

In
LIGHT *of*
ETERNITY

PERSPECTIVES
on
HEAVEN

FROM BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

RANDY ALCORN

In Light of Eternity

By Randy Alcorn

Introduction

‘When I Think about Heaven...’

I heard a pastor make a startling confession: “Whenever I think about heaven, it makes me depressed. I’d rather just to cease to exist when I die.”

I tried not to show my shock as I asked him, “Why?”

“I can’t stand the thought of that endless tedium. To float around in the clouds with nothing to do but strum a harp...it’s all so terribly boring. Heaven doesn’t sound much better than hell. I’d rather be annihilated than spend eternity in a place like that.”

Where did this Bible-believing, seminary-educated pastor get such a view of heaven? Certainly not from Scripture, where Paul said to depart and be with Christ was “far better” than staying on earth (Philippians 1:23). And yet, though my friend was more honest about it than most, I’ve found many Christians share the same misconceptions about heaven.

I’ve received thousands of letters concerning heaven because I picture it in my novels. Here’s a letter that came last week:

I’ve been a Christian since I was five. I’m married to a youth pastor. The reason I’m writing is to tell you thanks for writing *Deadline*.

When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to heaven I wouldn’t know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. I was never told any different by anyone either.

Until reading *Deadline* I was still terrified of heaven. But I’m not afraid any more. Heaven will be great.

It’s been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this fear of heaven and eternal life. You don’t know the weight that’s been lifted off me. I cried every time I read about Finney being in heaven and all his experiences there. Now I can’t wait to get there.

Because of pervasive distortions of what heaven is like, it's common for Christians to not look forward to heaven—or even to dread it. I think there's only one explanation for how these appalling viewpoints have gripped so many of God's children: Satan. Demonic deception.

Jesus said of the devil, “When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about heaven. Revelation 13:6 tells us the satanic beast “opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.” Our enemy slanders three things: God's person, God's people, and God's place—heaven.

After being forcibly evicted from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14), the devil is bitter not only toward God, but toward us and the place that's no longer his. (It must be maddening for him to realize we're now entitled to the home he was kicked out of.) What better way for demons to attack than to whisper lies about the very place God tells us to set our hearts and minds on (Colossians 3:1-2)?

Paul warned us to be aware of the devil's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11) and put on God's armor to stand against them (Ephesians 6:11). Make no mistake—one of Satan's favorite tactics is feeding us a distorted view of heaven. He knows we'll lack motivation to tell others about Jesus when our view of heaven isn't that much better than our concept of hell.

Look at all those people walking the streets, working in offices, standing in lines, sitting in restaurants. Their eyes are filled with needs, hopes, longings. The world tells them they're just molecules and DNA, time plus chance. But God “has set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Their hearts cry out for eternal realities, for what will last, what really matters.

They search for something, *anything*, to fill the raging emptiness within. Satan offers them anesthetics that temporarily dull the pain, but they wear off. The promise of fulfillment is always broken. So they go right on searching in all the wrong places. They turn to drugs, sex, money, and power for the same reason they turn to religion and self-help seminars. Their instincts tell them “something's missing, there has to be more.”

And they're absolutely right. Something *is* missing.

The first thing missing is the person we were made for—Jesus. Haggai 2:7 refers to Messiah as “the desired of all nations,” the all people of all cultures long for.

But there's something else missing. Every human heart yearns not only a person, but a place. The place we were made for. The place made for us.

In Revelation 7:12, Jesus makes a great promise to those who obey him: “I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem which is coming down out of heaven from God, and I will also write on him my new name.” Jesus says he will put on us the name of the person *and* the name of the place (heaven) for which we were made.

We spend our lives longing for this person and this place. Just as people restlessly move from relationship to relationship seeking the person they were made for, they move from location to location seeking the place they were made for. Somewhere new and better. A bigger house. A different city. The suburbs. A new neighborhood—safer, nicer, with better schools. That dream house in the country. That idyllic mountain chalet. That perfect beach cottage.

We have the very answers the world cries out for, yet our wrong views of God's person and God's place silence and distort our message. What a triumph of Satan that we would actually pass on to our churches, children and world a dreary view of heaven—and by implication a dreary view of God (If we imagine heaven is boring and dreadful, aren't we really saying *God* is boring and dreadful?).

When Jesus said to us, "I am going there [to heaven] to 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 14:2-3), he spoke as a groom to his bride-to-be. These are words of love and romance. How would any bride who loves her husband-to-be respond to them? She'd be thrilled. Not a single day would go by, not a single *hour*, in which the bride wouldn't anticipate joining her beloved in that place he prepared for her to live with him forever.

Like a bride's dreams of sharing a home with her groom, our love for heaven should be overflowing and contagious, just like our love for God. Our passion for God and our passion for heaven should be inseparable. The more I learn about God, the more excited I get about heaven. The more I learn about heaven, the more excited I get about God.

How it must wound the heart of our bridegroom to see us clinging to this dilapidated roach-infested hovel called earth, dreading the thought of leaving it, when he has hand-built a magnificent estate for us, a place beautiful and wondrous beyond measure.

What's your attitude toward heaven, your theology of heaven? Does it fill you with joy and excitement? How much thought do you give to heaven? How often do you and your church and your family talk about it?

If you lack a passion for heaven, I can almost guarantee it's because you have a weak, deficient, and distorted theology of heaven. (Or you're making choices that conflict with heaven's agenda.) A robust, accurate, and biblically-energized view of heaven will bring a new spiritual passion to your life.

Our problem isn't that we lack passion in general. We all have it—look at the way we stand up and cheer at sporting events. (Nanci and I do, anyway.) The problem is that we get most passionate about things that don't ultimately matter—the perfect season, the perfect house, the perfect lawn, the perfect car. None of these is bad—notice I didn't list pornography, adultery, fornication, theft, and hatred. Our problem is that the things fueling our passion are only secondary, while we lack passion for what's primary. To derail us, all Satan needs to do is minimize our passion for two things—the person of God and the place of God.

A. W. Tozer said,

Let no one apologize for the powerful emphasis Christianity lays upon the doctrine of the world to come. Right there lies its immense superiority to everything else within the whole sphere of human thought or experience.... We do well to think of the long tomorrow.

The greatest weakness of the western church today is arguably our failure to think of the long tomorrow—to take seriously the reality that heaven is our home. Out of this springs our love affair with this world and our failure to live now in light of eternity.

When my family goes on a trip, we like to know in advance something about where we're going. If we're planning a vacation, we carefully study the brochures and maps to know the destination's attractions. (We don't want to know everything—we do like surprises.)

God hasn't told us so much about heaven that it spoils all the surprises waiting for us. But he's told us enough—far more than most of us suppose—that we can envision it and get really excited about it.

Bookstore travel sections exist because everybody wants to know about the place they're going. So think of this book as a travel guide to heaven. If we want our children or grandchildren to be more excited about heaven than the Grand Canyon or Disney World or summer camp, let's open up the Bible and talk to them about heaven's attractions, not just earth's.

Chapter 1

Home

How acquainted are you with the final destination of the road you're traveling?

In my novel *Edge of Eternity*, Nick Seagrave—who wakes up in another world—chooses many wrong paths before he finally joins with others to follow the red road. It leads him to a great chasm. After he's carried over it by the mysterious Chasm-crosser, the road resumes on the other side. Occasionally Nick catches sight of his destination:

I turned in the darkness and beheld Charis, the glowing City of Light. The joy of that place was like a volcanic explosion, spectacular and thrilling, never subsiding. I could feel it from here.

“I see...my home.”

I laughed aloud. All my life I'd been going out, a wanderer without a home. Now I was coming in, a traveler headed home. I considered the joyous irony—the places I'd always been were never my home. And my true home was a place I'd never been.

Have you ever thought about that? The Bible teaches that for Christians, our home is where Christ is, in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8). That means our home is a place we've never been. How can that be?

On earth, home means so much to us because of the past, what we look back on with cherished memories. Heaven will immediately feel like home because we'll instinctively connect it to all we longed for and occasionally caught magical glimpses of while on earth. But in heaven we won't just look back, we'll look forward to and anticipate all that's ahead of us there. The longer we're in heaven, the more memories we'll make, and the more our home will be... home. It won't lose its hominess—it'll always gain more.

When the Bible tells us heaven is our home, what meaning should we attach to the word? I can visit somewhere and say, “This feels like home.” I'm saying it reminds me of home, that it has some of the qualities of home. But what are those qualities?

Familiarity is one — a fond familiarity. I was raised in a nonchristian home, but I have countless pleasurable memories from childhood. When I ride my bike through my old neighborhood (only a few miles away), that fond familiarity comes over me like a wave. The hills, the houses, the fences and fields, the schoolyard where I played football and shot hoops.

I find myself gazing at the house I grew up in. Every room in that house, every inch of that property reverberates with memories of my father, mother, brother, friends, dogs and cats and frogs and lizards. When I go to my childhood home, I step back into a place inseparable from who I was and am, inseparable from my family and friends.

That's a central quality of home: it's a place with loved ones. The "homeness" of the house I live in now is inseparable from my wife, Nanci, and my daughters, Angela and Karina. Memories of extended family and friends who've stayed with us also contribute to the homeness of this place. Everything here speaks of time spent with one another: playing together, talking together, eating together, reading together, crying together, praying together, charting the course of our lives together. Home is where you're with the ones you love.

The best part of heaven is that we'll be with our bridegroom, Jesus. Second best? We'll be with our family and friends who know God. That's why, when Christian loved ones die, He tells us not to grieve like those who have no hope, but to comfort and encourage each other by anticipating the ultimate family reunion, at the greatest destination in the universe (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Home is a place you fit right in. It's the place you were made for. Most houses we live in on earth weren't really made just for us. But heaven is.

I love to go snorkeling and watch those multi-colored fish and turtles in their natural environment. Occasionally I see ocean fish in an aquarium. I enjoy watching them, but I always feel like something's wrong. They don't belong there. It's not their home. They weren't made for a little glass box. They were made for a great ocean. I suppose the fish don't know any better, but I wonder if their instincts don't tell them their true home is elsewhere, they were made for another place. I know our instincts tell us this world isn't our home, that we were made for someplace bigger and better.

Home is also about comfort. It's a place you can take off the dress clothes and put on jeans and a sweatshirt and throw yourself down on the couch and relax. It's a refuge from the world. It's a place you *want* to be. I've traveled to many countries and as much as I enjoy them, I always love to come home. That craving for home is sweet and deep. Home is our reference point, what we always come back to. No matter how much we enjoy our adventures away, we look forward to coming home.

Home is where friends come to visit us. Home is where we read and reflect and listen to the music we enjoy. It's where we putter and plant gardens and rest to gain strength for our tasks. Home is the place I inhale the wonderful aroma of strong rich coffee every morning. (Okay, you hate coffee? Your loss.) Home is where Nanci fixes wonderful meals, including the world's best apple pie.

I realize it sounds like I'm romanticizing home. Yes, many people have had very bad experiences in their earthly homes. But the point is, our home in heaven is our real home. It will have all the good things about our earthly home, multiplied many times, but none of the bad.

"Delight yourself in the LORD and he will grant you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). God invites us to be delighted in him, his place, his plan, his people. Home is the place where delight in a cherished Father or

beloved bridegroom flourishes. Home is a fountainhead of delight. Home is where you enjoy the most enchanting moments.

The world has a saying—“You can never go home again.” It means that while you were gone, home changed and so did you. In fact, your old house may have been destroyed or sold. It may be forever inaccessible to you.

In contrast, when this life is over, God’s children will be able to come home...for the very first time. And because—unlike our homes on earth—our home in heaven will never burn or be flooded or blown away, we’ll never have to wonder whether home will still be there when we return. Heaven will never disappear and never lose the magic of home.

If heaven is truly our home, then it must have these qualities we associate with home. *Home* as a term for heaven is not simply a metaphor. It describes an actual, physical place — a place built by our bridegroom, a place we’ll share with loved ones, a place of fond familiarity and comfort and refuge, a place of marvelous smells and tastes, fine food and great conversation, of contemplation and interaction and expressing the gifts and passions God’s given us. It will also be a place of unprecedented freedom and adventure. (More about that later.)

I read an evangelical theologian who says heaven is “more a state of mind than a place.” But what does this mean? In the Bible heaven is not simply an attitude or positive thinking or imagining the best. Of course, contemplating heaven should affect our attitude. But that’s very different than saying heaven is a state of mind. On the contrary, heaven is a real physical place. And whenever we’re thinking accurately, it will be our reference point for all other places.

Jesus said, “I go to prepare a *place* for you...” He didn’t say, “I go to an indescribable realm devoid of physical properties, where your disembodied spirit will float around, and which is nothing at all like what you’ve ever thought of as home.”

If that were the case, He might just as well have said nothing. But he didn’t say nothing — he said *something*. He told us of an actual place He was preparing. He also told us why—“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 14:2-3).

Home, Jesus knew, is where you’re with the people you love the most in the place you love the most. And, incredibly, the longing of the Carpenter-King—he who holds the title deed to heaven—is that we should join him as his bride, and live with him there forever.

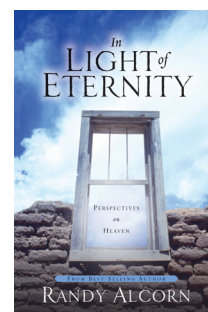
Now think about *that* for a few million years!

Learn more about *In Light of Eternity*

The deepest longing of your heart is for one person and one place. Jesus is that person. Heaven is that place. A thousand counterfeits vie for your attention, trying to convince you that they are what you're looking for. But you'll never find the true satisfaction with what the Shadowlands of this world have to offer. What you really crave can only be found in the land of substance: Heaven.

One moment after you die, you'll find out what's on the other side. Don't wait until then. Let this book guide you into discovering how wonderful your eternal future will be—and what you can do now to prepare for it.

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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God's Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, and unsupported people around the world. You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at www.epm.org.