

# Eternity: *You Exist,* *But Will You Exist Forever?*

Dr. F. Alan Pickering

*“Someday you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now.”*

**D.L. Moody**

*“Intimations of the transience of this life make me wonder more about the everlasting dimensions of the next life. I am thinking about heaven, feeling more the eternal weight of glory, and it is changing the way I live.”*

*“He who provides for this life but **takes not** care for eternity is wise for a moment but a fool forever.”*

**John Tillotson**

*“Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time  
like dew on the tip of a leaf.”*

**Tagore**

*“All I have seen teaches me to trust the  
Creator for all I have not seen.”*

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

This paper is going to provide brief treatments on:

- Mortality & death,
- the Case for Eternity, and
- What Heaven/Eternity will be Like.

# Mortality & Death

*"I stand at the limits of my knowledge  
and stare into infinity."*

**Albert Einstein**

*"Men study philosophy to prepare to die."*

**Plato**

*"The Body of B. Franklin, Printer; like the Cover of an old Book, Its Contents torn out, And  
stript of its Lettering and Gilding, Lies here, Food for Worms. But the Work shall not be wholly  
lost; For it will, as he believ'd, appear  
once more, In a new & more perfect Edition,  
Corrected and amended By the Author."*

**Inscription on Benjamin Franklin's gravestone**

**Y**ou exist, but will you exist forever? That is perhaps the most serious question a human being has to answer. But can it be answered to a satisfying psychospiritual level. This is perhaps one of the most serious and greatest questions mankind has wrestled with, for a great majority of people have tremendous fear of death and ponder a future existence.

## The Struggle with His Mortality

There is one plaguing obstacle—death, and the subsequent struggle with our mortality. Mortality is a big deal, especially as we get older. And you realize you don't have much runway ahead of you.

## Solomon's Struggle with Mortality

Solomon struggled intensely with his mortality (Ecc. 2.15, 16, 18-21; 4.2; 5.15, 16; 9.1-12), as most people do. One reason for his struggle was his lack of a fully developed view of a future beyond this life. It is noteworthy that other men of faith certainly did (Heb. 11.13-16), and we certainly do now this side of human history and the cross.

Solomon declared, “*You have set eternity in the hearts of human beings*” (Ecc. 3.11 PAR). But to be fair, his use of the word “eternity” (*ha’olam*) is very uncertain. For him, this sense of eternity in the heart may simply be a yearning to know what God is doing from beginning to the end with the times he has set (Ecc. 3.2-8). The Amplified Bible emphasizes the idea of *ha’olam* as “*a sense of divine purpose.*” His mention of an “*eternal home*” (Ecc. 12.5b) may suggest the permanence of the grave. There is a possibility Solomon may be making some reference to life forever. Perhaps Solomon could not silence a deeper voice within—“there is more beyond.” He speculated, “*Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into this earth*” (Ecc. 3.21; cf., 12.7)? And he even posited the idea of judgment (Ecc. 3.17; 12.14).

Some passages in Ecclesiastes may indicate that Solomon was an annihilationist—it’s over at death (Ecc. 3.18-21; 9.10b). The conviction that there is no afterlife continued in the teachings of the first century Sadducees. Some Jews today suggest that only the memory of our life continues in our minds of others, but Solomon even struggled with believing that (Ecc. 9.5).

No wonder Solomon was so miserable and struggled so intensely. He could never see beyond this life. Take away eternity and I’d be in the dumps too—frustrated, disappointed and pessimistic about life.

## Death & the Brevity of Life

Becker (1973) has done a thorough historical analysis of this struggle of humanity. With respect to man’s mortality, one of his most poignant conclusions is sobering, to say the least (Becker, 1973, pp. 268-69)—it is a long quote but *please* don’t you miss it:

We saw that there really was no way to overcome the real dilemma of existence, the one of the mortal animal who at the same time is conscious of his mortality. A person spends years coming into his own, developing his talent, his unique gifts, perfecting his discriminations about the world, broadening and sharpening his appetite, learning to bear the disappointments of life, becoming mature, seasoned—finally a unique creature in nature, standing with some dignity and nobility and transcending the animal condition; no longer driven, no longer a complete reflex, not stamped out of any mold. And then the real tragedy...it takes sixty years of incredible suffering and effort to make such an individual,

and then he is good only for dying. This painful paradox is not lost on the person himself—least of all himself. He feels agonizingly unique, and yet he knows that doesn't make any difference as far as ultimates are concerned. He has to go the way of the grasshopper, even though it takes longer.

Without question death is the greatest enemy of mankind (1 Cor. 15.26) and humanity has stood in trepidation of this dark reality (Ac. 4.16; Heb. 2.15). But *One* came down the pike of human history, took on the experience, beat it and declared, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he dies, will live again*" (Jn. 11.25). And then He added in that same verse, "*Do you believe this*"?

## An Uncanny Experience Before Death's Door

I use to fly around the country a lot with speaking engagements. One time many years ago, I missed a flight but was able to rebook on another airlines. As I was boarding up the outdoor ramp to my plane, I had an uneasy feeling—something didn't feel right, but I just shook this intimation off. This journey back home involved a short layover in Phoenix. My best friend was going to meet me at the airport and we could have some time catching up.

As we approaching the Phoenix airport, our pilot pulled out of the approach—a near miss with another plane I thought. Many minutes later, the pilot informed us that we would have to prepare for an emergency landing. Evidently the airplanes legs were not locking into place, or at least the indicators on the panel showed this to be the case. We circled around the airport several times, while the airline attendants instructed us how to make a crash landing. We could see ambulances and fire trucks were lined up along the runway. Needless to say, a wave of shock gripped everyone on the plane including me—it was death silence.

The couple next me seemed to be coming unglued, so I pulled my Bible out of my briefcase and read to them from Psalm 23. That seemed to help a little—"*though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,*" but they were still unnerved. The terror within me was

still present—my life could end in just a few minutes in a fiery crash. My I was too young to die. I had only been married a decade and had several young children I was thrilled to raise.

As we were making our descent at a rather steep incline, I remembered Jesus' words, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he dies, will live again. Do you believe this*"? I stared at those words, and I firmly said to myself, "Yes, I believe this." Instantly, an uncanny calm came over me. The terror was completely gone. I would do my best to get to one of the plane's exit just a few rows in front of me. But if we crashed, and I die upon impact in a fiery explosion, I felt a confidence my spirit would emerge out of my body and I would enter into eternity.

It seems like we all got punked—we had a hard landing but the wheels held! Yippie! It turned out to be a nonevent. But maybe a trial run for a future experience I would someday have. As William Butler Yeats quipped, "Sex and death are the only things that can interest a serious mind." How true in the human experience, and this existential issue compels the deepest level of personal attention by every individual. Without reservation, I say: Jesus is the only factor that can take on this existential issue and bring to your mind any kind of psychospiritual resolution.

### Nostalgia with This Earth

The leaves are falling again, and I am once more reminded of my mortality—how many more beautiful autumns do I have left on this earth? As I write in the setting of my beautiful backyard, the soothing music of the contemporary classical composer, Tim Janis, is playing from my Alexa speaker. At this moment, I am briefly washed with a sense of sadness as I consider the brevity of my life on this earth—why this tinge of sadness? Its deep in my psyche: the wasted time on this earth with trivial and meaningless; the regrets of so many mistakes; the longing to still make an impact with my life in significant ways; departing from those I so dearly love.

Indeed, death is our enemy and we will not be able to escape the experience. For this reason alone, there is a sadness that hangs with us as we continue this historical journey east of Eden. But what are the real answers to this dilemma. I call it the flip-side.

## The Flip Side of Our Dilemma

*First*, our finiteness and death sober us up as a human being, and confronts us with the existential reality of our life, we must have a seriousness with this experience we have been granted by the Creator. Superficiality and trivialness will not work for a human being—we’ve been called to the big leagues.

*Second*, Heidegger pointed out that we really know the experience of time well, because we are going to die. If we were not going to die, time on the clock would simply be an interesting, but meaningless item. This sense of time is a gift that propels you to work well with your existence. Thus, *“be spiritually proactive—make the most of every opportunity and strategically utilize the time you have on this earth in the best ways, because every day there are opportunities that can pull you into evil”* (Eph. 5.16 PAR).

This effective working with time can give us incredible agency and move us to be excellent stewards of our time, abilities, resources and even do significant things with humanity that will have eternal implications.

With respect to this whole dilemma of the brevity of our life and impending death, Rebecca McLaughlin (2023, p.52) makes an astute observation: “It’s the shortness and contingency of life that makes it meaningful. Death is not a bug in the human story. It’s feature.”

*Third*, we are driven to ponder eternity and God—our very Creator. How unfortunate or perhaps derelict it would be to *not* have this contemplation—we are encouraged to, *“Set your mind on the realities of heaven”* (Col. 3.1). And it is our mortality and death that gives us certain vantage points. Yet, death is still the enemy of humanity (1 Cor. 15.26), but the enemy has been defeated, and how incumbent it is for us to celebrate the win. Indeed, in view of this dilemma with our mortality: *“we do not grieve as the world grieves”* (1 Thess. 4.13-18); and as Jesus promised, *“In my Father’s house are many room—if it were not so, I would have told you”* (Jn. 14.2). And one of the most poignant passages in the Bible (Ps. 73.23-26):

*yet you are always with me, you hold me by my right hand, you guide me with your counsel and after you will take me into glory*

## Leaning into Life

You can lean into life more if you realize you are finite, that your time on this earth will end, and one day you will breathe your last breath.

As birth is unique to every person, so death is unique to every person. Shaping a unique approach that is appropriate for you is advantageous. While you had no agency to deal with the transition of your birth, given most situations, you do have agency to deal with the transition of your death. The greatest free-will agency you have is faith in God who gave you the experience of life to begin, and by His grace will allow you continue.

## The Case For an Eternity

*“If a man cannot be satisfied with this life, it is perhaps he was made for a different world”*  
**C.S. Lewis**

*“This world is not a conclusion. A sequel stands beyond—invisible as music but positive as sound.”*  
**Emily Dickinson**

*“There is no question that there is an unseen world.  
The problem is how far is it from midtown and  
how late is it open?”*  
**Woody Allen**

*“The heart never yearns for something that doesn’t exist.”* **C.S. Lewis**

*“Set your mind on the realities of heaven,  
let heaven fill your thoughts.”*  
**St. Paul**

**F**or a number of years, a portion of my counseling practice involved providing ministry for hospice patients. One of my hospice patients was an agnostic (unsure about God's existence), but believed there was no life after death. I found that most of our conversations were quite substantive. After a few weeks of dialogue, I eventually asked this former medical doctor to share with me his best case for his conviction that there was no life after death. I was just curious to find out what his basis was for such a serious conclusion. I wasn't attempting to debate, but to understand his perspective. The following week, I sought him out for a significant time together. However, I was amazed to find that he could not provide one cogent reason for his belief in annihilation after death. He simply felt this way. It was amazing to me that he was staking his entire future on just a feeling. That encounter motivated me to explore the case for a heaven, which I did share with him, and I want to briefly present it to you here.

The case for a heaven falls into three categories—philosophic reasons, empirical and scientific reasons, and theological reasons. And I will present them to you in a brief concise way (with a slight apologetic flavor), but so much more could be presented with each argument for this issue of an eternity. Let's start with the philosophic reasons.

### Philosophic Rational Reasons

Philosophy and theology have always been siblings. In the Enlightenment they started to break away from each other into divergent schools of approach to knowledge. But at its deepest root, philosophy is the love for wisdom—the wise application of knowledge in the human experience.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Yearning of the Heart

C.S. Lewis observed that the heart never yearns for something that doesn't exist. If I yearned to go to New Jersey, this state would have to exist. If I yearned to have Carvel ice cream, that brand of ice cream would have to exist. If I yearned to go to the Seaside Heights beach, it would have to exist. We just *do not* yearn for things that do not exist. Indeed, we yearn for things that exist, and there is this undeniable yearning in the heart of almost every human being for a continued existence in what has been called heaven. We yearn for heaven, because in fact heaven exist. Furthermore,

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<sup>1</sup> Philosophy comes out of two Greek words: *philia*, love and *sophia*, wisdom. Thus, philosophy is the love or pursuit of wisdom; and wisdom is the application of knowledge in a given situation or use of knowledge in life.

Lewis suggested: “If a man cannot be satisfied with this life, it is perhaps he was made for a different world.” Indeed, our spirit/mind is constantly stretching for something beyond our selves—ideas, greater possibilities, and as Marden (1910/2015, p. 5) observed, “Human life is so constructed that we live largely upon hope; the faith that runs ahead and sees what the physical eye cannot see...there is a reality to match our legitimate longing.” And that reality is eternity.

We yearn for a continuation of the most precious things of life—love, joy, relationship, aesthetics. This yearning for a heaven, for more of this experience of life is present in all of us. That is what drove the Pharaohs to build the pyramids, and the Greeks to speculate about the immortality of the soul. The fountain of youth myth is a yearning for life to go on forever.

In similar vein, McLaughlin (2025, p. 53) raises the point that experiencing closeness with another you are in love with feels like a “heaven.” Why is this this phenomenon reported as such? This concept of heaven seems to be so ingrained in us that we would refer to the most blissful experiences in heavenly terms. And isn’t it interesting that Solomon mentioned this *“eternity in the hearts of men”* (Ecc. 3.11).

### The Concept of Justice

The concept of justice or judgment makes eternity a logical extension. Solomon, perhaps unwittingly, mentioned this in his philosophical treatise (Ecc. 3.16,17; 12.14). How can there be justice if wicked people go to their death having received no punishment? We all know that many people never receive any kind of punishment or justice for their crimes on this earth (e.g., Hitler, Mao, Stalin, the 9/11 terrorist, child abusers never caught). If the wicked die and receive no justice, then life is utterly unfair and there is no incentive to live a godly life. Yet deep in the human spirit is the idea of fairness, justice, equity, and the righting of wrongs. Law courts confirm this penchant. Why do we even have law courts if this is not a prominent part of our psyche? Indeed, it is rooted in the universal laws established by the Creator. Anything outside those laws causes a cry to rise up within us—justice. Indeed, the koheleth/philosopher, Solomon mentioned that *“every hidden thing, whether good or bad”* would be brought to judgment (Ecc. 12.14). How could this be if there was not a reckoning in eternity?

If there is no equities in life, then nothing matters, and all is vanity. However, what one discovers is that everything matters to varying degrees, and ultimately we get away with nothing. Indeed, every word, action, thought, and relationship matters greatly. And Solomon declares that your life will be assessed—every act or deed will be brought to judgment (Ecc. 12.14).

This life is filled with an immeasurable amount of injustice and suffering. The only way that there can be some ultimate justice for victims of evil, is if there was an afterlife. The only psychospiritual comfort that addresses the unconscionable suffering of humanity (e.g., the sexual abuse and murder of a child, the murder of a loved one, genocide) is an afterlife. But such an afterlife exists only if there is a good and just God, and such a God provides a way to compensate for all the unjust suffering in this world. There will be a day in court for all of human history. It is called the Day of Judgement. The Judge will enter and all will arise.

Non-existence is Inconceivable.

There is something magnificent about our humanity (Ps. 139.14). A number of years ago, ABC 20/20 did a special on near-death experiences—that segment never left me. Immediately after the featuring of a number of near-death experiences people had, Barbara Walters and Dr. Timothy Johnson (who has both medical and divinity degrees) engaged in dialogue about the segment. Barbara Walters admitted that she did not believe in life after death, and then pointedly asked Dr. Johnson just why he believed in an eternity. His response was poignant: it was inconceivable that this marvelous human being would just end at death; and this incredible experience of life would be so brief and come to a screeching halt. Job articulated this same incredulity: “*You formed me with your hands; you made me, yet now you completely destroy me*” (Job 10.8).

Kider (1976, p. 34) observed, if extinction is the end of all people, “it robs every man of his dignity and every project of its point.” The death experience is not one of dignity (although one can face death in a dignified way) nor does it bring a person to the crowning point of his/her journey (although it may represent a marvelous crossing of the finish line). I have seen the end of the race scores of times and it is not pretty.

The experience of grief informs us here. We feel grief when someone dies because as relational beings, we were made for perpetual relationships. Grief tells us that we are deeply at odds with this experience of death. The only thing that seems to set well with us as a human being is perpetual relationship in eternity. It is quite interesting that toward the end of a person's life, the dying often start to see their loved ones. But is this truly hallucinating? I have talked with patients, who were not on psychotropic medications, describe to me people they were seeing and the rational conversations they were having. Is it possible they were seeing into the other world? I tend to think so—like being on the summit and seeing the others peaks that were obscured during the climb.

### Love

Why would God, who is love (1 Jn. 4.8), give us a love for Him, build a relationship with us, and not consider a future for this relationship to go on and on. This would amount to the greatest jilted love experience in all of human history. It would even border on cruelty. This dashing of love on the rocks of time would make the whole prospect of living forever a ludicrous idea. Yet, love is an eternal commodity.

I conceived my wonderful children in an experience of love, and anticipated a long life of relationship with every single one of them. How cruel and unconscionable of me to cut it off at the prime of things. This is not human; this is not God.

### Pascal's Wager

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), was a notable French mathematician, physicist, inventor, and philosopher. His brilliance, which for him was to the glory of God and for the serving of humanity. Indeed, he contributed enormously to probability theory, invented a mechanical calculator (Pascaline), the syringe, hydraulic press, and roulette wheel.

He was a strong believer in God and offered a philosophical rational argument for God's existence and with that an eternity. It was called Pascal's Wager. It is a decision-theoretic argument that goes like this. There is not definitive proof so belief in God is a rational-faith decision. But you have to put your life on one side of the equation. It's a deliberate placing of your bet on this side

or that side of the table, but you must decide because the implications are infinite—eternal life with God, or eternal damnation in hell. If God exists, and you put your bet (disbelief) on the wrong side of the wager, you experience an infinite loss. If God doesn't exist, it doesn't really matter where you put your bet because you are going to experience an infinite nothingness anyway. So, why not put your bet on the side of belief in an eternal loving God who has offered you eternal life—you gain everything and lose nothing. Indeed, you maximize potential gain and eliminate potential loss. Pascal argues that believing in God is the most rational choice, otherwise it is ludicrous to think otherwise.

### Life as a Progressive Journey

Progression seems to be built in our DNA. We are perpetually pushing forward and beyond: learning new words as we develop from childhood and beyond, learning to walk, to read, to play a sport and get better, to have a family, to graduate, to earn more money, to break a record... We are tilted to progress; digression in any manner is a sad thing. Why would progression from this life into eternity not be a logical extension of how we were created.

### Eternity or Meaningless

If there is no eternity, then the experience of life is meaningless. What is the point of having lived this life if it is all over after death. It makes life a useless experience. This is what Solomon felt and expressed his sense of his life being meaningless, because he had no real confirmation of an eternal existence. The whole experience of life becomes a cruel joke of evolution, or in the design of the Creator. Our orientation is to live, for this experience to be a continuous experience.

### Empirical and Scientific Reasons

Research on Near Death Experiences (NDE) is compelling. They all point to a future beyond this life, and researches have accumulated and documented interviews with thousands of people who have a NDE. Essentially the stories are consistent with minor variations irrespective of individual's culture and even religion.

It is possible that the Apostle Paul had a NDE. He was stoned in Lystra and left for dead (Ac. 14.19, 20). With this in mind, Paul reminisces, *“I was caught up into the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether my body was there or just my spirit, I do not know; only God knows. But I do know that I was caught up into paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be told”* (2 Cor. 12.2-4).

NDE are astonishing: people who are still alive even after their brain is clinically dead, deaf people hearing for the first time, blind people seeing for the first time, the transformation of people (e.g., atheist converted and turning their life around 180), individuals able to recount everything in detail all that happened at the scene of their death (e.g., a little girl at the bottom of a swimming pool in the winter giving uncanny detail of how she was brought back out of the pool and revived).

### Quantum Physics & Quantum Mechanics

Quantum physics and quantum mechanics adds significantly to this issue of an eternity. I do not understand this science but I have friends who do and what they share with me is thrilling. I was told that those in this field use to think there were seven different dimensions. Now they are convinced there are at least fifty, and they can prove it mathematically. If this is true, then why do those dimensions exist. Could it be that death is a transitioning into one of these dimensions?

No wonder, Scripture gives us hints of heaven being another dimension—heaven is not so much out there as it is in there:

- the “third heaven” (2 Cor. 12.2);
- the experience of the Mount of Transfiguration ((Mt. 17.1ff);
- Stephen shock as the heavens open and he saw Jesus standing (not sitting) while he was being stoned to death (Ac. 7.56);
- Jesus’ assurance of *many* “rooms” in his Father’s house (Jn. 14.2); and
- the numerous angelic appearances.

As my late professor and mentor, Dr. Lynn Anderson would so often say, “We dance on the rim of mystery.” We are unlocking those mysteries. For instance, how is it possible that in real time I can FaceTime or Zoom someone hundreds and even thousands of miles away. Scientists have

discovered a physics that God created. And you could argue that connectivity is indeed a mysterious thing that is rooted in an eternal God who has ensconced us in this reality.

### Neurotheology/Neuro-spirituality

Neurotheology or neuro-spirituality is a developing science that researches how religion affects the brain. Most of the researches have conclude that our brains are “hard wired” for God and a spirituality (see Rom. 2.15). Why would this be, if there is a constant interfacing with an eternal existence. Indeed, we are more than physiology. Our brains activate in particular ways when we are involved in worship, praying, meditating, and having a spiritual experience. I am amazed with many of my dementia patients who may not respond cognitively, but once I engage them in ministry, they sing a song with me, say, “amen” to a prayer, and participate in a way that is at times surprising. We are religious beings made for an eternal relationship with an Eternal God. There is this deep connection we have with God that continues throughout the distance of our life and, I’m convinced, forever.

We are intuitive and have a sense of a spiritual reality. Have you felt like someone was looking at you, and lo and behold, you turn, and indeed someone is looking at you. We have this intuitive sense that obviously connected with our physiology, but is beyond our physiology. It is posited by many neuroscientists and neuropsychologists that the mind is actually developed by our experiences with the world in tandem with the brain. We sense a spiritual reality. Indeed, love and joy are spiritual experiences albeit with a physiological response—indeed, we are a unique marvelous blend as a human being. Since God is not physical, the physical world is not the only reality. There is also a non-physical reality and our minds intuitively sense this. We sense someone is looking at us. We turn and behold it is Him.

### Neuroscience and The Mind Brain Difference

Many neurosurgeons and neuroscientists have made an incredible discovery. There is a difference between mind and brain, and that the mind is an entity that exists apart from the brain. Even when major parts of the brain have been removed through brain surgery, or if a person is born without huge parts of their brain missing, there is still an active mind that functions. Dr. Egnor (2025), a renowned neurosurgeon has conducted over 7000 brain surgeries. He was an atheist, but after a

moving experience with a medical emergency involving his son, and experiences with thousands of his patients in his medical practice, and research on brain surgery involving epileptic patients (e.g., cutting out portions of the brain, the removal of the corpus callosum that connects both half of the brain) he became a Christian. His research has led him to the following conclusions (this is a long summary, but feel free to peruse or deeply ponder each point):<sup>2</sup>

- there is a transcendent self (spirit/soul) that works with the brain, but is a separate entity from the brain—the mind utilizes the brain, but is beyond the brain, and the mind is something the brain isn't;
- brain research has demonstrated that the mind's activities of free will, consciousness, love, abstract thought can continue even when enormous parts of the brain are destroyed or removed (by brain surgery);
- The brain may be split by brain surgery (by the removing of the corpus callosum to alleviate severe epilepsy), but the mind remains united in spite of brain injuries or surgeries;
- The brain receives instructions from the mind (e.g., an actor directing his brain to be sad, drop some tears, and repeat some lines; or intentionally directing your brain to go into a fantasy);
- the brain with its commensurate abilities can be stimulated by electrodes, but not the mind (as demonstrated by the late neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield operations and research on patients);
- electrode stimulation of the brain cannot evoke abstract thought—only the mind is the source of abstract thought;
- a number of mental experiences do not have an origin in the brain, such as the capacity for reflection/introspection, transcendent reasoning, free-will, abstract reasoning, conceptual and qualitative thinking (e.g., nutrition, moral issues);
- patients who have brain injuries or surgeries may lose physical abilities, but do not lose the abilities of the mind (e.g., love, abstract thought);
- people in a coma (no signs of being awake or aware), or persistent vegetative state (PVS), or a minimally conscious state (MCS), all of which are referred to as an unresponsive

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<sup>2</sup> Each of these bullet points are significant. I encourage you to not skim them, but deeply ponder the stunning reality of the mind-brain difference.

wakefulness syndrome, demonstrate responsiveness of the mind which is not altered by the brain's incapacities;

- the *terminal lucidity* of dementia patients at periods before their death, show an amazing and intense ability with the mind, and the mind's utilization of the brain—the mind stimulates the dying brain for a burst of connectivity with loved ones before departing into eternity;
- conjoined twins who share brain parts, but have separate minds (e.g., separate abstract thinking, wills, moral choice) reveal the reality of individuals with a soul/mind but share the same body;
- near death experiences (NDE), even after the brain is clinically dead, which indicates a mind/soul disengaged from the person's body, and the subsequent changes in a person's life after the experience (e.g., diminished fear of dying, spiritual transformation, enhancement of the mind);
- the mind/soul/spirit has the capacity for free-will, which involves wisdom vs. foolishness, choosing good vs. evil, loving or hating, utilizing intellect to think about this or that, thinking logically or irrationally, feeling sad or happy, thinking about people, places, and events;
- the brain does not make the mind; the mind utilizes the brain—the spirit/soul of a human being utilizes his body, which includes the brain for expediting and experiencing life;
- the use of language for abstract communication about ideas is a mind domain, which includes grammar and grasping concepts behind words;
- we are conscious because we have a mind/soul/spirit that assesses life—consciousness is the means by which we think (not that which we think);<sup>3</sup>
- consciousness has no physical location in the brain—the human soul/spirit/mind is spiritual; consciousness is the eye of the spirit/mind/soul;
- human beings are not merely biological animals; we are distinct from animals in that we have a mind that has the capacity of abstract and creative thinking, contemplation of spiritual matters;

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<sup>3</sup> It is like wearing contact lenses, invisible to an individual, but the means by which one sees; or like seeing through our own eye balls. There is a marvelous Scripture which fits this idea: "You are light by which we see.." (Ps. ).

- the rational powers of intellect and will have no specific location in the brain, but are immaterial powers of the mind/spirit/soul; the mind utilizes the brain (and body) to accomplish the will and intellect of a person; the mind/spirit/soul has no location or space in the body; it is not material but spiritual and but is present where it acts and carries out the processes of life; it is where it acts; and
- most critical to our creation, with a mind/spirit/soul, a human being can sense God, connect with God (e.g., prayer) and contemplate God's will, and moral laws.

## Theological Reasons

### Relationality

God is a relational Being who created us as relational beings. For what? Relationship! How long? The Scripture indicates forever (Jn. 3.16; Eph. 1.3-14). As aforementioned, why would God create us, experience a relationship with us, and then terminate it after such a short time? It makes no sense, unless you go with the idea of no God. But if you posit a God, it is ludicrous to advocate a truncated relationship with an Eternal Creator, when in fact a thousand years with God is like a day with us (2 Pet. 3.8).

Frankly, we don't have enough time to get to know God while on this earth. We don't even have enough time to get to know each other. It seems this relationship experience takes an eternity. Indeed, God loves his creatures and "*His unfailing love continues forever*" (Ps. 100.5).

### Jesus

Jesus, the most credible person in all of human history, said there is a heaven. Jesus said, "*if it were not so, I would tell you*" (Jn. 14.1-4)—a brutal honesty with us. This question is so crucial, Jesus did not equivocate. He declared it is true—there is a life after death. He spoke the most hopeful words ever spoken in human history, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me though he dies will live again*" (Jn. 11.25).

Jesus' resurrection destroyed any doubts about a future in heaven. Just before his death, he said to the thief on a cross next to him, "*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise*"

(Lk. 23.43). And He went into the grave and three days later was resurrected—slam dunk! (By the way, there are as many as 32 irrefutable arguments for his resurrection.) This whole episode of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection would be akin to President John F. Kennedy telling the people of his era that he would go to Dallas, be shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, buried in Arlington National Cemetery, and three days later come out the grave. That “eternal flame” at the grave spot would signify the reality of life after death. It is an empty tomb in Jerusalem that really is the eternal flame.

St. Paul declared that *“If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitted more than all men”* (1 Cor. 15.19). And this brings us back to Solomon. Death brought more concern and angst to him than anything else. I’d be utterly inconsolable if I came to the conviction that there was no life after death. Yet, Jesus destroys all disillusionment and secures the greatest possibility for all human beings who embrace Him—enjoying life forever!

## Plus Ultra

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Spain considered itself the westernmost point of civilization. *Ne plus ultra*, “nothing more beyond,” was emblazoned upon its coat of arms. When Columbus returned back from his mission of discovering a new world in 1493, Queen Isabella was compelled to change the motto to *plus ultra*, “more beyond.” He returned with a certainty from a world he had never known. Jesus returned with certainty from a world he had always known.

## The Realities of Heaven

*“Never be afraid to trust  
an unknown future to a known God.”*

**Corrie ten Boon**

*“I just didn’t want to be blind to the  
endless possibilities of the unknown.”*

**Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Genius of Jesus***

*“As you get old, your vision should get better, not of this life but of the life to come.”*

## Max Lucado

God's people are encouraged—“*set your sights on the realities of heaven*”; “*let heaven fill your thoughts*” (Colossians 3.1, 2 NLT). This admonition is not just for older people running the last lap of life. He was talking to everyone in the church—children, teenagers, young adults, the middle-aged, and senior saints. Since heaven is our destination, we must perpetually ponder this ultimate future—heaven. Indeed, our encouragement is not only to *people into heaven*, but to *get heaven into people*. Once a person catches the reality of this eternal future, this eternal relationship, I'm confident an anticipation for a connection with God in eternity will build as time continues on this earth. So, let me share with just two profound and prominent realities of heaven: 1) a greater and fuller experience of life; and 2) the astonishing Presence of God. Let's explore both of these thrilling realities.

### A Greater & Fuller Experience of Life

Scripture speaks of this idea that so much of the religious experiences on this earth have been a “shadow” of a greater reality that is in heaven (Heb. 8.5; 10.1). Jesus himself reflects this greater reality (Col. 2.17). There is something of much greater magnitude with this experience of life in Jesus (Jn. 10.10), but we will realize it even more fully with Him in eternity.

#### How Could I Ever Leave This Place

Decades ago, while vacationing with my family in California, I remember a day at the beach. The ocean was so blue, the sky was clear, the sun felt so good touching my face, sea gulls were floating on the breeze yards away. My wife was next to me and my children were playing in the sand around me. I was eating some grapes taking in this beautiful creation with utter contentment. Then I thought, “How could I ever possibly leave this place?”<sup>4</sup> Almost immediately I was touched by the idea that the God who created all of this could certainly provide something even better. Then the Scripture hit me: “*Eye hath not seen nor ear hath heard all that God has prepared for those who love him*” (1 Cor. 2.9). What we have experienced on this earth will be magnified to its greatest degree. Many of those who have had a Near Death Experience report a beauty, colors,

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<sup>4</sup> I was thinking from a psychological perspective. As my friend Kevin Kumbalek observed: “Life is jaw-dropping beautiful.”

sounds, and especially a love beyond anything they have ever experienced on this earth, and the experience is so incredible, they just do not want to return. No doubt, they are experiencing an ultimate reality.

### Captivated by Colors & Sound

A while back, I caught a glimpse of the light spectrum through my reading glasses. The angle was just right and I was able to play with the prism of light and just dwell upon the brilliance of the colors. I am fascinated by the colors I see in this creation—autumn in New England is unsurpassed. The Grand Canyon at sunsets is phenomenal. Rainbows compel wonder. I think the colors in heaven will be beyond our experience. We will be captivated.

As mentioned earlier, the Apostle Paul, in all probability had a near death experience. He mentioned hearing sounds inexpressible. I attended a symphony concert played in an outdoor amphitheater in a mountain area of Oregon. The moon was full and illuminated the whole area. I closed my eyes at times and sensed I was in heaven as I listened to this most beautiful music. The sensations of joy and love swept through my body like the refreshing breeze moving through the mountains—it was a profound experience.

### Streets of Gold

It is interesting that the streets of heaven are described as being made of gold and the walls made of jewels. Asphalt paves our streets and sheetrock lines our walls, and yet we would not wrap a piece of asphalt up for a gift or give someone a square foot of sheetrock for a birthday, graduation, or anniversary present, because these items are just too common to be of any value. A gold ring or piece of jewelry would be preferred. So, we must conclude that the most valuable thing to us on this earth (metaphorically speaking) are just so common in heaven. Then what is most valuable in heaven? Perhaps it is the acquired things—love, joy, relationships, character, virtue. When Jesus said, “*Lay up for yourself treasures in heaven*” (Mt. 6.20), it had to have been things of far greater value than silver, gold or precious jewels. And really, love, joy, relationships, character and virtue are the most valuable things to us anyway.

Heaven will be a richer, greater, and fuller experience of every good thing we have had on this earth. Earth acclimated us to these fundamentals of reality.

## The Presence of God

The greatest fact about heaven will be the presence of God, our Creator. We will be with Him forever. It is the experience of being with One you absolutely love, someone you are head over heels and thrilled with. You are captured God, the Greatest Lover! The words of David so depict this future: *“You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever”* (Psalm 16.11 NLT).

### Intimacy

This presence involves intimacy—the deepest and perfect connectivity beyond what we have ever experience with anyone; worship—adoring someone irresistible; and glory—the thrill of astonishing existence with God.

God has been experiencing intimacy with His Son and the Holy Spirit for eternity. He created us in His image as relational beings, with a capacity for intimacy, just like He has been experiencing forever. We were made for intimacy—closeness with others, and especially an intimacy with Him. Jesus prayed that we would be one as he was One with the Father (Jn.17.22, 23). Oneness is the experience closeness and intimacy.

### Worship

Worship is ascribing worth to the One who in His Being is absolute love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness, and patience. He is holy—separate, distinct, completely Other. We will find ourselves caught up in perpetual awe and wonder—amazed with his infinite intellect, captivated by his love, thrilled with his utter joy, caught up in his peace, grateful for His power to create a world (who else could do such a thing). We will scarcely be able to take our eyes off the Creator. And so, we will adore/worship Him. It will be perpetual—we will hardly be able to do anything else.

### Being at Awe

Have you ever been to the Grand Canyon? I stood on the rim of the Canyon and was completely stunned with the reality of what I was beholding. Yet, God is infinitely greater than the Grand Canyon. People spend their entire life exploring and studying this geological marvel and find themselves just at the beginning. I suspect we will find ourselves in perpetual awe and discovery of this God. If a person can't even exhaust the knowledge of another human being, what of an Infinite, inscrutable God who is eternal in nature?

### Comparing Romantic Love

I think our experience of romantic love is akin to being with God forever. Romantic love (an experience God created) is a taste of a love experience with God. Being in the arms and embrace of a lover, staring into the eyes and face of a beloved, overwhelmed in love, scarcely being able to disconnect from the lover, or take your eyes off of the person. Time becomes irrelevant and the only thing that matters is the experience with the beloved. This is our future in the Presence of God, the greatest and most beautiful Lover.<sup>5</sup>

### Glory

Heaven is being caught up perpetually in glory. But how would you describe the idea of glory? It involves an experience beyond the norm, and actually the ultimate experience of thrilling existence—the state of great gratification or exaltation, and magnificence. Something “completely other” as stated by theologians. This will be the perpetual existential reality in eternity—glory.

Two grubs were on the bottom of a pond, and one of them said, “Have you noticed? All of our friends climb up the stem and we never see them again. Wonder what’s going on up there?” The other said, “Let make a deal—the first one that goes up the stem, let that one come back and tell the other what’s really going on up there.” His friend agreed and so they shook on it. Not many days there after one of the little grubs felt this urge to move toward the stem. He ascended the stem and then climbed on top of the lily-pad. Then he had a strange experience. He actually felt like he was coming out of his body, and in fact he was. For, when he awoke, he was shocked to

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<sup>5</sup> All that God created has a point we can learn from. So, the love romantic experience is instructive and portends something in eternity. Even the euphoria of orgasm with another in a covenant relationship brings us to a depth in sexual theology.

find his body strewn about on the top of the lily-pad. He could scarcely comprehend what had happened to him—“here I am and there is my body.” The next instant he stretched these big wide, rainbow hued, and iridescent wings, now a dragonfly. Instinctively, he takes off for the air and hovered over this pond that was once his home. He is experiencing sensations he has never had before. It is utterly thrilling. Then in the midst of this incredible experience, he remembered the deal he made with his buddy—“the first one that climbs up the stem, let that one come back and tell the other what’s really going on up there.” As he contemplated the deal, he realized he can’t go back, because he had been changed. But he has this one redemptive thought—“he too shall know this glory.”<sup>6</sup> For the Scripture declares:

- *“yet you are always with me, you hold me by my right hand, you guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me into glory” (Ps. 73.24);*
- *“...[we] will share in all His glory” (Col. 3.4);*
- *“this mortal will put on immortality, this perishable will put on the imperishable, and then will come the saying that is true—death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15.54);*  
and
- Jesus said, *“I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he dies, will live again” (Jn.11.25).*

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<sup>6</sup> This is an adapted parable that I was unable to track down to an original source. A form of it, “Water-bugs and Dragonflies,” has been found in many church bulletins as far back as 1985, as far as I can determine.