

IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE. . .

The Goal We Were Meant to Pursue (Pt. 2)

Small Group Questions

Introduction: What has been a major lesson you've learned in this series?

- 1. "Some people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good."
What does this statement mean?
Do you agree with it?**

- 2. How does focusing on heaven change our personal integrity?
Why would thoughts of heaven influence our decisions on earth?**

- 3. How does focusing on heaven change our personal evangelism?**

- 4. How would you answer someone who doesn't believe in a God who would send people to hell?**

- 5. How does focusing on heaven change our personal maturity?**

- 6. Pastor Tim mentioned three things that help us grow spiritually; The Bible, Prayer and Fellowship.
Which of these three present the greatest challenge to you?
What can you do to strengthen these disciplines in your life?**

Some one shared this story with me a couple of weeks ago: A Sunday School Teacher quizzed her class about how to get to heaven and the class gave her all the appropriate responses. Do you get there by being good? No. Do you get there by giving all your money away? No. Do you get there by being nice? No. Well then, she asked, how does one get to heaven? Finally one of the little kids realized the answer and raised his hand? If you're going to get to heaven, you've got to die? How many of you want to go to heaven? How many of you want to die? Unless Jesus returns beforehand, death is going to be your entryway to heaven. You're going to have to die to get there.

Worldwide, three people die every second. Nearly 11,000 people pass from this life to the next every hour. Every day, almost 260,000 people enter their eternal destiny either in heaven or hell. 82% of Americans believe in heaven, 63% believe we're going there when we die. That's because Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, told us that God has planted eternity in our hearts. We inherently know there is something beyond our present existence. Deep down inside we sense that eternity beyond the grave is real. Even in secular society. Mitch Albom a few years back authored a non-Christian, non biblically based New York Times best seller, "The Five People You Meet in Heaven." People are interested in heaven. Heaven is mentioned over 500 times in the Bible. Both the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures refer to it far more than I realized before this study. And one of the central thoughts of the Bible is that the way we think about heaven influences the way we live on earth. Maybe that's why the Barna research group has found that the moral lifestyles between Christians and non-Christians don't differ all that much. Maybe we, as a church, and I mean the universal church, all of us, as Christians, maybe we don't think about heaven enough.

2 Peter 3:11-18

¹⁰But ^(U) the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then ^(U) the heavens will pass away with a roar, and ^(V) the heavenly bodies ^(W) will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ^(X)

¹¹Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,

In other words, in light of God's plan for eternity, how should you be living today?

Jesus is going to come, you don't know when, it could be today. So, what difference does it make now in light of what we know about the future?

¹¹Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, ^(Y) what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ^(Z) waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and ^(Y) the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³But according to his promise we are waiting for ^(Z) new heavens and a new earth ^(AA) in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴^(AB) Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him ^(AC) without spot or ^(AD) blemish, and ^(AE) at peace. ¹⁵And count ^(AF) the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as ^(AG) our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you ^(AH) according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. ^(AI) There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, ^(AJ) as they do the other Scriptures. ¹⁷You therefore,

beloved, ^(AK) knowing this beforehand, ^(AL) take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸But ^(AM) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ^(AN) To him be the glory both now and to the day of ^(AO) eternity. Amen.

Hopefully, you know a lot more about heaven now than you did ten weeks ago. The biblical material has been interesting, fascinating and some of it still confusing. But, do you know more now than you did? Anything that we study and learn about the Bible – knowing stuff is always good, sometimes its fun to know stuff, it's interesting to talk about and share ideas. But information leads to accountability. I don't believe God is going to hold people accountable for things they don't know. But the Bible has also told us that there is enough evidence in the universe that all of us should have an appropriate concept of God. For you and me – who have the privilege of divine revelation, we are responsible for what we know. That's what Peter is telling us in this passage. Now that we know Jesus is coming again, now that we understand that one day the earth will be dissolved and the new heavens and earth will appear, the question is: how is that going to change the way you live today?

1 Peter 1:13 (ESV)

¹³Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here's another reference to heaven. Thinking of heaven should cause you to prepare your mind. Other translations use: gird up your minds for action; think clearly.

When we know what we know, it's going to change the way we think.

Col. 3:1 (NIV)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

If you don't stay focused on heaven – your thinking about life will be sloppy, the world will infiltrate your priorities, your ultimate purpose in life, which is to prepare for the life to come, will be compromised. Maybe you've heard the phrase: some people are so heavenly minded they're of no earthly good. Let me suggest this: if you and I thought about heaven more often, maybe the temptations of this world wouldn't be so powerful for us. CS Lewis wrote: It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this world.

A Focus on Heaven Changes Our

What we think about heaven has a great deal to do with how we live our lives on earth. Let me give you three things a focus on heaven will transform.

1. Personal Integrity

A Christ follower who understands the plan of God will more affectively live out the purpose of God.

1 Peter 1:13-16

¹³Therefore, ^(AG) preparing your minds for action, ^[a] and ^(AH) being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴As obedient children, ^(AI) do not be conformed to the passions ^(AJ) of your former ignorance, ¹⁵but ^(AK) as he who called you is holy, you also be holy ^(AL) in all your conduct, ¹⁶since it is written, ^(AM) "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

The connection between the return of Christ and our personal holiness is everywhere in scripture. I'm going to run through these quickly,

Col. 3:4-5 (NIV)

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

1 John 2:28 (NIV)

And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

1 John 3:2-3 (NIV)

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. [3] Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

There is a direct correlation between His return and your holiness. Why? Because Jesus told us over and over again that you don't know when he's coming back, you don't want to be caught unprepared.

1 Tim. 4:7-8 (NIV)

. . .train yourself to be godly. [8] For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Titus 2:11-13 (NIV)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. [12] It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, When Jesus comes back, or when you meet him face to face in paradise – you're going to want to be ready. And in order to be ready, you've got to say 'yes' to the right things and 'no' to the wrong things now, today, in order to stand before him unashamed tomorrow. Randy Alcorn in his book talks about being engaged to be married. And all through that engagement, knowing that one day you're going to be married to the one you love, it changes how you behave. Because you have a focus, you have a

destiny that you don't want to mess up. It shapes your priorities and values. What you're focused on shapes what you do, the choices you make. Preparing today greatly impacts your tomorrow.

2. Personal Evangelism

Nearly twenty five percent of the Bible is about the future. As I've said, there are far more references to heaven than any of us realize. In view of tomorrow, how should we be investing our today?

2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

In that same passage is the phrase, with the Lord a thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years. It was a popular view in the first century, it's even more prevalent today: you know what, Jesus has come back for two thousand years, what's the chances he'll come back today? Two thousand years is a long time for us, but it's not for God. No one is promised tomorrow, you know that. Every funeral you attend reminds you that eternity waits in the balance for every human being. 1 Peter says the God is patient. 2 Peter 3, verse 15 says to count the patience of our Lord as salvation. Parents: Do you have a child that keeps putting off what they've been told to do? You ask them, you tell them, you remind them, you yell at them, and then you lose your temper. And then they have the audacity to act like your behavior is out of control. I get this all the time: why would a good God send anyone to hell? It's a very simple response, "Why would anyone who has ignored him in this life expect anything else?" The day is coming. He has made His purpose known and He has been more than patient. We are without excuse. He died on the cross to make heaven available. And he takes no joy in the fact the many will reject his offer. But when the day comes, everyone will be without excuse. Who in your life is still excusing their life? That reality ought to motivate us to action. Knowing that eternity hangs in the balance should cause us to reach out, to pray for, and to engage those we love about their eternal destiny.

3. Personal Maturity

¹⁷You therefore, beloved, ^(AK) knowing this beforehand, ^(AL) take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸But ^(AM) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In other words: Know what you believe and why you believe it. And don't let the error of lawless people keep you from embracing truth.

Three Ways to Keep Growing

Here are three ways to invest in your maturity. All of these are linked to heaven.

1) Word of God

Rev. 22:7 (NIV)

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

You can't keep the words, if you don't know what the words are. Spiritual growth keeps your priorities in order, your values in place and your focus fixed.

2) Prayer

1 Peter 4:7 (NIV)

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Pray for all the things you need to keep your focus fixed and your optimism high. Pray for those who haven't yet made their reservation secure. If you examined all the prayers in the New Testament you might be surprised how little people prayed for personal needs and much they prayed for spiritual wisdom and insight.

3) Fellowship

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. [25] Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Your mother warned you not to hang out with the wrong crowd because influence is subtle but strong. As imperfect as the church is: this is preparation for heaven. Life in the church, spiritual community keeps you grounded Biblically, keeps you moving in the right direction and keeps you focused on eternity.

One Question to Ask: Is My Name Written in Heaven?

The Bible says there's a book, a registry, called the lamb's book of life. Maybe it's computerized by this time, I don't know. What I do know is this:

Rev. 21:27 (Msg)

Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will get in.

Ruthann Metzger is a Christian and a professional singer who tells a personal story about the importance of having your name written down. She had been asked to sing at the wedding of a very prominent and wealthy family in Seattle, Washington. No expense was spared for the social event of the season. And it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to participate. What she looked forward to most was the wedding reception being held on the top two floors of the Columbia tower which is the tallest building in all of the northwest. It was exclusive, elaborate and extravagant; candle lit tables, exquisite china and crystal, ice sculptures decorating the endless buffet table with tuxedoed waiters serving your every need. Ruthann and her husband walked up the grand staircase to the banquet room and gave her name to the matredee.

"I'm sorry, would you spell the last name again, I don't seem to have it listed."

M e t z e r, she responded. Once again, the man said, "I'm sorry, you're not on the list. I don't have a place for you." "But I'm Ruthann Metzger. I sang at the wedding. Surely

there's some mistake." "I'm sorry," was the reply, "I can't let you in. There simply isn't a place for those without a reservation." With that the man motioned for two ushers and had them to exhorted to the service elevator that sent them straight to the parking garage. After a period of silence in the car, Ruthann's husband asked, "What happened? What went wrong?" Ruthann knew. "When the invitation arrived," she said, "I was so busy with everything else, I never bothered to RSVP. I was the soloist, I just never assumed this would be a problem."

This story reminds us what it will be like for whole host of people living with the assumption that this won't be a problem. You can listen to all the political correctness you want. But Jesus made it very clear: I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. It doesn't matter who you are or how good you were. What matters is that your name is written down?

Have you accepted Jesus Christ as the substitute for your sins and the leader of your life? Are you ready to do that? Do you have questions about that? Don't leave today without securing your reservation.