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HEAVEN

THE OFFICIAL STUDY GUIDE



*Offering Peace for Today and
Hope for Tomorrow from the Words of*

RANDY
ALCORN

HEAVEN
THE OFFICIAL STUDY GUIDE
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Related titles:
Heaven
Heaven: The Official Study Guide Video Series

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Session 1

WHAT IS HEAVEN?

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23

Preparation

Concepts in this session are covered in the Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 of *Heaven*. We'll also be studying the following Scriptures: Exodus 15:12–13; Mark 16:19–20; Luke 2:14; John 14:1–4; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; Hebrews 4:14, 9:24, 11:13–16; Revelation 3:11–13; Philippians 1:19–23 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–9; John 8:44 and Revelation 13:1–6; 1 Corinthians 2:9–13 and Deuteronomy 29:29; Colossians 3:1–3.

Leader tip: Communicate with your group to make sure they are aware of the above resources. If you will be using the video teaching and/or the worship song provided on the *Heaven: The Official Study Guide Video Series*, check to see if the host of the group has appropriate video equipment.

Connection

As you begin this session, let a volunteer open with a brief prayer for your time together. If group members don't know each other well, invite members to share their names and the best vacation locations they've ever visited. If

you have a large group, you may want to divide into smaller groups of two or three for the Connection activity.

Ask the groups to talk about their answers to these questions, then let some share the highlights of those discussions with the entire gathering:

- Imagine you are five years old again. What was your concept of Heaven at that time?
- Where did your perception of Heaven come from?
- How has your concept of Heaven changed from when you were a child? What accounts for these changes?

Video Teaching

If you have the *Heaven: The Official Study Guide Video Series*, watch Session 1 now. Before pressing play, make sure everyone is in a position from which they can see and hear the video well. You may wish to use the provided worship song at the beginning of your time to focus attention or at the end to offer space for reflection—or both!

Discussion

The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal—that this world is not all there is.

Yet a startling thing has happened among modern Western Christians. Many of us habitually think and act as if there were no eternity—or as if what we do in this present life has no eternal consequences. The trend is to focus on our present circumstances instead of our eternal future. Because the topic of Heaven is so rarely addressed, and because of pervasive distortions of what it is like, it's common for Christians to not look forward to Heaven—or even to dread it. How sad!

The goal of this session is to center our thoughts on what Scripture has to say about our eternal home.

1. From the Bible, the video teaching, or the *Heaven* book, offer two statements of what Heaven is:
 - a)
 - b)
2. Read Exodus 15:12–13; Mark 16:19–20; Luke 2:14; John 14:1–4; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; Hebrews 4:14, 9:24, 11:13–16; Revelation 3:11–13. Write down what these verses say to you about characteristics of Heaven.
3. Think and talk about these questions: In what ways is Heaven described as a place? Is it described as being different from other places? How?

We were made for a person and a place. Jesus is that person and Heaven is that place. When Jesus told His disciples, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), He deliberately chose common, physical terms (*house, rooms, place*) to describe where He was going and what He was preparing for us. He wanted to give His disciples (and us) something tangible to look forward to—an actual place where they (and we) would go to be with Him.

Physically resurrected people need a physical place to live, not an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits. Human beings are not suited for such a realm. A *place* is by nature physical, just as human beings are by nature physical. (We are also spiritual.) What we are suited for—what we’ve been specifically designed for—is a place like the one God made for us: Earth.

In this study, we’ll see from Scripture an exciting yet strangely neglected truth—that God never gave up on His original plan for human beings to dwell on Earth. In fact, the climax of history will be the creation of new heavens and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1-4).

4. When people express worries about going to Heaven and living there eternally, what are they sometimes concerned about? What assumptions do they make about Heaven?

5. Read the words of the following quote from the church father Cyprian and then look up Philippians 1:19–23 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–9.

Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to paradise and the kingdom. Anyone who has been in foreign lands longs to return to his own native land. . . . We regard paradise as our native land.

From the words of Cyprian and the words of Paul, what do the longings we have now reveal to us about what we might experience in Heaven?

6. Consider the idea that Paul speaks of dying and being with Christ as “better by far.” What does it mean to you to think of living in Heaven as being better by far than your current experience? List out some of your present circumstances. Beside each item on your list, describe something that would be “better by far” than your current situation.

Better by far

Trying to develop an appetite for a disembodied existence in a non-physical Heaven is like trying to develop an appetite for gravel. No matter how sincere we are, and no matter how hard we try, it’s not going to work. Nor should it.

What God made us to desire, and therefore what we do desire if we admit it, is exactly what He promises to those who follow Jesus Christ: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth. Our desires correspond precisely to God’s plans. It’s not that we want something, so we engage in wishful thinking that what we want exists. It’s the opposite—the reason we want it is precisely because God has planned for it to exist.

Nineteenth-century British theologian J. C. Ryle said, “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven” (*Heaven*, Christian Focus Publications, 2000, p. 19). We could also say, “I pity the man who never thinks accurately about Heaven.” It’s our inaccurate thinking, I believe, that causes us to choose to think so little about Heaven.

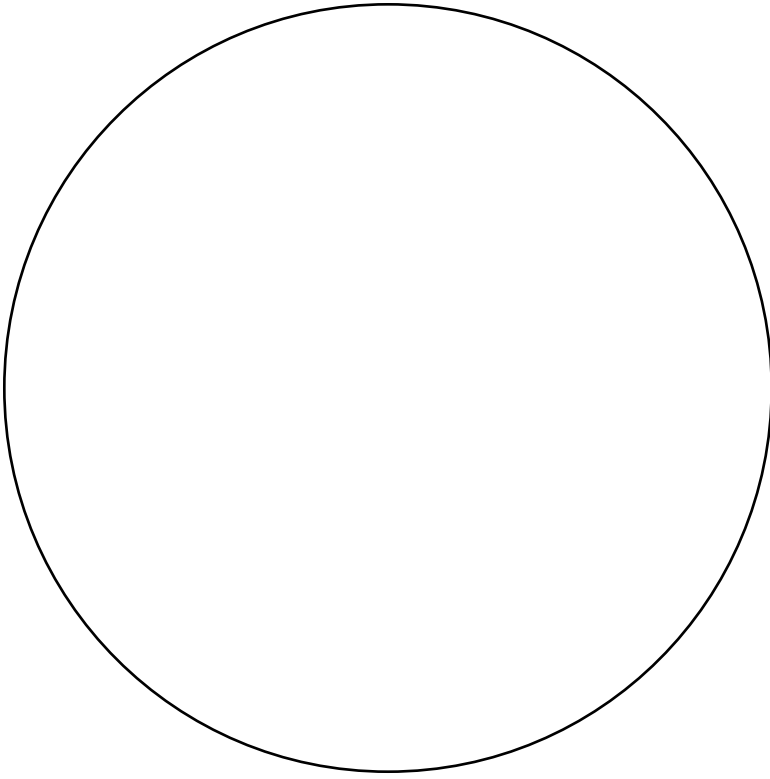
Let’s consider the forces at work behind our misconceptions and inaccurate thinking about Heaven, and learn how to counteract those.

7. Read John 8:44, Revelation 13:1–6. How does Jesus characterize the devil? What are the three objects of slander for the satanic beast described in Revelation 13?

8. It’s clear from Scripture that Satan lies. Some of his favorite lies are about Heaven. Consider this: If we become convinced that Heaven is boring, unearthly, or unknowable, what impact does that have on our motivation to live for the next life? How can it affect how (or whether) we share our faith?

we can understand Paul's admonition in Colossians 3:1 as follows: "Diligently, actively, single-mindedly pursue the things above"—in a word, *Heaven*. Given how this term is used, how do you think Paul is suggesting we should think about Heaven? What have you been doing daily to set your mind on things above? What should you do differently?

11. The command to set our hearts and minds on Heaven implies that this is not something we naturally or easily do—we have to be reminded and directed to do it. Our minds are often caught up in earthly things. Consider the metaphor of the dot and the line, as presented in the video teaching. Our present life on earth is the dot. It begins. It ends. It's brief. However, from the dot, a line extends that goes on forever. That line is eternity, which Christians will spend in Heaven. Right now we're living in the dot. But what are we living for? The shortsighted person lives for the dot. The person with perspective lives for the line. Fill the "dot" on the following page up with things that take your mind away from heavenly things. What makes the things in the dot so effective at taking our focus away from eternity? In what ways can we set our hearts on Heaven and live for the line?



Reflection

You may wish to use a worship song (“Great I Am” is provided on the video resource) to help the group focus as they spend a few minutes reflecting on Heaven. Here are some Scriptures and thoughts to help you:

- Think again about that image you had of Heaven when you were a small child. Picture it in your mind. Now, considering what we’ve learned so far about Heaven together, what would you change? Adjust your image to better reflect the biblical presentation of Heaven.
- Read Colossians 3:1–3 again. What can you do this week to become more heavenly minded?

- Pray, asking God to help you weed out any misconceptions and to reveal your fears and doubts about Heaven.
- Commit to reading the Scriptures presented below.

Response

Use the ideas and questions presented here in your personal time with God this week:

- What is one thought from this session that has given you some peace or made something clearer to you about Heaven?
- Read the descriptions of Heaven as presented in the following verses and jot down any thoughts you have as you reflect on these verses:

Isaiah 25:8–12

John 14:2–4

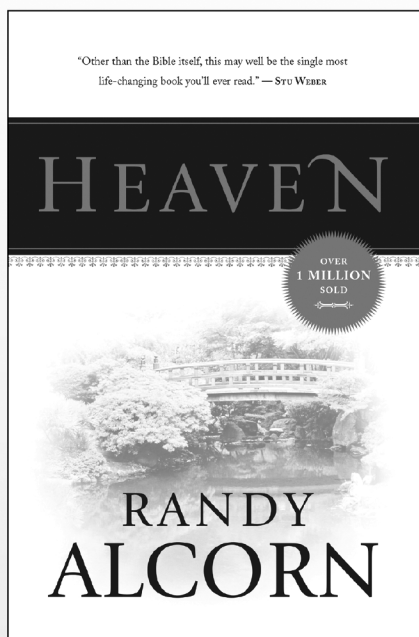
Hebrews 12:22–23

Revelation 7:13–17

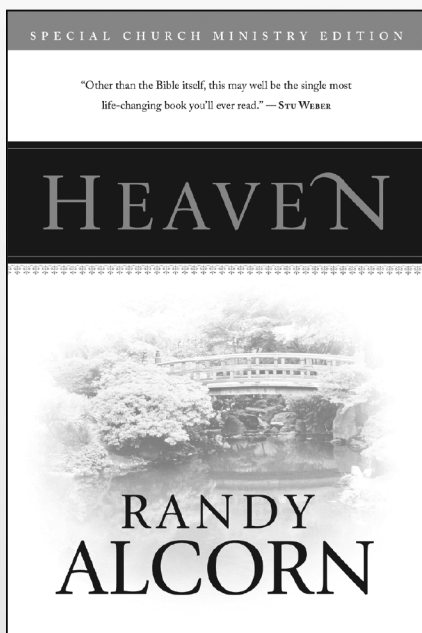
Revelation 22:3–7

- Use Ephesians 1:17–23 to guide your prayer time. Ask your Father God for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so you can know Him more. Ask for your heart to be opened up to the hope you have in the riches of His glorious inheritance and in His incomparably great power. Thank God for raising Christ from the dead and submit your will to His authority. And ask God to help you serve through the body of Christ.

Want to know more? Read Randy Alcorn's *Heaven*!



The compelling and comprehensive resource for all your questions about Heaven.



Special Church Ministry Edition
designed specifically for small-group
study.

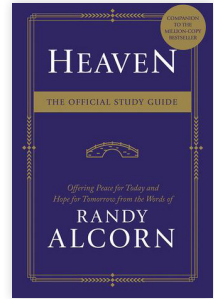


eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Heaven: The Official Study Guide*

Drawn from material from Randy Alcorn's bestselling book *Heaven*, this six-session guide offers small groups a chance to study, reflect on, and respond to the biblical truths that offer more than just a glimpse of eternity. They give a solid foundation for the hope that every Christian can have. Alcorn's clear and comprehensive explanation of Scriptures provides the backdrop for the study, which includes time for worship, prayer, and accompanying video sessions (available separately).

[Purchase this book](#)



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.