

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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When Faith
Becomes Sight

HEAVEN

JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD



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Becomes Sight

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Lifeway Press®
Brentwood, Tennessee

A watercolor illustration of several blue flowers, likely lilies, with long, slender petals and prominent stamens. The flowers are rendered in various shades of blue, from light to dark, and are positioned at the bottom of the page, partially overlapping the publisher information.

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ISBN: 978-1-4300-9034-2 • Item: 005846960

Dewey decimal classification: 236.24

Subject headings: Heaven \ FUTURE LIFE \ PARADISE

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Printed in the United States of America

Lifeway Women Bible Studies
Lifeway Resources
200 Powell Place, Suite 100,
Brentwood, TN, 37027-7707

Cover design by Lauren Ervin

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About the Author



Heaven: When Faith Becomes Sight is Jennifer's ninth video-based Bible study with Lifeway. It follows her popular Bible studies, *Amos: An Invitation to the Good Life*; *Take Courage: A Study of Haggai*; *Psalm 23: The Shepherd With Me*; *Hosea: Unfailing Love Changes Everything*; and *Me, Myself, and Lies: A Thought-Closet Makeover*, among others.

Jennifer has shared her inspiring messages to audiences across the country and through media outlets including: *The Dr. Phil Show*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, and *The Billy Graham Television Special*. She's the featured teacher and founder of Fresh Grounded Faith women's events and hosts the *4:13 Podcast* where she offers practical encouragement and biblical wisdom to help women live the "I can" life. Jennifer is also the publisher of the popular online leadership library called womensministry.net.

Jennifer is known for her substance, signature wit, and down-to-earth style. A unique mix of profound and playful, she weaves biblical truth with relatable stories, making God's Word accessible to those just starting out in Scripture and endearing to those who have walked with Christ for years.

She's a C. S. Lewis junkie, an obsessive audiobook listener, a dark chocolate lover, and she drinks way too much strong coffee.

She's been blind since age fifteen and says the greatest lesson she's learned in the dark is that it doesn't have to be well with your circumstances to be well with your soul. Jennifer is a boy mom and a GiGi of four (and counting) who lives in Missouri with her husband, whom she affectionately calls her very own Dr. Phil!

Connect with Jennifer at jenniferrothschild.com/heaven.

Four Things You Need to Know Before Starting This Study

(OKAY, FIVE; YOU'LL SEE)

1 YOU HAVE FREE ACCESS TO SEVEN VIDEO TEACHINGS ON PAGE 225

Here's the way to best use the videos: First, read page 8, "When You Smell the Flowers." This is my note to you, so don't skip it. I wrote it to you!

Then, gather with your group and watch the Session One video titled, "Getting the Scoop on Heaven" and take notes on page 10. You can do this study solo, but we believe it is best experienced in a group setting. So, join with your people at church, or pull some neighbors together, or just gather some friends and Bible study buddies to study with! You need them. They need you. God's Word is sweet when we share it together.

After watching the Session One video, begin your personal study in Session One: "Your Father's House" (p. 12).

Each week of study includes four days of personal study and concludes with a summary of *Takeaway Truths* and a fifth day titled *Dash Living Day*.

2 YOU WILL ENJOY DASH LIVING DAYS

The main goal of the *Heaven* Bible study is for us to gain a biblical understanding of Heaven so we can live faithfully in the now with eager anticipation of our future.

But also, this completed Bible study will become a practical resource for you and the people you love.

Every fifth day of each week of study will be a *Dash Living Day*. Often on a tombstone or in a news article about someone who has died, a birth date and death date are presented with a dash in between. For example, C. S. Lewis (11/29/1898–11/22/1963) is my favorite dead author. The dash between those dates represents what happened to that person between the date of birth and the date of death. At this moment, we are all living in the dashes. And how we live now and what we record about our lives becomes the legacy that outlives us.



So, *Dash Living Days* give us a chance to reflect and record important things about how we best live our lives in this moment and what we want others to know when we're gone. (You may want to make your loved ones aware these words exist and how to locate them.)

3 YOU WILL WATCH A VIDEO TEACHING FOLLOWING EACH WEEK OF PERSONAL STUDY

Each week of personal study is followed by a video teaching that provides insight and reinforces what you learned in your personal study. (To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.)

4 YOU HAVE EXTRA RESOURCES ONLINE AND LEADER HELP ON PAGE 210

If you're leading a group, you'll find Leader Helps on page 210 and other free resources at lifeway.com/heaven. You can also get tons of extra resources to enhance group and personal study at jenniferrothschild.com/heaven. Go there to get ideas, a *Heaven* playlist, video message summaries, and more.

5 YOU ARE LOVED



I love and appreciate you and am so thankful you care about studying Heaven. And just to show you how much I appreciate you reading this page all the way down to number five, scan this QR code for a special *Heaven* gift from me to you!



Introduction: When You Smell the Flowers

“I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here.
This is the land I have been looking for all my life . . . ”¹

C. S. LEWIS

I’ve walked many miles in the dark, thus my eyes are drawn to the place where there is no more night, no darkness at all. Since becoming blind at age fifteen, I’ve held the arms of friends, family, and strangers to navigate the unending darkness. I’ve held tight to my faith and been held by God’s grace through every dark day. And I’ve also held a white cane. I have definitely walked by faith and not by sight—in a very literal sense.

I’ll never forget how Mike, my mobility instructor, finished up my first lesson of learning to walk in the dark. I was seventeen years old when I got my first white cane, and with it I got Mike, the amazing guy who taught me how to use it. During that first lesson, he showed me how to navigate safely and helped me gain some independence. He walked me around my neighborhood, pointing out how to hold the cane, how to tap it, and how to anticipate all the rough places I would encounter.

Sweaty from the Miami heat and probably from the stress I felt, we turned the last corner toward my home. He paused and asked, “Do you smell it?”

I stopped and breathed in my surroundings. I did smell it. A lush bush of blooming hibiscus was right there on the corner near my home.

“When you smell the flowers,” Mike said, “you know you’re almost home.”

So, my friend, I ask you what Mike asked me, “Do you smell it?”

Pause and breathe in your surroundings.

The fragrance of Heaven is wafting along the path you walk even if you haven’t noticed it yet.

It is your reminder that home, your Father's house, is just around the corner—one breath, one heartbeat away. Even if Heaven came way too soon for someone you love or if you think (and hope) it is decades away for you, it is still our eternal home. By faith, it is our unseen reality that makes all we see here beam with real, unshakeable hope.

On this side of eternity, we each walk by faith, not by sight.

But there will be a day when the fragrance of those flowers is so strong that we will know, we will know we are almost home. Yet that scent of eternity is drawing us even now to the beauty, the hope, and the assurance of our ultimate home: Heaven.

So, as we navigate through bright and dark days here, we hold on to our faith, each other, and we are held by God's grace. The shadows we face and feel here—sickness, uncertainty, stress, sorrow—will all eventually lift when we are captivated by that sweet aroma that ushers us into the presence of the One whose face we will clearly see!

Over the next seven weeks together, we will gain a biblical understanding of Heaven. As we discover what the Bible says about our glorious unending, we will be fortified in the face of uncertainty, anchored in deep spiritual serenity, and grounded in eternity.

So, let's keep pressing on until that day when our faith becomes sight!

I'm so grateful we're learning this together. Onward and upward!

Love,

Jennifer

INTRODUCTION: GETTING THE SCOOP ON HEAVEN

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Welcome and Prayer

WATCH THE VIDEO

Death is not the end of our _____. Death is simply the _____ that separates us and transitions us into that forever story of our life.

What we _____ and what we _____ about Heaven will determine how we _____.

Heaven is a literal _____ where God dwells, where born again believers in Christ go when they _____ or when Christ _____, whichever comes first.

Blue flowers in literature, especially in German romantic literature represent _____, longing, and an _____ for the eternal.

The _____ is what expands and illuminates our _____ and our _____ of Heaven.

Go to jenniferrothschild.com/heaven to get an email summary of this video teaching in your inbox. Plus, check out my *Heaven* playlist to encourage you as you live what you learn.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.



CONVERSATION GUIDE

- What's the first thing you think of when you hear the word Heaven?
- If someone asked you what you thought Heaven was going to be like, what would you say?
- What has shaped your view of Heaven? What has been the strongest influence on your view?
- Does your view of Heaven affect how you live? If so, how? If not, why should it?
- What's one point/story/truth from the video teaching that resonated with you? Why?
- What are you hoping to get out of this study on Heaven?





SESSION ONE

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

JOHN 14:1-3



YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE

Heaven is often misrepresented, misunderstood, and perhaps missed altogether because of a lack of clarity about what it is and who goes there.

This week, you will get a working understanding of how Scripture speaks of Heaven and experience the comfort and confidence that knowledge provides. First, we'll examine how Heaven is spoken of from creation to the cross, especially how the Old Testament talks about the afterlife. Second, we'll examine how Heaven is referred to from the resurrection to the return of Christ, looking at how New Testament writers talked about what happens and where we go if we die before Christ returns. And third, we'll deal with how the Bible talks of Heaven after Christ's return, noting where we will spend all of eternity.



DAY 1

Eye Has Not Seen

“Earth’s crammed with Heaven, and every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.”¹

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Heaven. It’s your glorious unending. Your forever home. The place your faith becomes sight. I’m so grateful we’re spending the next six weeks in Heaven together! (Grin!) So settle in, take a deep breath, and let’s start. (You’ll notice at the beginning of each day I’ve written a prayer based on the Scripture in parentheses. Let these prayers prepare your heart for each day of study.)

*Lord, guide us through Your Spirit to know truth
and understand Your holy Word. Amen (John 16:13).*

As I write this, I’m standing at my glass-top desk, feeling the warmth of sunlight bathe the room.

Sometimes I stand here in my office and sense the soft afternoon light seeping through the window. Though I can’t see it, I know it’s there, and I lift my eyes and imagine what lies beyond the pane. In my mind’s eye I see the carpet of grass and the unruly limbs of the lazy oak that often scrape my window frame on a windy day. But then I imagine beyond; I see the blue flowers.

Full disclosure: there are no blue flowers outside my window, but I’m looking way beyond my front yard. I’m casting my imaginative gaze to a faraway place where I dream blue flowers grow.

You see, the blue flower in literature represents longing. It was a central symbol of the Romanticism movement, portraying a desire, yearning, and love of the eternal.² And oh, how I ache for the eternal. C. S. Lewis called himself, “a votary of the Blue Flower.”³

But here’s the thing: my physical eyes can’t see a blue flower. A degenerative retinal disease caused me to lose my eyesight when I was fifteen, so I have lived in physical darkness longer than I ever lived in physical light. And quite honestly, I don’t even have a good visual memory of a blue flower. But my fingertips have brushed the delicate petals of a blue hydrangea. I have breathed in its sweet, subtle fragrance. This has awakened in me a beautiful longing for that which I can’t even see.

It awakens what no eye has seen—images of Heaven, the place where I hope blue flowers grow.

Is there anything in your life that awakens an awareness of the eternal or a desire for Heaven? If so, describe it.

It’s interesting that often what we see or feel *here* awakens in us a longing, a desire for *there*, for Heaven. Even the temporary pulses with the echo of the eternal. Even the tangible can quicken our heartbeat and cast our gaze toward the transcendent. Yet what our hearts long for, no eye has ever seen.

Could that be what Paul was talking about in 1 Corinthians 2:9?

Let’s see.

Read the verse and list the main points.

Now, go back and read the verses surrounding verse 9. How do they help you understand what it means?

I've always thought this verse was talking about Heaven. I've even heard sermons where the preacher used that verse to explain how beyond our imagination Heaven must be. Yet when we read verse 9 in context, we see Paul was using Old Testament passages (Isa. 52:15; 64:4) to explain that now, through the Holy Spirit, believers can see with enlightened eyes God's wisdom in Christ. Only eyes opened by the power of the Holy Spirit can see such beautiful mystery.

So, spoiler alert. Verse 9 is not talking about Heaven. It's referring to the gospel.

Finding out that verse isn't about Heaven might be a little alarming, especially if, like me, you thought it was. But don't you just love learning how deep and beautiful its actual meaning is? And isn't it exciting to find out we have so much to learn, and maybe unlearn, about Heaven?

Can we apply the "no eye has seen . . . [what] God has prepared" idea of that verse to the mystery of Heaven? And can we let it be the fragrance of a blue flower awakening our longing for eternity? Maybe so, if we listen to the One who has actually seen what our eyes have not.

Find **John 3:13** and **John 14:2-3**. Write all three verses in order below and then read them aloud as one seamless paragraph a few times.

Did you hear that? Jesus came from Heaven and has exclusive expert authority on Heaven. He called that place, “My Father’s house” (John 14:2). His eye had literally seen it, so we can trust what He says about what our eye has not seen.

Pause here and ponder why Jesus may have chosen to call Heaven our Father’s house. What implications flow from that title? What emotions and thoughts do you have about it?

I call my earthly father “Hero Dad” because he was. Though I lived thousands of miles away, knowing my dad was home in his house in Florida brought me such a sense of security. I knew I always had a place in my father’s house. Even as a married woman, knowing he was there brought me such comfort. This was never more obvious to me than when he was no longer there. That home didn’t feel the same. Even though my mom was still there, the anchor, the cornerstone, the one who gave it foundation and stability was gone.

You may not have an earthly dad who brings you that kind of security and comfort. If so, I’m sorry, my sister. I can only imagine the hole in your soul that loss represents. However, you have a heavenly Father who loves you perfectly, and it is His presence and the certainty that Jesus has prepared a place for you in His house that can help bring your soul stability.

Jesus used figurative language to communicate what our dwelling with God will be like.

Which phrase below best represents how Jesus described our Father’s house (John 14:2)?

- unending luxury suites
- many rooms
- several small cabins

In most modern translations (CSB, NIV, ESV, NASB), it says there are *many rooms* in the Father’s house. But in the KJV, *mansions* was how it was translated. So, maybe you’ve grown up thinking we get a palatial dwelling with opulence and a coffee bar! (Okay, the coffee bar is my idea of Heaven.) That wasn’t the point Jesus was making, though.

What do you think Jesus meant?

The Greek word for *house* in the phrase *my Father's house* is *tē oikia*, which can be used to communicate a physical house or a family.⁴ Hmm. Perhaps the message here is not about rooms or mansions or dwelling places but about identity and family? You belong. I belong. There is plenty of room. We are family, and we have a home.

Oh, my friend, whatever wonder our eyes have seen here dims in light of what God has prepared for us there. Whatever beauty I imagine in the hue of a blue flower is sepia tone compared to the radiance that will burst forth before my seeing, enlightened eyes in Heaven.

So, we begin this study by acknowledging the great mystery of Christ crucified, raised, and glorified, and we anticipate the great mystery of seeing Him face to face someday—when our faith becomes sight.

Through the coming pages of this study, we'll pick apart Scripture to understand truths about our glorious unending, our risen life after death. But why we do this needs to be super clear.

So, let's end there. Why think about Heaven?

What reason did Jesus give to His disciples in **John 14:1**?

- To clarify their mission
- To correct their theology
- To comfort their hearts

Our compassionate Savior knew the troubled hearts of His disciples needed comfort. His words about His Father's house affirmed and assured them of the truth that there was far more to this life than the uncertainty they felt. This same truth can untrouble our hearts, too.

Consider your heart for a moment. Does it have some troubled spots?

Jot down what is unsettling you. Then ask God to use your growing understanding and anticipation of Heaven to bring comfort to your troubled heart.

My Troubled Heart List

Pause and write a prayer, pouring your heart out to Jesus.

Dear God,

Amen

The blue flower represents longing, and I am longing for Heaven. When you see a blue flower, let it remind you Heaven is near. Post a picture on social media, and tag me!

(In a few weeks, we'll revisit this list to see how your troubled heart is being affected by what you are learning about Heaven.)

All right, we're done for now, so go pick a blue flower (or find a picture of one) and study the fragile strength of each perfectly designed petal. Physically or imaginatively breathe in its fragrance and cast your gaze far past it to that place, the place God has prepared for you, the daughter He loves. Be comforted and strengthened today.

Tomorrow, ice cream. Really.

“ . . . and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

PSALM 23:6



DAY 2

The Scoop on Heaven

“One drop of the sweetness of Heaven is enough to take away all the sourness and bitterness of all the afflictions in the world.”⁵

JEREMIAH BURROUGHS

Pull up a chair, because we’re going to get the scoop on Heaven today, and it will be sweeter than ice cream!

But before we start, let’s ask God’s Spirit to “open our eyes” so we may know the hope to which we are called.

*Thank You, Lord, for our inheritance in Christ and in each other.
Teach us today about our glorious unending in Your presence.
Amen (Eph. 1:18).*

Let me start by asking you some questions.

Where did King David, Ruth, Ezekiel, Deborah, and other Old Testament people go when they died? After all, Jesus hadn’t come yet. Had He prepared the place in His Father’s house for them?

Or what about the thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus? Where did he go the day Jesus promised him they would be together in Paradise?

Where did Peter, Paul, Mary Magdalene, and other New Testament believers who died after Jesus was resurrected end up?

And what happens to all of them and us after Jesus returns? What is our final destination? Will we be in the same place they’re in right now?

Whew.

Underline the statement below that best represents your response to those questions?

- Never thought about it.
- Uh, I'm confused.
- I have a working understanding of where Old and New Testament saints went when they died.
- What? I just want to focus on the promise of Heaven rather than getting into those weeds.
- Dude, it's all Heaven. Don't get so picky.

Before I studied about Heaven, I thought it was just the place where God dwells and where I go when I die. I thought I'd show up there; get a new body; see Jesus, my dad, and C. S. Lewis; and not be blind. That was pretty much the extent of my thinking.

And oh, how I wanted all of that. Heaven felt like relief to me. It was rescue from the prison of my blind body, freedom to know and be known and be me.

I never thought to ask those questions.

**What about you? What are your thoughts about Heaven?
Is it appealing to you or not? Explain.**

**What helped form your impressions of Heaven? Books? Songs?
Scriptures?**

I grew up singing a song that proclaimed I had a mansion just over the hilltop where I would walk streets of gold and never grow old. But now I wonder. *Really? Is that true?*

I realized how little I understood about Heaven, and what I assumed about it was a little egocentric and a lot informed by songs as much as Scripture. Quite honestly, all the confusion I felt about Heaven troubled my heart.

So, as we begin digging into the details about Heaven, with some that may be new to you, don't let them shake you or diminish your view. Instead, let them bring clarity. Trust me, the process will help you love God deeply, long for Heaven more, and live on earth with an untroubled heart.

Alright, here we go.

What does the Bible actually say about Heaven?

First, when you read the word *Heaven* in the Bible, it has one of three meanings.

1. Where the bluebird flies. This is the air within earth's atmosphere (Deut. 4:17; Matt. 6:26).
2. Where the sun, moon, and stars are. The expanse of the universe (Gen. 1:1,17; Ps. 19:1-2).
3. The dwelling place of God (1 Kings 8:39; Matt. 6:9; Phil. 3:20).

So, don't assume every time you read the word *Heaven* in the Bible, it is referring to our eternal home with God. In fact, there are several words used in the Bible to represent Heaven and our afterlife with God.

Read the following passages and write the word used to represent Heaven in each one.

2 Kings 2:11 _____

Luke 16:19-31 _____

Luke 23:43 _____

2 Corinthians 5:1 _____

2 Corinthians 12:2 _____

Hebrews 11:16 _____

All these words for Heaven have different contexts and connotations we will explore more as we go along. But let's start thinking of all of this as one sweet treat from God—a carton of Neapolitan ice cream! You're welcome.

Growing up, every time I went to my southern grandmother's house, she served up Neapolitan ice cream in the daintiest pink parfaits! She always gave me three scoops—chocolate on the bottom, vanilla in the middle, and strawberry on top. You know what Neapolitan ice cream looks like, right? It's a carton of yummy, creamy delight in three flavors: chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry. Of course, this imagery is not scriptural, and I'm not using it as an analogy; it's just a fun, illustrative way to serve up some clarity about Heaven.

Even though we think of Heaven as ultimately one place, we need to see how the Scripture talks about it in three different time periods.

If this were Neapolitan ice cream, these would be the three scoops:

Scoop 1: This would be chocolate. It's how the Bible speaks of pre-resurrection Heaven—from creation to the cross.

Scoop 2: This would be the vanilla. It's how the Bible speaks of post-resurrection Heaven—from the empty tomb to the return of Christ.

Scoop 3: This would be strawberry. This is how Scripture describes post-return Heaven—from the return of Christ to the rest of forever.

Pause and read those again. Ask God to help you get that clear in your mind before we go on. To establish the foundation of our understanding, fill in the timeline below, labeling each section according to those three scoops. And if you're creative, you can make it look like Neapolitan ice cream.



This week we'll get a tiny taste of all three, but today let's start with chocolate, because that's a fine way to start! In fact, if you want to go grab some of that frozen delight (educational purposes only, of course), go ahead. I'll wait!

Again, you're welcome.

FIRST SCOOP OF HEAVEN

This is the far-left side of your timeline. It's pre-resurrection, the time between creation and the cross, specifically the time of the Old Testament.

Where does the Old Testament say followers of God went when they died? Read the following verses and jot down the words used to describe what happened to Abraham and Jacob when they died.

Genesis 15:15

Genesis 49:29

When Abraham and Jacob died, Scripture indicates they went to "their ancestors (or fathers) in peace." They were gathered to their people.

That tells us the company they kept but not where they went. What was their location?

Read **Genesis 37:35; 42:38**. Where did Jacob say his final destination would be?

Sheol (the grave). What and where is it? You may have thought, like me, that Sheol was another name for Hell. There's more to it than that. Let me give you a brief (as opposed to exhaustive) explanation.

In the Old Testament, the word *Sheol* was used to refer simply to the grave or to the place of the dead. It seems all were destined to experience it (Ps. 89:48). While it was definitely seen as the place the wicked were consigned to (Ps. 9:17; 49:13-14), it was also spoken of as the place the righteous went when they died. We already heard Jacob mention it, proclaiming he would “surely go down to Sheol” (Gen. 37:35). Job described it as “the land of darkness and gloom” where he would go and never return (Job 10:21). That sounds hopeless. But that theme of never returning seems to be more about not escaping death, rather than being confined there for eternity. Sheol may have been a place of the dead but not a dead end. The Old Testament writers hinted at this hope.

Read the following passages and note the hope expressed by each writer.

Job 19:25-27

Psalms 49:15; 86:13

Isaiah 26:19

So at this point in Scripture, all people go to the place of the dead when they die. But there are hints of separation and a different experience between the righteous and the unrighteous.

Now, stay with me; this is going to make sense! By the time of the New Testament, the after-life experience and location for the righteous and unrighteous was better defined, as seen in one of Jesus’s parables.

Read **Luke 16:19-31** and answer the questions below.

Where did Lazarus and the rich man go when they died?

In this parable, could they see each other?

How did Jesus describe what separated Lazarus and the rich man?

Two things we must keep in mind: 1) The main point of this parable was not to give a physical description of the afterlife; 2) building a doctrine based on a parable is asking too much of the story. However, the parable does illustrate Jewish thought at the time of Jesus about the place where the dead are located. Also, Jesus would not tell a story that was false. It would at least have echoes of the truth.

The parable depicts a realm with compartments.

What are the two compartments?

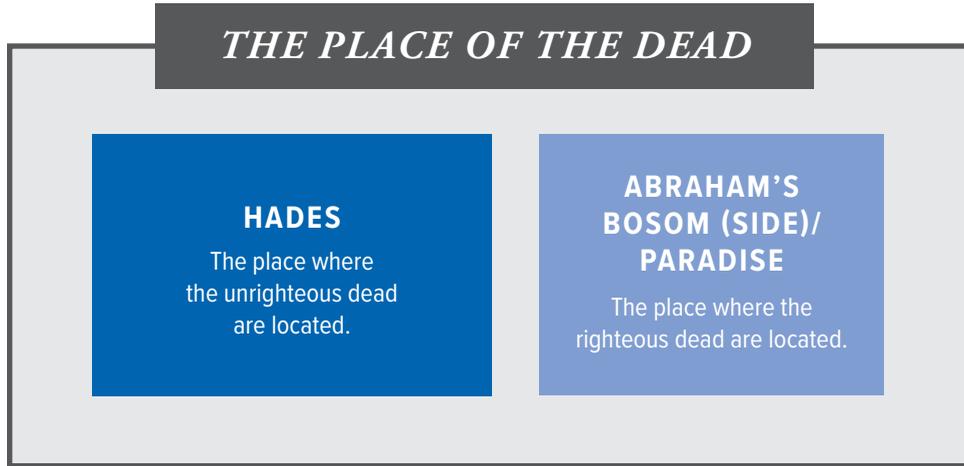
_____ and _____

In the parable, Hades represented a place of separation and punishment for the unrighteous, while Abraham's bosom (side) represented a place where the righteous dead experienced comfort and communion with God. For them, it was a blessed state of existence after death. So, before Jesus's death and resurrection, Scripture indicates all who died went to the place of the dead, where the righteous and unrighteous have a conscious existence but are separated and having very different experiences. They are in a holding pattern, you might say, waiting for what's to come next.

Hopefully this illustration helps:

CREATION TO CROSS

(Pre-resurrection Understanding of Life after Death)



Whew! Do you have brain freeze yet? I hope not! I know this may have been a lot to swallow, but it helps us get a taste so we can keep getting the scoop on Heaven.

Maybe you learned, or unlearned, something today that you never knew or thought about. I hope it was as satisfying as chocolate!

Before you finish up today, pray Psalm 86:10-13.

O God, your love toward your people is unwavering and astounding. Thank You for delivering our souls from the depths of sorrow, the depths of sin, the depths of self, and the depths of Sheol. We praise You in Jesus's name. Amen!

Good job, sister!

Tomorrow, another scoop: vanilla!



DAY 3

Ain't No Plain Vanilla Here!

“When a mortal man speaks anything of that eternal blessedness of the saints in glory, he is like a blind man discoursing about the light which he has never seen, and so cannot distinctly speak anything concerning it.”⁶

CHARLES H. SPURGEON

All right, we enjoyed a big scoop of chocolate yesterday. We got a taste of how Scripture speaks of the afterlife between creation and the cross. This gave us an understanding of where both the righteous and unrighteous dead went before Christ’s resurrection. To refresh your memory, flip back to page 24 and look at the timeline you created yesterday. When you do, note that today we will be in the vanilla of our Neapolitan ice cream. This is the second scoop of Heaven, looking at how Scripture talks about Heaven from Christ’s resurrection to Christ’s return.

Now that you’ve got that image in your mind, take a deep breath, relax your mind, open your heart, and ask God’s Holy Spirit to guide you into truth today.

Thank You, Lord, for Your Spirit who teaches us and guides us into truth. Teach us today for Christ’s glory and our good. Amen (John 16:13).

This may be the vanilla flavor of our Neapolitan ice cream, but trust me, it’s not plain! This scoop of Heaven is now—the time between Jesus’s resurrection and His return.

Read **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** and jot down the two titles Paul gives what I call this second scoop of Heaven.

_____ and _____

Paul seems to be using *third Heaven* and *Paradise* synonymously. This is the only place the third Heaven is mentioned in the Bible.

What do you think Paul means by this? Is there a first and second Heaven?

Yesterday we saw that *Heaven* can mean one of three things in Scripture (p. 24). The third Heaven is referring to the highest Heaven, the place where God dwells, in contrast to where the birds fly and the planets rotate.

Paradise is used only two other places in Scripture to describe Heaven. Let's take a look.

Read **Luke 23:32-43**.

What did Jesus say to the thief who hung next to Him?

He didn't tell him he'd have to pass through two layers of Heaven and then eventually he'd be there. No.

“Today you will be with me in paradise.”

What can you deduce about Heaven from those eight words Jesus spoke to the thief?

Jesus knew the thief wasn't going to make it off the cross alive that day, so His use of the word *today* suggests that to be dead here is to be alive there. And Jesus saying *with me*, indicates the thief and Jesus would be together in the same place. And the name of this place: *Paradise*.

Now find **Revelation 2:7**.

What can you deduce about Paradise based on this verse?

Paradise is the place where the tree of life flourishes and nourishes. The victorious Christ follower will have the right to eat from it. So evidently, Paradise is vibrant, alive, and for the living.

Both Paradise and the third Heaven describe a place prepared for Christ's family: a place of reward, revelation, and rest.

One phrase we will use to describe this second scoop of Heaven not found in Scripture is "intermediate state."

If you are ambitious, grab your favorite Bible resource or just search the internet for "intermediate state." Summarize what you find.

The intermediate state, put simply, is the time between a person's bodily death and their bodily resurrection. For believers in Christ, the intermediate state is a time of conscious existence in Paradise, or the present Heaven, separated from their physical bodies.

How do we know this?

Read [Philippians 1:21-24](#). What internal struggle was Paul dealing with?

What did Paul consider to be his better choice?

How would that be better?

Paul desired to depart to be with Christ. If Paul were to fade into unconscious oblivion when he died, would that be better? I think not. If Paul were in some spiritual limbo state until the resurrection, would that be better? No. In neither case would there be fellowship with Christ.

For Paul, departing this life and arriving in the presence of Christ was better than staying in his earthly life. Does that feel like the better choice to you? Why or why not? Be honest.

It's okay if it doesn't feel better to you yet. After all, departing means leaving your loved ones here. And if we're honest, lots of us have some degree of a fear of death. We might say we're spiritually prepared to go to Heaven; we're just not volunteering to go today! I get it. My prayer for you, for us, is that we will have such a clear revelation of Heaven—being with Christ and our glorious unending—that leaving earth will not feel like loss but gain. So be patient with yourself and the process of God's Spirit preparing you.

Moving on.

Let's take another look at Paul expressing his desire to be with Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

Explain in your own words the truth Paul was confident about.

What was Paul's preferred option (v. 8)?

Paul desired to be away from his human body and be with Christ. He was sure that the moment he left this life he would be fully alive, aware in Christ's presence. We also can be sure that the day we become absent from these human bodies, we will be fully alive in the presence of the Lord.

Alright, you're doing great. Let's look at one more Scripture passage to help us grasp this concept.

Read Revelation 6:9-10. How are the deceased believers described. Where are they and what are they doing?

John described these martyred believers as “souls” who were positioned under the altar and were actively “crying out” to the Lord. They are fully alive in God's presence and animated, even if not with the same kind of body we are familiar with here and now.

We will learn more about this in a few weeks. But for now, what we need to understand is that from post-resurrection until Christ's return, the New Testament indicates that those believers who die exist in an intermediate state in the present Heaven with Him. They are absent from their earthly bodies and present with the Lord in Paradise.

They are not in a suspended state of sleep. It is not an unconscious existence. No. They are fully alive in God's presence.

This is where my dad is. This is where your deceased loved ones who know Christ are. And if you know Jesus, this is where you will go if you die before Christ's return.

I told you this would be no plain vanilla, right?

These may be new thoughts for you. It may make you feel a little insecure about what you know, what you think you know, and what you may need to learn and unlearn. I realize the more I know, the more I need to know, and there may be things we cannot know.

Let's close by reviewing 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. As you read it, note or circle each time Paul admits he does not know. And what phrase does Paul use after he says that he does not know?

God knows.

Did you catch that, my friend? Paul, who was caught up into Heaven, into the presence of God, admitted he didn't know if it was in the body or apart from the body. He says he Did. Not. Know.

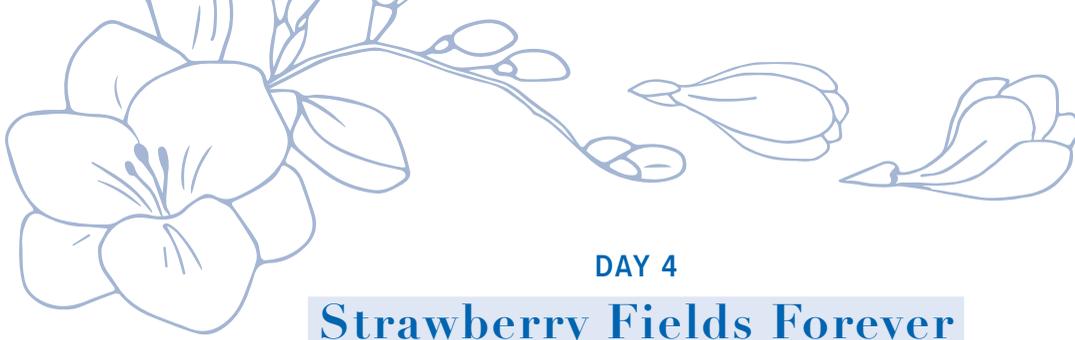
Can we be okay with admitting there are things we don't know either? And can we also rest on the two words Paul repeated twice: God knows?

He does know, my friend. He knows your questions, your confusion, your concerns. He knows you, and He loves you. Let not your heart be troubled. Cast your eyes past the shadows of this life to that bright beautiful forever God has for you.

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12 (NASB)

All right. Well done, sister. Tomorrow, our last scoop of Heaven—an endless scoop of strawberry!



DAY 4

Strawberry Fields Forever

“If you’re a child of God, you do not just ‘go around once’ on Earth. You don’t get just one earthly life. You get another—one far better and without end. You’ll inhabit the New Earth! You’ll live with the God you cherish and the people you love as an undying person on an undying Earth.”⁷

RANDY ALCORN

It’s just after sunrise, and I’m sitting on the deck. The simple grandeur of Table Rock Lake spreads out before me echoing an unending “ta-da!” Of course, I can’t see it, but oh, how it draws all my senses to its presence. The subtle fragrance of pine. The symphony of birds. The gentle caress of the breeze. The serene march of the water. All are like seeds of a blue flower planted deep in my heart, blossoming into a beautiful ache for forever.

As I sit breathing it in, it feels like it goes on and on—no boundaries, just beauty that lasts forever. Of course, I know there is a city somewhere lurking at the edges of this mini paradise. But if you could sit here with me, close your eyes and just take it in, I think you would feel it too. And as I sit here, I wonder: is this what it feels like when our glorious unending begins? Will it be so sensory rich and satisfying that we need forever just to absorb a tiny piece of it?

If you could design your “forever,” what would it be like?

We long for a forever so satisfying that even the ache for it brings us deep joy. We are created by God with this longing because only God can satisfy it. This ache begins to find satisfaction in our glorious unending in the new earth, which is our third scoop of Heaven.

I hope you came with a big appetite, because this is the strawberry flavor of our Neapolitan ice cream, and this last scoop is your glorious unending, which will go on and on forever!

Let's go back once again to the timeline you filled in on page 24.
Or better yet, draw it here and review.

This strawberry scoop is the “post-return” scoop of Heaven. It's how the New Testament talks about Heaven after Christ returns. It's when the in-between becomes the glorious unending, when the intermediate state gives way to our permanent state, when our blessed hope is finally made sight in our ultimate home where all Christ's redeemed get glorified resurrection bodies and live on the new earth.

We'll dive more deeply into the details about the new earth in Session Five, but for now let's get a taste of what's to come.

Read **Revelation 21:3-5** and then pause and pray.

Lord, help us, your children, to get a glimpse of what you have prepared for us. Thank You that you will dwell among us, You will be our God, and we will be Your people in the new earth forever. Amen (Rev. 21:3-5).

Let's see in Scripture how this third and final scoop gets served up. And you may want some kind of pink drink to sip as you study, so go grab it!

Read **John 6:40**, and summarize what Jesus said.

Based on that verse, what is Jesus going to do on the last day for those who believe in Him?

- Wake them up.
- Raise them up.
- Save them.

Oh, my friend, on the “last day,” Jesus won’t sound some kind of cosmic alarm clock waking up those who died in Christ, because their souls are not asleep! And He won’t save those who died, because that matter was concluded when they were alive. No. Jesus promised that He would raise up the believers’ bodies.

Let’s get a picture of what He meant by the “last day” and raising us up.

Note that “last day” is also referred to in Scripture as “that day.”

Beside each of the following references, write what Scripture teaches about the last day and how we are supposed to live today as we look forward to it.

Romans 13:11-14

Philippians 1:6

2 Timothy 1:12

2 Timothy 4:8

Hebrews 10:24-25

The return of Christ is considered “that day” or “the last day” or “the day of Christ.” That truly will be a glorious day! But it seems the New Testament writers were just as concerned about how we live presently as we wait for that day.

We are to clothe ourselves in the armor of light and walk in godliness as God works to complete His work in us. We walk in assurance knowing He is able to guard what we have trusted to Him, and we anticipate the crown waiting for us on that day. And we need to continue to meet together and encourage each other as that day approaches.

Don't you love that?

Pause and reflect. How are you living this day in light of that day? Do any of those verses strike you as something you need, by God's Spirit and grace, to apply to live this day well? Journal your thoughts.

Let's take a minute and look to the future “that day”! What should we expect to happen on that last day?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Based on those verses, create a list in order of what happens when Christ returns.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Notice these two items on your list: The dead in Christ will rise and those who remain alive will be caught up to meet Jesus on that day. In this passage Paul stated that those believers who are in the intermediate state, their bodies are raised up first. Then, if we are still kicking down here, we get caught up also.

Look at how John states it in **1 John 3:2**.

Beautiful, right?

Now read **2 Peter 3:12-13**, and describe what Peter says happens on that day.

Oh, my friend, we are promised new heavens and new earth (v. 13)! We will inhabit the new earth as Christ's redeemed people. This is our eternal state.

Someday earth will be made new, according to God's Edenic intent, and we will dwell there forever with Him and each other.

It's hard to imagine how all this goes down or comes up! But as we already said, God knows, and we can trust Him with His calendar and our future.

For me, the big takeaway is at the end of **1 Thessalonians 4:17**. Look at it again. Jot down the promise found in the last phrase.

What are your emotions and thoughts as you meditate on this promise?

Always. Forever. That's how long we will be with the Lord. It's how "that day" ends—with our glorious unending with Jesus on the new earth!

I remember the day my dad overheard me singing, "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through." He waited at my bedroom door until I finished the last line, "and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."⁸ Then he walked in my room and reminded me I was only eight years old, so I needed to figure out a way to feel at home here in my yellow bedroom with my Barbie® dolls! He mussed my hair, and we both laughed.

I just liked the melody. I didn't think about the lyrics at all.

But now, as a grown-up, I wonder, maybe this world is my home after all? Just not in its present sin-stained, fallen state. Some Bible scholars believe the new heavens and new earth will be completely new, and some believe the earth will be completely restored—*made* new. I lean toward the latter. I believe this world—this earth that awakens all my senses when I sit on the deck overlooking Table Rock Lake—is the same earth that will be made new. Just as we await “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23), all creation, which God originally declared good back in Genesis 1, is also waiting for redemption. As Paul said in Romans 8:20-21 (CSB),

“For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children.”

I love the way Randy Alcorn states it: “It will be as if an artist wiped away the old paint, stained and cracking, and started a new and better painting, but using the same images on the same canvas.”⁹ Earth will be restored and fit for God Himself to dwell among us, His redeemed children, where there will be no more tears or pain.

The beauty becomes more breathtaking. The joy becomes deeper. The curtains on the window of forever will be flung open wide so we will see with enlightened eyes our glorious unending! And perhaps there will be endless fields of blue flowers! Thank You, Lord.

So if that last day is a glorious day that ushers in forever days on the new earth, what are we to do with that truth besides look forward to it?

What is the concluding application Paul adds in 1 Thessalonians 4:18?

How can you be encouraged or give encouragement based on 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17? What are the implications for your troubled heart list on page 19?

Well, sister, the ice cream carton is empty! This day of study has probably answered some questions you had and created more. I get it. Let's be patient with the process as we study and build our understanding of Heaven. I also realize it's difficult to do a study of Heaven without end times questions rearing their cute, controversial, and confusing heads!

But the point of this study is what happens when we die, where we go, and what the Bible teaches about our forever risen life. It's not an end times study. My view on end times might be different from your view, but that's okay. We can still agree on the forever outcome.

Let's honor God's Word that He gave to the apostle Paul. Let's comfort each other with these things, not criticize each other. Comfort and encourage each other with the main thing: we will always be with the Lord.

Pray the concluding statement in Revelation 22:20-21 as we finish up.

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

Grace and peace to you, my friend.

Tomorrow is your first *Takeaway Truths* and *Dash Living Day*.

Love,

Jennifer



TAKEAWAY TRUTHS

Below are some important points we covered this week. There's also room for you to add other takeaways you want to remember.

- If you know Christ as Savior and Lord, you have an eternal home with Him that is secure.
- Before Christ's death and resurrection, Scripture indicates all who died, both righteous and unrighteous, went to the place of the dead (Sheol). There they have a conscious existence but are in separate places—unrighteous in Hades, righteous in Paradise (Abraham's side).
- The intermediate state is the time between a person's death and bodily resurrection. Believers, upon their deaths, will immediately go to be with the Lord in Paradise/Heaven.
- There is a day in the future when Jesus will return. At that point, believers will receive resurrected bodies and forever live with God on the new earth.



YOUR DASH VALUES

List below what matters most to you as you live within the dashes—the time between your birth and death—and share why you place value on those items. (If you need more space, feel free to use paper or a digital journal.)

In the present, this can serve as a compass to guide you as you navigate life on this side of eternity. It can help you evaluate your priorities, making sure you're giving time, resources, and attention to what's really important to you.

In the future, after your faith becomes sight and you are in the presence of the Lord, the people you leave behind will have a clear understanding of what was important to you. They can use your list as source material to write your eulogy or obituary. Or maybe it just makes for interesting conversation about you around the dinner table. Even from the grave you can influence their conversation!

MY DASH VALUES

WHAT I VALUE	WHY

“How much better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!”

PROVERBS 16:16



LIVING AN 8:18 LIFE

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Welcome and Prayer

WATCH THE VIDEO

THREE Cs FROM ROMANS 8:18

1. _____

- Consider if suffering is because of _____.
- Consider if suffering is because of _____.

2. _____

- We compare this present suffering to the _____ that will be revealed.
- Let the _____ lead to glory.
- Let the _____ lead to glory.

3. _____

- The glory will be revealed _____ us and _____ us.

Go to jenniferrothschild.com/heaven to get a summary of this video teaching sent to your inbox. And listen to my *Heaven* playlist to keep your heart encouraged and connected to Heaven.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

- Which was your favorite day of study? Why?
- Is there anything in your life, past or present, that stirs in you a desire for Heaven? Should there be?
- What are the implications of Jesus calling Heaven “my Father’s House”? What emotions or thoughts does that title stir in you?
- What did you learn and unlearn about Heaven from this week of study?
- For Paul, dying and going to be with Christ was better than staying alive on earth. Do you feel the same way? Explain.
- Is what Scripture teaches about the last day, when Jesus returns, currently affecting how you live this day? Explain.
- Which *Takeaway Truth* stands out to you and why?
- *Dash Living Day*: What are some things you listed on your Dash Values list and why?

VIDEO TEACHING

- What’s one thing that stood out to you from the video teaching? Why?
- Why is it important for us to consider our suffering?
- How would you define *glory*?
- What does it mean to compare our sufferings? What are we comparing them to? Is that difficult to do? Explain.
- How can both the good and the groans lead to glory? Is that happening in your life? Explain.
- How is glory going to be revealed both to us and in us?