

Heavenly Minded is a gem of a little book. Packed full of biblical instruction and godly wisdom, it challenges us to leave behind the notion that pleasing God requires adding to our faith, when fulfilment and purpose are already ours in Jesus. Spiritual growth happens when we say 'No' to earthly desire and practice, and set our focus on Christ alone. After all, we are only temporary residents here. The book is full of advice on how to 'set our minds on things above', which ensures that we will never lose sight of Jesus. Excellent for personal meditation, *Heavenly Minded* is also perfect for studying with others.

– CATHERINE CAMPBELL, author of *God Isn't Finished With You Yet*, and *Broken Works Best*

In this small book, you get a devotion, commentary, and Bible study all-in-one! This was just the reminder I needed to re-orient my heart heavenward, and I trust it will be just what you need as well. If you feel the pull of the world on your heart and mind, do yourself a favor and prayerfully read this book with heart and Bible open.

– KRISTIE ANYABWILE, Bible teacher, author

In the midst of our daily lives and earthly cares, what does it mean to set our minds on things above? In her new book, *Heavenly Minded*, Mary Willson Hannah unpacks wisdom from the book of Colossians as a guide to show us the importance and challenge of embracing our new identity in Christ. With biblical depth and insight, she warmly invites us to lift our gaze from our earthly circumstances and fix our eyes on heavenly realities.

– MELISSA KRUGER, author and vice president of discipleship programming at The Gospel Coalition

In this quick and compelling read, Mary Willson Hannah—true to form—offers thoughts that are smart, convicting, and theologically rich. A good fit for individual devotions, a small group Bible study, or Sunday school, this is a wonderful reminder of what Christians are looking forward to—and how that changes the way we live today.

– SARAH EEKHOFF ZYLSTRA, senior writer and faith-and-work editor at The Gospel Coalition



Heavenly Minded

MARY WILLSON HANNAH

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PART 1:

*The Need to Be
Heavenly Minded*



The Call

It seems odd to suggest that in order for people to live meaningful and productive lives on earth, they must focus on other-worldly things. But that's precisely what the Bible teaches.

The Bible is written largely for believers—believers like you and me who struggle with many trials and tribulations here on earth. It's only natural for human beings, living in this world, to be thinking about things in this world. It's normal that we give thought to our physical and emotional health, our appearance, our possessions, our relationships, our occupations, our failures, our successes. To manage them well, we have to think about them! But the Bible

consistently tells believers that worldly things can't be our priority. We must concern ourselves less with money, careers, politics, and sport—they can't be our main focus in life. We must concern ourselves more with our Savior, our identity and our final destination. Only then will we gain true joy, peace and hope. Heavenly mindedness, rather than worldly mindedness, is key to the Christian life.

There are many places where Scripture stresses the necessity of heavenly mindedness. One of the more famous passages is found in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae. In Colossians 3:1–4, he writes:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is 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).

Paul urges us to cultivate this heavenly mindedness in our lives. It is vital. It combats joy-sapping fear.

It heals Christ-dishonoring divisions. It undercuts soul-crushing doubts. And who doesn't want that?

"Jesus plus"

Have you ever been part of a local church in crisis? Serious troubles plagued the young Colossian church. Paul had never met these Christians face to face, but he was deeply concerned for them. Some in this local congregation had come to believe the secret to spiritual growth was to be found, not in Christ, but in mystical religious practices and rigorous self-discipline. Paul was distressed! So distressed, in fact, that he wrote them a letter from prison.

Paul most likely caught wind of these troubles from his ministry partner, Epaphras (see Phlm. 23). It was Epaphras who first proclaimed the gospel in his home town of Colossae (Col. 1:7–8; 4:12). And it was Epaphras who seems to have heard that a group of false teachers had infiltrated that congregation and caused divisions among them (Col. 2:16–19).

These false teachers claimed that for believers to mature and experience spiritual satisfaction, they needed to add to the simple gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They promoted a sort of

“Jesus plus” religion, arguing that, *in addition to trusting in Jesus Christ*, Christians should strive for super-spiritual “wisdom” and commit to certain religious regimens, such as treating their bodies harshly (Col. 2:16–23). You can visualize their understanding of true spiritual life as a pie chart: rather than comprising the whole pie, Jesus and his gospel contributed only one part, even if a large part.

In essence, these false teachers were claiming that their “Jesus plus” program was the key to true spiritual maturity. They intended to promote it and so take the Colossian congregation captive by worldly priorities and methods (Col. 2:8, 23), rather than heavenly ones.

Sound familiar? It’s a chronic temptation of the church in every generation to distort the gospel with some form of “Jesus plus” religion. A simple perusal of hot-topic debates among believers on social media illustrates these tendencies. We emphasize choice issues in a manner that sets them up as a litmus test for “authentic” or “mature” faith, and then we cancel anyone who fails our test. “I can’t imagine that a *real* Christian could ever vote for *that* political party,” we sometimes say. “How could a genuine believer not make

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such-and-such social issue their main priority?” Or, “How could a proper Christian go to *that* church or hold *that* opinion?”

Even when we might score 100% on a doctrine quiz, our “Jesus plus” attitudes and actions betray what we actually believe: that Christianity is *really* about following a set of moral rules, belonging to a particular church tribe, achieving certain life goals, or advocating for the right social cause (or avoiding *any* apparent support for *any* social cause). With this sort of in-or-out, hierarchal attitude, we inevitably create a religious “caste” system. We each can end up passing judgment on other believers who don’t adhere to our chosen priorities in the precise way we demand. None of us is immune to being deceived by a “Jesus plus” mindset.

The call to cultivate heavenly mindedness comes to us smack-dab in the middle of such temptations. So, if we’re to answer that call, we’ve got no alternative but to face up to the challenge it brings.

