

“Paul Mallard’s contention in this book is that the church is too focused on the present because we do not think sufficiently about heaven. With characteristic pastoral warmth he explains clearly, faithfully and straightforwardly what the Bible teaches about heaven and the new creation, answering the many questions we naturally have about our life after death. He clears away common misunderstandings and gives the reader a compelling and attractive vision of life with Christ and his people. Those who read this book will be stirred to a more confident hope, deeper longing to be with Christ, and comforted to face the struggles of living in this present age.”

**John Stevens**, National Director, FIEC

“In this winsome, clear, and compassionate book, Pastor Mallard offers a beautiful and thorough exposition of the Bible’s insights on heaven. Whether you’re shepherding a loved one through the end of life, facing the shadowy valley yourself, or seeking to transform your outlook with the truths of Scripture, *Heaven* offers theological riches that will comfort you, instill you with hope, and point you to the One who is making all things new.”

**Kathryn Butler**, MD, author of *Between Life and Death* and *Glimmers of Grace*

“Soaked in Scripture and laced with a blend of glorious theology and the practical wisdom and winsomeness that accompanies everything Paul writes and teaches, *Heaven* is a book that answers many of our questions and inspires our souls with a Christ intoxicated longing. I thoroughly recommend it.”

**Jeremy McQuoid**, Teaching Pastor at Deeside  
Christian Fellowship

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**PAUL MALLARD**

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**LIVING WITH ETERNITY IN VIEW**



Evangelical Press

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*For Julie*

*After that, we who are still alive and are left will  
be caught up together with them in the clouds to  
meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with  
the Lord for ever.*

*Therefore encourage one another with  
these words.*

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**PART 1**

# **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

My dad was a big bloke.

After the war he married my mum and worked in a grocer's shop in Birmingham. Back in the forties the shopkeeper cut the bacon on a bacon slicer. I remember the tapestry of scars on his hands where he had come too close to the rotating blade.

He was a great dad and my childhood was very happy. He wasn't a Christian but when I was converted at eleven, he and my mum were fully supportive.

When he was fifty he came to visit me for the weekend at college. We talked about my faith and I gave him a daily devotional to read. A couple of days later I got a letter from him. I have it in front of me now. Dad wrote:

"I was up at 6:00 this morning so I had time to read a passage from *Every Day With Jesus* regarding the meaning of the cross. I shall continue to read one each morning. I also prayed and invited God into my heart. I was very impressed with the passage Revelation 3:20, 'Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open I will come into him and I will sup with him and he with me.' I'm glad we talked together this weekend Paul, I begin to realize the joy you must derive from your Christian life."

It was no flash in the pan. Dad became a disciple of Christ. He was baptized and became a deacon in the church where my wife Edrie and I were converted. He loved Jesus, devoured the Bible and had a simple and obvious joy.



At the age of sixty they discovered he had inoperable cancer. He was given six months. He lasted nine.

My dad was a big bloke, but the cancer diminished him. He seemed to shrink physically. But his spirit and his faith were strong. Along with my mum and sister, I nursed my dad during the last three days of his life. He still had big hands covered with tiny scars. I held his hands and we talked about heaven.

“Tell me about it. Most of all tell me about Jesus. I can’t wait to see him,” he said.

As we talked together I think we both felt God’s presence with us in the valley of the shadow of death. We had a glimpse of glory.

My dad died at 10:15 in the morning on 31 July 1985. It was the day before his sixty-first birthday.

But was he right? Was he going to see Jesus? Is heaven real? Does it exist at this very moment in time? Would he even be conscious of anything?

We buried my dad, with words about the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead.

But what does that mean? Can we have any certainty or is it just wishful thinking? Is hope the worthless crutch on which feeble people who cannot face reality rest their weight?

And if there is such a place as heaven, what will it be like? Where will it be? Who will be there? Will we know each other? What will we do?

We all have questions about heaven. God does not tell us everything we might want to know, but he tells

us everything we need to know. In this first section I will explore some fundamental questions about the nature of the home Jesus is preparing for us.

By the end of this book I hope to have answered many of your questions. But more than that, my sincere desire is that a glimpse of glory will change your life.

## CHAPTER 1

# WHERE IS YOUR HEART?

I was fourteen when I read *Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand.

Wurmbrand was a Romanian pastor during the dark days when the Communist Party persecuted the church. He was imprisoned for fourteen years for the crime of preaching Christ. He was regularly tortured. For the rest of his life he bore the scars.

Years after reading the book, I had the privilege of listening to him speak. I will never forget what he said:

“Some nights I would sit in my cell feeling pain in every part of my body. I was cold and hungry and exhausted. And yet I would sing songs of joy. My captors could take away my possessions and my comforts. They could take away my family and my freedom. They could take away my dignity and my health. They could even take away my life. But what they could not take from me was the

grip of the nail pierced hands of my Saviour. They could not take my Jesus from me.”

The room fell silent as he opened his heart. I sat there stunned by the impact of his words.

Why did the book and the talk make such a big impact on me? Because they made me realize that this world is temporary. God richly blesses us with myriads of gifts which he wants us to enjoy, but in the end all of them are fleeting. Only those things which are eternal will last. And even when we have lost everything else, if we are Christians, we can never lose Jesus. He is our inheritance. In fact, at the heart of heaven is this glorious hope:

“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev 22:4–5)

Glimpsing this glory will change everything. The purpose of this book is to help us to do just that. And such a glimpse will transform us, so that like Richard Wurmbrand, we will be able to sing songs of joy in the darkest moments of our lives.

## **Half an hour a day**

When my dad died I began a quest to find out as much about heaven as I could. Of course I started with the

Bible but then I began to read what people had written on the subject. Some of it was amazingly fanciful or just downright misleading. But amongst the dross I found some gems. And shining brightest was *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* by the seventeenth-century pastor Richard Baxter.

Baxter served as a pastor in the small town of Kidderminster in the English Midlands. He lived during a turbulent period of history and witnessed civil war, the execution of a king, the birth and death of a republic and the restoration of the monarchy. It was a particularly tempestuous time for believers. Baxter's faithfulness to the gospel led to his ejection from his church, opposition, persecution and imprisonment. On top of this, from an early age he suffered from a whole range of ailments, including kidney stones, chronic pain, tuberculosis and bouts of depression.

His suffering drove him to think about heaven. Baxter challenges us to live our lives in the light of this glorious hope:

"Take your hearts once again and lead them by the hand. Bring it to the top of the highest mountain. Show it the Kingdom of Christ and the glory of it. Say to your heart, 'All this will your Lord bestow on you ... this is your inheritance! This crown is yours. These pleasures are yours. This company is yours. This beauty's place is yours. All things are yours because you are Christ's and Christ is yours.'"<sup>1</sup>

And Baxter practised what he preached. He tells us that from the age of thirty he decided to spend at least half an hour every day thinking about heaven. He lived into his seventies, which means he spent the next forty years meditating daily on heaven!

Was Baxter a fanatic? No! In the New Testament heaven is the climax of the “3 Rs” which are the blueprint for God’s future purposes – the Return of Christ; the Resurrection; and the Restoration of all things. It is the eternal destiny of all God’s people. Throughout the New Testament, heaven is constantly set before us as a motive for holy living and faithful service and confident suffering.

And yet it seems to be the last thing we think about. When was the last time you meditated on heaven? When was the last time you heard a sermon or read a book or had a conversation about heaven?

It seems we no longer think or talk or prepare for heaven as much as people of previous generations. It is largely absent from many of our hymns and sermons and prayers. How do we explain this eclipse of heaven in contemporary Christianity?

## **The eclipse of heaven**

There may well be a whole series of complicated reasons for this loss of emphasis. In the West many of us have such a comfortable existence that, although heaven seems to be a great idea, we are quite happy with our earthly lot and reluctant to let it go. In the past, when life was shorter and more uncertain, people found their focus drawn to

eternal things. Cemeteries were filled with children who had died in infancy sadly underlining the brevity of life and the closeness of eternity.

It may be controversial to say this, but after four decades as a pastor I cannot help but notice that in general the church is too focused on the present. Often we are staring at our feet when we should be fixing our eyes on our ultimate destination. The church faces many challenges in the future. It is really important that we have a solid grasp of where we are going.

Then of course there comes the common charge that people who are “heavenly minded are no earthly good”. C.S. Lewis refuted this many years ago:

“If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world are just the ones that thought the most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set afoot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Think about Heaven and you’ll get the earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you’ll get neither.”<sup>2</sup>

Out of love for our neighbours we should be fully engaged in this world, but there is a very real sense that

it is not our home – not, at least, until God has re-created it. Peter reminds his hearers that they are exiles scattered throughout the Roman Empire (1 Pet 1:1) who are to set their “hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming” (1 Pet 1:13). He goes on to instruct them:

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Pet 2:11–12)

Notice that they are not to opt out of engaging with their pagan neighbours, but they are to recognize that they do not belong here. In the final analysis, we do not need to make a choice between engaging with this world and longing for the heavenly hope of a new creation.

Yet the charge persists and still finds traction.

But maybe the principal reason for our reluctance to think about heaven is that it is often presented as such a totally unappetizing prospect. It is portrayed as an other-worldly existence somewhere off in space with no connection to the present creation. In the popular imagination the afterlife is a place of eternal disembodied hymn singing.

As we shall see this is not what the Bible teaches. According to Scripture the hope of the Bible is for a new



creation which will involve the total transformation of this present creation. In other words our hope is not way off in space, but right here. In a world washed clean we will worship and serve God and enjoy him forever.

The aim of this book is to explore what the Bible teaches about the nature of our heavenly life. My hope and prayer is that lifting our eyes to heaven will create a better and more rounded perspective on our lives now. How can I live the most fruitful Christian life today? Part of the answer is to be aware of a better life to come. Gazing at glory will strengthen our walk of faith and prepare us for trouble and trial.

Paul reminds us that “no eye has seen ... no ear has heard, and ... no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him”, so we should approach with caution. However, Paul goes on to assure us that “these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9–10).

We have a joyful duty to explore what God has revealed.

## **Many reasons**

I hope that I have already persuaded you that Christians should think more about heaven than we currently do, but if I haven't, let me give you four more reasons.

### **1. It is commanded**

Paul instructs the Christians in Colossae:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col 3:1–4)

We will return to these words towards the end of the book. For the moment just notice that Paul justifies his command with the reminder that their lives are intimately connected with the life of Christ. Jesus is in heaven – why wouldn’t you want to fix your gaze there?

In the verses that follow these glorious commands, Paul also blows out of the water the false idea that being heavenly minded makes us uninterested in this world. Focusing on heaven will affect our lifestyles, marriages, parenting and attitude to work (Col 3:5–25).

## **2. It means that we will be with Jesus**

The central attraction of heaven is the presence of Jesus. Seeing dismay and fear in the faces of his disciples just a few hours before he went to the cross, Jesus spoke words of comfort. He was going to the cross in order to prepare a place for them in heaven so that they could be with him forever:

“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)

The Bridegroom’s departure is not a divorce, just a temporary separation.

The highest aspiration we can have and the one which should transform us now is the longing to be with our Saviour. Jesus is the treasure secured in heaven and waiting to welcome us.

### **3. It is wise**

Psalm 90, the Psalm of Moses, is a meditation on the contrast between the holiness and eternal nature of God and the sinfulness and the brevity of human life. Moses writes against the background of the deaths of a whole generation of the people in the wilderness:

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.

Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn people back to dust,  
saying, ‘Return to dust, you mortals.’  
... you sweep people away in the sleep of death –  
they are like the new grass of the morning:

In the morning it springs up new,  
but by evening it is dry and withered.”  
(Psalm 90:1–3, 5–6)

How should we respond? Verse 12 tells us: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” To look soberly at the brevity of life and the vastness of eternity is to be heavenly minded, and to be heavenly minded is to be wise.

#### **4. It helps us endure with courage**

The Christian life is not easy. We live in a war zone grappling against a violent and malicious opponent. How do we endure? How do we keep going when we feel like giving up?

The letter to the Hebrews is written to people who face serious opposition. To encourage them the author reminds them that although it may be difficult to go forward, it is impossible to go back! He reminds them of the example of previous generations of believers. They endured all sorts of things because their eyes were on the final goal – a goal that was ultimately beyond this world, “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

And of course the supreme example of endurance is the Lord Jesus himself:

“... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross,

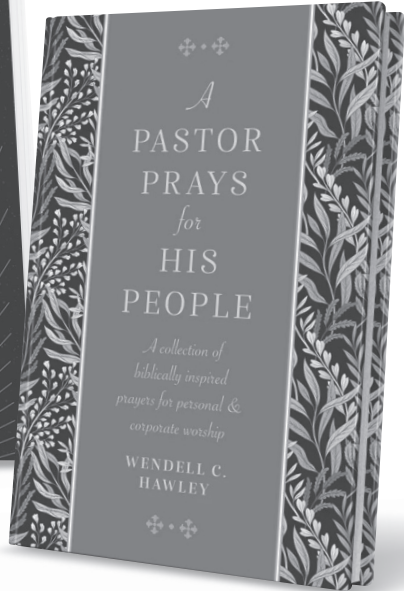
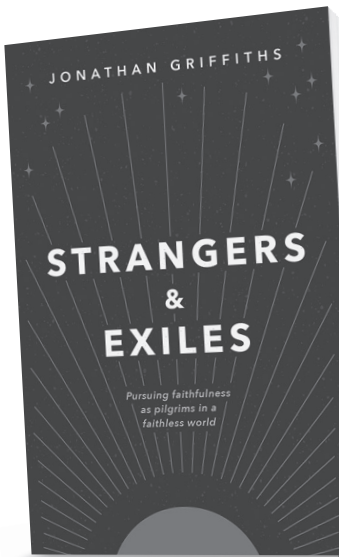
scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb 12:1–3)

In Christ, God did not walk away from human need. He rolled up his sleeves and got his hands dirty. To save us he went further and actually got his hands bloody. At the same time in the midst of the direst trials he endured with joy because his eye was on the prize.

To be heavenly minded is to glimpse glory, then fix our eyes on the prize and keep going.

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