

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. Additionally, for the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

There is something frightening about death. In fact, I would say that the fear of death is the greatest fear we face. What will it be like to die? Will we die alone? Will we die suddenly? Will our death be after a long illness? Where will we go when we die? Is there life after death? These are just some of the questions we ask as we contemplate death.

Most people don't like to think about death. Interestingly enough, human beings are the only creatures God made who have an awareness of death. Animals don't know that they will die. But we do. And we try our best not to think about it. We would rather think about anything than death. Yet, there is a sense in which we are not ready to *live* until we are ready to *die*.

The purpose of this booklet is to help us think properly about death. While the topic itself seems gloomy, we will discover that it is possible to face death peacefully. It is possible to face death with absolutely no fear. And once we are peaceful about our own death, we will truly be liberated to live our lives to the fullest.

Why Is It So Important to Think About Death?

There are several reasons why thinking about death is important. The first reason is the *inevitability of death*. Unless Jesus Christ returns while we are alive, each of us will die. In 2013, over 55 million people died. That means that 1 out of every 113 people on the planet died. Think about that. Almost 1% of the human population died in one year. And this happens every year. If you do the math on that, you will discover that in 2013 over 150,000 people died every day. Over 6,300 people died every hour. Over 100 people died every minute. Almost 2 people died every second.¹ People are literally dying all around us. And we shouldn't be surprised. The Bible tells us that death is a part of life.

In the Old Testament, we read these sobering words: *“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die”* (*Ecclesiastes 3:1-2*). Death is inevitable. And only an unwise person would refuse to think about what he knows he must one day face.

Another reason it is important to think about death is because of the *universality of death*. Death is no respecter of persons. It strikes

people from all walks of life. Death happens to the rich and to the poor. Death falls upon the young as well as the old.

As a minister, one of my responsibilities is to officiate funerals. For the last several years, I have spoken at approximately 100 funerals each year. And as I have, I have noticed something. I have actually been surprised by something. I have been surprised by the number of funerals I have officiated for young people.

When we think about death, we think about elderly people. But not everyone who dies is old. I have spoken at far too many funerals for children, teenagers, young adults, and others in the prime of life. None of these people thought they would die so young. They were just like you and me. They assumed they would live to be ninety years of age. But they didn't make it that long. And we may not either. Death strikes people of all ages.

Then there is the *finality of death*. The Bible says that “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). We only die one time. And when we die, our lives on earth are finished. We cannot come back and live our lives over again. After

we die, we must face God and give an account of how we lived our lives (*see Matthew 12:36*).

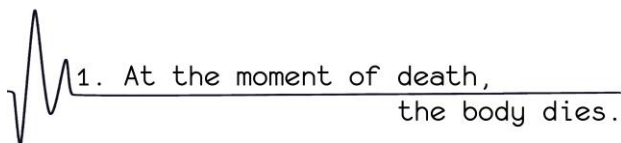
When we think about the *inevitability of death*, the *universality of death*, and the *finality of death*, we sometimes feel overwhelmed by it all. And we sometimes feel very much afraid.

That's why I said at the beginning that the fear of death is our greatest fear. We don't know *when* death will come or *how* death will come. But we do know *that* death will come. And I want us to be ready for it.

The best way I know to be ready for something is to learn as much as we can about it. When I was in school, I was a lot less nervous about an exam if I was prepared for it. The same is true for death. If we are prepared for it...if we understand what will happen...then we won't be so anxious. We will actually come to a place where we won't fear death at all. Instead, we will look forward to that experience that will propel us into the presence of God. After all, the Bible says: "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints*" (*Psalms 116:15*). We shouldn't fear anything that God considers to be precious. Instead, we should actually look forward to it.

I want to identify *eight things* that happen at the moment of death. As we learn what will happen to us at the end of life's journey, we will be much better equipped to face death with confidence and peace. Knowledge is power. So let's learn what the Bible has to say about the death experience.

What Happens at the Moment of Death?



The first and most obvious thing that happens at the moment of death is that the body dies. We need to face this fact. There is coming a day when your body will completely shut down. Your heart will stop beating. Your brain will stop functioning. And your organs will stop working. Your physical body will literally die.

In fact, the dying process has already begun. The Bible says that "*our outward man is perishing*" (*II Corinthians 4:16*). A quick look in the mirror will reveal that! My hairstylist

recently asked me how I wanted her to cut my hair. I jokingly asked her to cut out all of my gray hairs! Those increasing numbers of gray hairs on my head are just a little reminder from God that I'm not as young as I used to be. My body is getting older. And one day, it will die. So will yours.


In the meantime, we do everything we can to try to slow down the aging process. We color our hair. We whiten our teeth. We exercise our bodies. And we try to eat healthily. All of these things are important. I am in favor of anything we can do to look our best. But friend, at the end of the day, we cannot stop the hands of time.

I heard about a man who went to see his doctor. After the exam, the doctor told him plainly, "You only have one year to live." The man was flabbergasted. Being in his early forties, this was certainly not the news he was expecting to hear. After he received those devastating words from his doctor, he was then given a \$3,000 bill for the visit. He looked at the bill, and then he looked at his doctor. He said, "Doc, I can't afford this. I don't have \$3,000." To which the doctor replied, "I'll give you another year."

Isn't that what we all want...another year? Just a little longer. Yet, when it's our time to die, we cannot put it off for another year. We cannot delay it for even another day. In fact, the Bible says that God numbered out how many days we would live before we were even born (*see Psalm 139:16*). Our times are in His hands (*see Psalm 31:15*).

Billy Graham was once asked what had been his biggest surprise in life. The well-known preacher quickly responded, "The brevity of it." Here is a man well into his nineties, and yet as he reflects on his life he is amazed at how quickly it has passed by.

The Bible says that life is "*a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away*" (*James 4:14*). We're not here forever. We're just passing through. One day our time on earth will end. Our physical bodies will die.

 2. At the moment of death, _____
the soul leaves the body.

When our bodies die, we don't die. We are not bodies to begin with. We are souls. Bodies

are mortal. Souls are immortal. Bodies are temporary. Souls are eternal. Souls don't die.

The Bible says that we have “*to be absent from the body*” in order “*to be present with the Lord*” (*II Corinthians 5:8*). In other words, our souls have to leave our bodies in order for us to be with the Lord in heaven.

This is why Jesus said, “*Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die*” (*John 11:26*). Did He mean that our bodies won't die? Of course not. He meant that our souls won't die. People aren't bodies. People are souls. We live inside of our bodies. Think of it like this: You are not a *body* that has a *soul*. You are a *soul* that has a *body*. One day, at the moment of physical death, your soul will leave your body. That's really what death is. It is the separation of the soul from the body.

The Bible compares our earthly bodies to a *tent* and our heavenly bodies to a *house*. What is the difference between a tent and a house? Well, the primary difference is that *tents are temporary* while *houses are permanent*. Tents are fun for a night or two. Houses are more permanent structures. The Bible is saying that we will only live in our earthly tents for a little while. We will live in our heavenly bodies forever. Scripture says it this way: “*For we*

know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1). In other words, when our bodies die, our souls live on. We just move out of the *tent* and into the *house*. But we won't stop living just because our bodies die.

At the moment of death, those of us who have received Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord will immediately be transported from earth to heaven. The Bible doesn't teach that our souls go to sleep. And it doesn't teach that death ends everything. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that physical death is actually the beginning of a brand new and much better way of life in heaven with God.

The apostle Paul was writing about his own pending death in his letter to the Philippians. He said, and I paraphrase, *“I cannot decide whether I would rather keep on living my life here on earth or if I would rather go to heaven and be with Christ. If I stay on earth, I can continue to minister to you. But if I depart from this earth, I will go to heaven and be with Christ”* (see *Philippians 1:22-24*). Paul couldn't decide if he would rather continue living on earth or if he would rather go to heaven. But one thing was for sure...he

couldn't do both at the same time. In order to go to heaven, his soul would have to leave his body. He viewed it as a *win/win* situation. No wonder he could say, "*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (*Philippians 1:21*). When our bodies die, our souls go immediately to be with Christ in heaven.

We know that one day, at the rapture of the church, all of the Christians living on the earth at that time will suddenly be taken up into the air to meet the Lord. This is the only group of people who won't experience physical death. We may be living when this happens. It could happen at any moment. Think about it. All of a sudden millions of people will instantaneously disappear from the earth. But immediately before that happens, the Bible says that "*the dead in Christ will rise first*" (*I Thessalonians 4:16*). You may be thinking, "What does that mean? I thought those Christians who had died were already with the Lord." Well, they are. When the Bible talks about the dead rising, it is talking about dead *bodies* rising. The *souls* of all these Christians are already in heaven. But at the rapture, their bodies will be raised. And at that moment, their bodies will be reunited with their souls, and they will receive their *resurrection bodies*. Then those of us still living on the earth will be "*caught up together with them in the clouds to*


meet the Lord in the air" (*I Thessalonians 4:17*). We will receive our resurrection bodies at that specific moment in time.

Someone might ask, "If we don't receive our resurrection bodies until the rapture, what do the people who are in heaven look like now? What kind of bodies do they have?" Those are good questions, and thankfully Jesus answered them.

He told a parable about two men who died. (*see Luke 16:19-31*). One man was saved, and the other man was unsaved. The unsaved man, at the moment of death, went to a place called "Hades." "Hades," by the way, is not the same place as hell. Strictly speaking, no one is in hell yet. When non-Christians die, they go to "Hades." "Hades" is a place of punishment, torment, agony, and distress. But it is not hell. No one will go to hell until the very end of the age (*see Revelation 19:19-20; 20:10,14-15*). You can think of "Hades" as something like a county jail. And you can think of hell as the state penitentiary. Non-Christians, at the moment of death, go immediately to "Hades." There they await their eternal sentence to hell. This is why it is so important to be a Christian. As Christians, we won't go to "Hades" or hell. Jesus died on the cross, and He bore the punishment for our sins. Since our faith is in

Him, we won't have to be punished. But non-Christians will.

In His story, Jesus explained how the unsaved man in "Hades" was able to see the saved man in heaven. The Bible says that the unsaved man "*saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*" (Luke 16:23). Lazarus was the name of the saved man in Jesus' story. It is interesting that the man in "Hades" could identify both Abraham and Lazarus. That tells me that the people living in heaven today are living in *recognizable bodies*. They haven't yet received their *resurrection bodies*, but they certainly aren't floating around like ghosts. They are in recognizable bodies, more alive than they've ever been, in the presence of Jesus, in that city called heaven. That's what happens at the moment of physical death...the soul leaves the body. Christians go immediately to heaven! Praise God for that!

 3. At the moment of death, _____
God will be with us
in a special way.

No one wants to die alone. In that moment of physical death, as our bodies are shutting

down and our souls are actually leaving our bodies, we want somebody to be there with us. Many elderly people who live alone fear that when their time to die comes that they will be completely alone.

Well, I have good news for them. If they are Christians, at the moment of death they won't be alone. Jesus Himself has promised, "*I am with you always*" (Matthew 28:20). And that includes being with us in our experience with death.

As King David contemplated his own approaching death, he did so with confidence and assurance. His heart was filled with peace because he knew that he would not die alone. He penned these now familiar words: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me*" (Psalm 23:4). David knew that God would not abandon him when his life on earth was coming to an end. In fact, he knew that God would be with him in a special way.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you won't be alone when you die either. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus talked to His disciples about heaven. He said to them:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3).

Notice that Jesus said He would “*come again*” and receive His followers to Himself. At the moment of our death, Jesus will be there with us. He will be there to take us to heaven.

And He won’t be alone. Did you know that when we as Christians die that angels will be with us as well? In the story Jesus told about the saved man who died, He emphasized that the man “*was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom*” (Luke 16:22). The phrase “*Abraham’s bosom*” is just another way of referring to heaven. Jesus explained that this man was carried to heaven by the angels. Think about that. Angels, along with Jesus, will usher us into heaven. The great old song puts it this way:

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

*“I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,
Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,
Coming for to carry me home.*

*Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.”²*


If you think the day you got saved was a great day, just wait until you die. When you got saved, *you received Jesus*. But when you die, *Jesus will receive you*. You received Him *by faith*. But when He receives you, it will be *by sight*. The day of your death will be the greatest day of your life!

As I have said, no one wants to die alone. We need company. But many people are counting on the wrong company to give them peace. Think about this. If, on your deathbed, you are surrounded by family and friends, that would be a wonderful blessing. But if they are all you have, it would be a sad experience. It would be a sad experience because you would

be telling them “good-bye.” But if, on your deathbed, you have Jesus, then He will be saying to you, “Don’t worry. I’m here. And I’m going to take you home to be with Me.”

I don’t know about you, but I would much rather tell someone “hello” than “goodbye.” And that’s why I am so glad to know that Jesus will be with me on my deathbed. If I am blessed to have family and friends with me as well, then all the better. But the main thing they would be doing would be talking to me about heaven. They would be talking to me about Jesus. And since He Himself will be with me, His presence will make my death experience a peaceful one.

Friend, at the moment of death we won’t actually die. We’ll just leave our bodies and go home. And we won’t take that journey alone. We will be accompanied by Jesus, the angels, and “*the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*” (Philippians 4:7).



4. At the moment of death, _____
heaven will become our new home.

Heaven is a real place. It is neither a state of mind nor is it a figment of the imagination. Heaven is a city “*whose builder and maker is God*” (*Hebrews 11:10*). And when we die, heaven will become our new home.

If you think about it, heaven is actually already our home. We’re just not there yet. The Bible describes Christians as “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (*Hebrews 11:13*). The old song says, “*This world is not my home. I’m just passing through.*”³ We don’t actually belong here. The Bible says that “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (*Philippians 3:20*). We are citizens of another country. Yet for now, we’re living out our days on planet earth.

Whenever I travel outside of the United States, I never quite feel “at home.” I feel like I am in somebody else’s country. I feel like I don’t really belong. I feel a little bit out of place. And, actually, I am. I am out of place. I am in somebody else’s country. I don’t really belong there. I belong in the United States.

And when the airplane lands on American soil, I just feel right. I feel like I am home.

In a similar way, those of us who are saved are currently living in a place that really isn't our home. We love our country. We love our state. We're glad that we live where we live. But deep in our hearts, we know this isn't home. The Bible says that God has placed eternity in our hearts (*see Ecclesiastes 3:11*). And heaven, not earth, is eternal. We belong to another world. Our home isn't here. Our home is somewhere else. Our home is in heaven. And when our bodies die, we will be there at last.

Heaven is so much better than earth. Heaven is the only place in the world that is free from the ravages of sin. Heaven is the only place where life is lived as God intended for life to be lived. In heaven, there is no sickness, no sadness, no sorrow, no pain, and no death. Heaven is perfect in every way.

Not only is heaven *perfect*, but it is also *beautiful*. The streets are paved with gold, and the gates are made of pearls (*see Revelation 21:21*). The wall around heaven is constructed of jasper (*see Revelation 21:18*). And "*the foundations of the wall of the city*" are

beautifully “*adorned with all kinds of precious stones*” (Revelation 21:19).

There is no temple in heaven. The Bible says that “*the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple*” (Revelation 21:22). In heaven, there is no need for the sun or the moon. The Bible says that “*the glory of God*” illuminates the city and that “*the Lamb is its light*” (Revelation 21:23).

In the celestial city, there is “*a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb*” (Revelation 22:1). The “*tree of life*” is in heaven, and it produces fresh fruit every month (see Revelation 22:2).

And just in case you were wondering, we will never get bored in heaven. We won't be sitting around on clouds plucking harps. We will be actively and passionately worshipping and serving God. And we'll be fulfilled as we do.

In heaven, our bodies will never get tired. We will never get sick. We will never grow old. And we will never even be tempted to sin. Our new bodies will be free from the sin nature. And heaven will be free from the presence of sin.

When we die, we're not just going to be leaving our bodies and departing from this world. We're going somewhere! We're going to the place Jesus has prepared for us. We're going to heaven. We're going home.

At a funeral I spoke at recently, I was explaining to the congregation how the person who had died, because of his faith in Jesus Christ, was now in the presence of God in heaven. I compared the person's physical death to a bird being released from a cage. The person had been sick for a long time. He had actually become a prisoner in his own body. He had been trapped in a body that had worn down. When he died, he was mercifully released from that body.


I talked about how sometimes at a graveside service there is a dove-release ceremony. The doves are released from their cages as a picture of a person being released from the pains and difficulties of life. I explained how the person we had come to honor had been released from his body...just like a dove is released from a cage.

Using the dove imagery, I painted a clear word picture of what the death experience is like for a Christian. The people in attendance got the point, and I felt good about my sermon.

After the service was over, a good friend of mine said to me, “Jon, that was a nice service. But you left out the best part of the dove-release illustration.” I asked, “What do you mean?” He said, “Well, you’ve done enough graveside services to know what kind of birds are actually being released from those cages, haven’t you?” I replied, “Sure I have. They’re not really doves at all. They’re homing pigeons.” He said, “Exactly. And why are they called homing pigeons?” I responded, “Because when they are released from those cages they instinctively and immediately fly to their home.” With a smile on his face, my friend said to me, “And that’s the part of the illustration you left out. The next time you talk about those birds being released from their cages, be sure to stress to the people that at the moment of death we are not just released from our bodies. We, just like those homing pigeons, instinctively and immediately go home...to our home...in heaven with God.”

I wanted to reassemble the congregation and re-preach my sermon. But it was too late for that. The service was over, and the people were gone. But I have used that illustration several times since then, and I wanted to include it here. My friend was right. When our bodies die, it’s not just that our souls are released from them. It is much greater than

that. At the moment a Christian dies, he goes immediately to his heavenly home...escorted by the angels...safe in the arms of Jesus. At the moment of death, heaven will indeed become our new home. And I wouldn't miss it for the world!

 5. At the moment of death,
we will be reunited
with our loved ones.

The older we get, the more loved ones we have in heaven. Some people have far more family and friends in heaven than they do on earth. At the moment of death, we will be reunited with all of our saved loved ones who have preceded us to heaven.


One of the greatest things about heaven will be that we will get to live forever with those we were separated from on earth. Some of you have a spouse in heaven whom you haven't seen in years. For others, you have a parent there. Or a child. Perhaps a brother or a sister. Maybe a treasured friend. You think of them often, but you are separated from them now. At the moment of death, though, you will be

gloriously reunited. It's going to be a happy day!

I think of my grandfather on my mother's side of the family. In 1993, my grandparents flew from Atlanta to Houston to spend a few days with my parents. While they were in Texas, my dad brought my grandfather to Ft. Worth to visit me. They also went to Waco to visit my brother. Then they returned to my parents' house in Pasadena for the remainder of their visit. The night before my grandparents were to fly back to Atlanta, they went to a restaurant with my parents, and the four of them enjoyed a wonderful meal together. They got back to my parents' house and sat in the den and talked for a while before telling each other goodnight. "We'll see you in the morning" were some of the last words they spoke to each other before going to bed. Well, before the morning came, my grandfather died. He had a heart attack in his sleep and went peacefully to heaven.

My parents didn't get to see him "*in the morning*" as they had planned. That is the sad news. The good news, though, is that there is coming a day when "*a new morning*" will dawn. They will see him again. And so will I.

The Bible says, “*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning*” (Psalm 30:5). And our greatest joy will come in that *great morning* when we arrive in heaven. We will close our eyes in death. We will open them in heaven. And we will see, for the first time in a long time, those family members and friends whom we love with all of our hearts. And once we see them in heaven, we’ll never be separated from them again. We’ll be together forever. We’ll reminisce about old times. We’ll catch up. We’ll spend eternity in the presence of those we love. Heaven will be a happy reunion that never ends.

 6. At the moment of death,
we will see Jesus face to face.

As wonderful as it will be to be reunited with our family and friends, there is something even greater than that awaiting us in heaven. At the moment of death, for the first time in our lives, we will see Jesus face to face. The Bible clearly says that in heaven we will “*see His face*” (Revelation 22:4). I have already mentioned that He will be there with the angels

to take us home. But seeing Him face to face is so significant that I want to expand on it here.

I've never seen Jesus. At least not yet. For now, "*We walk by faith, not by sight*" (*II Corinthians 5:7*). But there is coming a day when our faith will become sight, and we will see *face to face* the One we've known *heart to heart*.

For those of us who love Jesus, seeing Him face to face will be the best part of heaven. I try to imagine what it will be like to finally see Him. To see the One Who died for my sins. To see the One Who has heard and answered all of my prayers. What will it be like to see the Person Who has been with me every step of my life's journey?


Just thinking about it is overwhelming to me. To think that there is coming a day when I will see the One Who has been with me through every happy, joyful, painful, and lonely season of life. To see the One Who has been my only constant in life. To see the One Who has been on the other end of all of my conversations with Him through the years. Seeing Jesus face to face will indeed be the best part of heaven.

I don't know about you, but I have several pictures of Jesus in my home. They are there to remind me of His presence. They are there because I love Him. The Bible says, speaking of Jesus, "*Whom having not seen you love*" (*I Peter 1:8*). I love Jesus. And I'm sure that you love Him, too. And one day our eyes will meet His.

In that moment, we will fall on our faces and worship Him. For those of us more prone to emotion, we will cry tears of gratitude, joy, love, and deep appreciation. How couldn't we?

But in my mind, as I imagine seeing Him for the first time, do you know what I want to see more than anything else? I want to look Jesus in the eyes...I mean before I even bow down to worship Him...and I want to see Him smile. That would be His way of showing His approval of my life and ministry before He even says a word. Just thinking about Jesus looking into my eyes and then lovingly smiling at me is enough to keep me going through whatever challenges I might face in life.

And that's what will happen at the moment of death. We will see Jesus face to face. What a day that will be!



7. At the moment of death,
everything will become clear.

We go through a lot of things in life that don't make sense. Why does God allow some of our loved ones to get cancer? Why do we have other physical problems? Why do people lose their jobs? Why does God allow people's hearts to be broken by a relationship that doesn't work out? Why are there tragedies? There are a thousand such questions we could ask. And they all begin with the word, "Why?"

The fact is, we don't know the answers to those questions. But one day, we will. The apostle Paul said, "*Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known*" (*I Corinthians 13:12*). In other words, there is coming a day when everything will be clear to us. Everything will make sense. We will finally understand the mysteries of life. Instead of asking, "Why?" we will proclaim, "Wow!" We will think to ourselves, "Now I know why God allowed that. He had a purpose that I couldn't see. Now I understand. Wow! This is amazing to me. Finally everything makes sense." The mysteries of life will all make

perfect sense to us in heaven...at the moment of our death.

Sometimes after a storm we see a rainbow. It is a reminder to us that God will never flood the earth again (*see Genesis 9:8-17*). It is also a reminder to us of the presence of God in our lives. Rainbows always make us think about God.

But have you ever thought about the fact that you have never seen a complete rainbow? We have only seen half of a rainbow. Sometimes we see a double rainbow. But we still only see half of each rainbow. We only see the arch.

Something similar often happens in life. We go through a storm, and after the storm has passed, maybe God lets us see some of the reasons why He allowed it. But we can't see them all. We still only "*know in part*" (*I Corinthians 13:12*). From our human perspective, we are only able to see half of the rainbow.

But in heaven, we will see the full rainbow. The Bible says that there is "*a rainbow around the throne*" of God in heaven (*Revelation 4:3*). Notice that the rainbow is not just "*above*" the throne. The rainbow is "*around*" the throne.

For the first time in our lives, we will see a full rainbow. And for the first time in our lives, we will fully understand the mysteries of life!


In the meantime, we continue to walk by faith...confident that God knows exactly what He's doing. And one day, we will know, too.

At the moment of death, not only will the *mysteries* of life become clear, but the *meaning* of life will become clear as well. When we get to heaven, when we see Jesus face to face, and when we begin to see things from God's perspective, we will gain a crystal clear view of the meaning of life. In that moment, it will become obvious to us that the most important things in life weren't things at all. Not our jobs, our bank accounts, our hobbies, our trophies, our successes, or our fame. We will discover that what really mattered was how we spent our time. Perhaps we will look around heaven and wonder to ourselves, "Who is here because I shared Christ with them?"

In heaven, we will discover that what really mattered in life was how faithful we were to God and how loving we were to others. I have often thought that if we could spend just five minutes in heaven and then come back and finish our time on earth that we would live a completely different kind of life. We would

invest our lives in what really matters. And what really matters are the Word of God, prayer, and people. Only those things are eternal.

But since we can't have that "*Five Minute Sneak Preview of Heaven*," let's invest our lives in those things now. I encourage you to spend whatever time you have remaining on earth in the reading and obeying of God's Word, in developing a solid prayer life, and in helping people however you can. I want to spend the remainder of my life on earth doing those things as well. Then, when we get to heaven, we'll be glad that we did! Because up there, that's all that matters.

 8. At the moment of death, _____
opportunity ceases.

To me, the most sobering thing we will discover at the moment of death is that all of our opportunities have ceased. The God we serve is a God of second, third, fourth, and a thousandth chances. He is a God of mercy and grace. But once we die, all of those chances are over. The Bible never says that after death

a person can do for God what he should have done while he was still alive. Death ends all of our opportunities.

In eternity, it will be too late to trust Christ for salvation. It will be too late to follow Him in baptism. It will be too late to share our faith. It will be too late to help others in need.

Anything we need to do for God, we need to do now. Jesus said that the time will come “*when no one can work*” (John 9:4). When we die, we must live forever with the decisions we have made. It will be too late then to get right with God. That opportunity will have passed. I wonder how many people will end up in hell who never intended to go there. They intended to go to heaven. They intended to get saved. But they never got around to it. They put that all-important decision off for too long. And when they die, it will be too late.

There is an interesting verse in the Bible that says, “*If a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie*” (Ecclesiastes 11:3). Similarly, when a person dies, he is forever in a fixed position spiritually. If he has been saved by the grace of God, he will live with God forever. If he has never been saved, he will be separated from God forever.

Years ago, I came across a poem that says it so well. It makes us think about where we will be immediately after our bodies die.

Five Minutes After I Die

*Loved ones will weep o'er my silent face,
Dear ones will clasp me in sad embrace
Shadows and darkness will fill the place,
Five minutes after I die.*

*Faces that sorrow I will not see,
Voices that murmur will not reach me
But where, oh where will my spirit be?
Five minutes after I die.*

*Naught to repair the good I lack
Fixed to the goal of my chosen track,
No room to repent, no turning back
Five minutes after I die.*

*Mated forever with my chosen throng
Long is eternity, O so long
Then woe is me if my soul be wrong,
Five minutes after I die.⁴*

Five minutes after we die it will be too late to make our peace with God. This is something we must do now. The Bible says, “*Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him*

while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). That verse implies that there is coming a day when it will be too late to find the Lord. There is coming a day when He won’t be “*near*” like He is now. There is coming a day when salvation will be unavailable. That is a frightening thought to say the least. No wonder the Bible says, “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*” (II Corinthians 6:2). We must make our peace with God today. The Bible says, “*Prepare to meet your God*” (Amos 4:12). This is something we must do now...before death comes...while we still can.

How I Overcame My Fear of Death

The Bible says that those who live with a “*fear of death*” are actually living in “*bondage*” (Hebrews 2:15). I can attest to the truth of that statement. For years, I was petrified at the thought of death. What would happen to me? Was I truly saved? Was I 100% certain that I would go to heaven? Those nagging thoughts were never far from my mind.

There came a time in my life, though, when I said to myself, “Enough is enough. God doesn’t want me to live like this any longer, and neither do I.” And so I overcame my fear

of death by getting down on my knees, asking Jesus to forgive me of my many sins, asking Him to save me, and inviting Him to come and live in my heart. After praying that prayer, I trusted Jesus to answer it. And I haven't been afraid of death since. I have lived for many years now with a peace in my heart that I cannot describe to you. Like the old song says, "*I've got peace like a river.*"⁵ And I thank God for it.

The Bible says that Jesus came to "*release*" us from the "*fear of death*" (*Hebrews 2:15*). And He has certainly released me from that fear. He can release you, too, and give you the same peace He has given me. All you have to do is trust Him. The Bible says, "*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (*Romans 5:1*).

When we trust Jesus to save us, He fills our hearts with peace. That is the greatest truth I have ever learned. For years, I prayed for God to give me peace. While it is certainly acceptable to pray for peace, the Bible makes it clear that peace is actually a result of faith. So if you are not peaceful about death then all you need to do is trust Jesus to save you. If you will trust Him, you will have peace. That is God's promise to us.

Everyone is trusting somebody or something to get them to heaven. Most people are trusting themselves. To be saved and actually to go to heaven, though, you have to transfer your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ. He died for your sins. He rose from the grave. And He can save you, keep you saved, and take you to heaven when your body dies.

If you would like to know for sure that you are a child of God, that heaven is your home, and that death is merely an experience that will make it possible for you to go from here to there, then pray this simple prayer. Jesus will answer it. The Bible says, "*Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved*" (Romans 10:13).

"Dear Jesus,

I am sorry for my sins. Please forgive me. Come into my heart and make me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Welcome to my heart. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

*In Your Name I Pray,
Amen."*

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, God just saved you. Congratulations! You are now a

child of God, and you have nothing to fear. You are now prepared to die and meet God.

You can now look death in the face and smile. In fact, you can say with the apostle Paul, “*O Death, where is your sting?*” (*I Corinthians 15:55*). The implied answer is that, because of Jesus, the sting of death is gone.

There is an old story about a father and his young son who were driving down a dusty, country road one day. The car windows were down, and a bee flew in. The little boy was scared of the bee and started to cry. The father said, “Don’t be afraid, son. I won’t let the bee sting you.” The boy kept crying so the father reached out and grabbed the bee with his bare hand. After a few seconds, he opened his hand and released the bee. As the bee buzzed around the car again, the little boy started to cry once more in fear. The father turned to his son, showed him the palm of his hand, and said these comforting words: “Son, you don’t have to be afraid of that bee anymore. Look at my hand. The stinger is in my hand. The bee can’t sting you because it has already stung me.”

Jesus says the same thing to us today. “You don’t have to fear death,” He reminds us. “Look at My hands. Look at those nail prints.

I took the sting of death for you, and I conquered the grave. The bee of death can't sting you because it has already stung Me. But it didn't defeat Me. Look, I have taken the stinger out of death."

The devil can try to intimidate us with the fear of death, but he can't do anything more than that. Jesus has taken the sting out of the death experience, and we have nothing to fear.

Friend, I don't know *when, where, or how* you and I will die physically. But I do know that because of Jesus we will die in peace. And we will go immediately to heaven. I want to declare over your life and mine that we will die like the great preacher Dwight L. Moody died...with peace in our hearts and these words on our lips:

*"There is no valley here.
Life is receding.
Heaven is opening.
This is my coronation day."*⁶

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- ¹ Stephen Ross, “The Harvest Fields Statistics 2014,” n.d., www.wholesomewords.org/missions/greatc.html (accessed May 16, 2014).
- ² Author Unknown, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, African American Heritage Hymnal* (Chicago, GIA Publications, Inc., 2001), p. 539.
- ³ Albert E. Brumley, *This World Is Not My Home, Hymns of Faith* (Carol Stream, Il., Tabernacle Publication Company, 1980), p. 230.
- ⁴ Mary Virginia Mackey Stillion, “*Five Minutes After I Die.*”
- ⁵ Author Unknown, *I’ve Got Peace Like a River, The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), p. 418.
- ⁶ This is a well-known quote from Dwight L. Moody’s deathbed experience. Different sources give different versions of this quote. The exact wording of this quote is how the author of this booklet learned it in his seminary studies.

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- *How to be a Happy Christian*
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Pasadena, Texas.

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