

Heading for Heaven

by Joyce Jamerson



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Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life



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Introduction and Dedication

Writing a book is somewhat akin to birthing a baby. The process is mostly enjoyable, sometimes agony, but at the same time there is anxious anticipation of delivering the bundle! It has been my desire to write this book for several years, even before the birth of the two previous workbooks. *Heading for Harvest, a Study of the Fruit of the Spirit* is actually preparation for this book, as is *Look Into Your Heart*. Bearing fruit and examining our hearts are *prequels* to getting to heaven. This book goes hand in hand with principles needed to keep our hands busy in the harvest and our hearts set toward heaven. Paul was torn between heaven and earth, anxious for his reward and we should be too, Philippians 1:23. This book is an attempt to bring heaven closer to our hearts and minds. It should be there every day, just as with an anticipated birth.

It has been my pleasure to teach these lessons to the ladies Bible class at Vestavia Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama. Because these good women have carried me along with their insightful comments and suggestions, it is lovingly dedicated to them. Since *re-inventing* my life here, they have been a constant, loving support and encouragement, and I look forward to continued good times of study together. The song title, "Heaven Holds All to Me" may mean more to those of us who have lost precious family members, so this study will hold those who have already ended their journeys close to our hearts, while we prepare to join them. Even though heaven will be great under any circumstance, looking forward to the reunion that will take place is more and more exciting as anticipation builds. Thank you for choosing this study. I hope you'll be challenged and will look to the future as we learn and prepare for heaven. As words turn into pages, and pages into a book, I am more and more aware of the controversy surrounding some of these subjects, so please investigate and be guided, not by my words, but by Scripture. Writing can be a fearsome thing and this work has been a challenge, but the real challenge is putting aside the trials of this life, as we prepare for the life of glory that God has planned.

—Chapter One—
Got Plans?

Planning for a Planned Place

*“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where neither moth nor rust destroys,
and where thieves do not break in or steal;
for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,”*

Matthew 6:20, 21.

What is the most beautiful piece of God’s creation you’ve ever seen? The prettiest scenery? Hawaii? The Grand Canyon? A national forest? Or maybe a sunset in your own back yard? How about a rainbow on your dream vacation?! It could be the beauty of changing leaves in the fall with a burst of color that can almost take your breath. The best times in our lives are probably not the times when we’ve had a riotously good time and laughed our heads off at some silliness—even though those times are cleansing and memorable, but the times when we could connect with the beauty of God’s creation and feel the companionship and camaraderie of being close to God.

Perhaps notable times include being in the quiet of your own home in your own private study of God’s Word, especially when some truth has suddenly become clearer in your mind or when the preacher makes a point that explains a long sought solution to a spiritual puzzle. In our search for knowledge and happiness, if God isn’t present, our lives will soon become dull and temporary and our attempts to re-create happiness are futile. Knowing God here is only a small part of what we will be able to know in heaven, but knowing Him takes a bit of planning.

Planning, organization, and time management are very trendy right now. We have closet organizers, kitchen organizers, and under-the-bed containers for storing our stuff! Day planners and kitchen calendars adorn our refrigerators, along with our daily Bible reading plans and how could we get along without

a sticky note here and there! We perform better when we are organized and as prepared as possible for the future. (If you have doubts, think back to the chaos that ensued when you lost your car keys!) God has the greatest of organizational skills. He planned the universe and spoke the world into existence, setting all things in order. Dwell for a moment on the vastness of the Milky Way galaxy which contains our solar system, one of many in the universe. Then narrow your focus to earth and to the United States; then to your state and city, to your street and to your home and then to you, among all humanity. Do you feel small yet? About the size of the head of a pin? It's mind boggling! God prepared this incredible planet and placed it in exactly the right spot, the perfect distance from the sun and created it to support human life. When earth was made ready, He then created Adam and Eve, the beginning of mankind. Every intricate detail of our existence was planned, right down to the air we breathe.

How many times have you made intricate and detailed plans? It may have been for education, career, or family; perhaps a longed for vacation, dream house, or even a long planned for retirement. Remember the time involved? The web sites or phone calls? Looking at plans? Years of studying and investing? The intricacies of such can be complex and involved, and there may even be some surprises along the way.

Not long ago a friend illustrated it this way. He had a chance to tour a friend's dream home that had finally been completed after being in the planning stages for many years. As he went from room to room, many questions were asked. "What inspired this design?" "How did you decide on this color?" When he asked, "Where did you get the idea for this stove?" the hostess left the room for a bit and returned with a big notebook. Every inspiration she had was in the book, including the plans. When she liked a certain cabinet design, it went into the book; likewise with paint colors and appliances, right down to the design of the laundry room. It was like her own personal Pinterest, a collection of her favorite comforts and home designs. I imagine the plans were studied many times and most likely, some changes were made to promote functionality.

And so it is with heaven. If we don't *plan* to go, we won't make it. Will we make the effort to secure our eternity, studying God's plan for us and making necessary life changes? Are we heading for heaven? Even the word indicates planning. The Greek word translated heaven comes from a root that means to *lift up* or to *heave* and is used as a contrast to earth, Matthew 6:19, 20; Genesis 1:1. Perhaps we should organize our own heaven notebook with scriptures and goals for achievement!

God has planned for our eternal future, so if we are desiring and planning our home in heaven, why aren't we speaking of it more? Getting excited about it? Is our affection really set on heaven instead of things on earth, Colossians

3:2? How often do we even think of it?

This place of awe and glory, especially planned for us, shows love beyond measure.

How long has it been since you heard a sermon about heaven and God's glory? Do you know God's plans for you? Through Jeremiah, God told His people, "For I know the plans that I have for you ... plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a

future and a hope," 29:11. In His great wisdom, He has planned a place without hospitals, cemeteries, crime, pollution, hurricanes, floods, or earthquakes; just a place of awe and holiness, peace, and safety. Heaven is a planned place just for us; we have a future and a hope, and it is organized by our awesome infinite God.

Why would He do this? We are personally designed by God, planned by Him in His likeness and known by Him before our birth, Genesis 1:26, 27; Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5. For those of us who have children, don't we want them to be good children? To also have family characteristics and resemblance? So it is with God. He has always wanted children made in His image to seek Him; to be with Him, to be His family, but the choice is ours. In our daily lives when someone invites us to their home, we feel valued. An invitation for dinner or dessert tells us they *wanted* to be with us, but we can accept or deny their invitation. There are rewards for those who accept God's invitation; an alternative for those who do not. The protection that is available is evident in

the story of Ruth, as Boaz, in tender emotion, expresses to Ruth the beautiful word picture of seeking refuge under the wings of God, Ruth 2:12. In 2 Samuel 22:3, David spoke of God as his stronghold and refuge, his safe place. Earlier, God had created cities of refuge for those who were threatened in some way, a place to seek safety until the issue could be solved. Refuge is available for us if we will seek it but doing so depends on our heart, Isaiah 17:10, 11. It is the seeking heart that finds refuge in Him, Luke 11:9, 10; Acts 17:26, 27; Hebrews 6:17, 18. God is so willing to let us find Him!

This place of awe and glory especially planned for us, shows love beyond measure, John 14:3, 4. We are surrounded by evidence of His love and our relationship now will only be a taste of what is to come. Remember, He promised eternal life *before* the ages began (Ephesians 1:3, 4; Titus 1:2); it is a gift for those who love Him; a free gift, Romans 6:23. Heaven is not an afterthought. Even the early patriarchs were looking for a better city, prepared by God, Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 11:16, 17.

“The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God,” Psalm 14:2.

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him,”

1 John 3:1.

As these lessons progress, we'll be weaving in and out of Bible history. It's important to understand the covenants (agreements between God and man) that took place. God made a promise to Abraham that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed and the New Testament cannot be understood without knowledge of what took place in the Old.

“By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed ... for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God,”

Hebrews 11:8-10.

Hebrews 11 helps us to understand how God unfolded His plan through the patriarchs Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses. Moses, the greatest leader of the Old Testament, brought the Jewish nation of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, across the Red Sea to safety. After Moses received the 10 commandments from God at Mt. Sinai, instructions were given to the people as to how to worship, including an intricate sacrificial system and the building of an elaborate portable tabernacle which housed His presence, Exodus 34, 35. He wanted to dwell among His people as they embarked on the planned journey to Canaan. Right and wrong ways to worship are noted as we read through Exodus and Leviticus, as there were detailed plans to be followed in the construction of the tabernacle and later, the permanent temple. The High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place only once a year on the Day of Atonement in order to mediate between God and the people. Worship was an important, planned event to be done in a specific way giving God's children opportunity to express their praise and devotion to Him. Since God intricately planned the tabernacle, and later the temple as His dwelling place among the people, think of the possibilities that wait for us in an intricately planned heaven; a permanent and eternal dwelling place for the part of us that is in His image, our soul.

Prophecies throughout the Old Testament tell of a coming Messiah, and when the time is right, God establishes a new covenant in order to include all of mankind. Even though the Jews were God's chosen, the plan was to provide the ultimate sacrifice for everyone. No more would the blood of animals be required in daily, monthly, and yearly sacrifices but only one sacrifice—one time—for all people and it would be through His Son, Jesus Christ. Undeserving as we are, we can never truly understand the depth of God's love for us; how He would let His Son leave the security and beauty of heaven to endure the trials of this evil, sinful earth. God sent His Son to be our sacrifice—our Passover Lamb—our Savior. Jesus Christ, name above all names, changing the world in a three year ministry.

Sadly, all would not receive Him. Even His ministry points us to heaven as He taught on the mountain (Matthew 5) and in the upper room as He tells the disciples, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in

me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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.

We notice David's longing for heaven in Psalm 84:10 when he writes, "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside." He wants to be *led beside still waters* and to *dwell in the house of the Lord forever*, Psalm 23. Comfort, rest, and the desire to worship permeate the Psalms. We see the same longing in the life of Paul as he urges others to head in the right direction, telling the Colossians to "set your mind on things above and not on the things that are on earth," 3:1-4. He lamented that God's planning and wisdom were not understood. His teaching was of conviction, desperately pointing out that if it had been understood, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. What God has in store for all generations cannot begin to be imagined! The glory of what lies ahead has not even entered into the heart of man. We speculate on details and hundreds of books have tried to explain heaven, but we are incapable of describing it with any accuracy. C. S. Lewis wrote of heaven and then said, "Guesses, of course, only guesses. If they are not true, something better will be," (*Letters to Malcolm*). There is glory to be revealed, Romans 8:18.

Heaven was never pushed to the back of Paul's mind; neither should it be in ours. His hope, so prominent throughout his letters, drives him to finish the course, and we'll look at hope through

the eyes of Peter, Paul, and John in later chapters. Shouldn't hope be in the forefront of *our* lives as well? It's easy to lose focus. We get busy; our lives are blessed with more than we

*Comfort, rest, and
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permeates the Psalms.*

deserve, which could make us more focused on our possessions. Perhaps that's why so many fail to think about heaven? We're happy here with all our *stuff*. There was a rich young ruler who had more interest in worldly riches (Luke 18:18-23) than in heaven, but whether rich or poor, we can look forward to becoming heirs in the kingdom, James 2:5. Heirs. God is

great as an investment planner! He has drawn up His will and has left us a copy, providing the church as a family and as a preview of heaven. With this inheritance, there will be no squabbling; we can all lay claim to what is willed to us. He not only wants to be with us, He wants us to be with Him!

In order to talk about heaven we must also speak of death; it is necessarily connected. Some do not want to speak of it at all; feared by some, ignored by others. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!” ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them,’” Revelation 14:13. The outer man goes to the grave and the inner man will continue for eternity, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17. As much as we might like to ignore it, there is another very real consideration; that of hell. If there is a place of eternal reward, it stands to reason there will also be a place of punishment. It is also feared by some and ignored by others, but it doesn’t remove the reality. Paul clearly says, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” and then outlines those who will not enter if they remain as they are, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. He also adds, “Such were some of you,” indicating some had left their sinful lives to be justified by Christ, v. 11. Faithful Christians have no need to fear this punishment, knowing that death can be precious and longing to be in the presence of the Savior.

As we study, we’ll look at God’s plan and reasons for our hope, outlining some of the details of heaven. If we can stand on the seashore and feel the glory and wonder of God, the future glory to be revealed will be beyond comparison. God promised it even before time began (Titus 1:2); it’s in our hearts because God set it there, Ecclesiastes 3:11. That is, unless we are ignoring it. We could be missing joys and comforts even in this present life just by failing to appreciate God’s promise. Focusing and learning about this beauty that can be ours will take some work on our part. Studying should bring us some excitement. It can mean the difference between singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” and thinking this is the same old tired song we’ve sung since we were little, or we can sing “Holy, Holy, Holy” and visualize angels surrounding the throne of God singing His praises, Isaiah 6:3.

Where is heaven and what is it like? *Why* did God provide such a place? Is it worth it to go there? How can we be happy if some of our friends and family are not there? Who is there right now? Will we know one another? Can we be *assured* of going? What will we be like? What is biblical rest? What will we do there? What does it mean to lay down our burdens? What are angels like? How does the resurrection relate?

I guess you can tell there are plenty of areas to study and discuss. Are you as curious as I?

There are many fantasies regarding heaven, and in these pages we'll look into biblical details (and the key word here is biblical), separating fantasy from fact. The only book needed in order to prove there is a heaven is our Bible.

Whatever our trials, whatever our burdens, whatever life has brought our way, if we obey God's plan, heaven will be our joy. It will be worth waiting for and we should be anticipating it daily.

I really hope you'll be traveling along with me on this exciting journey;
Heading for Heaven.

*"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
but those who plan peace have joy,"* Proverbs 12:20 (ESV).

Questions for Meditation and Discussion

1. Discuss the planning of our lives versus planning for heaven. How important are plans?
2. Why would God plan heaven as a reward? Describe its benefits.

3. Why did God plan places of refuge for His children? How does this compare to heaven?

4. Upon what does seeking refuge depend?

5. How did the early patriarchs view heaven?

6. What was Paul's admonition to the Colossians? How often do you think it happened?

7. How can being attached to our *stuff* keep us from seeking heaven?

8. What advantages can come from letting heaven be our focus?

Insight: From this lesson, what will help me visualize heaven?

Sidebar Studies:

Heaven in the Beatitudes
Planning and organization
Setting goals