're leaving.

And that's the kind of dying that's holy. Being excited about and looking forward to our death glorifies God and increases the faith of others.

Very few people die that way but you and I can. Most people don't believe that I admit. They don't believe that anyone can be excited about dying but they're wrong. We can – if we do two things. First, decide to be a disciple of Jesus. And second, understand life after life. When we understand what we believe, we benefit. So understand what you believe.

Which is the express purpose of this class. Assuming that you have decided to be a disciple of Jesus, the specific aim of this class is to help you understand what you believe about life after life and thus be benefited both in your living and your dying. The specific aim of this class is to assist you in developing a detailed and Biblical view of life after life.

The Intermediate State

Now that we know why we need to develop a detailed and Biblical view of life after life, let's do just that. Remember the continuum of life that we discussed. We have one life with three phases. The first phase is our life from conception to the death of our earthly body. The second is the phase from the death of our earthly body to the Second Coming of Jesus. Remember what that is called, "the intermediate state," and that's what we're going to address now.

Let me first of all say that there is a great deal of confusion about the intermediate state. Most preachers and Christians talk about the second phase of our life, the intermediate state, and the third phase, heaven, as if they're the same phase and kind of life.

Listen carefully to what preachers say at funerals and you'll know what I mean. They'll talk about what happens to us immediately after we die and describe not the second phase but the third, heaven. But they're mistaken in doing so.

Even James Kennedy, who was much brighter and competent than most of you and me, confused the issue. A week after he died, his television program broadcast a sermon he had preached several years ago about heaven. As brilliant as he was he blurred the distinctions between the intermediate state and heaven and left people with some wrong ideas about what we'll experience immediately after our earthly life ends.

But any confusion you may have will be cleared up now in our discussion of the intermediate state.

The Soul

As we will soon learn, the intermediate state isn't at all about our body. It's about our soul instead and we need to begin our discussion precisely there – with the human soul. To understand the human soul, we have to first of all understand the divine soul.

God has a soul? Many people are surprised to learn that, including Bible translators, but it's true. I mention Bible translators for a reason. The Bible makes it clear in many passages that God has a soul but translators can't seem to come to grips with the fact that He does. The Hebrew word translated "soul" in the Old Testament is "nephesh." The Greek word translated soul in the New Testament is "psyche." But many translations including the literal NASB that I use employ alternative language to translate it.

Here are samplings of Bible verses that reveal the soul of God. These are read in the KJV, which like the NASB is a literal translation but unlike the NASB doesn't use the alternative language for the word "nephesh" and "psyche." Those sampling are: Leviticus 26:11; Psalm 11:5; Isaiah 1:14; Jeremiah 6:8; and Matthew 12:18.

Let me ask you a question. What does it mean that God has a soul? The word "soul" refers to the deepest and most fundamental level of His being. It is the deepest level of His life and power. Since God is spirit and has no body, His soul has no relation to matter or body in any way.

Human beings also have a soul. The Hebrew and Greek words that refer to the human soul as the very ones that also refer to the divine soul. The Hebrew word is "nephesh" and the Greek word is "psyche." Let me give you a sampling of verses that use those words to refer to the human soul. Psalms is called "the great soul book" because it mentions the human soul so frequently. Psalms 42:1-2 and 63:1 are examples of this. Proverbs 21:10 and Mathew 16:26 are other excellent examples of this.

Let me ask you a question? What does it mean that human beings have a soul? And what is the human soul? Human beings are made up of five different dimensions: the mind with its thoughts, the mind with its feelings, the will or spirit, the body, and the soul. The soul is the enduring nonphysical center of our being that organizes our life into a whole. It's the aspect of our being that correlates, integrates, and enlivens everything that is going on in the other dimensions. It is the most basic level of life in the individual and is by its nature rooted in God.

Now that we know that both God and human beings have a soul and what in general the soul is, we need to understand that soul in relation to life. We need to understand two things.

First, only God has life. Life is defined as self-initiating, self-directing, self-sustaining power and activity. In that sense, only God has life. So the first thing that we need to understand is that only God has life.

Second, human beings have derivative life. We do not have life in its fullest sense. Take food away from us for example and we will die. Our life is derived from God, meaning that He gives it to us and sustains it. Colossians 1:17 says that in Jesus all things hold together. He is the glue of the universe in other words who sustains it and the life that is in it.

Now let's connect what I just said about life with what I said about our soul. Our soul is the receptor and transmitter of the life that God gives us. It's the receptor in that it receives life and power from God. It is the transmitter in that it then directs that life and power to our other dimensions including our body. Suppose for instance that we have all the food and water we need but God stops impart life to our body through the soul. We would die instantaneously. The life that God gives us flows through the soul to our other dimensions including our body. Our soul is thus the dimension that enlivens literally everything else in us. That is not so with animals. God imparts life directly to their bodies. But with human beings, He imparts life indirectly to our bodies through the soul.

With that in mind, remember how I defined the human soul. It is the **enduring** non-physical center that organizes our life into a whole. Notice the word "enduring." That simply means that it survives the death of our body. Even though the body dies, the soul continues to be the receptor of life by God. God continues to sustain the soul after the body dies.

The Three Views of the Intermediate State

That teaching is, I believe, the key to the issue that we are now going to discuss. That issue is this. What happens to human beings in the intermediate state? Professing Christians hold three views in that regard and I want to briefly address each one – before addressing in detail the one that is true.

The first view is that the soul sleeps. This is called psychopanny. People who adhere to this view contend that human beings do have an enduring or immortal aspect. That aspect is the soul.

This aspect, they claim, is bound up with the body. So, when the body ceases to function, so does the soul. It still exists but ceases to function. It is in a state of unconsciousness much like sleep.

When Jesus comes again, He through the Holy Spirit will resurrect the body. At that time, the soul will necessarily awaken as well and be reunited with the body of Christians and non-Christians alike and start to function again.

The second view is that the soul ceases to exist. Those who embrace this view say that the soul, like the body, is not enduring. It is inseparably linked to the body and brain and when those die, it does too. That means that every dimension of Christians and non-Christians alike, including the soul, simply cease to exist between the time that their bodies die and the time that Jesus comes again.

But during that time, God remembers us and we are still an idea in His mind just as we were before He created us the first time. Then when Jesus comes again, God, through the Holy Spirit, recreates us. He brings them into existence again with bodies and souls.

I had a friend years ago here at Bethel named David Heath who held this view. We discussed it for hours and he gave me written materials that espoused it.

You can see that the first two views do have one thing in common. According to them, the **conscious** existence of Christians and non-Christians alike ceases in the intermediate state. They have no consciousness and activity of any kind.

Let's personalize these two views. My godly mother died in 1995. According to the first view, psychopanny, her soul still exists but is asleep. According to the second view, her soul and body do not exist now. No part of her is alive. According to both views, she is not conscious or active at all.

But there's a third view that stands in sharp contrast to the first two. Those who hold it believe and teach that the soul still exists and that God gives us consciousness and activity through it.

This view derives from what I said about the soul. Remember what I said about the soul and the receptor and transmitter of life. God gives life and power to the soul, which in turn directs that to the other dimensions that make us up. That means that the soul doesn't get its life and power from the body. It gets its life and power from the soul. So, the body dying doesn't affect the life and power of the soul.

The result is that the soul lives on and continues to do so as long as it receives life and power from God, which I believe is forever after death. That means that the souls of Christians and non-Christians alike continue to live on in the intermediate state. Through the soul, God enables us to continue being conscious and active even after our earthly body has ceased to function.

Which View Is Correct

Those are the three views and we now have to figure out which is the correct one. We do that by studying the relevant passages in the Bible. We must interpret these passages objectively, with as little bias as possible. We must not let any preconceived assumptions taint how we interpret them. We must let them speak for themselves.

Several passages in the Bible do speak to the issue of our intermediate state. They address what happens to Christians when their earthly bodies die.

The first is Luke 23:43. The interpretive key in this verse is where the comma in it should be placed.

Some say that it should be placed after the word "today." If it's placed there, the word "today" refers to when Jesus is making the statement that follows. I (Jesus) am telling you (the thief) today – you will be with me in paradise. Thus, Jesus isn't identifying when this will happen but just assuring him it will someday happen. That someday might be at the Second Coming.

But that isn't how people speak in normal conversation. We don't designate that we're speaking to people now. That is absurd because they know that we're speaking to them now because they're with us and hear us.

The more likely is that the comma should be placed after the words "to you." Placed there, Jesus is telling the thief that this very day, after the thief dies, he will be in paradise with Jesus.

If that were true of the thief who came to saving faith on the cross, how much more would it be true of all of us who have saving faith. The very day that we die, we will be with Jesus in paradise. In my view that is the clear and precise teaching of that verse. The moment we take our last breath on earth, we're immediately in paradise with Jesus.

The second passage is the combination of John 8:51 and 11:25-26, which we've discussed before. Jesus makes the startling statement that disciples of His will never die. That statement has no substance of any kind unless our conscious existence never ceases. In fact, the words "never die" certainly imply just that. To never die means the same thing as to always live. So, we can know for certain that we continue living after our body dies.

The third passage is Philippians 1:19-24. This passage, in my view, is the most illuminating with regard to the intermediate state.

Paul is in prison for the cause of Jesus and believes that the Romans might execute him. He is torn between two desires as he ponders the possibility of that. On the one hand, he wants to keep on living so that he can continue ministering to Christians and doing God's work in the world. On the other hand, he wants to die because he will then, according to verse 23, *"be with Christ"*

Now, he doesn't state precisely that he expects to be with Jesus the moment he dies. Those with the first two views of the intermediate state would argue that he did expect to be with Jesus but not when he was executed but when Jesus comes again.

But that interpretation of the text is contrary to the whole tone of what Paul is writing here. If he believed that He wouldn't be with Jesus the moment he was executed but when He comes again, he wouldn't have written it in the context that he did here. The whole tone of the text suggests that being with Jesus was something imminent to him. It was something that he expected to happen soon. He undoubtedly believed that His conscious existence was going to continue with Jesus if the Romans killed him.

There are two other passages of interest here. Many people believe that these passages teach that there is life immediately after death.

The first is the account of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus gives in Luke 16:19-31. Most of you know the story. There was a rich man who lived an extravagant life. He was so self-absorbed that he either didn't notice or ignored a poverty stricken and gravely ill man named Lazarus. Lazarus survived by eating the rich man's garbage. The rich man and Lazarus died. The rich man went to Hades and Lazarus to Abraham's bosom. Jesus then described what happened in verses 23-31.

The interpretive issue in this passage is this. Is what Jesus tells about the rich man and Lazarus a narrative or a parable? A narrative is an account of something that actually happened. A parable is a story that the teacher makes up in order to illustrate and make vivid certain principles or truths.

If this passage is a narrative, then it tells us quite a bit about life immediately after death. If it's a parable it may tell us little or even nothing about life immediately after death.

Many Christian commentators and teachers believe that it's a narrative. Their strongest argument in that regard is that Jesus never named a person in any other parable that He told. Since He names the poor man here, Lazarus, then it must not be a parable.

I believe, however, that this is a parable and not a narrative. I believe that Jesus made this story up and told it in order to illustrate and make vivid the truth of Proverbs 21:13. This verse and others teach us that we must give as much as we can to the poor. Proverbs 21:13 pictures the poor crying out for help and those who can help them not helping. God will eventually help the poor who cry out. But as the wise man goes on to say in that verse, those who could have helped but didn't will themselves someday cry out for help and not be helped. That is a powerful truth of Scripture and Jesus uses a parable to make it real to us in Luke 16:19-31.

I believe that message of the passage explains the name that Jesus gave the poor man here. He gave him a name in the parable that helped drive home the point of it. The Greek word Lazarus here is from the Hebrew name Eleazar. It means literally "God has helped." That is an allusion I think to the very truth that the parable teaches. God will eventually help the poor when they cry out but not the rich who lived extravagant and self-absorbed lives.

That means, in my view, that this passage teaches us nothing about life immediately after death.

Giving its details serious thought show that to be the case. Consider this for example. Suppose that a person is in a literal flame like the rich man was and experiencing the unimaginable and horrific pain of that. Would it do any good whatsoever, would it give relief of any kind, for someone to dip their finger in water and touch the person's tongue. Would a person in that kind of torment make such a request and even more, would he or she even be able to talk, scream maybe but talk, no. There would not be the calm conversation that Jesus records here.

My interpretation then is this. The people to whom Jesus was speaking had a generalized concept of Hades as a place where both the righteous and the unrighteous go immediately after death. But by the time of Jesus, the concept had developed to include separation of the righteous and unrighteous in it. So Jesus made use of their thinking and incorporated it into a parable to illustrate the truth that he was trying to teach.

My point is that this is a parable that teaches us nothing about the first life after life, the intermediate state. We cannot conclude from it that non-Christians and Christians have physical bodies and go to a physical place after they die.

Another passage of interest is 2 Corinthians 5:8. I've heard many Christians including pastors claim that this verse teaches life for followers of Jesus immediately after death.

Paul discusses our earthly body in verses 1-10 using the metaphors of an earthly tent, verse 1, and earthly clothing, verse 2. Paul says that the tent will be torn down and the clothing taken off at death. Death destroys our earthly body in other words. But we need to despair because after that happens, God will give us an eternal home and heavenly clothing. Those are metaphors that refer to our resurrection body. Paul's point then is that we will discard our earthly body and after that take on our heavenly or resurrection body.

In that context, he says in verse 8 that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. The context that I just gave you shows what the phrase "at home with the Lord" means. It means when we get our resurrection bodies.

The context also shows that Paul doesn't intend to identify when that will happen. He isn't saying that it will happen immediately after death because in reality it won't. His concern isn't when it will happen. It's that it will happen. Thus, verse 8 does not teach us that we will live immediately after death, though as the other passages we studied show, we will.

There are then three passages that teach us about the intermediate state – Luke 23:43; John 8:51 and 11:25-26 (viewed as one); and Philippians 1:19-24. The two other passages often cited to teach us about that, Luke 16:19-31 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, in my view, do not. You can study them your selves and come to your own conclusions about them.

At this point though, what we do know is this. We will never die. The moment we take our last breath on earth, we enter into a conscious and active life with God, one that will continue as it is until Jesus comes again, at which point it will change.

But do we know anything about this life in the intermediate state? What do the three passages teach us, if anything, about it? And what can we infer about it from what those passages teach? Let's answer those questions now.

No Body and Brain

The first thing that we learn about our life in the intermediate state is this. We will have no body and brain and won't miss them. Let me explain that in some detail to you.

The Bible clearly teaches in passages that we'll discuss later that the Holy Spirit gives us our resurrection bodies when Jesus comes again. That is an undisputable fact – objective Bible believing-Christians at least. We do not get them immediately after we die but when Jesus comes again.

But that's a puzzling fact that raises this issue. Will we have bodies then in the intermediate state before Jesus comes again?

In his book Heaven, Randy Alcorn believes that we will. He admits that they will not be the resurrection bodies we get at the Second Coming. But according to him, they will be bodies nonetheless.

Alcorn's logic for concluding that seems to be this. We cannot be fully human without both a soul and a body. We must be fully human to live joyfully and well. In the intermediate state, we will live joyfully and well. Therefore, we must have both a soul and a body in the intermediate state. That is how I assess the argument that he presents in his book.

He does admit that the bodies we have will not be our resurrection ones. They will be some kind of temporary body instead that doesn't have continuity with our earthly bodies.

Listen to what he writes about that: *"It seems possible – though this is certainly debatable – that between our earthly life and our bodily resurrection, God may grant us some physical form that will allow us to function as human beings while in that unnatural state 'between bodies,' awaiting our resurrection. Just as the intermediate state is a bridge between life on the old Earth and the New Earth (by which he means heaven), perhaps intermediate bodies, or at least a physical form of some sort, serve as bridges between our present bodies and our resurrected bodies."* Notice how he describes the bodies we may have. They are *"a physical form of some sort."* He never gets any more specific than that.

I believe that Alcorn is wrong. I believe that we will not have bodies or brains in our intermediate state. I challenge an assumption that Alcorn have – that we must be fully human, with a soul and body, to live joyfully and well. We don't have to be fully human, as he defines it, to live that way, and in fact won't be.

Let me ask you a question. Does personal existence depend upon matter, meaning atoms and molecules? Or to ask it another way, do consciousness and activity require a body and brain?

We know beyond any shadow of a doubt what the answer to those questions is. It's "no." Personal existence does not depend upon matter. Consciousness and activity do not require a body and brain.

Can someone tell me how we know that is so?

John 4:24 tells us. God is spirit! Or as Deuteronomy 4:15 says it, He has no form. That means that God is not matter. He is not made up of atoms and molecules. There is nothing physical or material about Him at all.

And yet He has the highest levels of consciousness and activity that are possible. He is omniscient, which means all-knowing. He is omnipotent, which means all-powerful. And He is that without a body and brain.

The Bible teaches that God does not depend on matter. Matter depends on Him. We need to remember that at one time, if I can say it that way, there was no such thing as matter. At one time, not one atom or molecule existed. But God did, and later so did angels, and there was consciousness, activity, and life. Body and brain come from Him. He does not come from body and brain.

I know that is very difficult for us to comprehend but it's true. There is no way we can deny it Biblically.

Most of us have been taught that Satan rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. Notice the language of activity, "rebelled" and "cast out." That activity assumes consciousness. Satan, for instance, regarded himself as greater than God. The consciousness and activity that Satan's rebellion entailed makes the consciousness and activity that earth's rebellion and wars entail pale in comparison.

But here's what I want you to grasp in that regard. No material bodies or brains were involved in any part of the consciousness and activity that Satan's rebellion entailed? God and the angels and Satan and the fallen angels are spirit. They had no bodies and brains and still don't.

You get what I'm trying to say. Personal existence doesn't depend on matter. Consciousness and activity do not depend on body and brain. God secures His own consciousness and activity and that of all angels, including the fallen ones, through His own power.

And that's exactly what He'll do with us in the intermediate state. You and I will be conscious and active without matter. God will sustain our consciousness without a brain and our activity without a body. We will be, in that sense, like the angels are now. We will be spirit, not made up of atoms and molecules like we are now.

Where We Will Be

Since we will not have bodies in the intermediate state, we will not need a material universe in which to live and thus won't have one. It is as difficult for us to grasp this as it is to grasp existing without body and brain but it's just as true as that. Most of us have a problem accepting the reality of an unseen realm but we shouldn't.

But cutting edge researchers who embrace what is called "string theory" certainly don't. Scientists at Yale, Princeton, and Stanford, among others, contend that there are ten unobservable dimensions and likely an infinite number of imperceptible universes. These scientists believe in unseen realms in other words and so can we.

We must in fact if we believe the Bible. One of the terminologies that Paul uses repeatedly in Ephesians is "the heavenly places." He uses it in 1:3; 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; and 6:12. He is clearly referring to an unseen realm inhabited by spiritual beings including God Himself, angels, Satan, and demons.

Francis Schaeffer discusses this world in his book True Spirituality. Let me summarize what he says about it.

The Bible views reality as having two halves, like two halves of an orange. You do not have the whole orange unless you have both parts. It's the same way with reality. It has two halves or parts and we don't have the whole of reality without both parts.

Schaeffer calls the two parts of reality the natural world and the supernatural world, what Paul called the heavenly places. The natural world is material and thus seen by us. The supernatural world is spiritual and thus unseen by us.

That unseen world, Schaeffer contends, isn't way out there someplace. He writes: "*The supernatural structure of Scripture carries with it the emphasis that the supernatural is not far away, but near at hand, all about us.*" 2 Kings 6:8-23 illustrates it. The king of Aram and his armies surrounded Elisha and his servant to kill them. Elisha wasn't afraid and asked God to open the eyes of his servant so that he wouldn't be either. God did that and when He did, the servant, in verses 16-17, was able to see an army of angels also surrounding them, between Aram's army and them, to protect them. Schaeffer points out and correctly so that supernatural world was right there with the servant even though he couldn't see it.

Schaeffer is correct and the larger point is that there is a non-material realm that is just as real as the material realm. It is in this realm, I believe, the heavenly places, that we will live in the intermediate state just as God and the angels live in it now.

Alive as Never Before

Notice I said that we will *live* in the heavenly places. I mean by that – we will be incredibly conscious and active there.

Some people assume that any disembodied life must be only a shadow of our embodied present life. They assume that it must be some kind of spiritless existence that is weak on love, peace, and joy.

But nothing could be further from the truth. I've already pointed out that there are supernaturally high levels of consciousness and activity in the heavenly places right now as I speak. Believe me when I say that we won't just exist in the intermediate state, we will live as we never have before.

I often tell a story about Dwight L. Moody when I conduct funeral services. Let me recount it here for those of you who haven't heard it.

Some friends came to visit Moody when he was dying. As he talked with them about his impending death, he declared, *"Someday soon, you will hear that I am dead. Do not believe it because I will then be alive as never before."*

Moody was right and we need to be clear about this. The moment we take our last breath and enter into the intermediate state, we will be alive as never before. What that means is that our levels of consciousness and activity will be dramatically enhanced far above our levels of consciousness and activity now.

Here is an analogy that helps us grasp the radical nature of the change that takes place. My wife and I visited the Hattie Larlham Foundation in Apple Creek years ago. That institution houses profoundly retarded people. When I say profoundly retarded, I mean that their powers of consciousness and activity are below those of dogs. They have almost no ability to communicate or even receive communication. They cannot walk or move around. They are basically oblivious to the world around them, except for some sensations here and there. Imagine that God touches one of those individuals and they suddenly become a highly intelligent and healthy adult. They are able to do calculus for instance or analyze and appreciate a sonnet and so on. They can play baseball and drive a car and so on. Consider the incredible increase in their powers of consciousness and activity.

That increase pales in comparison to the increase that followers of Jesus experience when they take their last breath.

Think of this in terms of angels. I've said that in the intermediate state, we will be like the angels are now, having high levels of consciousness and activity without a body and brain. Let me ask you a particular question about that. How will our levels compare with those of the angels? Will we have higher or lower levels than they do? Will we be more or less conscious and active than they are?

Hebrews 2:5-8 may answer that for us. Hebrews was written to a group of Hebrew or Jewish Christians in Rome. Its author wrote to impress upon them the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Angels played a major part in Jewish revelation. Jews believed, for instance, that they gave the Law to Moses. So, the author discusses angels in 1:4-14. 2:1-4 is a parenthesis that leaves off that discussion of angels. Verse 5 then picks up where verse 14 left off. In verses 5-8, he discusses angels in relation to human beings and teaches that the former will eventually be subject to and under the dominion of the latter. People, not angels, in other words, rule the age to come.

The age to come certainly refers to the world and life that the Second Coming of Jesus ushers in. At that point, we will rule over angels. I would infer from that that our levels of consciousness and activity will be greater than theirs is.

But will they also be greater in the intermediate state? I suspect that they probably will. Think of the incredible powers of angels now. I believe that our powers in the intermediate state will probably exceed theirs.

Whether or not that's the case, we can be assured that our levels of consciousness in the intermediate state dwarf the levels that we possess at this moment. Moody did in deed express it well. We will then be alive as never before. Whatever powers we have will be astonishing and directed to a life of love, peace, and joy that would boggle our minds now if we could conceive it.

What I've just shared has profound implications for a life defining experience that every person, except those who die prematurely, has. I'm speaking of course of aging.

How many of you are over 26 years old? Then you are aging right now. Physiologists tell us that we actually start aging at the age of approximately 26. It's around that age that more cells of our bodies are destroyed than produced. We begin declining physically in other words and start moving toward the death of our bodies.

All of us are aging right now or will soon start and we need to come to grips with it. Some don't you know. Some people view aging as losing and try their best to either slow it down or cover it up. I've seen movie stars on television in their 50's whose eyebrows are almost up to their temples. They look like they have masks on because they've had surgery and gotten face-lifts to cover up what aging has done to their faces.

But that isn't the way it is with followers of Jesus. We know better don't we. We know that aging isn't losing but gaining. We know that it isn't a bad thing but a good one. That's because we see it in relation to our life after life, first in the intermediate state and then in heaven.

We know that when we pass through death, we do lose something. We lose the limitations of our physical bodies. We'll no longer be able to act or be acted upon by means of it. Our bodies are the intermediary between the material world in which we now live and us. We will lose the body at death and not be able to interact with the material world in a way that we do now.

And that's precisely what we're experiencing in our aging. I know that I am. We're losing our ability to act and be acted upon by our bodies. Examples abound. Several elderly people have told me, for instance, that food is losing its taste for them. They can't taste as well as they used to. And then there's eyesight, the most troublesome thing to me at this point in my life. Think of the progression in that regard. We start out with no glasses, then monofocals, then bifocals, and then finally trifocals.

This decline in our bodily abilities to interact with the material world is a normal part of aging and even dying. This decline simply prepares us for the new arrangement that occurs at death. I mean the new arrangement during the intermediate state in the heavenly places – in which we will not interact with the material world at all.

That enables us to take heart in our aging. Aging is not our enemy. It's our friend. It's the casting off of that which is holding us back from our new and full life with God in the intermediate state. That life can't be experienced in our earthly bodies. Their limitations don't allow it. So, we shed them like a butterfly does its cocoon. Aging is nothing more than you and me shedding the thing that is holding us back.

That is the reality of aging and we must grasp and believe it in order to age gracefully and well. I have this perspective. Whenever I see a new age spot or wrinkle or mysterious appearance, I interpret it in terms of the butterfly and cocoon. I'm like the butterfly shedding its cocoon. And when it is completely shed, I'll have a brand new and better life just like the butterfly does. That's my perspective and believe me when I tell you that it totally alters the way that I experience aging. It will do the same for you.

I'd summarize our life in the intermediate state by quoting author John Hick. I mentioned him before. He stated that we know nothing concrete about our eternal life after death. Yet, in the same book in which he says that, The Center of Christianity, he paradoxically goes on to write that Jesus did this: ***"Used symbols point to eternal life as limitlessly enhanced life, as a state of being more intensely alive in an existence which is both perfect fulfillment and yet also endless activity and newness. If death leads eventually to that, then although we still think of it . . . with trembling awe and apprehension, yet it will not evoke terror or despair; for beyond death we . . . will not be less alive but more alive than we are now."*** For a man who believes we know nothing concrete about life after life, he certainly knows a lot doesn't he?

And he's right. Everything that he said about it is true.

In the intermediate state, we will have a limitlessly enhanced life. Our existence will be both perfect fulfillment and endless activity and newness. We will be alive as never before. That in general is the nature of our intermediate life immediately after earthly life.

Identity and Relationship

I said that in the intermediate state, we lose our ability to interact with the material world. But we do not lose our identity. All of us will have a sense of who we are in our new arrangement.

Stop for a moment and think about who and what we are. Much has contributed to that. I think of the parents to whom we were born and the people, activities, and events that we experienced over the years. I also think of our responses and decisions in regard to those. That is our personal history and that history has molded and shaped us into the persons we have become.

All of us have seen television shows or movies themed around a person's amnesia. *The Bourne Identity* is an example of that. Something has happened that causes the person to forget everything that there is to know about him or her. He or she has lost all memory of their personal history. We know from the shows or movies what a frightening and depersonalizing experience that is.

That's exactly why it won't happen to us when we enter the intermediate state. We won't enter that life with amnesia. We will retain, I believe, our own personal history and the person we became as a result.

The moment I take my last breath and enter into my full life with God, I will know that I am Bobby Murphy, although hopefully I can change my name. I will know what I was on earth and the personal history, positive and negative, that contributed to what I was. I will remember, for instance, reading Dallas Willard's book The Divine Conspiracy and the turning point in my life that it turned out to be. I will remember a conversation I had one day with Elroy Stimpert about Brother Lawrence and the spiritual journey of practicing God's presence to which it led me. I will also remember the months in college in which I purposely became an agnostic in order to examine the faith that had been handed down to me.

The long and short of it is that we will retain our identities in the intermediate state. We will grasp who and what we are and why we are that just as we do now - with this difference. What we grasp about ourselves then will be much more accurate and complete than it is now. We will truly know ourselves for the first time.

Certainly, the Bible nowhere teaches that this is so. But we can infer it from the nature of God and human beings themselves. One of the ways that we are made in His image is our sense of identity. He has one that He grasps and so do we. We must have an identity in both phases of our eternal life and it must be the same identity that we have now. If our identity changes or if we fail to grasp the identity that we had in the earthly phase of our life, then we have become in our essence a different person. That will not happen.

What is true of our identity on earth is also true of our relationships with other persons on earth. They will remain intact, except that those relationships will not be mediated through the body and its physical environment.

Stop for a moment of the significant others in your lives right now. I'm talking about those whom you know the best and love the most – those who have contributed much to you and to whom you have contributed much. Your relationships with those people will remain intact in the intermediate state, except again that they will not be mediated through the body and its physical environment.

Since consciousness and activity do not depend on matter, neither do relationships. We talked about God and the angels existing in their spiritual state before matter was created. In that spiritual state, the angels had and have relationship with God and other angels. There is knowing, interacting, loving, and so on going on among them.

It will be the same with us. Think of all of the significant and saved others who have died before you. Who are they for you? For me, they are my precious mother, my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. The moment we die, we will begin to know, interact with, and love them again. We will remember our personal histories with them on earth and will then begin a new personal history with them in the intermediate state. We will build a life together in that state. They will be a vital part of our life and experience then and we will be part of theirs.

Please grasp the implication of that and I tell grieving people this when the time is right. When saved people that we love die, our relationship with them isn't ended. It's interrupted. Distinguishing between ended and interrupted isn't just semantics. The difference is real and huge. Ended signifies that our separation from them is permanent and that we will never relate to them again. Interrupted signifies that our separation from them is only temporary and that we will relate to them again – the moment we die.

Believing what I just said will dramatically alter the way that we experience the death of a saved loved one.

Paul makes that very point in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. He talks about *“those who are asleep.”* He’s referring specifically to dead Christians that his Christian readers loved. He declares in the opening line of the verse that he wants the Christians to whom he’s writing to be informed about what happens to Christians after they die. Doing that will encourage them and the end result will be that they *“will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.”*

Let’s analyze that last statement. When the loved ones of unsaved people die, do they grieve? Yes, they do. When the loved ones of saved people die, do they grieve? Yes, they do. Non-Christians and Christians both grieve when their loved ones die.

What is Paul’s point about that in the last line in verse 13? It’s that Christians should grieve differently than non-Christians do. I mean that really, actually, truly. In reality, our grief as Christians should be different than the grief of non-Christians.

But what is the difference? It’s that the grief of the Christian is mixed with joy. That assumes of course that the Christian actually knows and believes what I’ve said to this point about life after life. The non-Christian experiences only grief. The Christian experiences grief and at the same time true joy. That joy has two nuances.

One of those is the joy of reunion. I’ll explain the other later but for now, we have the joy of reunion.

I had the funeral years ago of a woman whose husband is a secularist. He believes that no one knows for sure what happens to us after we die but he suspects, by his own admission, that we just cease to exist. That’s what he believes and that belief affected the way he experienced his wife’s death. He grieved as one whose relationship with his beloved wife is ended, as one who is permanently separated from her.

I’m 57 years old now and I am thinking seriously about my death and the death of my wife Jill. One of us will likely die within the next 20 – 25 years, if not sooner, and leave the other behind on earth. Suppose that Jill dies. If I truly believe what I’ve taught you thus far in this class, I will grieve – but as one whose relationship with his wife is interrupted, as one who is only temporarily separated from her. I rejoice as well as grieve because my relationship with her will begin again, in 20 years or so, and be unspeakably better than it was on earth. I will once again know and interact with and love her far more fully than I do now.

Christian novelist Vladimir Nabokov wrote a letter to his mother to console her on the death of his father and her husband. I will relate an entire paragraph from that letter later on – when we study heaven. But for now, I want to quote just the last two lines in it. He has written that his mother and he would see his father again. He then declared: *“You must live in expectation of that tender hour, my love, and never give in to the temptation of despair. Everything will return.”*

That last line is absolutely powerful. Think about the relationships that you had with those Christian loved ones who have died. The very thing that Nabokov said was true about his father is true of those Christian loved ones. Everything will return not as it was but infinitely better than it was. I think of my wonderful mother. Everything will return. I think of my wonderful mother-in-law and father-in-law. Everything will return.

Try to grasp the bottom line of that. 100 years from now you and I will certainly be relating to all of the Christian loved ones of ours who have died before us. We will be conscious and active and so will they and we will love and communicate with each other in profound ways that we never dreamed possible. We will do so with our senses of identity and relationship intact. In my relationship with my wife 100 years from now, I will know that that she was my wife and I will remember the personal history that we had together as spouses. What is true of my wife is true of everyone including all of you. I will know and love you in the intermediate state knowing who you and I are and remembering our personal histories together.

Our Relationship with God

But as wonderful as our relationships with other Christians are, they are not the essence of our intermediate life. Our relationship with God is. Our relationship with Him is the lodestar of our eternal life in both phases – the intermediate state and heaven. That is the ultimate source of the unspeakable love, peace, and joy that we'll experience there.

There's something that we need to grasp. Our physical bodies on earth dramatically limit our ability to perceive and relate to God.

We will never of course experience God in His fullness because He is infinite and we are finite. That is inherent in what Paul teaches about God in 1 Corinthians 2:10-11. The Holy Spirit experiences The Father and Son in a way that we never can. Our problem is our finiteness. That finiteness is especially pronounced as we live and relate in our physical bodies on earth.

That's because those bodies have been greatly diminished since the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The bodily, psychological, and spiritual capacities of Adam and Eve before the Fall were far greater than our capacities are now. Ours, like theirs were after they sinned, are greatly diminished.

Because their capacities were greater than ours, so was their relationship with God. They were able to relate to Him at a much deeper level than we can. They were able to experience Him and His presence far more profoundly than we can. I would say this in fact. If God manifested Himself to us as He did to Adam and Eve, it would likely kill us.

Dwight L. Moody tells about an encounter of his that he had with God. He had been praying for months that God would come upon him and empower his ministry and He eventually did. He writes: *"Well, one day in the city of New York – Oh, what a day! I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for 14 years. I can only say, God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand."*

Notice two things. First, Moody's experience with God was the greatest earthly experience that he ever had. It was so spectacular that he couldn't describe it and seldom referred to it. Second, he couldn't experience too much of it or for too long. He had to ask God to stay His hand, meaning quit manifesting Himself to him as intensely as He was. Commenting on Moody's experience, D. Martin Lloyd Jones writes: *"It was so overwhelming, he felt as if he was going to be physically crushed."* Had Moody had the unfallen body and psyche of Adam and Eve, that likely would not have been the case.

We learn two things from that. First, experiencing God's presence is the single most fulfilling and satisfying experience on earth. Second, as satisfying as it is, our physical bodies limit the degree to which we can experience Him.

But when we die and our earthly bodies are cast off, we'll have a far greater capacity to experience God and His presence. We'll be able to have an even greater experience of Him than Moody or even Adam and Eve in their unfallen state had. We'll also be able to have it on a sustained basis, continually, without being crushed or killed. You understand now why I say that aging is simply the casting off of that which is holding us back, our body.

At this point, let me recap what we've learned about life in the intermediate state. #1 – we will have consciousness and activity without body and brain. #2 – we will live in the invisible spiritual realm called "the heavenly places." #3 – we will be alive as never before with powers of consciousness and activity that dwarf the powers that we have now. #4 – we will retain a sense of our identity and of our relationships with those Christians who have died. And #5 – we will have a dramatically enhanced capacity to experience God and His presence.

I'd sum it all up this way. The best possible life that can be lived on earth by the most functional and fortunate person possible pales in comparison with the life that followers of Jesus will have in the intermediate state.

We see then that what Paul says in Philippians 1:21 is literally true, *"To die is gain."* If we're followers of Jesus, we're literally far better off dead.

Transition and Arrival

Before leaving the intermediate state, I do want to discuss two topics that are urgent and relevant to us all. Those topics are transition and arrival.

Transition refers to dying. It's the time when we are approaching the end of our first phase of life, on earth, and the beginning of our second phase of life, in the heavenly places.

Most of us will have a dying experience. When I say dying, I'm talking about the final weeks, days, and hours of our last illness. If we die suddenly or are killed quickly, we will not be aware of the fact that we're dying. That is how some of us will pass from the first phase of life to the second – suddenly and unexpectedly. But the hard fact is that it won't be that way for most of us. Most of us will pass slowly and expectedly. We'll be aware that death is imminent – within months, weeks, days, and hours.

A few years ago, I visited someone who had moved from the hospital to the hospice center in Akron. As we talked, he commented how symbolic the place was. Since hospice centers are places of limited stay to die, it symbolized the nearness of his death, he said. He was right and died several days later.

That will be the experience of most of us here this morning. We will experience dying.

Most people fear that but we don't have to and won't if we think correctly about it. By thinking correctly about it, I mean that we must know and believe this. Dying is a time of passage. Hear that again. It is one of the most critical truths of our existence as followers of Jesus. Dying is a time of passage. It's nothing more than the beneficial passage from the first phase of our life to the second. It's a time of passage from the visible world to the invisible.

I want to say something about this time that each and every one of us needs to know. We won't go through it alone. Don't ever forget that. God is merciful to those of us who seek and love Him. He wouldn't dream of isolating us in our transition. He wouldn't dream of letting us go through it alone. And He doesn't.

What happens is this. God allows and enables the person in transition to experience both worlds – the visible world that he or she is leaving and the invisible world to which he or she is going.

I love the analogy that Dallas Willard uses to describe this. He compares it to a person who walks to a doorway between rooms. While interacting with the people in the room he's leaving, he begins to see and converse with the people in the room he's going to, whom the people in the first room can't see.

That's the way it is when we're dying. It's a time of passage when we experience the world that we're leaving and at the same time the world that we're going to.

Before the use of heavy sedation, it was common to hear dying Christians speak about seeing or hearing deceased loved ones, angels, or even Jesus. I think of Billy Graham's grandmother who rose up on her deathbed and said: ***"I see Jesus and He has His hand outstretched to me. And I see Ben and he has both of his legs and eyes."*** Ben was her husband who lost his leg and eye at the battle of Gettysburg. I also see Stephen in Acts 7 who said that he saw the heavens opened up and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Finally, I think of a dying Christian I knew who said, ***"Angels are filling the room."***

Notice that those whom those dying people saw were in physical form even though they are not now. Ben, Jesus, and angels are not in physical form. But in the time of passage, since we are still in our earthly bodies, those in the world to come are manifested to us in shape and form.

The experiences of the people I mentioned are normal experiences for followers of Jesus in transition. We can expect them.

Anyway, I believe that the experiences of the people that I just mentioned are normal experiences for disciples of Jesus in passage. We can expect them. So, take heart. When we're dying, we'll experience both the visible world that we're leaving and the invisible world that we're going to.

So that's what we need to know about our transition, our dying experience. Transition or dying is a time of passage from the visible world to the invisible, during which God will comfort us and prepare us for death by enabling us to experience both worlds.

After the transition comes what all informed disciples of Jesus eagerly anticipate – the arrival. I mean by that our arrival into our new life in the intermediate state as we've discussed it.

You might compare our arrival to a baby being born. The birth doesn't make the baby alive. He's alive already. The birth is just his or her arrival into a new and better life. It's the same way with us. Our so-called death is really a birth. We are birthed into God's full and eternal world.

The primary point that I want to make about arrival is that we are not cast into our new world and life in isolation. It's inconceivable that God would do that to us and in fact will not.

First, it's my opinion that angels themselves will accompany us from the visible world to the invisible. The Bible teaches that angels are ministering spirits. They exist to serve us and one of the ways they will do that is to accompany us through our transition to our arrival.

Remember the parable that Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus and which we discussed in some detail. Luke 16:22 says, ***"Now, the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom."*** Because this is a parable, in my view at least, we cannot recite this verse as a proof text for angels actually doing this at our death.

But I believe that they very well be the case. Remember the old spiritual that we sometimes sing: ***"I looked over Jordan and what did I see, comin' for to carry me home? A band of angels comin' after me, comin' for to carry me home."*** Since angels are ministering spirits and since we will be like them in the intermediate state, it is possible that they may accompany us through the last part of our transition and into our arrival.

So, we will arrive with angels into our new world and life and there will undoubtedly be a welcoming committee there to greet us.

Hebrews 12:1 teaches us that there is *“so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us.”* That cloud of witnesses refers to all those disciples of Jesus who have died before us. Some of those, the ones who loved and knew us on earth, are watching for us.

Going back to our discussion of identity and relationships, I believe that my mother, father-in-law, and mother-in-law who arrived years ago remember my wife and me and are mindful of the fact that I am not yet there with them but eventually will be. I also believe that they are anticipating and watching for my arrival and will be there to meet me when it comes.

When I arrive, they, along with Jesus, will greet and enfold me. I will suddenly find myself in a strange new world but I won't be fearful at all. I will be at peace and joyful instead because I'm not in it alone. Jesus and they will be with me in those first minutes and hours as I move from one astonishing experience to another. They will be with me as I become acclimated to my new world and life.

Conclusion

I'm now finished with our study of the second phase of our one life – the intermediate state between the death of our bodies to the Second Coming of Jesus and our resurrection.

I close our discussion of it out with this challenge. Based on the information I've given you in our study to this point, develop a way of thinking about transition, arrival, and life in the intermediate state. Prayerfully and carefully build a paradigm or worldview of those coming realities in our lives.

Here's why I challenge you to do that. It is a basic fact of our existence that the unknown and the unimaginable are naturally frightening to us. And that's exactly what transition, arrival, and life in the intermediate state are to 99.9% of disciples of Jesus today. They are unknown and unimaginable and thus frightening. Disciples of Jesus fear or dread dying because they don't have a way of thinking about those things. And the reason that they don't have a way of thinking about those things is because they've never had the privilege of learning them.

But you and I have. There are very few people on planet earth who know what we've learned the last two months. We need to take what we now know and use it to develop a way of thinking about transition, arrival, and life in the intermediate state. Dying will be something that we eagerly anticipate, not fear or dread, if we do.

The Second Coming of Jesus

As the word "intermediate" itself indicates, the intermediate state is temporary. It ends when an historical event occurs. That historical event is the Second Coming of Jesus.

The Second Coming of Jesus is one of the non-negotiable fundamentals of the faith. It is so because the New Testament so clearly teaches it.

I'm not going to discuss it in any great detail. I'll just discuss what we need to know to make sense of the third phase of our one life – heaven.

Let's start with the nature of His coming. We see what that is in Acts 1:9-11. This passage records the last event in the earthly life of Jesus. After arising from the dead, He spent 40 days on earth instructing His disciples. According to verse 9, He then left earthly not secretly but visibly to the disciples. Notice how He did that. He literally ascended into the sky and clouds until he was out of their sight. My grandson Malachi had a helium filled balloon at the Canfield Fair that got away from him of course. So he and I stood there and watched it ascend higher and higher into the sky until it was out of sight. That's the way that Jesus left earth in verse 9.

But notice what happened as He was ascending, in verses 10-11. Two angels suddenly stood by them as they were watching Jesus ascend and said, *"This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."* 2 Peter 3:4 calls what the angels were referring to *"the promise of His coming."* We call it the Second Coming.

What the angels told the disciples in verses 10-11 reveal the nature of that coming. It is a literal physical return.

Many churched people, including ministers, don't believe that. I met a mainline minister, for instance, who believes that Jesus coming again is fulfilled in the ministry of the church. He told me that the church is doing the work on earth that Jesus would do if He were here. That is the coming again that the angels were referring to. Another minister I know teaches that when the angels said He was coming again, they weren't talking about a physical return. They were talking about a spiritual return in which He would be in and among us, nurturing and directing our lives. It's what we call having a familiar friendship with Jesus.

Both of those ministers are clearly wrong. The Second Coming isn't a figurative or spiritual return. It's a literal physical return. I don't know about you but I take the angels at their word in verse 11. Jesus will come again in just the same way as He went.

Going back to the helium balloon simile, the Second Coming of Jesus will be just like that but in reverse. He in His resurrection body will visibly descend from the sky just as He visibly ascended to it. He will descend with a shout, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and an archangel will speak and a trumpet will sound as He does.

Make no mistake about it. The Second Coming is going to be the noisiest, most explosive, and most dramatic moment in all of human history. It will be a literal physical return.

That is the nature of it. Now let's examine the time of it. When is Jesus coming again?

Some say "never." We see that in 2 Peter 3:3-4. These verses show that there were people in the 1st century who were already skeptical about He coming again. The angels said He would but several decades passed and He hadn't. So, He wouldn't. If there were skeptics then, after 20 years, there will certainly be skeptics now after 2000 years. You know what they say. Yes, Jesus and the apostles said that He was coming again. But that was 2000 years ago. Wake up and smell the roses. It's obvious that He isn't.

Albert Schweitzer was one of those skeptics. In his celebrated book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, he acknowledged that Jesus really did believe that He was coming again. And that He really did urge His disciples to expect it. But He was obviously deluded, Schweitzer wrote. He thought He was coming again but isn't.

But just because 2000 years have passed doesn't mean that He isn't coming again. Peter explains why in verses 8-9 of chapter 3.

First, 1000 years is like a day and a day is like 1000 years to God. He transcends time in other words. And because He does, the length of time between the promise made and the promise fulfilled is irrelevant to Him.

Second, God is merciful. He wants non-Christians to have as much time as they can to repent and be saved. Stop and think about your unsaved loved ones and friends if you have any. With those people in mind, suppose that Father God allowed you to decide when Jesus is coming again. Would you decide "now" resulting in those people being eternally lost? Probably not! I suspect that the same kind of dynamic is making Jesus tarry.

So don't let the passing of the years fool you, Peter says. Delay isn't denial. We can stake our life on it. Jesus is coming again!

But when is He? That's the question.

That reminds me of a joke I heard. One of the angels comes to Jesus and asks Him when He's going to return to earth. *"I don't know,"* He replies, *"You'll have to ask one of those American preachers."*

There's a great deal of truth to the second part of that joke. Based on current events, many American preachers believe and teach that Jesus is coming again in our generation. John Hagee, Hal Lindsay, and Harold Camping are examples of those who do. But it isn't just preachers. I've had many Christians say this to me. Jesus must be coming soon. After all, things in the world are worse than they've ever been.

I'd say three things to those preachers and Christians. First, every generation thinks its current events are more important than any other generation's are. Second, things in the world aren't worse than they've ever been. And third, historical conditions are volatile and subject to change.

My point is this. As well intentioned as Christians are, date or even generation setting isn't something that we should do. Let's focus on what we do know, He's coming again, and leave the date setting to the Father.

Now that we know the nature and time of the Second Coming, let's examine the importance of it.

That importance is this. When Jesus comes again, it's all over. When I say "it", I'm talking about human history.

Human history has a perspective point, the Second Coming of Jesus. The moment the angels said that He would come again, all of human history began flowing to that event. All of the events of history are working together to bring about the ultimate and final event, the Second Coming.

Which is the point. It is the ultimate and final event. We see that in verses 10-12 or 2 Peter 3. Peter makes it perfectly clear that Jesus' coming closes out human history forever. I'm not historically astute but there's one thing that I know for sure – what the last event of human history is going to be, Jesus descending from the sky.

C.S. Lewis explained it well. He compared history to a play, our lives to a scene in the play, and God to the author who wrote it. Referring to the Second Coming, he writes: "***When the author walks on to the stage, the play is over.***" I just love that analogy. When Jesus comes again, the play is over.

But the Second Coming isn't just a final event – of earthly life. It's an initial event as well – of eternal life in heaven, which leads us to our study of that very topic, eternal life in heaven.

Judgment

This life begins with the resurrection of our body. After we finishing studying judgment, I'm going to discuss our resurrection body in detail. But for now, just know that at the Second Coming of Jesus God, through the Holy Spirit, is going to give Christians and non-Christians alike resurrection bodies. Daniel reveals this resurrection in 12:1-2 of his book in the Old Testament. Most commentators interpret the language of verse 2 to refer to universal resurrection of the body. Jesus confirms this universal resurrection in John 5:25-29. Notice what Jesus says. All who are in the tombs, everyone who has died, will come forth, believers to a resurrection of life and unbelievers to a resurrection of judgment. It's clear from these passages and others that eternal life begins with the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming of Jesus.

The next event, after the battle of Armageddon, is what the Bible calls "the judgment." Just as resurrection is universal, so is judgment. God will judge both the saved and the unsaved. Since our study is limited to the eternal life of the saved, I'm going to focus on their judgment.

If there's one thing that we can be sure of as followers of Jesus, it's that the triune God will judge us.

Certainly, He does so the moment that we die. At that point, we face what some writers call "***the judgment of faith.***" In this judgment, which is non-public, God determines whether or not we are people of faith who will be with Him in the intermediate life that we've discussed in detail. In that sense, all of us will know the moment we die what our eternal destiny, generally, is going to be.

But there is another judgment that occurs just after the Second Coming of Jesus. Some writers call this "***the judgment of works.***" In this judgment, God will judge both the saved and the unsaved according to their works.

C.C. Lewis explained this judgment generally as well as I've ever heard it explained. Remember that he compared history to a play and our lives to a scene in it. And that when Jesus comes again, ***"the play is over."*** He then completed his thought with these words. When the play is over, ***"The author will have something to say to each of us on the part that each of us has played."*** That is a truly instructive way of saying it. Judgment is God having something to say to us about our part in human history.

Now, orthodox Christians hold one of two basic views when it comes to judgment. Those views are based on different interpretations of Revelation 20:1-15. Let's read verses 11-15 for our purposes today.

Those who believe in a 1000 years of life on earth after Jesus comes again and before heaven, believe in two judgments. First, God resurrects Christians at the Second Coming and judges them just before the millennium begins. Second, He resurrects non-Christians after the millennium ends and judges them. The "great white throne" in verse 11 refers to this second judgment, they say.

But other Christians including me hold a different view. I don't believe that there will be a literal 1000 years of life on earth before our lives in heaven being. Thus, I believe that the great white throne judgment in 20:11-15 is the judgment of both Christians and non-Christians alike at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Revelation 20:11-5 and other passages, like Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 14:10; and 2 Corinthians 5:10, give us significant details about that judgment.

They teach us that God will judge us personally. It won't be a group judgment but an individual one. We will all stand individually before God who will fix His attention specifically on us. C.S. Lewis again explains this well. He writes: ***"In the end, the face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us . . . either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame never cured."*** God will give us His "undivided attention" as we say it when He judges us.

The relevant passages also teach us that God will judge us publicly. Every person who has ever lived will witness God's personal judgment of us. What He will judge is the deeds we did in our one life, good and bad. He will publicly reveal everything that we've thought, felt, said or done.

Many Christians contend that is not so. They base their contention on passages like Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:34, which declare that when we repent, God will "remember" our sins no more.

To interpret those verses literally is to clearly misinterpret them. If God doesn't remember our sins, then He is no longer omniscient or all knowing, which contradicts the Bible passages that teach that He is. It also makes Him less than God since He is no longer perfect and infinite.

Besides that inferential reasoning, we know from careful study of the Old Testament what it means when it uses the word "remember" in relation to God. In relation to God, it does not refer to a state of consciousness. It refers to a prelude to action instead.

Thus, when Isaiah and Jeremiah declare that God will remember our sins no more, they don't mean that He will no longer be conscious of them. It just means that He won't act against them instead. He will not punish us for them.

But He will bring them up on the Day of Judgment. He won't punish us for them but He will make them known. That passages I referred to earlier, Ecclesiastes 12:14, Romans 2:16, and 2 Corinthians 5:10, make that clear beyond doubt.

Making all of our deeds known achieves two purposes.

First, it glorifies God. Our judgment is not primarily about us. It's primarily about Him. It's the instrument by which God will be glorified in the eye of every person who has ever lived. When our deeds as Christians are made known, it will be obvious to all that we deserve eternal destruction. But we get eternal life instead through the finished work of Jesus. That will reveal God's mercy, grace, and love like nothing in all of human history ever has.

Second, it reveals our character. Jesus and the Bible teach that what we are determines what we do, good and bad. Thus, revealing what we did reveals what we were and became.

And that is the crucial point for our study of life after life. I say that because our character when we die determines what our heavenly experience and life will be.

Think of your own birth or perhaps the birth of your children. When we see a baby who has only recently come into the world, we need to ask and answer what is an instructive question. What is God's intended destiny for him or her? I mean by that his or her "ultimate" destiny. What did God make that baby to ultimately do?

The Bible answers that question for us in a number of passages. Let's examine two of those.

The first is 2 Timothy 2:10-13. This is a fascinating passage. In verse 10, Paul talks about obtaining salvation. Notice what part of that salvation entails. We will get "eternal glory." Having said that, Paul goes on to quote a 1st century Christian hymn. Someone in the first century wrote this hymn and it was used in public worship. The fact that Paul quotes it here shows that it's inspired. Notice what our ultimate destiny is if we remain faithful. According to verse 12, it's to reign with Jesus.

The second passage is Revelation 22:1-5. This is the last chapter in the Bible. The Bible closes by giving us a glimpse of what the future of friends and Jesus is primarily about. According to the last words in verse 5, it's about reigning forever and ever.

That then is what God intends for every person who is ever born. His divine plan and ultimate objective for each one is that he or she will reign with Jesus in heaven forever and ever.

What we have to figure out of course is what it means to reign. Let me ask you that question in fact. What does it mean that we will reign in heaven?

Reigning has two aspects: power and authority. Power means that people have the ability to decide and act. Authority means that they have the freedom to decide and act. So, to reign in heaven with Jesus means that He gives us the power and authority to decide and act there.

Now, everyone in heaven will have power and authority but they will not have it equally. Some will have more or less than others. Some will have greater or lesser abilities and freedom to decide and act than others will.

The issue is the basis upon which God decides how much power and authority to give His people in heaven. What will determine how much ability and freedom to act that He gives them?

The answer is found by way of analogy in a legal concept called power of attorney. Power of attorney is a principal-agent relationship. The principal gives the agent the same power and authority over his assets that he, the principal, has. The agent can decide and act with regard to those assets just as the principal can.

When I practiced law, people often asked me if they should give so and so power of attorney over their bank accounts, for instance. Let me ask you a question about that. What one factor more than any other would determine the answer to that question. That answer is the character of the potential agent.

That's what I told my clients and then encouraged them to ask and answer questions like these about the potential agent. How well do you know the person and his character? If you know him or her well, how honest is he or she? How loyal is he? How responsible is he? How much does he love or care about you? I encouraged my clients to ask and answer questions like that before giving someone a power of attorney. The answers would then determine if they should give legal powers to someone and if so, what powers to give. The general guiding principle is this. You give someone only those legal powers that you know you can trust him or her with.

Well, that's exactly what God does with us. He asks and answers those questions about our character – at judgment. He rehearses our deeds to officially determine our character. That character then determines the power and authority He gives us to reign in heaven. He gives us only the power and authority that He can trust us with.

That partially explains why Christian spiritual formation is the primary emphasis of our church. I'm passionate about it and one of the reasons I am is this. How much like Him that we become determines our eternal destiny. The more like Him we become, the more power and authority God will give us to reign with Him in heaven. The less like Him we become, the less God will give us.

I close our discussion of judgment with this thought. A God-given and mind-boggling eternal destiny awaits us on judgment day. The best way to glorify God is to fulfill that destiny. We do that by making and carrying out the wholehearted decision to be a disciple of Jesus who becomes like Him.

Heaven

We come now to that part of our study that most of you have been waiting for. I'm talking about the third and final phase of our one life – our life in heaven.

My primary resource for this of this part of our study, apart from the Bible, is Randy Alcorn's book titled *Heaven*. I do disagree with Alcorn on some significant issues but his book is the most comprehensive that I myself have ever read and I recommend it to you. It's a big book, over 500 pages, and it will take some expenditure of time and effort it takes to read it. But it's worth it.

The vast majority of Christians have two basic problems with regard to what they believe about heaven. First, they know very little of what they can know about it. And second, much of what they do know is wrong.

George Barna conducted a poll to find out what people believe about life after death. It found that *“an overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist.”* But it also found that what people actually believe about heaven and hell varies widely. One of Barna’s pollsters explained it this way: *“They’re cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources – television, movies, conversations with their friends.”* The end result of that is this. People possess a highly subjective patchwork theology of heaven and hell that has little Biblical basis.

Our goal now is to develop a theology of heaven that can guide our life on earth. Such a theology, by necessity, must be accurate and comprehensive. Accurate means that we must correctly understand what the Bible reveals about it. Comprehensive means that we must correctly understand what the Bible reveals about it *in totality*.

I’ve explained our strategy for doing that before. We will study and learn what the Bible teaches about it explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly refers to the facts that it gives. Implicitly refers to the implications that we can reasonably draw from those facts.

I would ask one thing of you in our discussion of heaven. Be objective about what you hear. Don’t be so biased that you reject something that is taught outright, without giving it any further or careful thought. Be open minded enough to at least consider new ways of thinking about things.

We are going to address a whole host of issues regarding heaven. You yourself have undoubtedly considered and developed opinions about some of those. But the majority of them have not even crossed your mind. So get set for a new and exciting journey into the world of heaven.

Issue #1 - Will we have a body?

The first issue is this. Will we have a body and if so, what will it generally be like?

The Bible answers the first part of the question. It teaches, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that we will have a body. Consider these passages as a sampling of what I mean: Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14; Philippians 3:10-11; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and finally, the Bible’s classic statement on the subject, 1 Corinthians 15:20-58. These verses make it crystal clear that we will have resurrection bodies in heaven and we need to learn as much as we can about them.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 reveals when we will get these bodies. It will be at the Second Coming of Jesus. When He descends to earth as we discussed it, all dead and living Christians will instantaneously and simultaneously be given resurrection bodies. The dead will rise first in those bodies to meet Jesus in the air followed by the living.

Romans 8:11 reveals who will create these resurrection bodies. It's the Holy Spirit. This verse teaches that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus' body from the dead and will do the same for us.

It also makes clear that He will do to our bodies what He did to the body of Jesus. The question of course is "What did He do to it?"

John Updike tells us in a statement he wrote about the resurrection of Jesus. ***"Make no mistake: if he rose at all it was as His body; if the cells' dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit; the amino acids rekindle, the church will fail."*** That is in reality what the Holy Spirit did to the body of Jesus. He reversed the dissolution of the cells that begins at death, reknit the molecules, and rekindled the amino acids.

What He did to the body of Jesus, He will do to ours? That raises a question though. What is the difference between the body of Jesus and ours at the Second Coming? The body of Jesus was still in tact. Our will not be. All that will visibly remain of us, whether we're cremated or not, will be the bones.

But remember one of the laws of the universe. Matter, meaning atoms, can be neither created nor destroyed. The atoms that make up our earthly bodies continue to exist even after our bodies have completely decayed. I believe that at the Second Coming, the Holy Spirit will actually use those atoms to create our resurrection bodies.

I believe that the fact that they're "resurrection bodies" implies that. The Holy Spirit could do it another way. He could simply create our bodies by bringing new atoms into existence instead of using the ones already in existence. But "resurrection" implies that He won't. He will use the ones already in existence instead to form our heavenly bodies.

Many people think that cremation impacts the Holy Spirit doing that but it doesn't. Cremation doesn't destroy the atoms that make up our bodies. They still exist after the bodies are burned. The Holy Spirit will use those atoms, wherever they are at the time, to create our heavenly bodies.

Do you realize what that means? There is a continuity between our earthly body now and our resurrection body forever. Paul implies that in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

Being born again is a good analogy of this. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, we become a new person, meaning a better person, when we're born again. But we're still the same person. The resurrection body is like that. It is a new body, meaning a better one, but it's still the same body.

Think about the resurrection body of Jesus. Was it the same body that hung on the cross or an entirely different one? It was the same body transformed. How do we know that? The nail prints in his hands and feet indicate that to be true.

In the same way, our resurrection bodies will be new in the sense of better but the same in the sense that they're the bodies that we're walking around in right now.

Church doctrine through the centuries affirms this. The *Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)* states this: ***"The self-same bodies of the dead which were laid in the grave, being then again united to their souls forever, shall be raised by the power of Christ."*** One of the most celebrated creeds of the church, the *Westminster Confession*, concurs. It states that ***"All the dead shall be raised up, with the self-same bodies, and none other."*** Notice the common language there, ***"self-same bodies."***

Most of you know who Joni Eareckson Tada is. Joni was paralyzed from the neck down decades ago but became a vibrant witness for Jesus. Listen to what she writes about that: ***"Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs, against splendorous resurrected legs. I'm convinced that if there are mirrors in heaven (and why not?), the image I'll see will be unmistakably 'Joni,' although a much better, brighter Joni."***

I agree with that. When we look at ourselves in the mirror in heaven we will know that it's us. The blueprint for our resurrection body is in our current body, even if it's aging and declining.

That has a vital practical implication to our earthly life now and Paul reveals what that is in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Our bodies are sacred shines of God, His dwelling place now and forever in heaven. We should therefore make them a showcase of God's greatness by caring for them and using them for purposes of godliness.

We have now addressed the first issue. Will we have a body and if so, what will it generally be like? Yes, we will have a body there will be a continuity between it and the body we have now. That means that we will have a head with two eyes, two ears, a nose, and a mouth. We will have two arms and hands and a torso and two legs and feet. In that sense, the people that we see in heaven will look like the people that we see on earth.

#2 - What will resurrection bodies be generally like?

But while there is great continuity between our earthly bodies and resurrection bodies, there is also great discontinuity between them. I mean by that our resurrection bodies will be different and far better in many ways than our earthly bodies are.

Paul gives us a glimpse of the difference in 1 Corinthians 15:35-50 in general and in verses 42-44 in particular. Let's examine verses 42-44 and the four differences that it identifies.

Verse 42. Our earthly body is perishable and our heavenly one is imperishable. Perishable means liable to destruction and decay. The health and strength of our bodily tissue on earth diminishes over time as we age. Or trauma can destroy it almost instantaneously. Imperishable means impervious to destruction and decay. The health and strength of our bodily tissue in heaven never diminishes over time. We will not age in other words. Trauma also cannot destroy that tissue. Thus, I'll get a bruise if I bump my head now. But my resurrection body won't bruise or be cut or break.

Remember what God did to the clothing of the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. According to Deuteronomy 8:4 and 29:5, their clothing and sandals didn't wear out during that time. There's isn't a clothing manufacturer today that can compete with that. What did God do? He enhanced the molecular structure of the clothing and sandals and made it imperishable. He'll do the same to the molecular structure of our resurrection bodies including the amino acids and proteins that make us living beings. Those molecular structures won't break down over time or be capable of being damaged or destroyed.

Verse 43. Our earthly body is dishonorable and our heavenly one is glorious. Dishonorable means that it is dysfunctional in many ways. It sometimes works or performs in ways that it shouldn't. Glorious means that it is perfectly functional. It always works or performs in ways that it should.

Take our taste buds for instance. Name a food the taste of which you just can't stand. It's so abhorrent to you that you'd have to literally be starving to death to eat it. For me, it's rye bread. I literally can't stand the taste. If my taste buds were perfectly functional though, working as they were meant to, I'd love rye bread. I'd love everything edible that God has given us to eat. That will be the case in heaven. Our taste buds and every other aspect of our bodily life will function flawlessly.

Verse 43. Our earthly body is weak and our heavenly body is powerful. Weak means that our body is limited in its capabilities. Powerful means that it is dramatically enhanced in its capabilities.

An imperfect but helpful analogy is comparing a newborn baby to an Olympic athlete. The baby and the athlete have the same body part but the Athlete's are much more highly developed than the baby's. In the analogy, our earthly body is the baby's body and our heavenly one is the athlete's. Our heavenly body will have far greater capabilities than our earthly body does. In fact, the powers or abilities of our earthly body will be further above those of our earthly bodies than the athletes are above the baby's.

Verse 44. Our earthly body is natural and our heavenly body is spiritual. Natural means that it is suited to an earthly life. Spiritual means that it is suited to a heavenly life.

That raises a question that someone asked last week. Will our resurrection body be like the body of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The answer is "no." Their body was natural not spiritual. It was suited to an earthly life and world, in their case, unfallen ones in Eden.

Verses 47-49 address this issue. Paul's point here is simple and clear. In this life, we are in the image of Adam. That means that our body is like the body of Adam was in Eden. But in our life in heaven we are in the image of Jesus. That means that our body will be like the resurrection body of Jesus not the unfallen body of Adam.

That our resurrection body will be like the resurrection body of Jesus is an unmistakable teaching of Scripture. Consider the following passages in the that regard: Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:21; and 1 John 3:2. These passages aren't subject to very much debate. They clearly reveal that our heavenly body will be just like the resurrection body of Jesus – absent the scars.

Romans 8:29 – Father God decrees what the destiny of His followers will be. It will be to become conformed to the image of Jesus. The word “firstborn” refers to His resurrection. He was resurrected first and many others will be as well after Him. Their resurrection bodies will be in the image of His – just like His in other words.

Philippians 3:20-21 - The body of our humble estate means our earthly body, which is quite humble if you think about it. Those of us in our 50's, who can't see things close up anymore, know that. The body of His glory refers to the resurrection body of Jesus, which was quite glorious as we'll see. Jesus has the power and authority to subject all things to Himself at the Second Coming and one of the ways that He will do so is to transform our earthly bodies so that they become just like His resurrection body. His resurrection body, in other words, is the prototype of ours.

1 John 3:2 – When Jesus appears, meaning at the Second Coming, we will be like Him. The words “we will see Him just as He is” indicates reference to His resurrection body. Just as the disciples saw it, so will we. And when we see it, it will be from our own resurrection bodies that are just like His, the one we are seeing. In that sense, it is “like” seeing “like.”

To this point, we've addressed two issues. First, will we have a body in heaven? Yes, we will and there will be some continuity with the earthly one we have now. We will have one head, two eyes, two ears, and so on. Second, what will our resurrection bodies be generally like? They'll be like the resurrection body of Jesus itself.

We are now ready to address more particular issues about our resurrection bodies.

Issue #3 – What will our resurrection bodies look like?

The first particular issue that we'll discuss is this. What will our resurrection bodies look like?

Let me ask you a question that gets us to the heart of this matter. Who is the nicest looking or most attractive person that you've ever seen? Some years ago, it was said that Mel Gibson had an almost perfectly proportioned and symmetrical face. That same year he was also voted one of the most beautiful people in the world.

In contrast to the beautiful people, we have the average looking people like most of us. I read in one of Dr. Paul Brand's books that from a purely cosmetic point of view, 64% of us could use plastic surgery of one kind or another.

Then there are unattractive and even deformed people. I saw a young man several months ago walking around the Hartville Flea Market. He must have had some kind of genetic defect because his face was horribly disproportioned and his body twisted. He was able to walk but only clumsily so.

Thinking of those people – the beautiful, the average, and the deformed, what will their resurrection bodies look like?

I would first of all answer by saying this. Their bodies will be far more attractive than the nicest looking person on earth today. Mel Gibson, in his prime, or Annette Benning in hers, weren't as attractive as you and I will be in our resurrection bodies.

The most beautiful person that we've ever seen is fallen and under the curse of sin and thus not as good looking as God intended them and us to be. Alcorn says it this way: ***"If we saw Adam and Eve as they were in Eden, they would likely take our breath away. If they would have seen us as we are now, they likely would have been filled with shock and pity."*** Whether or not that is so, we can be assured that Adam was better looking than Mel Gibson and Eve better looking than Annette Benning and that we will be better looking than Adam and Eve in our resurrection bodies.

Let me quickly add here that many Christians think this discussion of appearance is an ungodly concern. But it isn't. St. Augustine didn't think it was at least. He addressed this very concern in his classic work *The City of God*. He wrote: ***"(The body) shall be of that size which it either had attained or should have attained in the flower of its youth, and shall enjoy the beauty that arises from preserving symmetry and proportion in all its members . . . overgrown and emaciated persons need not fear that they shall be in heaven of such a figure as they would not be even in this world if they could help it."***

As always with all the details of heaven we discuss, remember that they're primarily about God not us. That is the case with our appearance. We're concerned about our appearance not for our sake but for God's. We want the appearance that will glorify Him for eternity and that's exactly what we will have.

Physical beauty really is not a subjective thing. There are objective standards of symmetry and proportion that make someone look attractive or unattractive. With that in mind, our resurrection bodies will be attractive. They will be perfectly symmetrical and proportioned from head to foot. They will be pleasing to the sight of God, others, and us. There will not be even one average looking or unattractive person in heaven.

C.S. Lewis said something in his celebrated speech title *The Weight of Glory* that contributes to our understanding of this. He challenged us to remember that ***“the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.”*** Suppose that Joe was suddenly transformed before us into his resurrection body. Lewis says that his appearance would be so striking that we would be tempted to bow down and worship him.

That doesn't mean of course that we'll all look alike because we won't. Bobbie Cather and I discussed God's ability to make 6 billion human beings who look different. The differences are purposeful. They are an expression of God's creativity. It pleases Him that people look different and the differences reflect His glory.

And so they will in heaven. God will take the physical and facial features that characterize us now and perfect them. Thus we'll look different, much better, but still retain a semblance of our earthly appearance.

That seems to be reflected in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to His disciples. You can study the passages for yourself: Matthew 28:8-10; Luke 24:13-53; and John 20-21. Reading between the lines, it seems that the disciples recognized Him eventually but not initially. He looked different enough that they didn't recognize Him initially. But He look same enough that they did recognize Him eventually.

That's implicit in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. Let me ask you. Did anyone witness the resurrection of Jesus? No, no one did. No one actually saw His dead bodily come to life. But the people in verses 3-8 witnessed two things. The first was Jesus' body dead. The second was Jesus' body alive. They then logically concluded that He had risen. But the point for our purposes is that Jesus' resurrection body had to be somewhat recognizable for them to know it was Him.

So, we will different than we do now but retain a semblance of our earthly appearance. We will look enough like ourselves that others will recognize who we are. Thus, I will recognize my wife Jill as being my earthly wife in a resurrection body.

That implies that all of us will look different in heaven just as we look different now.

I think, for example, that we will have different heights and weights. Jack is taller than I am now and will probably be in heaven as well.

We will also likely have different skin colors. Races like looks are expressions of God's creativity and please and glorify Him. So they will like continue in heaven. If we're Caucasians on earth, we'll also be in heaven and the same goes for blacks, Asians, and so on. Racial identities will continue.

The bottom line is there will be a genetic carryover from the earthly body to the heavenly one. Alcorn states that to be true and I agree.

That explains the morphing of babies or even fetuses that have died. Despite their premature death, they still had a genetic code. That code will be the basis of the resurrection body that the Holy Spirit gives them. Thus they will look in heaven like would have looked like as adults but perfected.

#4 – Will our resurrection bodies have gender

Our discussion of appearance has implications to a fourth issue. Will our resurrection bodies have gender? Will we be the gender we are now or will there be no gender distinctions separating us?

Some believe that it's the latter. In his book *Where on Earth is Heaven?* Arthur Travis writes, "***There will be no male and female human beings. We shall all be children of God and sex will be no part of our nature.***" Travis goes on to contend, "***Men will not longer be men nor will women be women.***" In his book *Heaven Opened*, James Campbell agrees. He writes, "***They have reached that androgynous condition in which sex distinctions are transcended, or rather, in which the qualities of both sexes are blended together.***"

I vehemently disagree. Our gender is not merely a component of who we are. It is a part of the essence of who we are. Since we maintain our identities in heaven and since there is continuity between our earthly and resurrection bodies, I believe it's safe to conclude that we'll be of the same gender in heaven that we are now. If I'm male on earth, I'll be male in heaven. If I'm female on earth, I'll be female in heaven.

#5 – What will our age be?

Another issue relating to our resurrection bodies is age. What will our age be in heaven? I have a friend whose three year-old daughter died. Will she be three years old in heaven? My wife's grandmother died when she was 99 years old. Will she be 99 years old in heaven? Or will we all be the same age?

It may surprise you to learn that Christians have written much about this issue throughout the centuries, especially during the Middle Ages. By the 13th century, there was an emerging consensus. Most theologians believed that we reach our peak at 30 and thus concluded that everyone will be that age in heaven.

The renowned medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas contended that we will all be the age of Jesus, about 33. Listen to what he wrote about that: *"Human nature is deficient in a twofold manner: in one way because it has not yet attained its ultimate perfection, and in a second way, because it has already receded from its ultimate perfection. Human nature is deficient in the first way in children, and in the second way in the aged. And therefore in each of these, human nature will be brought back by the resurrection state of its ultimate perfection, which is in the state of youth, toward which the movement of growth is terminated, and from which the movement of degeneration begins."* Aquinas believed growth terminates and degeneration begins at 33. So, that is the age we'll be in heaven.

Author Hank Hanegraaff agrees. He teaches that our DNA is programmed so that we reach optimal development from a functional perspective. This optimal development seems to be reached in our 20's or 30's, depending upon the person. Since the blueprints for our resurrected bodies are probably in our DNA, then it makes sense that our bodies will be resurrected at the optimal stage of development determined by our DNA.

That is my view. Suppose that my DNA determined that I reached my optimal development at 25, Joe at 28, and Marni at 30. Then our resurrection bodies will look like those respective ages in heaven. I'll look 25, Joe 28, and Marni 30.

Some, like C.S. Lewis, believe that we'll appear ageless. In *The Great Divorce*, he says of heaven's inhabitants, *"No one in that company struck me as being of any particular age. One gets glimpses, even in our country, of that which is ageless – heavy thought in the face of an infant, and frolic childhood in that of a very old man."*

Alcorn has the most novel belief of all. He writes: *"I suggest the possibility that in Heaven we'll see people as most remember them on earth. So I'll see my parents as older, and they'll see me as younger . . . I don't mean that the physical forms will actually change but that the resurrection body will convey the real person we have known, and we will see each other through different eyes."*

The view that Lewis and Alcorn put forward don't seem plausible to me. It makes sense and seems logical to believe that we'll look in appearance as if we're at the age of our optimal development.

But realize that age is only about appearance because our resurrection bodies will be optimally developed and perfect from the very beginning and never change in that regard. They won't age in other words. So, in a sense, there is no age in heaven. Our bodies will look the same at the end of the millionth year in heaven as they did in the first.

I can think of at least one practical implication of this. I once heard a grieved mother remark about her dead three year-old, *"I'll never see her grown up."* But the truth is that she will. She'll see her grown up in heaven.

#6 – Will Our Bodies Be Perfect

We come now to a sixth issue that the Bible does explicitly address. Will our resurrection bodies be perfect?

Revelation 21:4 two insights that have definite implications to the nature of our resurrections bodies. It says that there will be no death or pain in heaven. Our resurrection bodies will never die and will never feel pain. We can infer certain things from that. They will not be subject to disease, malfunction, or injury of any kind.

I talked with a mother several months ago whose adult daughter died as a result of the damaged cause by diabetes. Her daughter was diagnosed with it when she was three years old. Obviously, her pancreas and the system that it runs malfunctioned. But that kind of thing will never happen in heaven.

1 Corinthians 15:43, which we discussed briefly, teaches us why it won't. The word "glorious" refers to being wholly functional. Our resurrection bodies will be just that – wholly functional. There will not be even the slightest dysfunction of any kind in them. They will perform flawlessly and efficiently and I mean wholly so.

If you read any introductory chemistry book, it will begin by telling you that all of our extrinsic experiences have to do with atoms and molecules. When we wash our hands and get the dirt off, that is all about chemistry. When we rub our eyes when they itch and get relief, that is all about chemistry, and so on. Our bodily life in the material world is all about the structures and properties of atoms and molecules.

Our resurrection bodies will be made up of molecules just like our current bodies are. But those molecules will be different, far better in their composition and structure than they are now. Their properties and structures will be dramatically enhanced. In fact, they will not be capable of being broken down and will function flawlessly. The result is that our bodies will be perfect.

About 90% of our body is composed of water molecules, which is two hydrogen atoms bound together with an oxygen atom. Our resurrection bodies will also be made up of water molecules but the molecules and atoms that make them up will be different, better, in composition and structure. Their composition and structure will not decay and they will function flawlessly.

That our bodies are perfect will mean that our brain is as well, since it is a body part. Our brains and thus our minds will function flawlessly.

Joni Earekson Tada tells about speaking to a class of mentally handicapped Christians. They were inspired when she said she was going to get a new body. But then she declared, ***“And you’re going to get new minds.”*** To which they replied with cheers and applause. They know what they want, new minds, and were thrilled to hear that they are going to get just that.

That does reveal the relevance of what we’ve discussed thus far about the resurrection body – age, look, and so on.

Many years ago, when I lived in Barberton, I knew a young woman who was quite unattractive. One of our idioms is “a 10” meaning that a woman is gorgeous. In order to communicate her appearance, let’s say that she was a 1. She was unattractive as one can be without being deformed. That was a curse for her of course in our culture of appearance. She was trying to follow Jesus but struggled with doing so. She explained why: ***“We sing that chorus “God Is So Good” but He hasn’t been to me. Look at me. How can I believe He’s good when He made me look like this?”***

She illustrates a fundamental truth of our existence. In order to love God, we must believe that He is good. And to believe that He is good, we must believe that it is good that we exist and that we exist the way that we do. Some people have devastating physical and mental problems. Some are so devastating in fact that they cannot believe that it’s good that they exist and thus that God is good. And if He isn’t good, they can’t experience His love for them and in turn love Him. In that context, our job is to help them come to the recognition that their existence, as they are, is good and that they can love God as a result.

Dallas Willard discusses just that in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*. Listen to these insightful words about that: *“What of victims of sexual abuse or of dreadful diseases, birth defects, war, and other terrible things? But if we have suffered terribly, we must choose not to let that be our life focus. We must, if we can, focus on God, God’s world, and ourselves as included in it with a glorious destiny of our own. And when we cannot, we should seek out those who bring or can help us find the power of the kingdom to do so. Gratitude then focuses forward on redemption, and on the future that is given to us in God’s future, come what may. In light of that, we return to receive, to even welcome, our life as it actually has been and is.”*

That is one of the most significant and helpful paragraphs that you will ever hear. Every word of it is true. Many if not most of those who suffer terribly must grasp the glorious destiny that God has for them in order to believe that He is good and to know and love Him.

But in my view, they must grasp that glorious destiny in detail to do so. A vague and undetailed vision of their future isn’t very helpful in generating faith in God’s goodness.

About 10 years ago, I conversed with the father of an 8 year-old dwarf. He had resentments against God for creating his son that way. He knew the disadvantage and the pain and heartache his son was going to go through because of it. He already was going through it as his son’s peers constantly teased and made fun of him.

I didn’t know what to tell him then but I know what I’d tell him now. It’s two things one of which is this. God has a glorious destiny for your son if he follows Him and I would explain it in detail, including the part about appearance. Your son will not always be a dwarf. Actually, he’ll be that for only a short period of time, 70 or 80 years. But forever after that, he will be perfect in appearance, more handsome and appealing to the eye than the best looking person on earth today.

I can give you another such scenario. When I was at Barberton Friends Church, a young couple gave birth to a stillborn baby. The mother was devastated. She could hardly bare the thought of not seeing her child grow and not having a life. She became extremely bitter against God as a result and pretty much forsook Him in the process. I did the best I could in counseling her but to no avail.

I’m afraid I wasn’t really very helpful to her. I was only 28 at the time and didn’t know the truths that I know now that would have helped her. I regret that to this day.

If I were counseling her today, I would explain to her what I just explained to you about the goodness of our existence. I would then point her to her dead child's glorious future. Her child will one day be grown. She'll be a 28 or 30 year-old with a body like the one I have described and will continue to describe. She will also have a life, one in which she will reign with Jesus as I'll explain it in a few weeks. I would point out and emphasize to her that these aren't just pretty words that are meant to encourage her. Remember what Sergeant Joe Friday used to say, "*Just the facts.*" Those are just the facts, the truths, that come from and are assured by the goodness of God.

I say all of that to say this. You may think that some of the details about heaven that we're learning are irrelevant to you. But they are not. Each one has ramifications for the person that we now are and the life that we're now living.

For instance, a person who grasps the details of the resurrection body that we have discussed and will discuss and believes them, will respond psychologically to aging much differently than a person who doesn't know or believe them.

The details are not irrelevant. If they are in fact part of our future destiny and if we are in fact to live life forwards as we discussed at the beginning of this study, how can they be irrelevant? In truth, each one has implications to our psychological and behavioral life.

#7 – Will we eat and drink in heaven?

We come now to an issue that many people have raised to me. Will we eat and drink in heaven.

To answer that question, we must first of all address the nature of eating in this life. Let me ask you? Why do we eat?

There's an old saying that all of you know. We should eat to live, not live to eat. We far too often take well-wrong axioms at face value without evaluating them. Let's evaluate this one. Is the second part of the axiom, that we shouldn't live to eat, true? Yes, it is. To live to eat is a sin called hedonism. Is the first part of the axiom, that we should eat only to live, also true? No, it is not. To eat only to live is a sin called asceticism, referring to the bad kind of asceticism.

Some centuries ago, a Saint named Ciaran mixed sand with his bread so that it wouldn't taste good. He did so because he believed food was just for living and not enjoying.

But he was wrong. If food was just for living and not for enjoying, God wouldn't have made us with taste buds. Taste buds are a vivid physiological testimony to one of the main purposes of food – not just to keep us alive but to bring us pleasure as well. The pleasure we get from food not only enhances our lives but delights and glorifies God as well. Think how much duller our lives would be if food didn't taste so good. Thus every taste of food glorifies Him because it's a demonstration of His goodness to and love for us.

But food has another purpose – celebration. As Alcorn points out, words describing eating, meals, and food appear over a thousand times in Scripture. The Bible says much about feasting and feasting is “profoundly relational” to quote Alcorn. The Old Testament feasts were spiritual gatherings that drew direct attention to God and His goodness, greatness, and love and were a way of relating to Him. They were also a way of relating to each other. The bottom line is that conversation, storytelling, relationship building, fellowship, laughter, and joy mark eating meals together.

This explains one of the most stirring texts in the entire Bible, Revelation 19:7-10. This text pictures our heavenly experience as attending a great marriage feast, we the bride and Jesus the Groom. While this particular text is probably meant to be figurative, it demonstrates that the meaning of feasting and eating meals together goes far beyond survival.

While this text itself is probably metaphorical, the real life experience that is part of the comparison, eating with Jesus, is something that we will actually do. Several passages seem to indicate that.

One is Isaiah 25:6-8. Note that Revelation 21:4, which is about heaven, quotes verse 8. That means that verses 6-8 are about heaven. Verse 6 promises in that regard that God will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples of all nations, that is, those who were and are His disciples.

The interpretative issue is whether or not this is figurative or literal language. The detailed description of it indicates that it's to be taken literally. I believe that lavish banquets that Yahweh Himself prepares will be a routine part of our heavenly life.

This was clearly something that he promised the disciples themselves in Luke 22:29-30. They would participate with Jesus in His messianic banquets in heaven and since Revelation 19:7-10 confers upon us the same standing as that of the disciples, so will we.

All of that shows us that we will actually feast, as we choose to, with Jesus and other believers together in heaven. We will have real meals together that celebrate our redemption and all that it entails.

Jill watched a special on television about extravagant wedding receptions. The one she watched cost \$1,115,000. It was actually incredible. But that will be "peanuts" compared to the feasts that we'll have with Jesus and fellow believers in heaven.

I say all of that to say this. We will eat in heaven and eating will serve the same purposes there that it does now on earth – pleasure and celebration.

That we will eat in heaven implies several things.

One is that we will experience hunger and thirst and digest food. Some people deny that we will, citing Revelation 7:16 as their proof text. My response to that text is this. The physical symptoms here, hunger and thirst, are often metaphors in Scripture for unfulfilled desires. That is probably their meaning here, as verse 17 indicates. The verse isn't saying that we won't have desires in heaven but that those desires won't go unfulfilled. Even if it is literal language, John isn't saying that we'll lack appetite but just that it will always be fulfilled.

Think about it. Hunger and thirst in and of themselves are not bad things. They're only bad things in a world where they can't be fulfilled, as in Ethiopia or the Sudan or some other drought stricken area of the world. In a world of plenty, which heaven will be, hunger and thirst are good things. They are what makes food and drink so pleasurable.

Let me share one of my favorite earthly experiences. A few years ago, I went out running on a day that was 94 degrees and almost 100% humidity. I parked my car at the cemetery there in Greenford and ran out into the country. I purposely didn't drink before I ran. Consequently, I was horribly thirsty after I finished the six miles. I then drove to that little store in Greenford and bought a can of my favorite soda, grape. Parched, I got back into my car and slowly drank that soda. Satisfying my thirst that day was one of the most pleasurable physical experiences I've ever had. Just ask my wife Jill. I still talk about it to this day.

To find pleasure in eating and drinking requires that we desire to eat and drink. And to desire to eat and drink means that we will get hungry and thirsty. And we will satisfy that hunger and thirst with greater pleasure than I had that day in Greenford.

Now, if we eat and drink, then we will also digest. Our bodies will process the food and drink the way they do now and turn it into energy and strength. But remember that our bodies will be perfect. We can infer something from that. Our digestive systems will work flawlessly and efficiently and thus there will be no elimination processes. The entirety of what we consume will be used to produce energy and strength.

Another implication of eating in heaven is that food and drink will taste, smell, and look dramatically better than they do now. It will do so for two reasons.

First, the food and drink itself will have different molecular makeup making it better with regard to texture and taste than our food and drink are now.

Second, our tongues will have a different molecular makeup making our capacity to taste far superior to what it is now.

The taste buds in our earthly tongues have a certain capability. There are 17 or 18 of them and they're able to experience four flavors in combination – sweet, salty, bitter, and sour.

You know of course which of those flavors people like the best. It's sweet. In fact, according to an article in *U.S. News and World Report* titled "The Senses," human beings are genetically hard-wired to crave sweetness.

But the tongues of our resurrection bodies will have dramatically greater capabilities than our tongues do now. I suspect that we'll have more taste buds that are able to experience more flavors in combination.

The bottom line is this. What is your favorite food, the one that you think tastes the best? To me, it's a bowl of butter pecan ice cream floating in Hershey's syrup. I think on the rare occasions when I have it, "***nothing could taste better than this.***" But in reality, everything in heaven will taste better than that.

I would not in passing that there won't be meat in heaven. Since there won't be death, there won't be meat. There won't have to be. There will be varieties of foods that we aren't even aware of. We have four basic food groups now. There will be many more in heaven.

I close out our discussion of eating in heaven with this final point. Since heaven will be a perfect place filled with perfect people, we enjoy far more pleasures than we do now – not fewer.

#8 – Will our resurrection bodies have senses?

We come now to an eighth issue. Will our resurrection bodies have senses?

We have five senses now and will most certainly have those same five in heaven. But they will be dramatically heightened in their capabilities.

The senses of smell and hearing that dogs have, for example, are far superior to ours. They can smell and hear things that human beings can't. Our senses of smell and hearing could be greatly enhanced in other words and likely will be in heaven. We'll be able to smell odors and hear sounds that we can't now.

Or take sight. I've read that a bald eagle can spot a mouse in a field from a mile away. That's incredible now but will be normal in heaven. We'll likely have powers of sight that go far beyond that.

Think about the things that we can't see now because they're too small or too far away. That likely won't be a problem in heaven. It's conceivable that our eyes will have telescopic and microscopic capabilities as they're needed. If we need to see something that is very small, we can activate our eyes into microscopic mode. If we need to see something far away, we can activate them into telescopic mode.

Alcorn raises the issue of additional senses. He contends that God may give us more than five and I agree. I don't know what those would be since they do not exist now but it's conceivable that God can create them in our resurrection bodies.

However God does it, He will do it. He will greatly enhance our ability to perceive the material world around us in heaven by heightening the senses we have now and perhaps by even giving us additional ones. We'll have sensory capabilities that far exceed the ones that we have now.

#9 – What kind of powers will our resurrection bodies have

We come now to what is just an exciting issue. What kind of powers will our resurrection bodies have in heaven?

Our earthly bodies have powers don't they. We have the power to act on and respond to the material world around us. We can move through water, for instance, from one place to the next, climb to the top of a hill, put Kool-aid into water and so on.

But the powers that our earthly bodies have now pale in comparison to the powers they'll have then. I like to use an analogy to explain that. Compare the power that a slug has to act on and respond to the material world with the powers that we have. The difference is vast. But as vast as it is, it is less than the difference between the powers of our earthly bodies and those of our resurrection bodies.

That raises a question though. What kind of powers will we have? What will we be specifically able to do?

In my view, the miracles of Jesus help us answer that question. I believe that the powers that Jesus had in his earthly non-resurrection body give us a glimpse of the powers that we will have in heaven. Here is my reasoning for believing that.

Let me ask you? How did Jesus do the astonishing miracles that He did on earth. Acts 10:38 tells us. It wasn't through His own divine power, which He apparently laid aside during His ministry and life. It was instead through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowered Him to do what He did.

Now let's go back to a verse we discussed before, Romans 8:11. This verse teaches that the Holy Spirit transformed the earthly body of Jesus into His resurrection body. I have two questions for you.

First, when Jesus was in His resurrection body, did He still have the power to do the miracles that He had done in His earthly body? He most certainly did.

Second, was that power now His own, as the 2nd person of God, or was it still the Holy Spirit's?

I believe it was the latter. Resurrection bodies are finite not infinite. So, when Jesus was in His resurrection body, He was in a finite body. And because He was in a finite body, I believe that He still necessarily did what He did through the power of the Holy Spirit. In my view, He began exercising His own divine powers only after He ascended and discarded His resurrection body.

Now, referring Romans 8:11 again, we know that the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, will also raise us from the dead. The Holy Spirit will give us a resurrection body just like the resurrection body of Jesus. It makes sense, therefore, to conclude that He will give us the same kind of powers in that body that Jesus had in His. If He in His resurrection body could do the miracles He did during His ministry, then we in ours, which are like His, will be able to do the same.

My point is that the miracles that Jesus did during His earthly life give us a glimpse of the powers that we will possess in heaven. That means that we can learn a great deal about those powers by examining His miracles.

When we examine His miracles and the things that He did in them, we learn this basic principle. He controlled the ultimate foundations of reality. He manipulated, suspended, and even transcended the natural laws of the universe.

And so will we in heaven. Human beings can manipulate the natural laws of the universe now. Nuclear reactors and nuclear bombs are classic examples of what I mean. But human beings cannot suspend or transcend those laws. But we will be able to in heaven just like Jesus did. We'll be able to control the ultimate foundations of reality. We'll be able to not only manipulate natural laws but suspend and transcend them as well. Let's take a close look at several of His miracles and you'll see exactly what I mean.

We begin with His first recorded miracle in John 2:1-11. He turned water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. Let me ask you. What did He specifically do to cause the water to turn into wine?

Everything that exists is made up of atoms and molecules. Molecules are nothing more than a combination of one or more atoms. We know, for example, that water is made up of 2 hydrogen atoms bound together in a certain way with 1 oxygen atom to form a molecule. Many of these molecules bound together make up water. The same thing is true of wine. Wine is made up of certain atoms bound together in a certain way to form a molecule. Many of these molecules bound together make up wine. I don't know what the molecular structure of wine is but I do know that it's different than that of water. It is made up more than just hydrogen and oxygen atoms.

That shows us what Jesus did to perform this first recorded miracle. He acted on the molecular structure of the wine in the pitchers. In the power of the Holy Spirit, He actually willed the molecular structure of the water to change into the molecular structure of wine and it did.

That shows us that Jesus had the power to change the molecular structure of things. Remember when the devil tempted Him to change the stones into bread. That was a real temptation because He actually had the power to do that. He had the power to change the molecular structure of the stones into the molecular structure of bread.

I believe that you and I will have this same kind of power in heaven. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we will actually be able to alter molecular structures to the point of changing one thing into another. Thus, I will be able to turn a stone into a Little Debbie!

Mark 4:35-41 records another miracle of Jesus. The disciples and He were crossing the Sea of Galilee when a fierce storm suddenly blew up. We've all been in such storms and they're frightening enough on land in our houses let alone on the sea in a little boat. Jesus was sleeping in the boat and the disciples awakened Him. Then, according to verse 39, ***"He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm."*** The disciples were so awe struck by this that, according to verse 41, ***"The became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'"*** This miracle shows us that Jesus was able to control and even create weather patterns.

One of the things that human beings desire to do the most and are able to do the least is to control weather patterns. The best we can do for tornadoes, for example, is study them and hope to predict when they will happen. We are trying to do some things that can possibly prevent certain weather events from happening. I read in that regard that scientists are testing shooting electromagnetic fields into funnel clouds to stop them from becoming tornadoes. We certainly have no current technology that will prevent or control weather patterns and probably never will have. The best that we can do is to predict and even that is inaccurately done.

But all of that will change in heaven. We will have the ability to control and even create weather patterns. Jesus willed and/or spoke and certain things happened to the atmospheric conditions around Him that created the weather He wanted. We will very likely be able to do the same in heaven.

Matthew 14:22-33 records another spectacular miracle of Jesus. He walked on water and enabled Peter to do the same. How did Jesus do this? What did He do in reality to keep Peter and Him from sinking? It appears that He either suspended or transcended the law of gravity.

We will likely be able to do the same in heaven. We will be able to defy gravity either by transcending or suspending it as we will. We will be able to walk on water or better yet fly. That is one of my biggest fantasies – standing on a hill on a beautiful day in Amish country looking out over a beautiful valley and wishing I could just fly out over it. I will be able to in heaven.

Luke 24:36-37 and John 20:26 reveal another power Jesus had – this one in His resurrection body. These record two enigmatic occurrences. They both happened pretty much the same way. The door was locked but Jesus suddenly stood in the midst of the disciples, frightening them. That would be like being in my office with the door locked and suddenly Bill Schmidt is standing right in front of me.

Many commentators conclude that Jesus had the supernatural power in His resurrection body to suddenly appear in and disappear from places. That suggests, I believe, the ability to actually move through matter and possibly to move from place to place almost instantaneously. Remember *Star Trek* and the famous line, "**Beam me up Scotty.**" In space movies, people are often able to be teleported almost instantaneously from one place to another. Jesus seems to have been able to do just that.

And we will too, I believe, in heaven. I believe that we will be able to move through matter and almost instantaneously from one place to another over vast distances. Suppose that I am in one part of the universe and want to visit Robert who is a million light-years away in another part of the universe. I will be able to do that within a very short period of time.

There is a final miracle of Jesus that I want us to consider, my favorite of all. It's the feeding of the 5000 thousand men and several thousand women and children in Matthew 14:13-21. Jesus did that with five small loaves of bread and two fish.

How did Jesus do that? We say that He multiplied the loaves and fish. What that means as a practical matter is that He actually created loaves and fish from nothing. Think about it. 8000 thousand people would have required a minimum of 8000 loaves and 8000 fish. That means that Jesus had to come up with at least 7,995 loaves and 7,998 fish. How did He do that? He simply created them from nothing Jesus as He created the universe from nothing in the beginning of Genesis 1:1.

I believe that we will have that same kind of power in heaven. We will be able to create matter (atoms), that don't already exist and to create them as we want it to be. Suppose, for example, that I want to create a beautiful garden of flowers, grasses, and trees. I will be able to create that out of nothing.

I'd go even further than that. There are currently 110 known elements in the universe. An element is an atom with certain properties. I believe we'll be able to create new elements, which will dramatically impact the heavenly environment in which we live.

Those miracles that I've mentioned give us a glimpse of the kind of powers that we'll have in heaven. They teach us that we'll have a practical mastery over the foundations of reality that is beyond our imaginations.

The power that we have won't be unlimited of course or we would be God. We will have whatever power the Holy Spirit endows us with. It will have its limits that God Himself will determine. He will determine that based on our character.

That last point is critical to understanding the extent of our reign in heaven, which we'll discuss in several weeks. We talk about there being degrees of reward in heaven, which is in fact true. We cannot understand those degrees and the impact of our lives now on them unless we understand what I've discussed about our powers.

#10 – How much will we know in heaven

We tackle an issue now that is related to the previous one. We've talked about what we can do in heaven. Now let's examine what we can know in heaven. The specific issue is this. How much will we know in heaven?

Over the years, I've heard a number of people say that we'll know everything when we get to heaven. They probably believe that because of a verse they've read, 1 Corinthians 13:12. Notice what Paul writes there. Referring to heaven, he writes, ***"but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."***

The interpretive issue is what the word "fully" refers to. Does it refer to infinite knowledge, meaning that we'll know everything? Or does it refer to perfect knowledge, meaning that what we know will be flawless or accurate? It obviously means the latter. I say "obviously" because no quality or ability of a finite creature can ever be infinite. Wayne Gruden explains it well in his *Systematic Theology*. He writes: ***"1 Corinthians 13:12 does not say that we will be omniscient or know everything, but, rightly translated, simply says that we will know in a fuller or more intensive way, 'even as we have been known,' that is, without any error or misconceptions in our knowledge."*** His explanation of the verse teaches us two things.

First, we will know perfectly in heaven. Our knowledge will be flawless, without error. That means that we will never misunderstand or be mistaken about anything. We will know things as they really are not as they aren't. We will never need to be corrected in other words.

Second, we will never know infinitely or absolutely in heaven. We will never know everything that there is to know about everyone and everything in heaven. There will always be things that we don't know. Not knowing everything isn't a flaw. It's part of being finite and because we'll always be finite, then so will our knowledge be.

Not knowing everything opens up the possibility of learning. But will we learn in heaven? In his book *Whatever Happened to Heaven*, David Hunt writes: "**Activities such as investigation, comprehending and probing will never be necessary. Our understanding will be complete.**" Most people seem to agree with that. George Gallup conducted a poll with regard to people's perspectives of heaven. It showed that only 18% believe that we will grow intellectually in heaven.

But in this case, it's the minority, the 18%, who are right. Our intellectual curiosity, our desire to know, isn't part of the curse. Adam and Eve possessed it before the Fall and so will we in heaven. One of the greatest pleasures in life is discovering new truth and we will have that pleasure in heaven.

The point is that we learn. We will continually search out and know more than we did before about heaven itself, heaven's inhabitants and most importantly God Himself.

Puritan preacher Jonathon Edwards, perhaps the most celebrated preacher in American history, addressed this issue. He said that "**the saints will be progressive in knowledge of all eternity**" and that "**the number of ideas of the saints shall increase to eternity.**" In his view, continuing to learn and discover is essential to happiness and joy even in heaven. He wrote about that: "**How soon do earthly lovers come to an end of their discoveries of each other's beauty; how soon do they see all there is to be seen! But in heaven there is eternal progress with new beauties always being discovered.**" Edwards was right. We will continually learn and know more than we did previously.

We will continually learn about God. Ephesians 3:8, for instance, mentions "**the unfathomable riches of Christ.**" Verse 19 of that same chapter discusses "**the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.**" Those verses suggest that we can never know all that there is to know about the riches and love of Jesus. We will learn more and more about them and still have more to learn.

That is certainly consistent with the infinitude of God. He is infinite, which by definition, means that there will always be things about Him that we won't know. Our learning about Him, therefore, will last forever.

And that will be part of the pleasure of our relationship with Him. Part of the intense joy of courtship is learning new things about the one that we're growing to love. We will have that intense joy forever with God in heaven.

We will also learn more and more about heaven itself. Suppose that you were given the opportunity of learning everything there is to know about our entire universe and any other universes that exist. What a thrilling prospect that would be. Well, we'll have just that prospect in heaven. We'll begin with the knowledge of the universe that we have now and have the ability to continually learn more and more about it forever. What the most advanced cosmologists and physicists know about our universe will be peanuts compared to what we'll eventually learn about it.

Our learning will be directed to the inhabitants of heaven, both angelic and human, as well. We'll continually learn more and more about them as we relate to them for eternity. Most of you know that Francis of Assisi is my favorite saint. I will have the privilege of knowing Him in heaven both with regard to his earthly and heavenly person and life. Then consider Gabriel, Michael, and the rest of the angelic host. We'll learn about them as well.

The long and short of it is that there will be intellectual process in heaven. Stimulating discovery and fresh learning will be a vital part of our lives there.

#11 – How smart will we be?

Our 10th issue raises a related issue. How smart or intelligent will we be in heaven?

We've talked about the physical powers that our resurrection bodies will have. Like Jesus did in His earthly and resurrection body, we will have a practical mastery over every phase of reality.

But we will also have a cognitive mastery over that reality. I've preached before that Jesus in His earthly body was the smartest person who ever lived. He had not only a practical mastery over every phase of reality but a cognitive one as well. He knew more about quantum physics, for instance, than Stephen Hawking does. He knew more about interior design than Joan Steffan does. And so will we in heaven.

Our resurrection bodies will be perfect and powerful. The brain is part of that body and thus will be as well.

Many consider Stephen Hawking to be the most intelligent person on earth. His IQ, I believe, approaches 200. IQ's of 180 are almost unheard of and those who have them are considered geniuses. They have an ability to grasp reality that you and I, with normal IQ's, do not. Some of the equations for quantum physics, for instance, take up whole walls and are simply beyond the grasp of people like me.

But that won't be the case in heaven. Our IQ's then in comparison to Stephen Hawking's now makes his paltry. What he can do cognitively is child's play compared to what we'll be able to do in heaven. We'll have the real ability to master quantum physics, calculus, microbiology, or any of the other challenging fields that are beyond us now. The smartest people on earth today are mental midgets compared to what we will be in heaven.

In the final analysis, we'll have not only a practical mastery over every phase of reality but a cognitive one as well.

#12 – Where or what will heaven be?

The firsts 11 issues that we've discussed establish beyond any shadow of a doubt that we will have a bodily existence in heaven. I personally don't know of anyone who disputes that. To dispute that is to reject the Bible's clear teaching that we will have eternal resurrection bodies.

But where will those bodies live? What kind of world or place will heaven be?

Many deny or at least downplay the material nature of that world or place. Alcorn quotes several authors and theologians in that regard.

In his book *Christian Theology*, Millard Erickson writes, "***While heaven is both a place and a state, it is primarily a state.***" By state, he means a condition of being.

In his *New Testament Theology*, Donald Guthrie writes, "***Paul does not think of heaven as a place, but thinks of it in terms of the presence of God.***" That is a commonly held belief. Like Erickson, Guthrie simply dismisses the material aspect of heaven.

In his book *Home at Last*, Walton Brown claims that heaven is "***a spiritual condition more than a spatial location.***" Once again, a writer struggles with heaven as a real time and space place. As the previous writers did, he appears uncomfortable with the idea that heaven is a real material world and tries to reduce it to something less than that.

I can empathize with all of those writers because I thought the same way they did for most of my life. To me, the idea that heaven is a real material place diminished its splendor in my mind and so I refused to think of it in those terms. But when I objectively studied what the Bible teaches about our resurrection bodies and drew the right implications from what I learned, I changed my mind.

I now know and firmly believe this. Heaven will be a real material world. Since we will have a bodily existence, it only stands to reason that this existence will occur in such a world. A body made up of atoms and molecules requires a world made up of the same and that is what heaven will be – a world made up of atoms and molecules. It will be a place, in other words, one that we can experience with our senses, one that we can see, hear, smell, taste, and feel.

That place, in my view, is the present universe or universes regenerated and renewed. I say “universes” because some cosmologists now believe that other universes exist besides our own. I believe that our universe and those universes if there are any will comprise the place that we call heaven.

There are several relevant passages that address this issue.

The first is Isaiah 65:17. This verse teaches us that heaven will be comprised of “new” “heavens and earth.” Please grasp that “new” doesn’t mean “not this one,” that is, not the current heavens and earth. It simply means “not this one as it is.”

We ourselves use the word in that sense all the time. We say, for example, that a reformed alcoholic is a “new” man. We don’t mean by that “not that man” or “some other man.” We mean by that “not that man as he was.” It’s still the same man but changed.

That’s the meaning here in verse 17. Heaven isn’t heavens and earth that are not the current heavens and earth. It’s the current heavens and earth not as they are now. It’s the current heavens and earth changed or as the Bible says it elsewhere regenerated or restored.

This new heavens and earth are so glorious and satisfying that ***“the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”*** That line has two possible meanings.

One is that we will remember literally nothing about the current heavens and earth and life in it. Thus, we will know nothing about God’s life, our life, or anyone else’s life on earth.

If verse 17 is taken in that sense, then we will not know that Jesus lived, died, rose, and ascended because that's part of the "former things." We will not know that we were sinners and will not know how we came to make a decision for Jesus.

But the last line in verse 17 can have a second meaning. The new heavens and earth are so glorious and satisfying that we won't long for life in the old heavens and earth. The house and location that Jill and I live in now is our favorite place we have lived. We like it far better than our old house and location, so much so in fact that we don't long for or even think about our old one. To quote verse 17, it simply doesn't "come to mind." That's the idea in verse 17.

A parallel passage, Jeremiah 3:16, confirms that. There is an old thing in this verse – the Ark of the Covenant. God manifested His presence to the Israelites through that. There is also a new thing. God will manifest His presence to them in the future in Jerusalem far more profoundly than He did through the Ark. That new thing will be so far superior to the old thing that the old thing, the Ark, ***"will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor will they miss it, nor will it be made again."*** The meaning obviously isn't that the Israelites won't know that the Ark ever existed. It's just that they won't long for it because their new experience with God will be so much more satisfying than their experience with the Ark was.

What I've done demonstrates just how crucial studying verses is. Superficial readings of them rarely do justice to them and often create misunderstanding and confusion. We need to dig into the verses and their context to discover what they truly mean. Doing that with verse 17 is vital to understanding the true nature of heaven.

There are other verses that teach the same truth about heaven that Isaiah 65:17 does. It will be a new heavens and new earth, that is, the current heavens and earth, regenerated and restored. Those passages are: Isaiah 66:22, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21:1.

I would make a comment about Revelation 21:1. Last year, I spent three months studying Revelation verse by verse with a commentary. I learned something about verse 1 here that I hadn't known before.

There are two words in the Greek language that are translated "new." The first is *neos*. That word refers to recency. Something is recent, that is, came into existence not long ago. The second word is *kainos*. That word refers to difference. Something is qualitatively, in its nature, different than it was. Its existence isn't new but its nature is because it's been changed.

Let me illustrate that for you. There is a "new" restaurant adjacent to the JoAnn Fabrics Store. It's called . It was built this past year and opened for business several weeks ago. Last year at this time, it didn't exist. It exists now. It's "neos" or "new" in the sense of recency. In contrast there is a "new" restaurant adjacent to the Shell Gas Station on Route 224. It's the Taco Bell Store. It was renovated this past year and opened with its new décor. Last year at this time, it existed. And it exists now but with a different décor than before. It's "kainos" or "new" in the sense of quality. It's different in its nature or form.

With those two Greek words in mind, look again at Revelation 21:1. The "new" heaven and earth referred to can be one of two things. It can be not the present heaven and earth but another one that just came into existence. Or it can be the current heaven and earth but not as it is. The current one changed in its nature.

Which of those two meanings it has depends on the Greek word translated "new." If it's "neos," then the new heaven and earth refers to the first of those – another one. But if it's "kainos," then it refers to the second of those – the current one changed. Well, the Greek word is "kainos."

You realize what that means. John is saying that heaven isn't heavens and an earth that just came into existence but the current heavens and earth that are in existence now but different than they were – sort of like the "new" Taco Bell.

Also notice the statement that *"the first heaven and the first earth passed away."* The meaning of passed away is determined by the meaning of "new." The meaning isn't that the current heaven and earth have gone out of existence but that the current heaven and earth, *as they are*, have. They still exist but with a different nature than they do now.

The last phrase *"and there is no longer any sea"* confirms that interpretation. That isn't to be taken literally. The "new" earth in heaven will have seas. It's a figurative way of saying that it will be the same earth but different in nature.

Some people think that 2 Peter 3:10-13 is inconsistent with the interpretation that I just gave you. They think that it outright contradicts such a view. So, we need to examine what it teaches.

Verse 10 says that the current heavens will "pass away." I just explained the meaning of that above in Revelation 21:1. That doesn't mean that the current heavens have gone out of existence but that they, *as they are*, have.

Verse 10 also says that the current heavens will be destroyed. The word "destroyed" like the word "new" has several nuances. Verse 6 supplies the correct nuance here in verse 10. That verse says that the flood in the days of Noah "destroyed" the world. That obviously doesn't mean "eradicated from existence" because the world still existed after it. "Destroyed" clearly means regenerated and cleansed. It means "made better."

Verse 10 also says that the earth and its works will be burned up. There is an interpretive issue here. My Bible has a footnote beside the words "burned up." It says, ***"Two early manuscripts read discovered."*** Manuscripts are copies of the original writings of the New Testament authors. The oldest manuscripts, closest to the originals, don't contain the Greek word translated "burned up." They contain the Greek word translated "discovered" or "shown." That's why the NIV translates verse 10 as "laid bare." What that then means is that God's fire will expose or show things as they are – identifying and judging both the good and the bad.

Introduction to Christian Theology by H. Orten Wiley sums up well what Peter is telling us in this passage: ***"St. Peter does not intend in these passages to teach the annihilation of the world by its fiery baptism. Rather the word "dissolved" carries with it the idea of loosing the world from the bondage of corruption so that it may become what it was originally intended to be."***

T.C. Hammond concurs in his book *In Understanding Be Men*. Referring to the passages we studied in Isaiah, 2 Peter, and Revelation, he writes: ***"The references imply not annihilation, but a complete destruction of all links with an old and sinful world and the transformation of the old into a new world, never to know sin and corruption. As with the resurrection of the body, there is both continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new, which is represented both as issuing out of destruction, and as consisting in the 'conversion' and liberation of creation."***

Hammond is precisely right and the point is this. The place of heaven is the current heavens and earth regenerated and restored. Several passages explicitly teach us just that.

One of those is Matthew 19:27-28. Jesus is clearly referring to heaven in verse 28 and notice what He calls it – "the regeneration." Heaven is the regeneration, that is, the regeneration of God's creation and His people.

But the classic passage on the regeneration and restoration of the current universe and everything in it is Romans 8:18-25.

Look first of all at a word that Paul uses in verses 19, 20, 21, and 22, "creation." Creation is the primary subject of this passage. It refers to the universe and everything that's in it. The universe and everything in it is called "creation" because God made it. He conceived every atom of it in His mind and willed it into existence. It includes all of the stars, planets, asteroids, soil, beaches, rivers, oceans, human beings, dogs, cats, possums, snakes, flowers, trees, and everything else that exists in it.

When it comes to creation, Genesis teaches that God made it good. But then something unspeakably awful happened to it. Paul says in verse 20 that it ***"was subjected to futility."*** He says it differently in verse 21 but the meaning is the same. It is in ***"slavery to corruption."***

Those verses teach us that when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden, so did the rest of creation. There is some kind of spiritual link between human beings and the universe. That link is so defined that the universe's destiny, from the very beginning, was and still is tied up with the destiny of human beings. When human beings sinned and were cursed, so was it. The result is that as spectacular as it is, there's something either inhospitable or evil about it. It is futile and corrupt.

Scientists tell us about black holes for instance. Black holes are essentially the death of a star that collapses in on its self. Would there be black holes if creation weren't fallen? No, there would not be? Stars would remain intact and not grow cold and die.

Paul's description of creation in verses 20 and 21 isn't exaggerated. It is subjected to futility. It is in slavery to corruption. It is in a fallen state that God never intended it to be in.

But it won't always be. That's because at the Second Coming of Jesus, Father God is going to redeem it. That's the word, in its noun form, that Paul uses in verse 23. The Greek word translated "redemption" here means to be set free from sin and its consequences. For creation, that means that God will transform it into the condition or state that He intended when He made it. Think of its condition or state before the Fall. Its redeemed state will be qualitatively far better than that. That's why the Bible calls it what it does in the verses we studied, ***"a new heaven and a new earth."***

Now, according to verse 21, we as followers of Jesus wait eagerly for our final redemption. But according to verse 19, so does creation. It ***"waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."*** That's because when they're redeemed, so is it.

In his outstanding commentary on Romans, Andrew Nygren explains that verse this way, "*The redemption of mankind is also to be the redemption of creation.*"

Do you realize what that means? It means that God has an eternal destiny for the stars, planets, animals, vegetation and everything else that exists in our universe. And that eternal destiny is linked to ours. Simply put, creation will be part of the eternal life that we live with God in heaven.

It will be that in several ways one of which is this. It will be our habitation. Heaven is a place and that place is the redeemed universe. Robin Bancroft talked about looking at a star filled sky in Colorado, where the darkness allows the stars to shine through. As we look out on those stars and even beyond, we are looking out into the future home of our resurrection bodies.

Not only does Scripture teach that the current universe or universes is our future heavenly home, so does logic itself.

Guillermo Gonzalez is a brilliant physicist and astronomer who has had dozens of articles published in technical journals and magazines. He has been featured on the covers in fact of magazines including *Scientific American*. Jay Wesley Richards is a brilliant ivy league professor of philosophy and theology and a prolific writer.

Together they authored a book titled *The Privileged Planet*. That book documents the astonishing evidence that established a creator and designer for the earth – and at least one apparent purpose for humankind. Our concern is that one apparent purpose.

Gonzales and Richards make two observations. First, our universe is vast and seemingly unnecessary for our survival as a species. Second, earth's location in the universe is the best possible place for observing it.

Based on those observations, they conclude this. **The universe is designed for discovery.** It's vast beyond our ability to grasp it and purposely so. What appears superfluous or unnecessary isn't really that. It has a purpose – for us to explore and discover.

Lee Strobel summarizes what Gonzalez and Richards believe this in his book *The Case for the Creator*. He writes: "*If God so precisely and carefully and lovingly and amazingly constructed a mind-boggling habitat for his creatures, then it would natural for Him to want them to explore it, to measure it, to investigate it, to appreciate it, to be inspired by it – and ultimately, and most importantly, to find Him through it.*"

What Strobel wrote is true but incomplete. He left something out, which we'll talk about next week, and it's an absolutely vital point for understanding our destiny. The universe is designed for human beings not only to discover but **to rule over** as well and we are currently doing that – to a paltry degree. But God's people will someday have an incomparably greater capacity to do both of those things in our eternal life with God. Part of our eternal destiny is to discover and rule over the universe and again, we're going to discuss that shortly.

But the point for our purposes now is that the present universe or universes, if there are more than one, constitute the place that we call heaven. Heaven is a place and that place is the current universe or universes regenerated and renewed.

When I say regenerated or renewed, I mean that God will make it perfectly suited for human beings with resurrection bodies to dwell in. The sun, the Milky Way, the constellations, and everything else in it, including the natural laws that govern it, will still be there but altered however it is needed to be a suitable dwelling place for human beings with resurrection bodies.

I'd close out this issue of our study by saying this. Satan won a victory when Adam and Eve and all of creation fell. But God will have the last glorious word by redeeming His creation and making it in its entirety part of His own life for eternity.

#13 – What part will earth play in heaven?

Now that we know that the universe is our heavenly home, we need to address the destiny of our home now, planet earth. Since earth is part of the universe, it will certainly be part of heaven but what part is that? That is our 13th issue. What part will earth play in heaven?

Let's stop for a few moments and think about earth's part in the universe now.

Strobel's book *The Case for the Creator* discusses just that in chapter 7. He explains what is called the Copernican Principle or as it is also called the Principle of Mediocrity. Almost every introductory astronomy textbook states over and over again that there is nothing special about the earth's situation, location in the universe, or features and nothing special about our solar system or human beings themselves. They teach that our planet is unexceptional and that it revolves around a typical star in an average and mundane part of the universe. That is the view of most scientists today.

But they're wrong. Gonzales and Richards make that clear in their book I mentioned before *The Privileged Planet*. The earth isn't an unexceptional planet and the sun isn't an ordinary star. On the contrary, both are highly special or unique. Their features and location in the universe are quite astonishing. If you'd like to know more about that, read either *The Case for the Creator* (chapter 7) or *The Privileged Planet*. But for our purposes today, just know that earth is a special place in this vast universe of ours.

And it will likely continue to be in heaven. We've read and discussed passages that call heaven "the new heavens and earth." Earthly clearly will be part of heaven. In his book *The Nature of the Resurrection Body*, Edward Thurneysen writes about that: "***The world into which we shall enter in the Parousia of Jesus Christ is . . . not another world; it is this world, this heaven, this earth; both, however, passed away and renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people that will be the scene of redemption.***"

Let's think about that in terms of our earth. I have several favorite running routes out in the country. One of them has two large hills and a valley in between. So, I run down the road into the valley and then up the other road and it's just a breathtaking view both ways. The new earth will be those two hills and that valley – regenerated and renewed. If I choose to, I will be able to go back to that location in heaven and will recognize it as the place I ran. I'm simply reiterating Thurneysen's point. The heavenly earth is this earth.

But just as earth is a special place now in this vast universe of ours, so it will be a special place in the heavenly universe. In my view, as I'll discuss later, it won't be our home. But it will be a place at which we will spend a lot of time.

Turn to Revelation 21 and you'll see why. Look first at verses 1 and 2. These verses picture a holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven to earth. Now look at 21:10-22:5. The verses that comprise this passage teach us many things about that city.

The interpretive issue is whether or not all of the details that are given about the city are metaphorical or literal. I have read three or four commentaries on Revelation over the years, all of which take the language to be metaphorical and I think that is exactly right. Revelation is apocalyptic literature and the nature of that kind of literature, which is highly symbolic, suggests that as well as the details themselves. So a literal city will not come down out of heaven to earth after Jesus comes again

Look at 21:16 for instance. This verse teaches that the city will be cubic in its dimensions. It will be 1500 miles wide, long, and high. 1500 miles high would mean that it rises far above earth's atmosphere. The ground surface of the city would be 2,225,000 square miles, which is 10 times as big as France or Germany for instance.

Taking into the account that Revelation is apocalyptic literature and the apparent impracticality of having a city with a wall 1500 miles high, I'm fairly certain that the language here is metaphorical. The figurative meaning is that there will be plenty of room in heaven for all.

But I believe that there may be a city on earth that will be a central location for God's people to gather and worship together. That would make sense to me.

For one thing, since earth has a special place in our universe now, it seems logical to conclude that it will have as well in the heavenly universe. And since corporate worship will clearly be a part of our heavenly life, it seems logical to conclude that there will be a central place of continual worship for God's people to gather. And since Jerusalem was God's holy city on earth, it seems logical to conclude that it will be his holy city in heaven.

I envision God somehow specially manifesting His presence in what is now Jerusalem on what is now earth. I envision that being the centrally known place of worship in heaven, where God's people can come night and day and worship Him with angels and other people. It would be analogous to the Old Testament temple in that regard. Thus, we who inhabit heaven can go there any time and corporately worship Him with large throngs. We can and will worship individually and perhaps with selected groups of people. But at Jerusalem, our worship will involved larger numbers and more diverse groups of worshippers.

The long and short of it is this. Based not on my interpretation of Revelation 21 and 22 but on the place of Jerusalem and earth now in God's scheme of things, I believe that both Jerusalem as a city and earth as a planet will have special significance in heaven as a central location for worship and perhaps even fellowshiping with Christians and angels. They will be places at which we will spend a lot of time in other words.

#14 – What does it mean to reign in heaven?

We come now to an issue that many of you asked about at various points in our study. What does it mean to reign in heaven? Remember our discussion of that. God's ultimate destiny for every human being is that he or she will reign with Him in heaven. But what does that mean as a practical matter.

I begin with a celebrated passage that is widely read at memorial services, John 14:1-4. In this part of his last supper discourse, Jesus speaks about going to prepare a "place" for His disciples and us. He mentions in the course of doing so that in His Father's "house" are many "dwelling places" or "mansions" as some versions translate it. Let me ask you. What do the words "house" and "dwelling places" refer to and what does it mean that Jesus is preparing a place for us?

Many Christians answer those questions this way. "House" refers to earth and "dwelling places" refers to literal mansions on earth. You've seen some of the mansions that rich people live in. One CEO that I read about is building a \$76 million mansion. Many Christians think that Jesus will prepare a mansion like that one for us and that we will live in it as our heavenly home.

But in my opinion, that view is wrong – on three counts. First, the word "house" doesn't refer to earth but to the universe. Second, "dwelling places" doesn't refer to an earthly mansion but to some part of the universe. And third, Jesus "will" not prepare that place for us but "is" preparing it right now.

Let me use an analogy to explain what I mean. Suppose that you are 20 years old and are confined to a ten by ten room with only a coloring book and crayons for the rest of your life. Would that be a good life experience for you – being in that room coloring for the next 50 years? Obviously, it wouldn't.

Now, suppose that a spider is confined to that ten by ten room for its life. Would that be a good life experience for it? Yes, it would. Many spiders in fact spend their lives in just that kind of space.

What determines the dramatically different experience of the human being and the spider? It's their powers of consciousness and activity. The material environment is more than big enough for the powers that the spider has. It is far too small, far too confining, for the powers that the human being has and thus diminishes if not destroys his or her personhood.

That teaches by way of analogy the problem that being confined to earth would pose for people with resurrection bodies. Just as the ten by ten room would be far too small of an environment for our powers of consciousness and activity now so earth would be far too small of an environment for our powers of consciousness and activity then – in heaven. Our very personhood would be frustrated and diminished in heaven by such a confinement.

We're given a hint of this even now. Why is it that countries have space programs? Why is it that people write and dream about exploring and colonizing other planets in other galaxies? It's because the seed of our eternal destiny, reigning in the universe, is buried within us. We were made for that and we have the stirrings of it in us.

That helps us interpret what Jesus means in John 14:1-4. "House" refers not to earth but to the universe. "Dwelling places" are the planets, solar systems and galaxies that make it up. And Jesus is right now preparing our place in the house or universe. He is readying the planets, solar systems, or galaxies over which we will reign with Him.

Did you know that there are ten billion galaxies in our universe that we know of and in those galaxies are one hundred billion billion planets. That is 100,000,000,000,000,000,000 planets. There are likely more galaxies and planets that we don't know of than that we know of.

Are all of those galaxies and planets superfluous? The vast majority of them obviously have no impact on planet earth and life on it. Are they therefore utterly without purpose or point? Are they just unnecessary clutter? No, they are not. They have great and even eternal purpose and point. They are in fact the places that Jesus is right now preparing for those who follow Him. They are their future homes forever in heaven.

You can see from this what one of our problems is when it comes to heaven. It isn't that most of us think too big. It's that we think too small. The place that God is preparing for us if we follow Him is far greater than a \$76 million mansion on earth.

What I've said to this point raises a critical question, one that many of you have been waiting to discuss. What will we do in our heavenly home, the universe? The answer is that we will, with Jesus, reign over it. Let's examine now what that means as a practical matter to us.

I begin with one of the first fundamental truths that the Bible reveals in Genesis 1 and 2. God created human beings to rule.

Let me ask you a question. What did God make Adam and Eve to do? Did you ever think about that? He made and placed them in the Garden of Eden and their lives began. But what were those lives about? What did they do and did God have a grand design for them?

As 3:8 implies, their purpose was first of all to know, love, and relate to Yahweh. Relationship with Him was the cornerstone of their lives and walking and talking with Him were a primary activity of theirs in that regard. That same thing will be true of us in heaven. Relationship with God will be the cornerstone of our lives and walking and talking with Him will be a primary activity of ours.

But was that the only activity of Adam and Eve? Did they do anything else and if so what?

We know from 2:21-25 that they related to each other. They were married and carried out the relation activities that involved. Verses 24-25 indicate that sexual relationship was one of those activities.

2:18-20 show another activity of theirs. They were to study, categorize, and relate to the animal kingdom. John Wesley believed that animals had higher powers of consciousness and communication before the fall and that Adam and Eve were able to relate to them more profoundly than we can to our animals today.

2:15-17 reveal that their activities also included working. They were to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden. They were horticulturalists who manipulated their agricultural environment to look and be the way that they wanted it to be. They worked in other words. Work wasn't a result of the fall. Only its nature as labor was. Nature became far more untamable and encroaching after the Fall.

All of the activities that I've mentioned to this point occurred within the confines of Adam and Eve's immediate environment, the Garden of Eden. That raises a fascinating issue. Had they not sinned, would human life have gone beyond the garden and into the earth at large? The answer is a resounding "yes." God never intended that human life on the perfect earth be restricted to Eden.

We see that in 2:10-14. This passage always puzzled me. It has nothing to do with life in the Garden of Eden. It's actually a break in the narrative. It suddenly and without warning breaks out of Eden and opens up to us a world of diverse countries and resources.

I now know what it means. It shows us that God had more in store for Adam and Eve and their offspring than the confines of the Garden of Eden. The places named and the minerals of verse 12 reveal that God intended for human life to move out from Eden and over the entire world. Derek Kidner explains it this way in his outstanding commentary on Genesis. He writes about this passage: ***“The digression, overstepping the bare details that locate the garden, discloses that there is more than primitive simplicity in store for the race: a complexity of unequally distributed skills and peoples.”*** He’s right. God intended Adam and Eve or their offspring at least to move out into the earth at large to do with it what they had done with the Garden of Eden.

If Adam and Eve had not sinned, large groups of people with righteous not sinful natures would eventually have populated the earth and turned it into the same kind of paradise that the Garden of Eden was. There would have been agriculture, science, arts, literature, entertainment, sports, and so on but unencumbered by the sinful nature that dominates those things now.

1:26-28 confirms what I have just said. This passage contains what is called the creation covenant. It is what Dallas Willard calls “the human job description.” It goes back to the question I asked at the beginning of this particular discussion. What did God create Adam and Eve to do? He created them to “rule over” and “subdue” the earth. Notice that it’s the “earth” and not just the Garden of Eden. It’s obvious that God had far more in store for human beings than just cultivating and keeping the Garden of Eden. They were to cultivate and keep the entire earth. They were to take dominion over it. That includes every thing in it – living and non-living.

God equipped Adam and Eve and us for this task. He gave them all of the intellectual and physical abilities that they would have needed to do that. He also gave them the one thing they needed more than anything else to do that – relationship with Him.

That is a vital point. They were to carry out the creation covenant with Him as their co-partner and companion. Dallas Willard explains it well in *The Divine Conspiracy*. He writes: ***“However unlikely it may seem from our current viewpoint, God equipped us for this task by framing our nature to function in a conscious, personal relationship of interactive responsibility with Him. We are meant to exercise “rule” only in union with God, as He acts with us. He intended to be our constant companion or coworker in the creative enterprise of life on earth. That is what His love for us means in practical terms.”*** Willard is right. They were to act in union with God Himself in carrying out the mandate that He gave them to rule over and subdue.

Having said all of that, the issue to which we now need to give some reflection and thought is this. What does it mean to rule over and subdue the earth? Or to ask it another way, what does it mean to reign over it?

I'm going to give you a precise definition and please remember it. Some of you have had problems throughout our class with the words "reign" or "rule over." You have equated them with taking charge over and controlling people but please get that out of your minds.

But they aren't about that. They are about this instead. As Genesis 1 and 2 clearly imply, to rule over, subdue, or reign means to generate value, that is, to generate what is good. It means to generate value, what is good, for God, others, us, and our environment.

Now, the Fall diminished and in some senses spoiled the ability of human beings to achieve that. Adam and Eve's sin was essentially the choice to "rule over" without God. The result was that they and subsequently we became less capable of ruling over the earth. Their powers and ours to do that diminished. In addition, the earth itself became less susceptible to being ruled over. Before the Fall, for instance, animals were drawn to human beings. But now they fear or are even hostile to us. Lions were much easier to rule over before the Fall than they now are after.

Nonetheless, our fundamental makeup is unchanged. The deepest longings of our hearts confirm our original calling including the creation covenant. Our very being still assigns us the task of ruling in our own lives and over creation – to produce value there. We experience this quite frequently in the impulses we feel.

If most of us see an animal in trouble, for instance, we feel that we should do something about it or at least that someone should. Our house on Cover Drive has a small woods behind it, in which several possum live. Jill and I go out of our way to consistently put food leftover food at the edge of the woods for them. We feel the impulse to produce value, to make the lives of those possum better. That impulse we feel can be traced back to Genesis 1:26-28.

That then is the fundamental principle that we see in Genesis 1 and 2. God designed and equipped human beings to rule over, to subdue, to reign over, the earth.

But was it just the earth that He intended them to reign over? That question leads me to this question. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, would they have lived forever, as they were, on earth?

I believe that the answer is "no." I believe that after a period determined by God, they themselves would have been given the same kind of bodies that we will have in heaven. I won't call them resurrection bodies because they wouldn't have died. But their unfallen earthly bodies would have been changed into the same kind of bodies we will have in heaven. They would then have been set free in the universe to do with it what God called them to do on earth – rule and reign over it, subdue it. They would have been set free in it to produce value, what is good, for God, others, them, and their environment.

I believe that for the two reasons I've already discussed. First, the earth as their home would be too confining for the great powers they had. And second, God has a purpose for everything. But if Adam and Eve were confined to earth forever, then the universe would have been unnecessary and thus have no purpose. The vastness of the universe must have a purpose and that purpose was for Adam and Eve and their offspring to reign in it forever.

My point is that God will design and equip our resurrection bodies to do in the universe what He designed and equipped Adam and Eve to do on earth – to reign over it, that is, to rule over and subdue it. That means that we will be designed and equipped to be set free in our assigned part of the universe to produce value, what is good, in it – for God, others, us, and our environment itself.

Dallas Willard describes this in general terms in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*. It's a stirring description and goes like this: ***"In any case, we should expect that in due time we will be moved into our eternal destiny of creative activity with Jesus and His friends and associates in the 'many mansions' of 'His father's house.' Thus we should not think of ourselves as destined to be celestial bureaucrats, involved eternally in celestial 'administrivia.' That would be only slightly better than being caught in an everlasting church service. No, we should think of our destiny as being absorbed in a tremendously creative team effort, with unimaginably splendid leadership, on an inconceivably vast plane of activity, with ever more comprehensive cycles of productivity and enjoyment. This is the 'eye hath not seen, neither ear heard' that lies before us in the prophetic vision (Isaiah 64:4)."***

Notice what Willard claims here. We will reign in cooperation with Yahweh Himself, probably his angels, and certainly other Christians as we produce eternal value and good within our heavenly home. This will involve an inconceivably vast plane of activity. Think of something vast like the building of the Panama Canal. That is like playing in a sandbox compared to our endeavors in heaven.

I certainly don't know the endless details that this will involve but I can conjecture what a few might be. Let me give you a possible scenario as I imagine it to be, remembering that this doesn't even begin to do justice to the subject.

I'll use Don Renzenbrink as our guinea pig here. God says to Don at judgment: *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make you ruler over many things."* He then assigns Don the Milky Way as his "mansion." The Milky Way, with all of the stars, planets, and whatever else that makes it up will then become the place in which he will live and over which he will reign. God will set him free there to use his powers to do whatever he wills with it. He will be able to rule over and subdue it just as Adam and Eve were able to rule over and subdue the earth.

He will do that of course in detail, moving from one creative achievement to another in each part of that galaxy. He will do so in cooperation with God and even with others whom he chooses to assist him. The creative work he does will involve every branch of applied sciences that exists today and perhaps even others that don't. It will involve meteorology, chemistry, microbiology, astronomy, astrophysics, quantum mechanics, horticulture, calculus, and much more. The difference is that his activity in those fields will dramatically excel the highest levels of achievement that we know today.

Thus, he may transform this planet into a garden paradise filled with sensory delights never before experienced on earth. He may turn that planet into a water world of oceans and seas filled with dazzling aquatic wonders. He may create cities that afford a whole array of sensational cultural experiences that others can visit and enjoy. He may create centers of cuisine that offer irresistible delicacies that people from all over heaven will come to. He may plan festivals and special celebrations developed around specific themes that Yahweh Himself co-hosts with him. And on it goes.

The possibilities of course are limited only by the powers of mind and body that he possesses, which as we've seen, are extraordinary. Whatever he does, Don will spend eternity creating value, creating good, in the Milky Way for God, others, angels, and him. Heaven becomes better and better as time moves on and as Don continues to partner with God and others in ruling over and subduing his galaxy.

That then is what it means to reign. We exercise the authority and power that God has given us in the part of the universe to which He has assigned us. We do whatever we desire to do to create value, goodness, there.

#15 – What determines how much authority and power God gives us

Our discussion of reigning in heaven brings us to a 15th issue. What determines how much authority and power God gives us. I did mention this briefly at the beginning of our study but would like to address it in more detail now.

Knowing what our ultimate destiny is has profound implications to our current life on earth. It explains the way things are psychologically in our lives and what our primary aim in life should be. There is in fact a causal connection between our everyday life on earth and our reigning in heaven. A parable that Jesus tells us Matthew 25:14-30 explains what that connection is.

I introduce this parable with a penetrating observation about human life. Power requires character to bless not curse. Great power requires great character to bless not curse. That observation underlies this parable that Jesus tells.

Let's start with the opening words of verse 14, *"For it is just like."* The preceding passage, 25:1-13, reveals what the "it" is. It's the kingdom of heaven. This passage contains what is called a kingdom parable.

Parables have several points of reference in them. Points of reference are details in the parables that represent something else. To interpret them, we have to correctly identify both the points of reference and what they represent. So, let's do that with this one.

There are four individuals in it – the master and three slaves. The context makes clear that the master stands for Jesus and the first two slaves stand for His followers. The third stands for those who don't follow Him but they're outside the concern of our discussion.

Notice what the master does to the first two slaves. Verses 21 and 23 tell us that He puts them in charge of "a few things." Verse 15 tells us that those few things are five talents and two talents respectively.

The "few things" is a point of reference. It represents something. The question of course is what that something is. It refers to, I think, the power and authority that God gives His people now on earth. Let me explain what that's about.

God has given each of us our own kingdom to reign over or rule on earth. That kingdom is the range of our effective will. It is the realm in which we have power and authority, meaning independence of action. It is the realm in which what we want done is done.

Everyone, including infants, has some degree of control over some things in their lives and need to have. It is now recognized that having a personal kingdom as I defined it is vital to our physical and psychological life. We see this in children. We have to let them do it, whatever the "it" is, as soon as feasible. Otherwise, we stunt their very development as a thinking, feeling, and willing moral creature. Having a place of rule goes to the very heart of our personhood and it is one of God's greatest gifts to us on earth.

Let me illustrate as a practical matter what I'm talking about here by mentioning things that are within our kingdoms, within the realm of our power and authority.

Our money is. Most of us will make approximately \$1.5 million over the course of our 40-year working life. That \$1.5 million is within my kingdom on earth. God has given us the power and authority to use it as we choose. That same thing is true of us whatever the amount of money we make and have control over is.

Our minds are part of our kingdoms. God has given us the power and authority to place them on whatever we choose to place them and to apply them to whatever inquiries we choose. Thus, you and I have the power and authority to place our minds constantly on God or only occasionally on Him. Or we can use our minds to build a vision of God or not build a vision of Him.

Our bodies are part of our kingdoms. God has given us a great measure of freedom and control with regard to them. I weigh 140 pounds now. I can, if I choose to, weigh 160 pounds.

Our souls are part of our kingdoms. The fact is that God has, for the most part, entrusted the care of our souls to us. We can care for them or neglect them by the things we do with our minds and bodies.

Those are just samples of the countless things in life that are within our kingdoms, that we have power and authority over. And they are what the "few things" that Jesus assigned to the two slaves represent.

Now, notice what the two slave were – faithful with the few things. They used them as their master wanted them to use them. They did with them what their master willed.

In the same way, Jesus calls us to be faithful with the "few things" we have. That means that we reign over our kingdom on earth just as Jesus wants us to. We exercise our power and authority on earth as Jesus wills us to do.

We do or don't do that literally hundred of times each day. We exercise our power and authority faithfully or faithlessly in all the issues that arise in our lives, big and small.

Suppose that we're going to buy a car for instance. Assuming that we have enough income or credit, we have the power and authority to determine what kind of car that we'll buy and how much it will cost. Thus, we can buy a \$10,000 used one, a \$20,000 new one, or a \$45,000 new one.

That transaction is one of the "few things" of this parable. We can be faithful in it. So, we study and learn what the Bible teaches about money, giving, and simplicity. We then make our purchase according to what the Bible teaches. Or we can be faithless in this little thing. So, we make our purchase contrary to what the Bible teaches either because we haven't taken the time to learn it or we've learned it but have chosen to ignore it.

Or suppose that our spouse is in a bad mood and makes a cutting remark to us. We have the power and authority to determine how we'll respond to the remark. That response is one of the "few things" of this parable. We can be faithful in it. Knowing that the divine conspiracy between God and us is to overcome evil with good, we do just that by turning the other cheek and being loving and kind. Or we can be faithless in this thing. Either not knowing any better or not caring if we do, we respond to the evil with evil. We retaliate and make a cutting remark right back to him or her.

You get the idea. You and I have God-given power and authority over thousands and thousands of "few things" in this one life on earth that He has given us. The issue in that regard is whether or not we'll be like the first two servants, faithful in them, or like the third, faithless.

But there's another point of reference in the parable. That point of reference is the "many things" of verses 21 and 23. Remember that the "few things" represents the power and authority that God gives us over things now, in life on earth. In contrast, the "many things" represents the power and authority that God gives us over things then, in our never-ending life in heaven.

To understand the "many things," we need to recall our discussion of reigning in heaven and the three aspects that doing so involves. The first aspect is the mental and physical powers God gives us. The second aspect is the authority, or freedom of action, that God gives us to exercise those powers. And the third aspect is an assignment, which is a material domain, a part of heaven, in which to put our powers and authority to work to generate value and good.

Those three things go together to comprise the “many things” that God will give to us in heaven.

Now that we know what the points of reference are and what they stand for, let’s figure out what the parable teaches us. It teaches us that there is a causal connection between how we’ve reigned on earth and how we’ll reign in heaven. How we’ve used our powers and authority in our assignments on earth conditions the powers, authority, and assignments that God will give us in heaven.

It’s often said that there will be degrees of reward in heaven and there will be. And in my view, that reward has to do with three things – the extent of the powers, the degree of the authority and the scope of the assignments that God gives us. Some will have greater or lesser powers, authority, and assignments than others.

There’s a reason for that and it has to do with character. Let’s go back to the observation with which I introduced this parable. Power requires character to bless not curse. I’d ask you two questions about that.

First, is it true? Is it true that people with power but poor character generally hurt more than they help? Yes, it is. History and our own experience prove it so. Is it also true that people with power and good character help more than they hurt? Yes, it is. Once again, history and our own experience prove it so.

Suppose that a man is recently released from prison after serving several years for embezzlement. That same man volunteers to serve as treasurer of your Little League Association. Do you suppose the Association would give him that assignment and the power and authority that go along with it? They most certainly would not and rightly so. How he handled the power and authority in his prior assignment, the one in which he embezzled, reveals his character. Assuming he hasn’t changed, that character in turn establishes that he is unsuited to be treasurer. He can’t be trusted in that regard.

The dynamics are the same in heaven. How we have reigned on earth reveals our character. And in heaven God will give us the powers, authority, and assignment that are suited to that character. He will give us what He can trust us with in other words.

Let me ask you what I’ve already asked myself about that. Based on what your character is right now, how much could God trust you with in heaven? Could He entrust you with a city or a planet or a solar system or a galaxy. Could He be confident, for instance, in assigning you the Milky Way and setting you free in it to do what you please with the incredible powers you have?

The implication of what I've just discussed is profound. It implies that there's a link between our earthly life and heavenly life. How we live and reign in our everyday kingdoms conditions and even determines what our heavenly kingdom will be and how we'll live and reign in it.

That is one of the reasons that discipleship to Jesus and becoming like Him are my passions. Deciding to be a disciple of Jesus and to become like Him does two things. First, it and only it enables people to live abundantly now. And second, it and only it prepares people adequately for the glorious and never ending future that God has for them.

Do you want to fulfill the temporal and eternal destiny that God has for you. There is only one way to do it. Decide to be with Jesus in order to learn and do all that He says. Anyone who makes and carries out that decision will become more and more like Him and those who become that are ready to reign – now in this life and forever in the life to come.

#16 – What will our relationship with God be like in heaven?

Our 16th issue addresses the single most significant aspect of our life in heaven. What will our relationship with God be like there?

I start off with a radical statement for which I make no apology. The joy of heaven is centered in God! As Alcorn says it, God Himself is heaven's greatest prize.

Few if any secular approaches to heaven even consider that. There are a best selling novel and a movie based on it I believe titled *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. It portrays a man who feels lonely and unimportant. He dies, goes to heaven, and meets five people who tell him his life really mattered. He discovers forgiveness and acceptance from them there that touch him to the core.

Now, the movie may appeal to secularists but it is fundamentally flawed. It pictures a heaven that isn't about God but that is about people. The problem with that view is that it isn't really heaven then and I mean at all. It's just a different version of human society on earth.

It is a clear and basic principle of Scripture that God is what makes heaven heaven. Listen to two quotes in that regard. Teresa of Avila said, *"Wherever God is, there is heaven."* And John Milton said, *"Thy presence makes our Paradise, and where Thou art is heaven."*

Now, what Teresa and Milton said will make no sense to us at all to most people. The highest good that most people experience in their lives is some reality that the world itself offers. That good might be money, sex, power, human relationships or any other number of things.

Watch romantic movies, for instance. They clearly imply that the highest good in human life is having an intimate and romantic relationship with someone. The single men or women in them usually end up learning that it's human relationships and not anything else that the world has to offer that will bring them meaning and joy.

That might make for a good movie but it doesn't make for a good life. I'm a student of human personality and life. I've spent countless hours observing human behaviors and contentions and I can tell you this. There is no human relationship or anything else on earth that can give fullness of meaning and joy to a human being.

There is only one thing that can and it's relationship with God. I don't say that lightly or because I'm supposed to as a pastor. I say it because it is simply and utterly true. As Psalm 16:11 so boldly declares, it's in God's presence, and His presence alone, that there is fullness of joy. Nothing on earth compares to it.

And neither does anything in heaven, which is precisely my point. The essence of heaven for us is God's presence and our experience of it. Samuel Rutherford said it well: *"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."* Martin Luther concurred. He said: *"I had rather be in hell with Christ, than be in heaven without Him."*

Those are either the most ludicrous statements in all of human history or the single greatest truth of our existence. The question they raise really is this, *"Are they just pretty words?"* If they are, then we can simply dismiss them as the ramblings of two psychotics. But if they aren't, if they're reality instead, then we need to commit ourselves to them. We need to commit ourselves to relationship with God now and forever.

But as meaningful and joy producing as relationship with God is now on earth, it is far more so in heaven. As I briefly mentioned at the beginning of our study months ago, we will have a far greater capacity to experience relationship with God in resurrection bodies than we do now in earthly bodies. We will have a far greater and deeper access to His presence than we do now.

There's a great old hymn that expresses our dramatically enhanced capacity to relate to God in heaven. It's titled *Face to Face*.

But what does that mean as a practical matter, that we shall see Him face to face? How will our relationship be different, better and deeper, than it is now? I have given this some thought and this is my opinion, although that is all it is, an opinion, an educated guess.

After Jesus, who was arguably the greatest person who ever lived? When my sons were little boys, that's what their Christian pediatrician asked me one day. The question assumes of course that there has been a greatest person who ever lived, which I think is true. So, assuming it is true, who, in your opinion, is it.

I didn't even hesitate in answering the pediatrician. In my view, the greatest person who ever lived is Moses. That's why, in fact, that we named our firstborn son just that, Moses. I can make a strong Biblical case that Moses is the greatest person who ever lived. That case is found in Numbers 12:6-8. In this passage, God Himself explains why Moses was greater than any of the prophets. It has to do with the nature of God's communication to them and him.

Notice how God spoke to the prophets and other followers of His. It was through dreams and visions. The Bible gives us many examples of such dreams and visions. Acts 16:9-10 is one of those. Both dreams and visions involve, to one degree or another, a trancelike condition. They are different than ordinary waking consciousness in that they involve a detachment from a person's actual surroundings. As Dallas Willard points out in his book *Hearing God*, both are unusual states of consciousness that require some degree of interpretation. That's how God spoke primarily to the prophets.

But in contrast to that, notice how He spoke to Moses. According to verse 8, it was "mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord."

Two other ways that God communicates to people are audible voice and phenomenon plus audible voice. Examples of audible voice are God speaking to Abraham at Moriah (Genesis 22:11-12, 15-18) and to the boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3). In each case, God spoke verbally to the people involved. Examples of phenomenon plus voice are fire passing through the air and God speaking to Abraham (Genesis 15:17-18); the burning bush and God speaking to Moses (Exodus 3:3-6); the burning mountain and God speaking to Israel (Exodus 19:18 and 20:1); the descending dove and God speaking to Jesus (Matthew 3:17); and the blinding light and Jesus speaking to Saul (Acts 9:3-8).

Those are examples of what verse 8 calls God speaking “mouth to mouth, even openly.”

Now, here’s what I want you to grasp. God speaking that way to Abraham, Peter, Paul, and the other great Biblical and historical friends of His were anomalies in their lives. They were exceptional events in other words that they only rarely experienced. Such means of communication were not a normal part of their ongoing conversational relationships with God.

But they were a normal part of Moses’ conversational relationship with God. As verse 8 indicates, audible voice and phenomenon plus voice were not anomalies in his life but normal and frequent occurrences instead.

And they will be in our lives as well in heaven.

The primary means by which God communicates to us now is what we call “the still small voice of the Holy Spirit,” which I’ve explained in detail in sermons and lessons. I’m convinced that we’ll still experience that consistently in heaven though with a far greater clarity and depth than we do now.

But that won’t be the only primary means by which God communicates with us. Another primary means will be, I believe, audible voice and phenomenon plus voice. I believe that God will consistently speak audibly to us with and without phenomena accompanying Him doing so. Imagine what Moses must have experience inside and outside of him when he encountered the burning bush. Experiences like that will be a normal and natural part of our relationship with God in heaven. Someone hearing God’s audible voice even once seems odd to us now, even psychotic. But someone not hearing God’s voice constantly in heaven will seem odd to us then. That won’t even happen in fact.

But our relationship with God will involve more than He just communicating to us. It will also involve He constantly manifesting Himself, His presence, to us.

Remember the story I told at the beginning of our study about Dwight L. Moody. One day in New York, God manifested Himself to Moody so that he had a spectacular and exhilarating experience of His presence. But God’s presence became so overpowering that he had to ask Him to withdraw it. He felt as if he was going to be crushed and killed by it. Moody’s experience was, I believe, a glimpse, taste, or sampling of heaven.

In my opinion, God will regularly manifest Himself to us in heaven like He did on that one occasion to Moody. The difference is that in our resurrection bodies, we will be able to experience far more of His presence than Moody was able to. We will know the splendor and majesty of God's presence as Moody did that day but sustained. We won't have to ask Him to stay His hand and withdraw from us.

These manifestations of God will touch every aspect of our being - our bodies, minds, wills, and souls. His presence will permeate each of those aspects bringing us into a union of love with Him. The closest thing to it on earth is the sex act between a husband and wife who are madly in love. Certainly, there will be no sexual component with God but the dynamics of union and love that characterize the sex act will be there. God will touch us in the core of our being and we will touch Him in the core of His. Those manifestations of God will be superpersonal encounters that deepen our love for Him each time that we have one.

Besides those special but constant communications and manifestations, we will always have a profound sense of God's presence with us. In objective reality, He is fully present with us now in every moment of our lives and will continue to be so in heaven. The difference is that we will have a greatly heightened sense of that presence in heaven.

A good analogy is being in a living room with a spouse. I'm not talking to my spouse or even encountering her. I'm thinking about and doing something else. But I have a real sense of her presence with me as I do. Our sense of God's presence with us in heaven will be subjectively far more vivid and real than that. Someone in our church testified that she had a temporary but strong sense of God's presence in her living room. It was so strong in fact that she said it this way, ***"God was in my living room last night."*** She was as much aware that He was with her in her living room as she was that her husband was with her.

That strong sense of God's presence will be our steady and uninterrupted experience in heaven.

I close this issue by quoting Theologian Sam Storms: ***"We will constantly be more amazed with God, more in love with God, and thus ever more relishing his presence and our relationship with him. Our experience of God will never reach its consummation. We will never fully arrive, as if upon reaching a peak we discover there is nothing beyond. Our experience of God will never become stale. It will deepen and develop, intensify and amplify, unfold and increase, broaden and balloon."***

#17 – What will our relationships with others be like in heaven?

Now that we know what our relationship with God will be like in heaven, let's peruse what our relationships with others will be like. The others I'm talking about of course are all of those persons in history who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Just as we relate intimately to God, so we'll relate intimately to them.

The first logical point to make is that relationship with God in heaven doesn't exclude relationships with people. To find pleasure and joy in such relationships doesn't offend Him. It pleases Him.

Creating a redeemed community of believers within in which He would dwell forever has been His plan from the very beginning in fact. Both the Old and New Testaments teach us that. Exodus 29:44-46 shows that God purposely created a community of people, a nation, that He might inhabit. That nation was Israel. 2 Peter 2:1-10, makes clear that God's redeemed community became the body of believers, the church. The church is the spiritual Israel that God created to inhabit for eternity. Ephesians 2:19-22 gives us a lovely picture of the church as the dwelling place of God.

It is obviously true that we will be part of a great community of people in heaven whom we will know and love.

A few of these people we will have already known and loved on earth. But certainly the vast majority of them we will not have known and loved on earth. Whatever the case is, we will get to know them through and through and spend our eternal life relating to and loving them.

Jesus makes clear in Matthew 22:20 that there will be no marriage in heaven. Thus, we will not be married to our current spouses.

There's a good reason for that. Think about it. The marriage relationship is intended to be the single most satisfying earthly relationship. We relate to one person of the opposite sex on an intimate and high spiritual, emotional, and physical level. Why are we restricted to one person in that regard? Why don't we relate to two persons or four or ten on that level? It's because we can't. We don't have the spiritual, emotional, and physical powers to have more than one spouse. Apparently, Adam and Eve didn't either, since Genesis 1-2 clearly imply monogamy as God's plan. The book of Genesis is a running commentary on what happens when we attempt to have more than one spouse. It makes the home a hell not a heaven on earth.

But in heaven, we'll have far greater spiritual, emotional, and physical powers to relate than we do now. Thus, restricting the highest degrees of relationship to one person or even several persons would be far too restricting for us. It would frustrate and diminish our lives there.

That raises the issue of sex in heaven. Quite simply, there won't be any. Despite what our current culture believes about it, the Bible teaches that sex was designed for the marriage relationship. And since there won't be marriage relationships in heaven, then there won't be any sex either.

Most people consider sexual activity the most exciting experience on earth and are thus disappointed at the prospect of not having it in heaven. But they need not be. That fact of the matter is that the sexual experience that we have now on earth will be replaced by something better in heaven.

C.S. Lewis discussed that very topic in his book *Miracles*. He used an analogy to explain it that hits the nail right on the head. It's a brilliant analysis and I want to share it with you: *"I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer 'No,' he might regard the absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it."*

Do you get Lewis' point? There might be a flaw in his analogy because some of us might think there is more pleasure in chocolate than sex. But assuming that is there is more pleasure in sex than chocolate, his point is a clear one and true. Sex excludes chocolates and that's okay because it's so much better than chocolate is. In the same way, something unknown to us in heaven excludes sex and that's okay because the something unknown is so much better than sex is – not only qualitatively but quantitatively as well. It far exceeds sex both in nature and frequency.

Inherent in that discussion is the fact that we will pursue and develop relationships with every redeemed person who has ever lived. We will have both the power and the time to do that, since heavenly life is forever.

The relationships we have with people will have many different nuances depending on our own personalities and histories. I mentioned in last week's sermon the destiny altering influence that Dallas Willards books have had on me. I owe him an eternal debt of gratitude for the truths I've learned from him about God and His kingdom. That fact will undoubtedly engender a unique relationship with him in heaven. Our relationships with our family members and the brothers and sisters in Christ we've known on earth will most certainly color our relationships with them in heaven.

Our relationships will undoubtedly involve communication. We will speak to others with utter clarity. We will say what we mean and we will say it precisely. We will also listen attentively to what others say with absolute understanding. We will hear them say what they actually said. There will be no misspeaks and there will be no mishearings. Thus, there will be no misunderstandings in communication to disrupt or diminish our relationships.

I believe that there will be one heavenly language. The narrative of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 suggests that. It appears that God's purpose for mankind was to have one language, which promotes unity and power. He only took that away because such unity and power is a threat in a fallen world.

Pentecost in Acts 2 was a partial and temporary reversal of Babel but heaven will be a total and permanent reversal. So, there will likely be only one language and it will be a heavenly one. It will also be a perfect one. It will not allow any of the ambiguities and misunderstandings that all earthly languages now do. It will be precise, appealing, and clear.

Not only will we communicate with and get to know each other but we'll do things with each other as well. We will worship together, dine together, carry out great enterprises together, play together, study together, experience wonders together, and much more.

The attack and withdrawal that characterize human relationships now will not characterize them then. There will be none of the will to power, jealousy, envy, malice, resentment, bitterness and so on that seem to dominate relationships in our current world. Our heavenly relationships will be perfect – completely righteous and free of sin.

But they will also always be finite. That means that we probably won't always agree on things. Since we won't know everything and will likely have different tastes in food, clothing, music, and so on, we won't always see eye to eye on things. But we will undoubtedly tolerate and even celebrate our differences without any of the defensiveness, anger, and suspicion that we experience now.

I sometimes talk about a dream of mine. It's to be part of a community of believers in which the agape love of the Bible prevails. By "prevails," I mean that the majority of people in the group are spiritually advanced enough to usually live out the 15 aspects of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Imagine such a community in your mind and how wonderful it would be to be part of it. But the community that we're part of in heaven will be significantly better than that. That's because agape love won't just prevail there. It will utterly prevail there. All the people not just a majority will not just usually but always live out the 15 aspects of love.

Having said that, however, I would also say that there will be privacy in heaven. We will have our alone times as we choose just as we do on earth. And in those alone times, we can encounter God as unique individuals who make their own special contribution not only to heaven itself but to God as well.

#18 - Will there be animals in heaven?

Children often ask their parents if their pets that died will be in heaven? That raises a larger question that makes up our 18th issue. Will there be animals in heaven?

The passage that we discussed at length before answers that question for us. That passage is Romans 8:18-25. There is some kind of spiritual link between human beings and the universe. That link is so defined that the universe's destiny, from the very beginning, was and still is tied up with the destiny of human beings. When human beings sinned and were cursed, so was it. But in the same way, when human beings are redeemed at the Second Coming of Jesus, so will the universe be.

Genesis 1 and 2 make clear that God created animals on the 6th day just as He did man. That implies that, after man, animals are the most magnificent part of His creation. It only makes sense, therefore, that when God eternally redeems man and the universe, He will redeem animals as well. He has an eternal destiny for them, in other words, just as He does for man and the universe.

But what does that mean as a practical matter? It means that there will be animals in heaven. Besides Romans 8:18-25, there are other passages in the Bible that seem to teach that. Those passages include Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65, and Hosea 2. If they are interpreted literally, which the context indicates they should be, then there will undoubtedly be animals in heaven.

That doesn't address the question that children ask though does it? Will our pets that died be in heaven?

C.S. Lewis believed that they will be. In his book *The Problem of Pain*, he writes that animals can become such a part of our lives that they become part of who we are. When we humanize them by making them our pets, they are in us. They share our personhood. They enter into the spiritual depths of our being. Accordingly, he argued, our resurrection would be less that it ought to be if our animals didn't share it with us. They have an immortality, in other words, not in themselves but in us their masters. Our resurrection will therefore encompass theirs.

Joni Eareckson Tada believes the same thing but for an additional reason. In her book *Holiness in Hidden Places*, she writes: ***"If God brings our pets back to life, it wouldn't surprise me. It would be just like Him. It would be totally in keeping with His generous character . . . Exorbitant. Excessive. Extravagant in grace after grace. Of all the dazzling discoveries and ecstatic pleasures heaven will hold for us, the potential of seeing Scrappy would be pure whimsy – utterly, joyfully, surprisingly superfluous . . . Heaven is going to be a place that will refract and reflect in as many ways as possible the goodness and joy of our great God, who delights in lavishing love on His children."***

The arguments that Lewis and Tada make are strong ones. They are logical and make sense. But the stronger argument is the Biblical one. Romans 8:18-25, in my view at least, simply teaches that our pets will be part of our eternal life in heaven. But it isn't just our pets, it's all of the animals who have ever lived as well.

On November 30, 1781, the great John Wesley preached a remarkable sermon about animals. He articulated what the Bible teaches about animals and then drew conclusions about their ultimate destiny as a result. Let me give a brief summary of what he concluded in that regard.

Adam and Eve's sin affecting animals, causing them to suffer fear and pain, was a great injustice. God, being a just God, is going to make amends to them at the Second Coming of Jesus. He is not only going to resurrect them but restore them as well. He said about that: ***"They will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which they had in paradise, but to a degree of it much higher than that. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil."***

You can see from that what Wesley believed. Animals were in a much higher state in the Garden of Eden than they are in now. Their mental and physical powers were far greater. At the Second Coming of Jesus, He will resurrect them and restore them to a higher state than they had in the Garden. Wesley then conjectured about what the ultimate consequence of that would be. He said: *"What, if it should then please the all-wise, the all-gracious Creator to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What if it should please Him . . . to make them . . . capable of knowing and loving and enjoying the Author of their being."*

That may in fact be the case. I concur with Wesley that animals may actually be able to know and communicate with God and us in profound ways.

Those of you who don't love animals in general and pets in particular, cannot at all appreciate what I've just discussed. You may think that it's ludicrous in fact.

I preached a sermon about animals in heaven nine years ago. One of our regular attenders stopped on the way out and disgustingly told me, *"What you said today is ridiculous."* It wasn't that she just disagreed with it but for some reason it angered her.

I don't know why but my response is this. It may be ridiculous subjectively to her but it isn't objectively. The problem is hers not mine. The Bible does contain a theology of animals and I've studied what it teaches in detail. Her problem is that she's never taken the time to do that. If she did, she'd have a far greater appreciation for the inherent splendor of animals than she does. The simple truth is that God holds them in far higher regard than she does. And in light of that far higher regard, the idea of their resurrection isn't illogical at all. I love animals. But even if I didn't, I'm objective enough to study the Bible and at least admit the possibility if not likelihood of there being animals in heaven.

Three of my pets stand out to me. They're all dogs – Grady and Grizzly who are dead now and Adah. I told my wife Jill that she can have all of our other pets, including the cats and pot bellied pig, but that I want those three dogs. I'll just visit the others in her part of heaven on a regular basis and she can visit those three in mine.

But seriously, I do believe that Grady, Grizzly, and Adah will be in heaven with me and will be an important part of my eternal life there. It will glorify God that they are. Consequently, when a child asks me if their pets will be in heaven, I always answer "yes" and mean it. I believe, by the preponderance of the evidence, that they will be.

#19 – Will we ever get bored in heaven?

Our final issue for discussion is one that concerns many people. Will we ever get bored in heaven?

Alcorn mentions an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. There is a group of beings called the “Q continuum.” These beings have immortality and think it a curse. One complains that everything that could ever be said or done has already been said or done. The only thing left is repetition and utter boredom. He sums it up with these horrifying words, ***“For us, the disease is immortality.”***

Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov addressed that same issue. He wrote: ***“I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”***

Believe it or not, some Christians have the very same concern. I’ve heard several verbalize their fear that heaven will ultimately be a boring place. John Ortberg tells about having lunch with a friend who said: ***“I believe in heaven, John, but frankly, I’m afraid heaven seems boring. I don’t know what I’d do after a while.”***

You and I don’t need to worry about that. That’s because our environment and we ourselves are going to be dramatically different than they are now, as we’ve discussed previously. Yes, it’s true. Everlasting life on earth as we are now would eventually become boring. But everlasting life in heaven never will be.

“Too much of a good thing” is one of the inexorable laws of our life before death. No matter how exciting something is, too much of it makes it not exciting anymore. We’ve all experienced that. But that isn’t one of the inexorable laws of our life after death.

There is an earthly experience that gives us a sampling of what the emotional tone of our life in heaven will be constantly like. Can some one tell me what that is? It’s play.

Two authors in particular share rich insights into the spiritual dimension of play. Those two are Peter Berger in his book *Rumors of Angels* and C.S. Lewis in his book *Surprised by Joy*. Both authors teach that play provides us with brief touches of eternity. They contend that play often suspends time and space and allows us to experience a taste of the transcendence. It’s a crack in time and space that gives us a taste of heaven.

I am in total agreement with that. I believe that play places the ambience of heaven before us. The excitement that we experience in it is a hint of the excitement that we'll experience in heaven – constantly and consistently.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. So let me give you a picture. I want to show you a brief clip from the movie *Hoosiers* that I've shown you before. But it's worth seeing again.

Let me give you the background. Hickory is a small town in Indiana whose people eat, drink, sleep, and breathe basketball. Remarkably, the Hickory High School basketball team makes it to the state championship game. Hickory, enrollment, 64, is playing defending champion, South Bend Central, enrollment 2200. It's David and Goliath all over again. But incredibly, with only 19 seconds left in the game, Hickory is only one point behind and has the ball. Watch what happens, focusing on the facial expressions and bodily movements of the people involved. Try to imagine, if you can, what these people are experiencing – what they're feeling.

I make two points. First, heaven is like that. Second, heaven is like that *all the time*. Notice the phrase I used, "all the time." Let me explain the implication of that by asking you a question. What is the most exciting, exhilarating, emotion-producing moment of your entire life?

Notice something striking. None of you said, "***The present moment.***" Let's go back to *Hoosiers* again. Suppose that I asked the people involved in that game the very same question that I just asked you – the next day. What is the most exciting moment in your life? You know what they would say, "when that final shot went through the hoop last night." Notice that it would be a moment last night and not the present moment.

But our life after death in heaven won't be like that. Imagine that we're in heaven and I come up to you and ask the question, "***What is the most exciting moment in your life?***" What is your answer honestly going to be? It going to be "***This one.***" Whether it's the intermediate state or heaven, the most exciting is always going to be the present one. Imagine having the excitement of that last shot you saw but knowing that the next moment will be even better and the moment after that better still and so on forever.

C.S. Lewis captured the essence of this in his book *The Last Battle*. Referring to Christians in their life after death, he writes: "***Now at last they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.***"

You recognize what that means. It means that you and I don't have to worry about being bored in heaven because we won't be. On the contrary, every chapter, every moment, will be better than the one before it.

#20 – What does our life after death mean to our life before death?

I've spent six months now discussing our life after life. I trust that it will be a springboard for your own personal study of the subject. What I've shared with you are the conclusions I've drawn from my study. May they assist you in drawing your own conclusions from your own study.

But why is it important that you do that? Some might object that taking six months to study and discuss life after life is a waste of time. After all, all of us have countless problems to solve, challenges to meet, and goals to pursue in the course of our everyday lives. So how can the things that we've studied and discussed possibly be relevant to any of that?

I answered that question at the beginning of our study. I quoted Blasé Pascal who said that we need to define our lives backwards and live them forwards. Knowing the details of our future destiny helps us competently do both of those things.

But I close our study with an additional point. Knowing how we will live our life after our life on earth directs how we live our life on earth.

Most of you know that I'm a Yankee fan and that my favorite player growing up was Mickey Mantle. His father died at the age of 40 and for some reason, Mickey always believed that he would too. So, he lived a wild and reckless life of partying, alcohol, and sex. It took its toll though. He had a life threatening liver problem in his early 60's and eventually died of liver cancer several years later.

I'll never forget what he said during the first bout of liver problems he had. He declared, *"I'd have taken better care of myself if I knew I was going to live so long."*

In a similar way, you and I should take better care of ourselves because we're going to live so long – forever. Mantle was talking about the care of his body. I'm talking about the care of our souls. Mantle was talking about living well in his earthly future. I'm talking about living well in our eternal future. We need to take care of our soul so that we can live well in our eternal future.

Now, we take care of our bodies by doing what is good for us physically. We take care of our souls by doing what is good for us spiritually. We take care of our bodies by committing ourselves to our exterior life. We take care of our souls by committing ourselves to our interior life.

It is precisely at that point that understanding the details that we've learned in this study comes into play. Life on earth has an obvious advantage in that it's so vivid and real. It's in our face so to speak so that our activities, values, and beliefs tend to be formed and conditioned by it. Consequently, even though the Bible teaches that we're pilgrims just passing through this life, we think, feel, and act as if we're permanent residents of it. We think, feel, and act as if this life is all there is.

Understanding the details of our life after life is a corrective to that. If our vision of life after life is vague and abstract, it will only minimally impact the way we live our everyday lives. But if it is vivid and abstract, it will actually alter the way we think, feel, and act. Failing in our professions won't devastate us for instance because we know we'll ultimately reign. Learning that we're dying won't distress us because we know that our consciousness and existence never ceases, only increases. And so on.

Paul the Apostle expresses the ultimate consequence of a disciple of Jesus understanding life after life. He writes in Philippians 1:21, ***"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."*** Understanding life after life prepares us to live and to die as well. Praise the Lord!

