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## NOTES

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# Heaven

There are 2 options for the Heaven series. Each option could also have variations your group leader might implement.

### Option A

January: Heaven 3 week study; use questions (weeks 1-3) provided; Reading in Heaven, by Randy Alcorn highly recommended, but optional for group discussion.

February - March: Malachi 11 week study on the book of Malachi; lessons will be provided; connects with sermon series; major themes in Malachi include God's great love; living in fear of the Lord; covenant marriage; God's people demonstrating God's justice; the trust test of giving; and a theology of remembrance.

April - May: To be determined

### Option B

January - March: Heaven 13 week study; Heaven by Randy Alcorn required reading for group participation, one section per week; Group discussion based on 4 basic questions that are the same for each section.

# INTRODUCTION

## The Subject of Heaven

*“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”*

*John 14:1-3*

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”*

*Revelation 21:1-4*

### HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED...

*What is Heaven really going to be like?*

*What will we look like?*

*What will we do?*

*Won’t Heaven get boring after a while?*

We all have questions about what heaven will be like.

This study is based on the Scriptures, and on Heaven, by Randy Alcorn. In his book, Randy invites you to picture Heaven the way Scripture describes it - a bright, vibrant, and physical New Earth, free from sin, suffering, and death, and brimming with Christ’s presence, wondrous natural beauty, and the richness of human culture as God intended it.

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- \* How has this section helped you live now in light of eternity? How are your thinking, beliefs and lifestyle being changed?

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God has put eternity in our hearts. We are homesick for Eden. We're nostalgic for what is implanted in our hearts. It's built into us, perhaps even at a genetic level. We long for what the first man and woman once enjoyed - a perfect and beautiful Earth with free and untainted relationships with God, each other, animals, and our environment. Every attempt at human progress has been an attempt to overcome what was lost in the fall.

Our ancestors came from Eden. We are headed toward a new earth. Meanwhile, we live out our lives on a sin-corrupted Earth, between Eden and the New Earth, but we must never forget that this is not our natural state. Sin and death and suffering and war and poverty are not natural - they are the devastating results of our rebellion against God.

We long for a return to Paradise - a perfect world, without the corruption of sin, where God walks with us and talks with us in the cool of the day. Because we're human beings, we desire something tangible and physical, something that will not fade away.

Adam was formed from the dust of the earth, forever establishing our connection to the earth (Genesis 2:7). Just as we are made *from* the earth, so too we are made *for* the earth. But, you may object, Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for us and would take us there to live with him forever (John 14:2-3). Yes. But *what is that place?* Revelation 21 makes it clear - it's the New Earth. That's where the New Jerusalem will reside when it comes down out of Heaven. Only *then* will we be truly home.

## WEEK 1

1. How does Paul speak of death in these passages:

a. Philippians 1:21-23

b. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8

c. 2 Timothy 4:6-8

2. The following statements were made long ago, the first by an unbeliever and the second by a church leader. What does each man suggest about the Christian view of death?

If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby. *Aristides, AD 125 (an unbeliever)*

Let us greet the day which assigns each of us to his own home, which snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of the world, and restores us to paradise and the kingdom. Anyone who has been in foreign lands longs to return to his own native land.... We regard paradise as our native land. *Cyprian, AD 250 (a church leader)*

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3. Consider the following two statements about Heaven, made by Christians. Is there anything in these statements you relate to? Have you had any negative assumptions or uneasiness about Heaven?

- a. Whenever I think about heaven, it makes me depressed. I'd rather cease to exist when I die. I can't stand the thought of endless boring tedium. Heaven doesn't sound much better than hell. I'd rather be annihilated than spend eternity like that."
  
- b. I've been a Christian since I was five. I'm married to a youth pastor. When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to Heaven, I wouldn't know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. I was never told any different by anyone. . . . It's been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this fear of Heaven and eternal life."

4. Jesus said "When he [Satan] lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). How does Satan lie to us about heaven?

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5. These passages relate to death and the afterlife. What do they tell you?

a. Hebrews 2:14-15

b. 1 Corinthians 15:55

c. Job 19:25-27

d. Isaiah 25:7-8

e. Revelation 21:1-4

6. You've likely heard someone say, "Don't be so heavenly minded you're of no earthly good." How do these two passages help you respond to that comment?

a. Colossians 3:1-2

b. Hebrews 11:14-16

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## Teaching Section

Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms.... I am going there to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Christ chose common, physical terms (house, rooms, place) to describe where he was going and what he's preparing for us.

The ultimate place God is preparing for us is not an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits. Humans aren't suited for such a realm. A place is by nature physical, just as human beings are by nature physical (not just spiritual). What we've been specifically designed for is the place God made for us in the beginning: Earth.

7. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) The "heavens and earth" together are a reference to the entire cosmos, the universe. (Genesis 1:8,17; 2:1). How does Genesis 3:17-24 explain why there would be need for a "new heaven's and new earth"?
  
8. Read 2 Peter 3:13. Are you looking forward to what this verse describes Christians as looking forward to? Why or why not?

## WEEK 2

1. We're promised in Revelation 21:3 that on the new earth, "God will live *with* them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be *with* them and be their God." Since God's central dwelling place, by definition, is Heaven, would it be accurate to say that one day there will be "Heaven on Earth"? (That is, on the New Earth?)
2. Revelation 22 promises "They will see his face." What will it mean to see God's face? Why is that such an amazing promise?

### Teaching Section

Consider the words of Augustine, written in the fourth century:  
*God himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall be our reward. As there is nothing greater or better than God himself, God has promised us himself. God shall be the end of all our desires, who will be seen without end, loved without cloy, and praised without weariness.*

And those of Jonathan Edwards, written in the eighteenth century:  
*"The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things...but that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield them delight and happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them."*

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3. David's central desire was "to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Psalm 27:4). How might we see God's beauty on the New Earth? Where will we look to see his beauty?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Revelation 22:3 and 5 says, "[God's] servants will serve him...And they will reign for ever and ever." Where and over what will God's servants reign forever? What might reigning over God's New Earth involve? Will God's design for his children to reign over the earth be a new idea? (Hint: see Genesis 1:28)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How does the idea of God's resurrected people serving and reigning on a resurrected earth relate to the stereotype of Heaven as a place where we will float around as disembodied spirits with nothing to do?

6. What similarities do you see between Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22? In what sense are the first and last two chapters of the Bible bookends that correspond closely to each other?

**To Ponder:** by Calvin Miller

*I once scorned ev'ry fearful thought of death,  
When it was but the end of pulse and breath,  
But now my eyes have seen that past the pain  
There is a world that's waiting to be claimed.  
Earthmaker, Holy, let me now depart,  
For living's such a temporary art.  
And dying is but getting dressed for God,  
Our graves are merely doorways cut in sod.*

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## WEEK 3

1. Ephesians 1:10 says that God's purpose in Christ will be put into effect when history comes to its culmination. That stated purpose is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." How will that promise be fulfilled when there is a new heaven and new earth?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In Matthew 19:27-28, when Jesus talked to his disciples about "the renewal of all things," what do you think He meant?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In Acts 3:21, Peter preached that Christ "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his prophets." What do you think it means that God will "restore everything"?

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4. Read through these passages. What do they tell you about God's ultimate plan for the earth?

a. Isaiah 11:9-10

b. Isaiah 60:1-22

c. Isaiah 65:16-25

d. Isaiah 66:9-22

e. Ezekiel 47:2-14

f. Daniel 7:14-27

g. Haggai 2:6-7

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## Teaching Section

Consider what these re- words tell us about the past, present and future of humanity's relationship with God, and the future for us and for the earth.

**Redemption:** buying back what was formerly owned.

**Reconciliation:** regaining a prior friendship.

**Renewal:** making new again, restoring to an original state.

**Resurrection:** becoming physically alive again, after death.

**Regeneration:** being born again, having a new beginning.

**Restoration:** bringing back what was lost.

5. Consider the words of two theologians:

*God hangs on to his fallen original creation and salvages it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands—in fact, he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project. Humankind, which has botched its original mandate... is given another chance in Christ; we are reinstated as God's managers on earth. The original good creation is to be restored. ~ Albert Wolter*

*What happens to our bodies and what happens to the creation go together. And what happens to our bodies is not annihilation but redemption... Our bodies will be redeemed, restored, made new, not thrown away. And so it is with the heavens and the earth. ~ John Piper*

Do the above statements contradict 2 Peter 3:11-12, which says the earth will be "destroyed"? (Before answering this question, note the next verse, 3:13, which speaks of the coming new earth. Note also that the same word "destroyed" was used of the waters of the flood in 2 Peter 3:6, creating a parallel between an earth once destroyed by water and which will be destroyed by fire. Was the earth destroyed by water inhabited again after the flood? Since the disintegrated bodies of humans will be restored, why not a disintegrated earth?)

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6. Meditate on Romans 8:18-23. What does this verse suggest about what will happen to the present creation as a result of God raising his people from the dead?

7. What does Ephesians 1:10 says that anticipates the New Earth?

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8. The following is the end of C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*:

And as He [Aslan, the Lion, who is Christ] spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before.

What does this say to you? How does it make you feel?

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