

## WHAT IS HEAVEN *REALLY* LIKE?

## Discussion Guide #1

Lesson: "What On Earth Is Heaven Good For?"

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Aim: to introduce the series and to understand how heaven gives us the hope to be victorious in this life.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** As we go around the circle and tell our names, I'd also like to know: Do you have a favorite hymn? Could you identify one particular song that you especially like? I'll begin: my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and one hymn that I like is \_\_\_\_\_.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Tonight we are beginning a new series entitled "What Is Heaven *REALLY* Like?" When we think of heaven, one of the associations that comes to mind are the many hymns about heaven, because songs about heaven have often been popular. Of all the hymns that you know, is there a song about heaven that you especially like? Is there a particular hymn about eternal life that you **DON'T** like?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Most of us first learned about heaven when we were young children. In what ways have your concepts of heaven **CHANGED** since you were a child?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** It can be difficult for us to comprehend a spiritual dimension like heaven, because our only experience has been in this life here on earth. In fact, as you try to imagine what heaven will be like, what are some of the questions you have? If you could ask God anything you wanted, what would you *really* like to know about heaven?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Martin Marty, a well-known professor of religious history at the University of Chicago, remembers hearing many sermons on heaven and hell in his childhood, but observes that "Now the only time you hear of heaven is when somebody has died." Other scholars of American religion have noted the same thing. In spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of people in this country believe in heaven, most churches don't seem to emphasize it very much. Why do you suppose preachers in this country don't talk about heaven as much as they once did?

One possible reason why American preachers don't talk about heaven much today is because, since it is where God's people will be **AFTER** their existence on this earth is over, they think heaven doesn't have any relevance to our life **RIGHT NOW**. In this conversation we will consider the question, "What On Earth Is Heaven Good For?"

TURN TO the book of 1 Peter (near the back of your New Testament), Chapter 1. READ Verses 3-5. **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In these verses the apostle Peter piles up one promise after another, so let's try to sort them out. What are some of the good things the Father has provided for his people that you can identify in these verses? What, specifically, are some of the blessings listed by Peter that we have received from God?

*Possible Answers:* His "great mercy"; A "new birth" (see verse 23; cf. John 3:3-8); A "living hope"; The confidence that comes from the resurrection of Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 15:17-20); A heavenly "inheritance" that we can never lose; A protection or "shielding" by His power (see Jude 24); Our coming salvation.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** One of the gifts of God listed by Simon Peter is the gift of a “living hope.” To understand the significant of “a living hope,” let’s think about the importance of hope for living. At different stages of our life, we might have different dreams and goals for our future. What is an example of something that a person might HOPE for:

- when they are children?
- when they are teens?
- when they are in their 20’s?
- when they are in their 30’s or 40’s?
- when they are in their 50’s or 60’s?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** As you think about those dreams and goals at each stage of life, what impact do you think they had on us, or have on us? Hope focuses on the future, but what role does it play in our life right now?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What happens to a person who has LOST HOPE? If you had to identify what you would consider to be the opposite of hope, what word would you choose?

READ Verses 6-9 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In these verses Simon Peter describes how considering the future GOAL of our faith can affect our attitude and motivation right now. The New Testament often uses the analogy of athletics to describe what it means to live the Christian life. As you look at these verses, what do they suggest to you about the parallels between a Christian’s motivation and that of an athlete in training? What are some ways that following Jesus is like training for the Olympics?

Background Notes: For examples of athletic training as an analogy to discipleship, see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 2 Timothy 2:5, 4:6-8; Hebrews 12:1-3.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Back in the 1960’s, John Lennon of the Beatles wrote a song entitled “Imagine”, in which he sang: “Imagine there’s no heaven, It’s easy if you try; No hell below us, Above us, only sky. Imagine all the people living for today.” Let’s take Lennon up on his invitation: imagine for a moment that heaven did NOT exist, that the Bible had NOTHING to say about any eternal home, and that as far as we knew, this life is all there is. If God had never promised us life after death, and there were no such thing as heaven, how do you think that would change our perspective on our time here on earth? In what ways would our experience of this life be different without the hope of heaven?

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** The promises in the Bible of an eternal home called “heaven” are not simply “pie in the sky after we die.” Our future hope of heaven equips us to deal with the difficulties that we will face on this earth right now. Because Christians know that we have a prize waiting at the end of our race, we can have the motivation we need to be faithful, and even joyful, in the hard times of life.

**NEXT TIME** our topic will be “Living In The Presence of God.” To prepare for that conversation, read the last two chapters of the Bible, Chapters 21-22 of the book of Revelation.

## WHAT IS HEAVEN *REALLY* LIKE?

## Discussion Guide #2

Lesson: "Living In The Presence of God"

Text: Revelation 21:1-22:5

Aim: to allow our imaginations to begin to consider the experience of living in glory with God.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** If you had to choose, out of all the places you have visited, the most beautiful or awesome scenery, what place would you select? I'll begin: my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and the most beautiful location I have ever visited would have to be \_\_\_\_\_.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Paul tells us in Romans 1:20 that the "invisible qualities" of God can be seen in the world he created. If we applied that principle to HEAVEN, is there anything in nature that suggests to you God must have created a wonderful existence for us after this life is over? 2. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God "has set eternity in the hearts of men." What are some negative aspects of this world that cause us to long for a heavenly home, to believe God must have something in store for us that is better than this life?

While it may ultimately be impossible for us to comprehend a spiritual dimension such as heaven, the Bible provides plenty of imagery, so God clearly wants us to use our imaginations! In this lesson we will consider an extended description of eternal life and attempt to visualize heaven.

TURN TO the book of Revelation (the last book of your New Testament), Chapter 21. READ Verses 1-8. This passage lists many of the blessings we will enjoy once we are finally able to experience all that God has in store for us. **DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are some of the things we WILL have in heaven that we don't presently enjoy here on earth?** Possible Answers: A "new heaven and new earth" (v. 1); A "new Jerusalem" (v. 2); A direct experience of fellowship with God (v. 3); The ability to "drink without cost from the spring of the water of life" (v. 6).

**DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are some of the things that we WON'T have in heaven that we currently endure in this life?** Possible Answers: No sea (v. 1); No tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (v. 4); No wicked people (v. 8). Background: The "sea" was a symbol of evil (cf. 13:1; Isaiah 57:20).

**DISCUSSION QUESTION: One way to understand the difference between our experience in this world and the life we will enjoy in heaven is to think of all the people whose services are needed on earth but who will be unemployed in heaven. For example, since there won't be any pain, we won't need any pharmacists, and since there won't be any wicked people, we won't need any police! What are some other occupations that won't be needed in heaven?**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION: In verse 8 we are reminded that heaven is not the only eternal destination! In last week's conversation we noted that preachers in America don't emphasize HEAVEN as much as they used to, but even fewer are talking about HELL! Why do you suppose that is? What do you think American preachers don't preach as many sermons on HELL any more?** Background Note: The "second death" is described in Revelation 20:11-15.

READ Verses 9-21 **DISCUSSION QUESTION: It is difficult to say with certainty whether these descriptions refer to literal physical elements or whether they point to some spiritual reality that is even greater than humans could possibly comprehend, given our present limitations. What would be the general impression, however, that this description would have on someone in the first century? What would these images communicate to them?**

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** What about those of us in the twenty-first century: What images are created in YOUR mind when you read this passage? Do you have anything in your imagination or experience that you can relate this description to?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Verse 21 tells us that the street of the city was made of “pure gold.” Taken literally, that would seem to make a slippery pavement! What do you think that symbolizes? What do you think we are supposed to understand when we are told the streets are made of GOLD? 2. Verse 14 tells us that the names of the twelve apostles are written on the twelve foundations of the wall. What does that suggest to you about heaven?

Background Notes: The church is built on the foundation of the apostle’s Spirit-inspired teachings (See Ephesians 2:20, Acts 2:42, John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:13, etc.). In the Hebrew culture twelve was the symbol of completeness. It is fascinating to note that this description of the heavenly city contains twelve “12s”: there are twelve gates (v. 12); twelve angels (v. 12); twelve tribes (v. 12); twelve foundations (v. 14); twelve apostles (v. 14); 12,000 stadia in length, 12,000 in width, and 12,000 in height (v. 16); the walls are 144 (i.e., 12 times 12) cubits thick (v. 17); twelve precious stones (v. 19-20); twelve pearls (v. 22); and twelve crops (22:2).

READ Verses 22-27 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Once again the description of eternal life is as significant for what is NOT in the picture as for what it includes. As we review these verses, what does the absence of the following things communicate to you about heaven?

- Verse 22 “NO temple”
- Verses 23-24 “NO sun or moon”
- Verses 25 “NO shut gates, NO night”
- Verses 26-27 NO wicked people

READ Chapter 22, Verses 1-5 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** We remember the story in Genesis Chapter 3 of what happened when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden after they sinned. Now, in the last chapter of the Bible, the story of humanity has come full circle. What are some of the ways that this description in verses 1-5 is the OPPOSITE of what happened in the Garden of Eden? *Possible Answers: In Genesis 3, humans lost their access to the “Tree of Life” – now it is once again available to us; Adam, Eve, even the earth were “cursed” because of sin (Genesis 3:17-24) – now there is “no longer any curse” (v. 3); Because of his sin, Adam was sentenced to “painful toil” (Genesis 3:17) – now there is “healing” (v. 3) and “no more pain” (21:4); Adam & Eve were cut off from their previous fellowship with God – now humans will have a direct fellowship with the Lord (v. 3-4); Adam & Eve were deceived by the serpent (Genesis 3:13) – now the Devil is gone (20:10)!*

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** While most people focus the physical aspects of this description of glory – pearly gates and streets of gold – the primary emphasis of this passage seems to be on the presence of God and the Lamb among His people. What is the most difficult thing for YOU about trying to picture what that experience will be like?

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** TURN to the gospel of John, Chapter 14. READ Verses 1-3. While there is much that we cannot now comprehend about heaven, we can be confident that it will be more wonderful than we could ever imagine! For a Christian, heaven is more than a location – it is above all a relationship, because the most wonderful thing about heaven is that it is the place where we will be WITH God and with Jesus!

**NEXT TIME** our topic will be “Our Eternal Clothing.” To prepare for that conversation, read 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:10.

## WHAT IS HEAVEN REALLY LIKE?

## Discussion Guide #3

Lesson: "Our Eternal Clothing"

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Aim: to begin to consider the Bible's promise of a new, more permanent body in heaven.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** What was the very first set of wheels (car, truck, motorcycle, etc.) you ever owned and, when you think back on it, do you have fond memories? I'll begin: my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and the first form of transportation I ever owned was \_\_\_\_\_.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** When you are ready to get rid of your old vehicle, do you have any sentimental attachment to it? Was it difficult to let it go, or did you just walk away without looking back?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Every new generation of automobiles seems to have more improvements, more technology, and more options than the previous one. When you compare the model you're driving now to the very first vehicle you ever owned, how are they different?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** No vehicle lasts forever, of course, but today's cars and trucks are lasting much longer than those of previous generations. Even so, eventually they all wear out. What would you say is an indication that its time to get rid of your vehicle, and when would you decide to instead try to "fix it up" and hang on to it a while longer?

We may be sentimental about our very first car or truck, but realistically most of us wouldn't want to go back to driving an old and outdated model again. In the same way, the Bible teaches that one day we're going to "trade in" these old bodies of ours for a "new and improved model" offered by God. In this conversation we will learn that, when that time comes, we will be so happy with our new body that we won't miss the old "trade in" at all!

TURN TO the book of 2 Corinthians (the eighth book of your New Testament), Chapter 4. READ Verses 7-12 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In verse 7, when describing the physical hardships that he and many other early Christians had to suffer for the sake of the gospel, Paul uses an interesting expression to describe their human bodies: he calls them "jars of clay." It certainly doesn't sound very flattering to be compared to a cheap clay pot! What does that expression suggest to you about Paul's view of his **PHYSICAL BODY**, or about his view of the **GOSPEL**? What does it mean to you to know that our bodies are "jars of clay"?

*Possible Answers: It suggests that the POWER of the gospel is not in us, but in God, so we should not focus on the preacher, but on the message (see verse 5); That what counts is not the vessel itself, but rather what is contained WITHIN the jar, which in this case is the precious gospel of Christ (see verse 6); Clay was a cheap, inexpensive material, so it may suggest that the human body is not worth very much when compared to our eternal soul (cf. 1 Timothy 4:8); Just as a jar is simply a TOOL to be used, so we are God's instruments to be used for the sake of the gospel (READ 2 Timothy 2:20-21); That the body is fragile and easily broken; That we can more effectively demonstrate God's power when we have none of our own (verses 10-11; cf. 12:9-10) that we can brag about or rely upon; Our physical bodies came from the dust and will return to it one day (Genesis 3:19).*

Verses 13-15 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Like all the apostles, Paul was an eyewitness of the Resurrection. In what ways would you think that experience affected him over the rest of his life? In what ways do you think the apostles were different as a result of having seen the resurrected Jesus?

READ Verses 16-18 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. The human body is a marvelously constructed “machine” but, even so – it does have its limitations. What are some of the drawbacks to our earthly bodies? 2. What are some of the **CONTRASTS** that Paul makes in these verses, and how does each contrast give us **HOPE** in hard times? 3. From a strictly literal standpoint it doesn’t sound logical to say that “we fix our eyes on what is **UNSEEN.**” What do you think Paul means by that statement? How can a person **SEE** the “unseen”?

READ Chapter 5, Verse 1 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Here Paul draws a contrast between the “earthly tent” of our present physical body and the “eternal house” of the form we will have in heaven. Many of us have been camping at one time or another. What would you say are some of the attractions to staying in a **TENT**? What are some of the **disadvantages**? 2. What does that contrast suggest to you about the differences between our physical bodies now and the existence we will enjoy in heaven?

READ Verses 2-5 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** An English teacher might fault Paul for mixing his metaphors here, because he uses two different pictures – **BUILDINGS** and **CLOTHING** – to try to explain our attitudes towards our physical bodies now and the eternal body we are looking forward to in heaven. Paul twice uses the word “groan”: what does that word suggest to you about our existence in this life? What might cause us to “groan”?

Leader’s Insight: The word “groan” in verse 2 suggests an uncomfortable situation. Paul uses the word again in Romans 8:23 to express our same anticipation of a new existence when he says “we...groan inwardly as we wait for the adoption as sons, the **REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES.**”

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Paul tells us in verse 5 that God has placed His Holy Spirit in us as a “deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” When is the last time you made a **DEPOSIT** on something? What is something you have made a **DOWN PAYMENT** on in the past? 2. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is a “deposit” because He enables us to rise above the limitations of our present physical existence and begin to appreciate and experience spiritual realities. What would you say are some of the ways that the perspective of a child of God will be **DIFFERENT** from that of an unspiritual person? How does it change our outlook on life when we have God’s Spirit living in us? Background Note: This work of the Spirit in us is also described in 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14; and Romans 8:14-17.

READ Verses 6-10 Here is one of the ways our outlook on life is changed: we can be confident *even while* experiencing hardships, because we realize that the bad things that happen to us in this life are only temporary, but the good we are able to do in this life will reap an eternal reward!

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** After reading this passage, how would you describe Paul’s attitude towards our present earthly bodies? Would you call his view of our physical body mostly positive, mostly negative, or something in between?

Background Note: On the contrast between “Faith” and “Sight” READ Hebrews 11:1-3, 7, 13 and 27; see also Romans 8:24; 1 Corinthians 13:12; and John 20:29-31.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** We know all too well that our physical bodies are only temporary, but Paul assures us that one day we will trade them in for a “new and improved model” in heaven!

**NEXT TIME** we will learn more about the differences between our earthly body and the form we will assume in heaven when we discuss the topic “Spiritual Bodies.” To prepare for that conversation, read 1 Corinthians 15:35-58.

## WHAT IS HEAVEN *REALLY* LIKE?

Discussion Guide #4

Lesson: "Spiritual Bodies"

Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3

Aim: to consider how our present bodies will be transformed into a spiritual body in heaven.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** When is the last time you visited a ZOO? I'll begin: my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and the last time I went to a zoo was when I went to \_\_\_\_\_.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. If you were visiting a zoo, would you have a favorite animal that you especially wanted to see? 2. Is there any part of the zoo that you would avoid? If so, why? 3. Most animals don't seem all that interested in looking at US; why do you think humans are so interested in viewing the animals?

Looking at all the different creatures in the zoo can remind us of the amazing creative power of God. In this conversation we will learn that the great diversity of animals on this earth can also help us with one of the most difficult challenges in this study: trying to imagine what our bodies will be like in the spiritual dimension of heaven.

TURN TO the book of 1 Corinthians (the seventh book of your New Testament), Chapter 15.

READ Verses 35-38 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Many of us who have grown a garden can especially appreciate this analogy. In what ways is the seed that we place in the ground in the spring LIKE the plant that eventually grows up, and in what ways is the full-grown plant DIFFERENT from the original seed from which it came? 2. What does this analogy of the seed and the plant suggest to you about the nature of our heavenly body?

Leader's Insight: One thing it might suggest has to do with our IDENTITY. You can always recognize the continuity between the seed and the plant: even though a full-grown corn plant is so much greater than the original corn seed, the plant can be clearly identified as the outgrowth of the seed. This addresses a common question: "Will we know each other in heaven?" It is also significant that when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31), Moses had been dead for at least 1300 years and Elijah had been gone from the earth for nearly 900, but they each still possessed their recognizable identity!

READ Verses 39-41 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. One of the ways Paul tries to emphasize that our heavenly bodies will be different from the physical form we now have is by reminding us that God has already created an incredible diversity of bodies here on the earth! When you visit the zoo, what are some of the more unusual animals you will see, and how has God designed their bodies to be perfectly suited to their own native environment? 2. When we consider the animals we realize the Creator who designed all living things has given many of the other creatures abilities that WE don't possess. When it comes to physical attributes, can you think of any ways that some animals have an ADVANTAGE over human beings?

READ Verses 42-49 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Paul uses a series of contrasts in this passage to emphasize the differences between our present physical form and the body we will enjoy in heaven. What are some of the contrasts he lists? 2. Jesus tells us in John 4:24 that God is a spirit being, so it makes sense that we will be given a spiritual body in order to live with God in a spiritual environment like heaven. What are some of the limitations of our PHYSICAL existence that might be removed once we receive a SPIRITUAL body?

*Possible Answers for Question 1: "Sown perishable – raised imperishable"; "dishonor/glory"; "weakness/power"; "natural/spiritual"; "first Adam/second Adam (Jesus)"; "dust of the earth/from heaven"; "likeness of the earthly man/likeness of the man from heaven."*

READ Verses 50-53 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. Paul states bluntly that our current “flesh and blood” bodies cannot exist in a spiritual dimension like heaven because they are “perishable.” What are some of the items you can buy at the supermarket that are “perishable”? What do they all share in common? 2. Those people who are alive when Jesus returns will be instantly “changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye,” so that their bodies can be suited for life in heaven. Perhaps the special effects employed by filmmakers can help us visualize that instantaneous change from one form into another. If you were teaching this topic to a group of young people, and you wanted to select a scene from a movie to illustrate a bodily transformation, can you think of a movie that you could use?

READ Verses 54-58 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Even though it is challenging to imagine a spiritual existence, in what ways could it still be beneficial for us to TRY to picture heaven?

NOW TURN four books over to Philippians, Chapter 3. READ Verses 20-21 This verse tells us three things about our resurrection bodies: first, our present body will be “TRANSFORMED” by the power of Jesus; second, in our new existence we will be LIKE Jesus; and third, in comparison to the physical form we have today, our resurrection body will be “GLORIOUS”!

Since it is difficult to comprehend a spiritual dimension like heaven, let’s stretch our imaginations with some mental exercises in order to understand just how glorious our spiritual bodies can be.

**MENTAL EXERCISE #1:** 1. When you were young, did you ever read comic books? And if so, were there ever any superheroes that you wished you could be? 2. What were some of the physical qualities possessed by your favorite comic book “superheroes”? Is there any reason why God could not give us that ability in heaven?

**MENTAL EXERCISE #2:** A few moments ago we listed some of the remarkable physical abilities God has given other creatures on this earth. If you could possess, in heaven, any one of those abilities that God has already provided to other living things in this world, which would you choose? Is there any reason why God could not give us that ability in heaven?

**MENTAL EXERCISE #3:** The most clear description of our transformed bodies is that they will be “like Jesus.” The Bible tells us that in the world in which we now exist, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Suppose that in heaven our new bodies reflect God’s way of looking at a person. What if, in heaven, our appearance is not determined by outward characteristics such as height, facial features, or skin color, but that instead our appearance reflects the inner qualities we cultivated here on earth by following Jesus. What are some of the qualities demonstrated by Christ you would to reflect in your heavenly appearance? In what ways would you want to most resemble Jesus?

Background Note: That approach to imagining our spiritual body is hypothetical, of course, but it may not be as fanciful as it first appears: READ 1 Peter 3:3-4. Cf. 1 John 3:1-3.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** TURN to the book of 1 John, Chapter 3. READ Verses 1-3 Perhaps we can not now exactly picture what our bodies will be like in heaven, but we can be confident that they will be transformed into a spiritual body; that it will be glorious; and most of all, that we will be like Jesus! That is certainly enough to realize we want to go there!

**NEXT TIME** we will have our last conversation in this series on heaven. Our discussion topic will be “Heavenly Hope.” To prepare for that conversation, read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

## WHAT IS HEAVEN *REALLY* LIKE?

Discussion Guide #5

Lesson: "Heavenly Hope"

Texts: Colossians 3:1-3, Revelation 22:1-5, 21:24-26

Aim: to consider what it is we will actually DO in our heavenly home.

**ICEBREAKER QUESTION:** The whole purpose of school is to prepare us for life when we get out of school! As you think back on your education, what would you say is one of the most important things you learned? What is one thing you learned in school that you carried with you later in life? I'll begin: my name is \_\_, and one thing I have used throughout life is \_\_.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** When we were in school, do you think we actually understood the real purpose of our education? At what point do you think the average student begins to clearly comprehend that school is a training ground for real life?

Just as our education was merely a training ground for our success in later life, so our existence on this earth is ultimately a preparation for eternity! In this conversation we will discuss the importance and benefits of focusing on heaven. TURN to the book of Colossians (the twelfth book of the New Testament), Chapter 3. READ Verses 1-4

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**  
1. Why do you think Paul wants us to set our hearts "on things above"? In practical terms, how could reflecting on heaven affect our life here on earth? 2. Paul urges us to focus our thoughts on heaven, but as we have seen in previous conversations, this topic is often overlooked. What are some reasons why people might ignore the subject? What are some things that might prevent people from seriously thinking about heaven?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** One of the reasons why people don't think more seriously about heaven is the mistaken idea that, since heaven exists in a spiritual dimension, it is somehow LESS SOLID, LESS REAL than this world. What do you suppose are some of the common misconceptions that people have about their existence in eternity? When they think about what it would be like to live in heaven, what sort of picture would you think the average person gets in their mind? Background Note: Heaven is actually MORE real than this world – see 1 John 2:17!

In this lesson we will try to fulfill Paul's command to seriously contemplate heaven. Some folks, however, aren't all that interested in thinking about heaven because they can't imagine what we will DO for all eternity. For example, Huckleberry Finn thought heaven would be boring because "all a body would have to do was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever." To get some idea of what we will actually do in heaven, let's TURN to the book of Revelation (the last book of the Bible), to Chapter 22 (the last chapter of the last book of the Bible).

READ Verses 1-5 **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** 1. While we can recognize the Bible does uses many, many symbols to try to communicate realities we could never fully comprehend here on earth, it is important to note that all of those symbols describe heaven as a very real PLACE that has been prepared for us by Jesus, and that we will have very real BODIES in heaven. What are some of the pictures used in this passage to describe the reality of heaven to us? How many different images or pictures in this passage can you list? 2. Verse 2 tells us that heaven is a great CITY, so we know that it will be a community where there will be socializing and fellowship with other children of God. And, Revelation 19:9 compares it to a WEDDING FEAST, we know heaven will be a place of CELEBRATION. What is the happiest, most joyful social gathering you can imagine here on earth? And how does thinking of that celebration help you picture heaven?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul assures us that heaven will be a place of REUNION with all of our loved ones who have died in Christ, and also with all the great men and women of faith from all ages. When you get to heaven, what individual (other than Jesus) would you most like to interview, and what would you like to ask that person?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** One of the things we will certainly do throughout eternity is WORSHIP God. In heaven, however, our praise won't be indirect as it is here on earth, because there we will be in the actual presence of God. While worship services here on earth can sometimes seem dull and disorganized, they can also on occasion stimulate great joy, insight, or inspiration. What is, for you, the most meaningful aspect of worship? Can you identify a time when you were genuinely moved or inspired by your participation in worship?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In Chapter 22, verse 5 says that we "will REIGN forever and ever." As part of that experience of reigning with Christ we will apparently exercise authority over the angels, because in 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul says we will judge angels. Since Jesus told us repeatedly that in his kingdom there will be a great reversal of positions, and "the first will be last, and the last will be first," what kinds of people here on earth will have the LEAST power in heaven and what kinds of people will enjoy the GREATEST positions of authority?

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Verse 3 tells us we will "SERVE" God in heaven, and several passages in the Bible seem to indicate that we will be given meaningful responsibilities. Although surveys consistently show that many people find satisfaction from the work that they do, rarely do our jobs on this earth bring about complete fulfillment. What are some of the frustrations and limitations of this life that prevent us from developing our fullest potential or hold us back from exercising all the gifts God has given us?

Background Note: In the parable of the talents, the master's reward to the faithful servants is: "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you IN CHARGE of many things" – Matthew 25:21, 23.

TURN BACK one chapter in Revelation to Chapter 21. READ Verses 24-26 **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Many commentators understand these verses to mean that we will bring the very best human creativity into heaven, where it can be employed to bring glory to God. If you had none of the limitations of this world, and especially, if there were no deadlines to meet or time pressures to fulfill in heaven, what one gift that YOU would like to develop?

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** Harold Hazelip has written, "Eternity is not simply MORE of what we have now. It is like freezing those precious moments of life and spreading those moments through eternity. It is like being so caught up in what you are doing that all concept of time vanishes. Think of those times when you were oblivious to everything else while observing a beautiful sunset, or being caught up in a joyous song, or immersed in a lovely thought. Duplicate that moment and you will have some idea of what eternity will be like." While we cannot not understand all that we will do in eternity, based on the promises God has made about our future, and the blessings we have already experienced in this life, we can be sure that we don't want to miss what God has planned for us in heaven!

[Source: *Questions People Ask Ministers Most*, p. 140]