

VIDEO-BASED
6-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

A PLACE CALLED HEAVEN

Surprising Truths About
Your Eternal Home

DR. ROBERT
JEFFRESS

A PLACE CALLED HEAVEN

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Your Eternal Home

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ROBERT JEFFRESS is the senior pastor of the thirteen-thousand-member First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and a Fox News contributor. He's also an adjunct professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Dr. Jeffress has made more than two thousand guest appearances on various radio and television programs and regularly appears on major mainstream media outlets such as Fox News Channel's *Fox and Friends*, *Hannity*, *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, *Varney & Co.*, and *Judge Jeanine*, as well as on ABC's *Good Morning America* and HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher*.

Dr. Jeffress hosts a daily radio program, *Pathway to Victory*, which is heard nationwide on more than 930 stations in major markets such as Dallas-Fort Worth; New York City; Chicago; Los Angeles; Houston; Washington, D.C.; San Francisco; Philadelphia; and Seattle. His weekly television program can be seen in 195 countries and on 11,295 cable and satellite systems throughout the world, including China, and on the Trinity Broadcasting Network and Daystar.

Dr. Jeffress is the author of twenty-four books, including *When Forgiveness Doesn't Make Sense*, *Countdown to the Apocalypse*, *Not All Roads Lead to Heaven*, and *A Place Called Heaven: Ten Surprising Truths about Your Eternal Home*.

Dr. Jeffress led the congregation of First Baptist Dallas to complete a \$135-million re-creation of its downtown campus. The project is the largest in modern church history and serves as a spiritual oasis that covers six blocks of downtown Dallas.

Dr. Jeffress graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary with a DMin, from Dallas Theological Seminary with a ThM, and from Baylor University with a BS. In May 2010 he was awarded a doctor-of-divinity degree from Dallas Baptist University. In June 2011 Dr. Jeffress received the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year award from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Jeffress and his wife, Amy, have two daughters and three grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

If any of us learned that we were going to move to a foreign country, we would do everything we could to learn about that place so that we would be prepared when moving day arrived. One day all people will leave this life and enter the next. As Christians, we know someday we'll leave our familiar country and be united with God in heaven. And yet many of us know very little about this place called heaven.

Many of us don't give much thought to heaven because our journey seems so far off. Perhaps we believe we still have time to prepare for our trip, but the reality is that none of us know when we'll be called to our final destination. Some of us may be intimidated by passages of Scripture about heaven that seem hard to understand. Others don't give much thought to heaven because it seems to have very little to do with the way we live today.

For whatever reason, people don't think about heaven as much as they should. Heaven is relevant to our lives today. Thinking about heaven will change the way we live on earth. In this study we'll examine the Scriptures to answer six common questions about heaven so that we'll be prepared when the time for our departure arrives.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

This Bible study book includes six weeks of content for group and personal study.

GROUP SESSIONS

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God’s Word, and with the video teaching of Dr. Jeffress.

START. This section includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

WATCH. This section includes key points from Dr. Jeffress’s video teaching.

DISCUSS. This section includes questions that guide the group to respond to Dr. Jeffress’s video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

PERSONAL STUDY

Each week provides five days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits stories, Scriptures, and themes Dr. Jeffress introduced in the videos so that participants can understand and apply them on a personal level. The days are numbered 1–5 to provide personal reading and activities for each day of the week, leaving two days off to worship with your church family and to meet as a small group. If your group meets on the same day as your worship gathering, use the extra day to reflect on what God is teaching you and to practice putting the biblical principles into action.

SUPPLEMENTAL ARTICLES

At the back of this book you’ll find articles that can further develop your understanding of the ideas presented in this study. They provide additional biblical teachings on key words and doctrines related to heaven.

TIPS FOR LEADING A SMALL GROUP

INCLUDE OTHERS

Your goal is to foster a community in which people are welcome just as they are but encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to—

INCLUDE any people who visit the group;

INVITE new people to join your group.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small-group experience has the following characteristics.

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.

NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Silence isn't a bad thing. People often need time to think about their responses to questions they've just heard or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're studying. People are less likely to speak up if they fear you're looking for only a certain answer.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point people to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with group members during the week. Participation during the group session is always improved when members spend time connecting with one another outside the group sessions.



WEEK
1

What Difference
Does Heaven Make
in Our Lives Today?



Start

Welcome to session 1 of A Place Called Heaven. Use the following questions to begin your time together.

Let's start by introducing ourselves to be certain we all know one another. If you don't know someone, share a little about yourself.

When you think about heaven, what images comes to mind? What shaped your images of heaven?

How often do you think about heaven?

Every Christian is on a journey to a place called heaven—a one-way trip that will last for eternity. The subjects of death, judgment, heaven, and hell are often daunting to consider. Most people choose to ignore these topics because they believe they have long lives ahead of them. However, Scripture addresses these inevitable realities on a regular basis. This is why we're committing the next six weeks to gain a better understanding of the place Jesus has prepared for us and to bring heaven closer to our hearts, minds, and everyday lives.

Before we watch Dr. Jeffress's teaching, would someone open with prayer, asking God to lead us and teach us more about heaven?

Watch

Use these statements to follow along as you watch video session 1.

Our departure for heaven is both certain and relatively soon.

The fact that life is very brief here on earth should motivate us to use our time wisely.

Why Should We Focus on Heaven?

1. Focusing on heaven reminds us of the brevity of our earthly life.

2. Focusing on heaven prepares us for the certainty of judgment.

There is a way that leads to eternal death.

There's a more narrow road that leads to heaven.

There are gates that open to both eternal death and eternal life.

3. Focusing on heaven motivates us to live pure lives.

Judicial righteousness is our right standing before God.

When God looks at you and me, he sees us as totally, completely forgiven.

Ethical righteousness is our right acting before God.

4. Focusing on heaven places suffering in perspective.

Although God's promise for heaven is yet still future, it really should impact the way we live every day.

Discuss

Discuss the video with the group, using the questions below.

How could our daily responsibilities cause us to think less about heaven instead of more?

Have you ever experienced a life event that caused you to focus on heaven or to long for a better place than earth? If so, explain.

Read John 14:2-3. Why did Jesus want the disciples to understand that He was preparing a place for them?

C. S. Lewis once said, “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”¹ How should the reality of heaven shape the way we live?

When are you most likely to consider the brevity and fragility of your life? Why should those realities cause us to think more seriously about heaven?

Read Matthew 7:13-14 and John 14:6. Discuss the similarities between these passages. What do they teach about heaven?

How can we focus on living a pure life without trying to earn our way into heaven?

Why does it seem to be increasingly difficult to live pure lives in our culture? What factors might make a life of purity more challenging today than in previous times?

How does the fact that Christ’s righteousness is available to us connect our daily struggle for purity to the reality of heaven?

How does the hope of heaven affect our perspective on suffering (death, tragedy, injustice, etc.)? When has this hope helped you personally?

Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group session.

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1980), 134.

A Place Called Heaven

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Why should we be concerned about heaven? The obvious answer is because we're all going to die and step into eternity.

My ministry necessitates a lot of travel. Every time I journey to a distant destination, I make a checklist of tasks I need to accomplish before I leave and items I need to take with me on the trip. This preparation is especially important if I know I'll be gone for an extended period of time.

For a long international trip, for example, I need to do the following.

- Contact my credit-card company and notify them of where I'll be so that they won't think my card or identity has been stolen and freeze my account.
- Call the cell-phone company to have my phone enabled for international service.
- Check the weather forecast to know what clothing to pack.
- Be certain I have my ticket and passport so that I can arrive at my destination and get past the gates.

Wise travelers go through a routine to prepare for leaving home, even if it's just a weekend getaway. Yet very few people ever prepare for the ultimate journey everyone will take to an eternal destination. Many Christians don't consciously spend a lot of time thinking about heaven. Perhaps you haven't either. The overwhelming responsibilities of living in this world can easily eclipse time spent thinking about the reality of the next life. In addition, the fact that we know so little about our home in heaven makes it seem remote and irrelevant to our earthly lives.

This is exactly why over the next six weeks we'll examine what the Bible tells us about the place Jesus has prepared for those who trust in Him for salvation (see John 14:2-3). My prayer is that through this study you'll not only long for heaven but also live out your days here on earth with a renewed sense of divine intentionality.

DAY 1

THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH

All people die. The one certainty all people have in life is the fact that it ends. And death often comes suddenly as well as unexpectedly. King Solomon stated:

Man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.

ECCLESIASTES 9:12

The Old Testament patriarch Isaac expressed the same dilemma: “Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death” (Gen. 27:2).

If God has ordained every day of your life—including the day of your death—the stark reality is that every second that passes moves you closer to the grave. That’s a great reason to begin thinking seriously about your eternal home, as well as how you spend your days on earth.

How often do you consider the inevitability of death? Check one.

- Constantly**
- Rarely**
- A healthy amount**

**What emotions or feelings do you have when you think about death?
Why could considering death be productive?**

**What has informed your thoughts on death? Family background?
The Bible? Other religious knowledge? Personal loss?**

A Place Called Heaven

We've all heard the old saying that became the motto of hedonism: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." This has been a common cultural mindset for centuries, and it continues today. However, Scripture warns of continually adopting or following such a perilous paradigm.

Jesus' parables were filled with teaching about seeking God's kingdom, being intentional about life, and investing time and energy in loving people. He taught these truths by both wisdom and warning. Read Jesus' parable of the rich fool:

Someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" Then He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

LUKE 12:13-21

What flawed assumption did the wealthy man make?

How might you be storing up things for yourself that have little or nothing to do with what God desires for you?

Why do greed and materialism distract us from recognizing the inevitability of our death and therefore from preparing for our eternal home?

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Jesus wasn't condemning wealth in these verses. The reason He called the man a fool is that he allowed his pursuit of wealth to make him complacent and self-sufficient. In verse 20 the word *required* in the original language of the New Testament comes from the concept of a loan that has come due or has been called in. Our lives are on loan to us, and Jesus can call them in anytime He chooses.

Few of us live with this reality in mind. We must always remember that we aren't promised tomorrow. Often only the threat of terminal illness, a near-miss accident, or a tragedy will make us think about being stewards of the life God has so freely given. But we need to recognize that each breath is also a gift from Him.

Everyone will leave this world at some point. God alone will determine how long we'll be on this earth. The realization that our time is finite should certainly motivate us to use all our time and resources wisely. To avoid being caught off guard like the rich fool, we need to live with the brevity of life and the urgency of eternity in mind:

*Teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.*

PSALM 90:12

What does it mean "to number our days"? How does numbering our days produce wisdom?

List three areas of life in which you're using the time God has given you as you should.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A Place Called Heaven

List three areas of life in which you may be wasting time and could make better use of your precious hours.

1.

2.

3.

Record one practical step you could take to eliminate some items on the second list and maximize the time you devote to items on the first list.

Learning to number our days means we live with the understanding that our time on earth is limited and is expiring with every passing moment. Taking an eternal perspective on our minutes, hours, and days allows us to exercise wisdom in the way we spend our time. Numbering our days helps us live with the end in mind.

Christian author Joni Eareckson Tada, who became a quadriplegic in a diving accident in 1967, wrote:

Heaven may be as near as next year, or next week; so it makes good sense to spend some time here on earth thinking candid thoughts about that marvelous future reserved for us.¹

Joni also encourages believers to invest in relationships. Sharing the truth of the gospel in any way and anywhere we can is always a valuable and eternal use of our time on earth.

What's one simple way you can invest more in your relationships?

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

What's one simple way you can maximize your time on earth this week by focusing on eternity?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I confess that death is a difficult subject for me to think about, so I don't think about heaven enough. Please help me better understand Your purpose for my life and my place in heaven, the eternal home You've promised me. Help me number my days so that I can spend them investing in eternity. In Christ's name, amen.

1. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 15.

 DAY 2 

THE BREVITY OF LIFE

One of my closest friends and I both lost our parents when we were young adults. That shared experience has caused us both to talk frequently about the brevity of our time on earth. However, as much as I miss my parents, I see their early departure, from my perspective, as a gift from God that continually reminds me of how brief my own life is. I must live with eternity in mind. And that's true for you as well.

Have you ever lost someone close to you? If so whom?

What impact did that loss have on your understanding of life and death?

If your loved one who died was a Christian, how does his or her death make heaven seem more real to you?

Read James's words about the brevity of life:

You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

JAMES 4:14

Is planning wrong? What point was James making?

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Why are we so often consumed with what will happen tomorrow? How has planning for the future caused you to miss opportunities God has given you today?

What makes it difficult for us to accept that our lives are like a vapor?

Planning is wise and is commended in Scripture (see Prov. 14:15; 15:22; 20:18). Jesus sent out disciples with a plan (see Luke 10:1-2). Paul was methodical when establishing churches (see Acts 14:21-23). James wasn't calling believers to stop planning but rather to plan with the brevity of life in mind. We've all had plans that fell through at the last minute. Most people have experienced unexpected hardship. Just like our plans, our lives can change irreversibly without a moment's notice. Like a vapor, life is here for a moment and then is gone.

Read King David's prayer on this topic:

*LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.
Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;
Surely every man at his best is a mere breath.*

PSALM 39:4-5

Why is it good for us to remember how short life is?

In what ways is our perspective on time radically different from God's?

A Place Called Heaven

Consider the following diagram.



Randy Alcorn uses this diagram to illustrate the brevity of life. The line is eternity. The dot represents all your years on earth. Right now you're living in the dot, so to speak. Yet we rarely think about the line, the eternity that's waiting. Millions of lives live only for the dot, which is only a blip on the radar compared to the eternal.¹

Yet the dot and the line are connected, for our lives touch eternity. While we live in the dot, we don't live for the line. If we aren't careful, we'll begin to see our lives as the dot and not the line. As David said, our days are merely "handbreadths" (v. 5). Against the backdrop of eternity, the dot is minuscule. We must live with eternity in mind and, in particular, with heaven in mind.

What's one practical step you can take this week to create a stronger connection from your dot to eternity?

How could memorizing some of the Scriptures we've examined this week help you keep the brevity of life in mind?

Use the chart to record a few things you've been delaying and ways you can take action on those items in the coming weeks.

What have you been delaying?	How will you take action in the coming weeks?

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Barring the unexpected, this week you, everyone in your family, your small group, and everyone living on the earth will be given the same gift from God. Regardless of age, finances, position, nationality, or any other differentiating factors among human beings, we'll all be given 168 hours this week (seven 7 days times 24 hours equals 168 total hours). Time is an equalizer. We can't do anything about the hours that are gone, and we can't do anything about those to come, only the ones we're living in now. Yesterday is in the past, and tomorrow never actually comes, so today is all we have. We need to use God's sacred gift of time—all 168 hours—to focus on eternity with Him through our attitudes and actions as we love Him and love people. Life is short, so we must live it well.

How do you spend the majority of your free time?

Based on what you recorded on the chart, how could you use your free time better or differently?

PRAYER

Dear Father, You alone know the number of my days, so I trust You with my life and my time. Please guide me and teach me to make the most of each gift—every hour You give me breath—to serve You and love all people with whom I come in contact in Your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

1. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 436.

DAY 3

THE CERTAINTY OF JUDGMENT

Because of the reality of sin, we're born traveling down the wrong road. We all start this life headed in the opposite direction from God; we hit the ground running from Him. Because of Adam and Eve's initial sin in the garden, we're born into rebellion. The prophet Isaiah put it this way:

*All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way.*

ISAIAH 53:6

Sheep are defenseless animals, so a sheep wandering alone is in serious danger. People don't have to do anything to end up in hell when they die. All they need to do is to continue traveling in the same direction they've been traveling since birth.

Read these words of warning from Jesus:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

MATTHEW 7:13-14

Why do you suppose Jesus said the road to destruction is wide and broad, while the road to life is narrow? How have you seen this truth play out in your experience?

In light of Jesus' words, what choice do we all face?

All of us are born on the road of rebellion. All people have found the road to destruction; it's well traveled. To find the narrow gate or the way of Jesus, we must make a decision to make a spiritual U-turn. The Bible calls this reversal *repentance*.

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction. Only when people admit that they're on the wrong road can they discover the right road.

Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life (see John 14:6). Jesus is the only way to find the narrow road. He alone has the keys to the gates to either eternal judgment in hell or eternal salvation in heaven.

The certainty of judgment lies behind each gate. Hebrews 9:27 states, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." There's no escaping the fact that each one of us—Christians and non-Christians alike—will face God's judgment when we arrive at the end of our lives on earth.

The Book of Revelation describes the judgment that awaits those who reject Christ:

I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

REVELATION 20:11-15

Why do we need the truth of verses like these even though they may make us uncomfortable?

Why would Satan want people to ignore Bible passages like this?

How can verses like these make you more grateful for the saving grace and mercy of Jesus?

A Place Called Heaven

Judgment is more commonly thought of a fate befalling nonbelievers, but Christians aren't exempt from God's judgment. Though all Christians face judgment with the certainty of forgiveness and deliverance, the end of every Christian's life is also a gate, or judgment:

We also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:9-10

Why should knowing that all of our actions will be revealed and evaluated in light of Christ motivate us to love and obey God?

What confidence do we have even as we face this judgment?

What differences do you see between these verses and Revelation 20:11-15?

As Christians, we're assured of heaven, but Paul was talking about a day of evaluation and commendation in which Jesus will judge our actions on earth. All we do in our earthly lives has eternal consequences. What an amazing incentive to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (see Matt. 6:33)!

Have you ever been fired from a job for making mistakes or violating the company's protocols? Or on the other hand, have you ever gone through an evaluation and been promoted in a business? The choices we make on the job yield results. When we're assigned the stewardship of a job in a business, putting ourselves first, ignoring the rules, or being apathetic to the boss's goals and desires eventually results in dismissal. Conversely, putting the company first, working hard to meet the organizational goals, and excelling in a job can bring promotion and blessing.

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

Most people understand what it's like to build a career. This worldly paradigm not only reflects what happens in eternity but also serves as a practical, simple analogy to better understand the verses you've read.

While Scripture passages like these may be difficult to understand, we must always remember that God is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). His desire is to reward all those who live life for His glory in His name. The certainty of judgment shouldn't scare Christians but should push us to honor God with our lives.

Why should the certainty of judgment motivate us to live zealously for God and to share the gospel passionately with the lost?

PRAYER

Father God, use these verses to motivate and inspire me not only to live my life for You daily but also to share my testimony and faith with the people I encounter so that they will come to know You. You don't want me to fear eternity but to have faith in You now and forever. May my life continually reflect the fact that You're my way, my truth, and my life. In Christ's name, amen.

DAY 4

TO LIVE PURE

When I'm asked to do TV interviews for news channels and talk shows, the majority of the time they're filmed in the late afternoon or early evening. Because of the extremely bright lights and high-definition broadcast equipment, I have to concentrate on keeping my clothes clean throughout the day. I tuck a napkin into my shirt collar at lunch to prevent tie stains. I use a wet towel to wipe any dust off my jacket. And just before the camera rolls, someone always runs a lint remover over my clothing. The reason is that any slight imperfections in my attire or appearance will be visible when broadcast in high definition.

The Bible often uses clothing as a metaphor for our spiritual lives (see Isa. 61:10; Mal. 2:16; Jas. 5:2; Rev. 7:14). A day is coming when every Christian's actions will be placed under the perfect eye of God's judgment, and all imperfections in us will be revealed. When that day comes, we want to be prepared. Preparation comes as we live with moral purity:

If any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15

Why did Paul use the analogy of fire as a purifier that reveals the spiritual work we do in our lives?

What truly matters to God at the end of our lives?

What Difference Does Heaven Make in Our Lives Today?

As we discussed in day 3, Christians enter judgment with assurance, but they still face judgment. On that day the purity of our hearts and intentions will be revealed. Paul used fire as a metaphor to describe the judgment that will burn away what's impure within us. While straw and dross turn to ashes, metal and precious stones are purified by fire. When the fire burns our impurity away, we're left with only what's pure and acceptable to God.

Every Christian wears two kinds of righteousness that inform the way we live out our purity. The first is our judicial righteousness—our right standing with God—that we receive when we trust Christ as our Savior. Judicial righteousness is the gift of God's forgiveness; therefore, we can do nothing to improve it, soil it, or remove it. It's the foundation of our purity before the Lord.

Judicial righteousness alone presents an incomplete picture of righteousness. Our changed hearts must result in changed actions. Ethical righteousness is the way we live as Christians—right actions before God after we're saved. Ethical righteousness is the outworking of judicial righteousness:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to [God], for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

REVELATION 19:7-8

What's the connection between wearing fine linen wedding clothing and our righteous acts done on earth?

Why is the analogy of a bride at a wedding particularly helpful for us in understanding what it means to prepare ourselves for heaven?

The church is the bride of Christ. Like a bride on her wedding day, we want to offer ourselves to our bridegroom as pure and presentable. This means we must take care to live consistent, ethical lives that prepare us to meet our Savior.

No one today would argue that we live in an increasingly sinful world. We're surrounded by messages and images of immorality, rebellion, and lawlessness that make

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it hard to keep our character clean and to stay away from the saturation and stench of sin. This daily struggle gets more and more difficult as the days go by. Yet one of the best ways to keep our lives spotless is by allowing our longing for heaven to drive us to be clothed with the pure, righteous character of Christ:

Now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

COLOSSIANS 3:8-10,12-13

**List all the ways Paul said we're to live our ethical righteousness.
What do we put on? What do we take off?**

How does our judicial righteousness (our hearts changed by God) affect our ethical righteousness (our works from faith)?

When Paul used the phrases "put them all aside" (v. 8) and "put on" (v. 10,12), he was intentionally referring to taking off dirty clothes and putting on clean ones. What do you need to put off now that you've been changed by Christ?

Much of what we spend our time on will be burned up in the judgment. Our acts of faith, however, will endure beyond this world. That's why living a life of moral purity is essential. It matters not only in this life but also in the next. The metaphor of taking off and putting on clothes shows us that moral purity is a choice we make daily:

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Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless.

2 PETER 3:11-14

Through Christ we've received the privilege and the power to live lives pleasing to Him by choosing Him over sin. Purity is possible to ready us for heaven by the saving grace of our Savior.

When is it easiest for you to live out your ethical righteousness? What barriers exist to your living the life of purity God has called you to?

PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for Your forgiveness and grace. Thank You also for the power You provide me to live a holy life, choosing Your ways over my own. Help me understand that heaven can begin here with my choices to glorify and honor You. Give me the strength and boldness to say no to the world and say yes to You. In Your name, amen.

DAY 5

THE STRUGGLE OF SUFFERING

I've been a pastor for many years, and one of the questions I'm asked most frequently is "Why does God allow _____?" Insert in the blank any number of horrific experiences that can happen in this life. Sometimes these questions arise from spiritual struggles and doubts, while others result from tragic personal experiences. We all have these questions at different points in our lives for various reasons.

Although God rarely answers the *why* of these questions, He gives us plenty of counsel to help us put suffering in perspective:

Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18

Remember, Paul had been shipwrecked, imprisoned, and beaten within an inch of his life, yet he referred to each event as "momentary, light affliction" (v. 17).

What was Paul communicating about eternity in these verses?

Why is taking an eternal perspective on struggles hard for us?

We certainly have struggles and heartaches in this world that we feel may never end, yet Paul said that compared to eternity, these agonies are only momentary. Our afflictions, no matter how unbearable they may seem at the time, are light when compared to the weight of heaven.

Would you consider a two-thousand-pound block of concrete to be light or heavy? The answer depends on what you compare it to. Compared to you and me, even weighed together, the block is very heavy. But placed against a fully fueled 777

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jetliner, that same concrete block is light. Paul is telling us that perspective is everything. The most horrendous experiences we may suffer through in this life last only a moment compared to the indescribable future God is preparing for us in heaven.

Heaven is the promise that God will eventually make all things right and that He will one day fulfill our deepest longings. Although God's promise is still in the future, it should make a tremendous difference in our lives today. The hope of heaven is that all creation will receive what it has long desired: freedom from the crushing oppression of sin:

The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

ROMANS 8:19-25

What four truths did Paul identify about creation in these verses?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

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List two benefits Paul said we'll experience.

1.

2.

The world is fallen. All creation is waiting for God to redeem it because it was subjected to futility, but one day God will release it from corruption. Until that point it groans as in the pain of childbirth. Paul was explaining that right now in their present state, before the return of Christ, both humankind and creation are suffering because of the realities of sin and evil. But in Christ we have hope, and “in hope we have been saved” (v. 24).

One of the greatest examples of suffering depicted in the Bible is Job. God told the entire heavenly realm, including Satan, that Job was “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8). He was blessed in every manner a man could possibly be blessed. In a discussion between God and His enemy that’s difficult for us to understand, Satan was allowed to take everything from Job. Observe Job’s response:

*Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head,
and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said,
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked I shall return there.
The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.
Blessed be the name of the LORD.”
Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

JOB 1:20-22

What strikes you about Job’s response to losing everything dear to him?

What view of God must Job have had to respond this way?

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Eventually, God frankly spoke to Job. Job's response is a great lesson for us all:

*Job answered the LORD and said,
“I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.
‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
‘Hear, now, and I will speak;
I will ask You, and You instruct me.’
I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear;
But now my eye sees You;
Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”*

JOB 42:1-6

How would you summarize Job's experience with God? What observations can you glean from his words?

God rarely gives us the *why* for suffering. We have no indication in Scripture that Job ever knew anything about God and Satan's exchange. Yet Job exhibited incredible faith, honesty, and transparency throughout his grief and disease. God blessed him with twice what he had lost. Job lived another 140 years, seeing the births of four generations (see v. 16).

Job never received the answers he sought, but he remains an example of patient faithfulness. When we struggle in suffering, we need the same perspective that God gave Job. Seeing all our suffering in light of God's larger plan allows us to wait patiently and faithfully in the midst of hardship.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, while I pray against any form of suffering, I know it will come into my life. Give me the strength and foresight to be prepared in Your Spirit, just as Job was. Help me place suffering in the proper perspective, knowing that in heaven there will be no more tears or pain. Thank You for eternal life. In Christ's name, amen.