

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Basic Doctrines: Heaven

iFOLLOW

Walking with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

Curriculum Development: The iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition curriculum development was lead by the **Center for Creative Ministry**. **General Editor:** Monte Sahlin; **Assistant Editor:** Debbonnaire Kovacs; **Directional Advisory:** Brad Forbes, Carole Kilcher, Ceri Myers, Cesar Gonzalez, Clayton Kinney, Curtis Rittenour, Dave Osborne, Dave VanDenburgh, Gerry Chudleigh, Jane Thayer, Jerry Thomas, John Appel, Jose Rojas, Kim Johnson, Nicole Chao, Paul Richardson, Rich DuBose, Shasta Nelson, William Sutton; **Pastoral Advisory:** Claudio Consuegra, Collette Pekar, Dave Hutman, Don Driver, Fredrick Russell, Jerry Nelson, Jesse Wilson, Leslie Bumgardner, Loren Fenton, Rebecca Brillhart; **Unit Authors:** Alberto Valenzuela, Althea Pineda, Corienne Hay, Debbonnaire Kovacs, Ed Dickerson, Gianluca Bruno, Gil Bahnsen, Greg Nelson, Jack Calkins, James Whibberding, Karen Collum, Monte Sahlin, Norma Sahlin, Pam Splawinski, Patty Ntihuka, Reinder Bruinsma, Ryan Bell; **Additional contribution** by Maria Ovando-Gibson; **Additional editing:** Dave Gemmell, Meredith Carter; **Graphic Design:** Mind Over Media; **Layout:** Paul D. Young; **Web Development:** Narrow Gate Media.

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iFOLLOW

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Basic Doctrines: Heaven

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what Jesus meant by saying that the kingdom of God is within you
2. Know that the reality we live in today is a transient phase in God's larger plan
3. Choose daily to walk with Christ in His kingdom

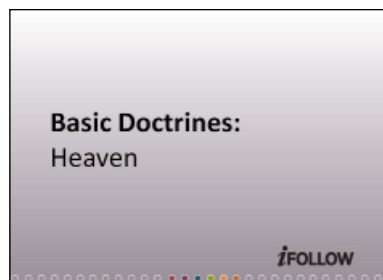
Content Outline

- A. Heaven: What Is It?
- B. The Kingdom Within Us
- C. When Do We Get There?
- D. Heaven or Hell?
- E. The New Earth

Background Material for the Presenter

From the moment Adam and Eve lost the Edenic paradise, every generation of God's people has waited for a new heaven and a new Earth as their eternal home. For many today, however, the word "heaven" has become meaningless, a concept that belongs to the realm of fairy tales. We delude ourselves, they say, if we think there is some kind of life beyond this current existence. Some go so far as to say that it is positively wrong to tell people that there is a heaven. They argue that it keeps people from putting all their efforts into what they could achieve in life here and now.

Even many Christians struggle with the concept. They are not so sure that heaven is a real place. Should heaven, rather, be interpreted as a state of mind? On the other hand, there are many who believe that at death the soul is released and enters a non-material place called "heaven" to live with God. They are confident that their



father, mother, husband, wife, or child—who has preceded them in death—is now with God in heaven and that a few years at most separate them from a reunion with their loved ones. What’s the truth on this important topic?

Scripture provides two primary meanings to “heaven.” First, heaven is the dwelling place of God, from where He reigns and acts. (Deut. 26:15, 1 Sam. 2:10, Psalms 11:4, 53:2, 103:19, Isa. 6:1-4, 63:15, Matt. 5:16, Rev. 3:12, 11:13, 20:9) Heaven is His throne, and Earth is His footstool, with His reign extending to all created order. (Isa. 66:1, Acts 7:49) Heaven is the place where angels worship God continually and await to do His bidding. (Ps. 103:19, 20; Matt. 18:10; 22:30; Matt. 24:36; Rev. 3:5) From heaven Jesus came, (John 3:13, 31; 6:38, 42) and to heaven He ascended and functions as our Mediator. (Heb. 8:1, 9:24, 1 Pet. 3:22) It is from there He will come again. (John 14:1-3)

Second, heaven is the home of the redeemed. (John 14:1-3, 1 Thess. 4:17) The plan of salvation reaches its final stage when the redeemed enter into the joy of the new heaven and the new earth where God Himself “will dwell with them.” (Rev. 21:1-3)

The ultimate definition of heaven, then, is where God dwells. At the end, the new Earth will become God’s dwelling place (Rev. 21:1-3) and the inheritance of the redeemed. This ancient hope is not a figment of fanciful imagination but a reality based on God’s promises. Peter wrote: “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” (2 Pet. 3:13, NIV)

The Kingdom Within Us

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior, we enter into a new kind of existence. Although still subject to the results of sin—aging, sickness, and the temporary “sleep” of death—we have already, in a very real sense, received eternal life. It is important never to lose sight of that crucial fact. We have been “born again” and have a new life “in Christ.” Those who have declared their allegiance to Christ are “children” of God. (1 John 3:2, NIV) They have “crossed over,” Jesus declares, “from death to life.” (John 5:24, NIV) They have become part of the kingdom of God as they have incorporated the kingdom values into their lives. They now have a different Master, and their ultimate focus is no longer on the things of this world but on the eternal city.

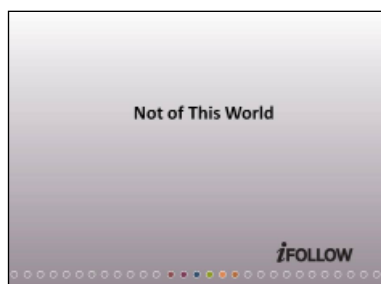
Ellen White expresses it this way: “As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. ... Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. ... As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence.” (White 1898, p. 331)



The apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:12-14, thanks God for having “qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Clearly, for the early church God had already accomplished these things through the death and resurrection of Jesus. A person must simply accept that gift (easy) and then learn how to live into it (not so easy). That latter reality is what most of the New Testament is about, both before and after Jesus lived here.

Not of This World

Jesus’ most famous prayer, after the Lord’s Prayer, is probably that recorded in the entire chapter of John 17. In verses 15 and 16, He prays, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” Later, responding to Pilate’s question concerning his kingship, “Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John 18:36)

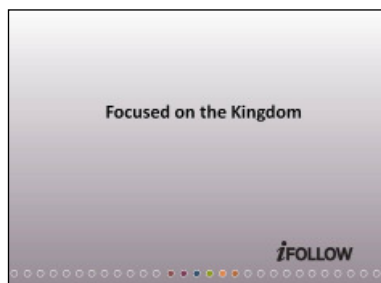


It’s easy to say. Not so easy to do. What does it mean to live life as one who is “in the world but not of it?” To truly learn the answers to this question requires that we immerse ourselves daily in the Word; all of the Word, from beginning to end. There are answers there enough to last the whole lifetime of the Christian trying to live out the experience of which Jesus spoke and prayed.

Focused on the Kingdom

There is one more general answer, however, one which will help in nearly every situation: Don’t concentrate on this world. In the daily, ordinary, mundane minutiae of life, we do our best to keep it clear to ourselves that even in these little details, our final goal is not earth, but heaven.

Because of our inability to comprehend the reality of heaven, we tend to place either too much or too little importance on tangible, earthly, material things. Satan uses our lack of comprehension to skew our view of life and our value system. Either we forget all about heaven and end up living lives that bear witness not to new creation, but to a dog-eat-dog jungle existence, or we become “too good for this earth,” so unworldly,



as one old saw puts it, that we're "no earthly good."

There is no affirmation of either of these attitudes in Jesus' life. This is why time spent in reading and praying about His life and all the other lives recorded in Scripture for our benefit will help to keep us clear. Like Abraham, we are "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10)

This kind of attitude, prayerfully carried through life, will often make it possible to gain some glimpses of heaven on earth. But this is not all there is. What we experience of the reality of the heavenly kingdom while we are still on earth is only a foretaste of the "inheritance" that is to come. It makes us long for more. When Jesus comes in His glory, "all the nations" will be gathered before Him. (Matt. 25:32, NIV) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" (Verse 34) That is the moment God's children have been waiting for. They will be home at last!

"Better than all the friendship of the world is the friendship of Christ's redeemed. Better than a title to the noblest palace on earth is a title to the mansions our Lord has gone to prepare. And better than all the words of earthly praise will be the Savior's words to His faithful servants, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Matt. 25:34. (White 1900, p. 374.) Someday, by the grace of God, we're going to actually **go somewhere**. But when?

When Do We Get to Heaven?

Is there life after death? This question has been a persistent one throughout history. More than a third of the world's population believes in reincarnation, the endless cycle of birth and death. Many would deny any future after death. But Christians take the future seriously and believe in heaven, although their views may differ.

It is quite astonishing that the idea of an immortal soul—which is separable from our physical body and which ascends to heaven right at death—has become so dominant among Christians. Satan's lie in Eden was: "You will not surely die." (Gen. 3:4, NIV) The immortal soul was a common pagan theme, continued and further developed by Greek and Roman thinkers and writers.

By contrast, the Bible clearly teaches the following facts about the true nature of death: (1) It is seen as a rest. "David rested with his fathers," 1 Kings 11:21. (2) It is like a sleep. "Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death," Psalm 13:3. (3) It is an unknowing state. "The dead know nothing" and have no part in "anything that happens under the sun," Eccles. 9:5-6. (4) It is still identified as a sleep in the New Testament, even after Jesus had been raised. "We will not all sleep," 1 Cor. 15:51.



When we die, we enter into a state of unconsciousness that the Bible compares to sleep. Unaware of what happens in the world, we await the morning of the resurrection. Only then will the great multitude of the redeemed enter heaven to join the very few, such as Enoch and Elijah, who have preceded them! But it is not going to be a long wait. The moment we close our eyes in death, the next thing we know will be Christ at His second coming. In other words, as far as those who die in Christ are concerned, it will make no difference whether it was 3,000 years ago or the day before Christ returns. They close their eyes in death, and the next thing they are conscious of is Jesus returning to get them. It will seem, to them, instantaneous.

Perhaps most interesting of all is that Job, accepted by scholars to be one of the oldest stories in Scripture, clearly understood that he had a redeemer who would rescue him at a last day involving a physical resurrection. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” (Job 19:25, 26) There is no difference between this understanding, perhaps 5,000 years old, and the one described by Paul in I Thessalonians 4:16-18. “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [Why would they need to “rise” if they were already there in heaven?] 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 forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

“In the New Testament the blessed hope never focuses on individual death, but always on the return of Christ and the resurrection and translation of the saints to meet Him together, at the same time. It is in this future, and not what happens at death, that saints can find comfort.” (Gulley, pp. 293-294)

Heaven or Hell?

Not all people will be saved. Some will be eternally lost. Human beings have been created with a free will. Someone once expressed it like this: There are just two kinds of people; those who say, “Lord, Your will be done,” and those to whom the Lord says, “I have to respect your choice; your will be done!” In the end, no one asked to be born. We’re here only because we’ve been created without our consent. God offers us the hope of eternal life, if we choose it. If we don’t, then we will go back to the nothingness out of which we came. It’s our own choice.



Heaven is a reality. It is a place. It is where God lives together with the other Members of the Godhead and a host of loyal angels. It also is where we will live if we remain on God’s

side. When Christ returns and the first resurrection takes place, the resurrected saints will accompany their Lord to heaven, where they will remain for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4-6) After the thousand years a series of events will take place, culminating in the creation of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (Rev. 21:1), where the redeemed will then live forever.

But hell also is a reality. The popular belief in a place where sinners will be tormented and burn for all eternity does not have biblical support, and is, in fact, an appalling concept for those who claim to believe in a loving God. But neither has the popular idea that in the end all people are going to be saved. Those who reject the good news of salvation and refuse to be obedient to God will be judged and condemned and will face a death from which there is no resurrection ever. Those who believe that all people will be saved argue that a God of love will not allow anyone to lose out on eternal bliss. They have a point to the extent that God is, indeed, love personified and wants to save all men and women. He says as much in Ezekiel 33:11: “Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” And again in 2 Peter 3:9: “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

But tragically, not all people want to be saved. Christ could not have expressed it any clearer: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned,” but He also added that “those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:24, 29, NIV)

It remains our choice. Heaven can be ours if we choose to believe in God and are willing to become disciples of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Future and the New Earth

The future is a major concern of Scripture; it views the future as part of God’s strategy to conclude the great controversy. Heaven is God’s promised destination for His people. Even as we await this finale in God’s plan, we need to reaffirm what heaven is and what its joys are.

Four times in Revelation 21:1-8, John argues that the initiative and the fulfillment of this eternal home of the redeemed rest with God. He has staked His name, nature, and authority to validate His promises. To deny this possibility is to deny God. What are the joys of this heavenly home?

First, God Himself will dwell with us. (Rev. 21:3-4) The biblical concept of the new earth throbs with the single most important idea that God would be the dynamic of that order. The earth renewed will become the locus of His throne. Fellowship with God will be fully



restored. That face-to-face communion will be the source of utmost joy and happiness for the saints. (Rev. 22:4)

Second, former things—all associated with sin—will pass away. (Rev. 22:5, Isa. 65:17) No more tears. No more pain. No more death. No more unfairness and injustice. (Isa. 65:21, 22) Work will have its dignity and fulfillment. (Isa. 65:23) Sickness will vanish, and perfect health shall characterize the inhabitants: “The leaves of the tree [of life] were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2; see also Ps. 46:4) Perfect peace, perfect enjoyment of God, perfect worship, and joyful obedience will mark the life in the new earth. (2 Cor. 6:16, Heb. 8:10, Zeph. 3:9)

Third, harmony and righteousness shall characterize land and life in the new earth. (2 Pet. 3:13) With the abolition of the curse upon the earth (Rev. 22:3; cf. Gen. 3:16–19), creation will be freed from its bondage and decay. (Rom. 8:18–22) The desolate earth will be transformed like the Garden of Eden. (Isa. 30:23; 35:1, 2, 7; 65:17; 66:22; Hos. 1:10; 2:18; Zech. 8:12) Peace will characterize the environment: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.” (Isa. 65:25)

Beyond Our Wildest Expectations

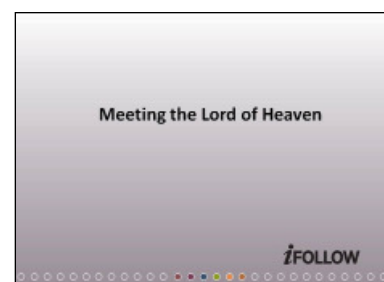
Have you ever wondered how it will be in heaven and on the new earth? Will we recognize each other? Will we have eternal youth? What will we do when there? Will we have our own occupations? Or will we only sing God’s praises? Will we travel to other places in the universe? How much will we remember of our earthly existence?

Most of these questions can only be speculated about, here. What we know is, God has greater plans for us than we could ever dream for ourselves. In his descriptions in Revelation 21 and 22, John tells us that in the new world that God will create everything that could possibly be a threat to us will have been removed and everyone who could present a danger to us will be absent. We will be eternally secure!



Meeting the Lord of Heaven

We have every reason to believe that on the new earth we will be able to recognize those we knew in this life. Our resurrection bodies will resemble that of the risen Lord. When He appeared to His followers after His resurrection, He clearly was recognizable to those who had been with Him prior to His death. What an inexpressible joy it will be



to be reunited with those we lost in death. But the supreme experience will be to meet the Lord of the universe. Our songs will come true: “Face to face shall [we] behold Him, far beyond the starry sky!” What a privilege it will be to stand before the Alpha and the Omega of the universe.

We cannot yet imagine what it will be like to meet our Savior. How many questions will we want to ask! The why question, which has so often been on our lips, finally will receive its definitive answer. We will at last understand why God permitted particular trials and temptations into our earthly existence. While we were here, we will have learned not to doubt God’s wisdom and goodness. All distrust will have dissipated as we learned (usually the hard way) that God never abandoned us. But it will be so wonderful to finally know why God allowed certain things to take place. And only then will we realize fully how we have been protected from all kinds of dangers.

Most important of all, eternal life is all about singing eternal praises and worshipping the King. Why? Because He is worthy of our adoration. “That the Maker of all worlds, the Arbiter of all destinies, should lay aside His glory and humiliate Himself from love to man will ever excite the wonder and adoration of the universe. As the nations of the saved look upon their Redeemer and behold the eternal glory of the Father shining in His countenance; as they behold His throne, which is from everlasting to everlasting, and know that His kingdom is to have no end, they break forth in rapturous song: ‘Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His own most precious blood!’ ” (White 1888, pp. 651-652)

We are people with a destiny that extends far beyond our short existence in this present world. We are citizens of a heavenly kingdom. This kingdom is both present and future. It already is with us but will be realized fully in all its glory when Christ returns to take us home. Then eternal life in God’s presence will be ours. When discouragement and pessimism creep into your life, remember that your Creator is getting a place in heaven custom-ready just for you.

Handouts in this Package

1. Participant Notes



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Additional Resources

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DVD and Video

Martell, J. L. (Producer), & Ford, Mark (Director). (1989). *Fear No Evil*. United States: NAD Church Ministries. (Distributed by AdventSource. This is a 20-minute documentary designed for use with secular people.)

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Basic
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Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the differing views Christians have about heaven?
2. To some, heaven is a true but distant reality, too removed from the daily grind of life to impact much. To others, it is a comforting mythology; to still others, it is an opiate that numbs the pain of the present. As a believer, how do you relate to heaven's reality?
3. According to the Bible, when do the saints inherit heaven?
4. When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, He responded that the kingdom was within us. What did He mean by that statement?
5. Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God as already come and as yet to come. How do you distinguish between the two?
6. What can we do to stay focused on heaven despite the fact there is so little we know about it?
7. Try to imagine a world without sickness, death, fear, loss; a world in which we only keep growing in knowledge and love. What things here give us hints at what it will be like there? Let your imagination seek to grasp what this new existence will be like. What are you especially anticipating?
8. What will it be like when you meet Jesus face to face? What do you think you will say to Him, and why? What do you think He'll say to you?
9. Why is the promise of heaven so important to us?

Group Activity

Activity 1

Purpose: To enjoy sharing some speculations about heaven, knowing we can't even come close to the reality.

Preparation: Arrange chairs in a circle or more than one circle if the group is large. Allow ten chairs per circle. You will need writing materials and one clipboard per circle.

Assignment: There is a popular party game in which participants each write one line of a story without seeing what anyone else has written. This could be adapted to make an interesting (and probably amusing) word picture of some of our highest flights of fancy concerning what heaven might be like. Give one person a piece of paper and clipboard. Have this person write one sentence they've imagined about heaven. Encourage them to be as creative as they like, and stretch their minds. They then fold the part of the paper that holds their sentence back so their sentence is out of sight, clip that under the clip, and pass the paper on. When everyone has added a sentence, one person unfolds the paper and reads it all.

Debrief: What kinds of ideas were there? Which were similar and different? Did some seem silly or outlandish? Why? What do these sentences reveal about the attitudes and thought patterns of those participating?

Time? Allow a few minutes to get into circles, and a minute per person for writing. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for sharing.

Activity 2

Purpose: To share and discuss growing and developing ideas of heaven.

Preparation: You will need tables or desks, with writing and art materials on each. Have markers, crayons, paint, glue, magazines, scissors, or whatever occurs to you. Each person will need large paper or a poster board (or half poster board.)

Assignment: Have each person divide their paper into three parts with dividing lines, and label the three parts, Childhood, Youth, and Adulthood. In each section, they may write, draw, or otherwise represent their ideas of heaven in those eras of their lives. If they wish, they may also represent the influences that caused or changed their thinking over the years.

Debrief: Discuss the thoughts and reactions of the group. What do they believe

now? Why?

Time: Allow at least 20 minutes for participants to create their poster, and another 15 to 30 more for discussion. Alternatively, the discussion could be going on at the same time.

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Group
Activities

**Basic
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Handout

Key Concept 9: Heaven

Key Texts: John 14:1-3, Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, Revelation 21

Concept: Heaven is a real place. At death the Christian does not immediately go to heaven but awaits the resurrection when Jesus will raise the dead and give His people immortality.

Connecting with Scripture

A. "You can just go to hell!" Have you ever heard anyone say these words in anger? What do they really mean? Have you ever heard anyone say, "You can just go to heaven?" Why not?

B. Write about some of the common ideas about heaven and hell that you have heard or been taught. How did these ideas affect your life and thinking? What do you believe now?

Sharing and Receiving Scripture

A. After reading John 14:1-3, ask yourself, "What does this passage teach me about heaven?"

1. This passage was written for people concerned about the future.
2. The Father's house, Jesus says contains plenty of rooms for each of us.
3. If Jesus is "preparing" a place for us, then we will not go there until the Second Coming
4. The way to heaven is through Jesus Christ.
5. Trusting in God about heaven is the only way to peace.
6. Other...

B. Do we as Christians go immediately to heaven when we die? How does this teaching fit with Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6?

1. The verse says, "...but the dead know nothing."
2. Psalm 115:17 tells us that the dead do not praise God.
3. In John 11:11-14 Jesus compares death to sleep.
4. Those "asleep in Jesus" rise from death at His second coming (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 16).
5. Revelation 22:12 says we receive eternal life and enjoy heaven when Jesus comes back
6. Other...

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HANDOUT

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C. There are many Bible passages that teach us about heaven. Choose some of these Scripture verses and share your thoughts on them.

1. Philippians 3:21 tells us something God will give us when we go to heaven.
2. Isaiah 35:3-6 shows us what will happen to all physical deformities in heaven.
3. Matthew 8:11 reveals who we will fellowship with in heaven.
4. Isaiah 65:21-23 helps us understand what we will do in heaven.
5. Revelation 21:18-21 explains some of the dimensions of heaven.
6. Other...

D. One of the most touching pictures of heaven is found in Revelation 21:1-4. As John, the writer of the book of Revelation, describes what he saw, choose one part of these verses you personally look forward to the most.

1. Verse 1 tells us there will be a brand new heaven and new earth.
2. Verse 2 describes heaven coming down to this earth as a bride dressed for her husband.
3. Verse 3 shows how God will be with us personally & why there will be no more separation
4. Verse 4 says God will wipe away every tear from our eyes & no more death or mourning.
5. Verse 4 also says there will be no more crying over pain.
6. Other...

Applying the message of Scripture

Choose one of the following options and work on a solution. If the opportunity arises, share your solution with someone else.

Option 1: Finish these sentences, “Nothing brings me closer to heaven than...” “One thing that really makes me long for heaven is...” “I cannot wait to meet [insert name] in heaven.”

Option 2: Your co-worker hears someone at work say, “My aunt was a good woman. She recently died and I’m sure she is now in heaven.” Your co-worker laughs, looks at you and says, “Do you believe in that fairytale stuff?” What do you say to your co-worker?

Option 3: “I will never make it to heaven, it’s just too hard to be good enough to get there.” That’s what a teen in your church tells you one day while you are teaching a Bible class on heaven. How do you respond to this discouraging comment?

Valuing Scripture in Your Life

A. Heaven is a real place, but it’s easy to forget about heaven in our busy lives. What

is something you can do to remind you of heaven during this coming week? Reflect quietly on this for a minute or two.

B. Find a partner with whom to share your thoughts about the above question, then pray for each other.

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