Living in Anticipation of Heaven

In his book, *Heaven Better by Far*, author Oswald Sanders states: “God has not told us all we’d like to know, but He has told us all we need to know” about heaven. We can rest secure in the knowledge that has been revealed to us. What promises do we have from God about our eternal life? (Read John 10:27–28; 1 Corinthians 15:53–57; Philippians 1:23; 1 Peter 1:3–4.)

Heaven will be better than anything on Earth. Death is not the end and has no power over us. God knows our names and will shepherd us into His presence. We are heirs of the Kingdom of God. How can these promises help relieve our uncertainties?

We can be certain of where we’re going. Despite our sin, God has provided the means of grace by which we will spend eternity with Him. While we wait, how should we live our lives in anticipation of heaven? (Read Matthew 6:19–21; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; 1 John 2:15–17.)

The Bible provides us the map we need with the preparations we should make and tells us what our destination will be. We can invite others to join us on this journey — there will be plenty of space available for them. When our lives reflect the hope we have because of Jesus, others will be drawn to find out more. How does 1 Peter 3:15 encourage you to be ready to tell about the source of that hope?

Closing

Even though we don’t have the full picture of the glory of heaven, we do have God’s promise that when we die, we will be with Him in paradise (Luke 23:43). We don’t need a Facebook page or a top ten travel destinations guide to know that we will be welcomed into God’s presence and told, “well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23). The joy that this knowledge brings gives us peace, comfort, and hope. We can be secure that heaven will be better than any five-star resort ever could be!

Sing verses 5 and 6 of “Jerusalem, My Happy Home.”

Closing Prayer: Good and gracious God, thank You for Your promise of eternal life. Thank You for sending Your Son to die for my sins so that I may live in paradise with You. Help me to live in that hope and by doing so, to show others the way to You. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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God’s Mirror

By Rev. Daniel Paavola

Opening: Pray for God’s vision of us to become our own vision. Pray also that we see others as God does in His mirror.

Mirrors, Mirrors, On The Wall,
I’d Just As Soon Avoid Them All.

If possible, I don’t try on clothes before I buy them. It’s not the little rooms, the hidden pins, or the stiff collars that get me. It’s the mirrors. Changing room mirrors show sides of me that I never see otherwise, and I would just as soon keep it that way. I’m amazed that people see me that way every day and actually keep their eyes open.

Now, you might love the mirrors in your life. That’s wonderful, and I wish for you a long, happy reflective life. But if you can relate to my problem with mirrors, then we’re ready for God’s view of us in Ephesians 5. God uses our ordinary relationships to reflect His own relationship with us.

In Ephesians 5:32 Paul, having quoted Genesis 2:24 concerning a man and wife becoming one flesh, then says: This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church (ESV). There-
fore, what does the marriage experience show us about our relationship with Jesus? The good news is that this is a mirror with only the best views of us all in Christ.

A Very Costly Engagement Ring

The first mirror is engagement. What reflects light, love, and hope better than a beautiful engagement ring? While we can't impose our 21st Century engagement practices on the Bible, there's biblical truth in the costly action of the groom beginning the engagement. We're His choice by grace, before the world's foundation, Ephesians 1:3–6. This choice is not dependent on our past or our promised future. It is made timeless by His own action.

But there is a cost. While Ephesians 1 shows the eternal view of God's choice, that selection came at His personal expense. Consider the groom-to-be who goes searching, day after day, for the perfect ring. He has sold his car, his motorcycle, his boat — everything — to get the money for this ring. Finally, he finds the right one. Seeing it, people stop in amazement. How could he pay so much? And who is this woman for whom so much is spent?

Perhaps the ring that binds us to Him is Jesus' crown of thorns worn on the cross. That is an expensive ring! That's a ring that took years to shape. That's a ring that stops the world whenever it's seen. He poured His entire life into that moment. The lasting circle of His crown is the binding, eternal choice of God for each of us.

Read Ephesians 5:25–31. Consider the following questions:

- Why should it cost something to buy the engagement/wedding ring? In other words, why should the groom-to-be not say, “Honey, you won't believe it! I got this for almost nothing!”
- How does the crowning sacrifice of Jesus' death present us to himself in splendor, verse 27 (ESV)?
- Since, as verse 29 states, no one is expected to harm his own body but rather cherish and nourish it, why would Jesus give up His entire life for us?
- When the world sees the price paid for us, how might our image improve, at least in the eyes of those who can count that cost?

For One Long Shining Moment

Engagement is a great time and showing off the ring is wonderful. But soon everyone has seen it. There has to be something more — the wedding day. If ever there is a day for mirrors, this is it. I hope that every bride is pleased with what the mirror shows as she walks into the church. Even more, I hope that she is pleased with the reflected view that comes with the groom’s smile. Being pleased with herself in the mirror is one thing; seeing pure joy and love in the eyes of her husband is even better.

Read Titus 3:3–7 and recall Ephesians 5:25–27. Consider the following questions:

- How perfectly do we appear in the mirror of God's sight? (Imagine the ultimate Say Yes To The Dress episode.)
- But while God says that He finds nothing wrong with us, Ephesians 5, we still know we're not perfect. Should we correct His view and point out our flaws?

But Now There's Two

Maybe the best cure for our fear of mirrors is to bring someone else into the picture. Then we don’t have to look at ourselves at all. We can focus completely on that other person. That’s the final step in the mirror of God. Once we are united with Christ, our view changes from ourselves to Him. We move from the wedding day to the marriage, to a lifetime of seeing someone besides ourselves. Our fears of how we look are calmed when we see Him, with us, and in action for us.

Read Romans 8:33–39 and recall Ephesians 5:25–33. Consider the following questions:

- How closely to Christ have we become in the view of God? See also Galatians 3:26–28.
- When do we see Jesus in action for us? Especially what do we see Him doing in Romans 8:34?
- Related to this, there is a third Person in the mirror. What is the Spirit doing on our behalf in Romans 8:26–27?
- If we are afraid of being separated from God, viewed harshly again in a mirror of judgment, what message should we hear from Him in Romans 5:1 and Romans 8:1?

In The End, It’s Not The Clothes

When we're finished looking into God's mirror, what matters is not what we're wearing or how we promise to look better next time. It's the relationship with our Savior who is willing to be seen with us. It's His place beside us and within us and His view of us that matters. When He says that in His view we look perfect, that's the last image we need from the mirror.

Closing: Pray to be able to see ourselves as God sees us, without stain, wrinkle, or blemish. Pray also that our focus is not on ourselves but on Jesus who is willing to be seen with us.
Leader’s Notes and Bible Passages
Available Online

By Shari Miller

**Faith Talk:** How would you explain a “defining moment” in any person’s life? Try to arrive at a group definition and write it below. Share one such moment from your life with a partner or in a small group.

As we consider three people from biblical accounts who had defining encounters with Jesus, we will explore how the life of each person was changed and what significance that has for each one of us.

**Opening Prayer:** Dear Father in heaven, we praise You that You have given us life here on earth, but more important, life eternal through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Your Son Jesus. Our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Continue to direct and guide us as Your Holy Spirit empowers us to share the Good News of salvation in our everyday lives. We boldly ask that You bless our study of Your Word.

In Jesus’ great name we pray, Amen.

**Sins Forgiven!**
Read Mark 2:1–12. Describe Jesus’ life-changing encounter with the paralytic man. What two gifts did Jesus give to the paralytic man?

**If time permits:** How might society have viewed this paralyzed man? How might today’s society view the paralytic? What do you believe was the defining moment in this encounter? Why was the forgiveness of his sins the most significant moment for this paralytic? How might this forgiveness have changed his life?

How do our sins paralyze us? What words and phrases in the following Bible passages describe our sin and its effects?

- Psalm 25:11
- Psalm 38:4
- Ephesians 2:1–3

The Good News is that Jesus meets each of us by grace “up close and personal” on the cross of Calvary.

What do the following passages assure each believer in Jesus Christ?

- Psalm 103:12
- Isaiah 1:18
- Jeremiah 31:34
- John 19:30

**Faith Talk:** How does this “up close and personal” forgiveness through Jesus Christ specifically change your life? Share with a partner or in a small group.

**New Life Given!**
Read Luke 7:11–15. Describe Jesus’ encounter with the widow from Nain and her son. What was the defining moment in this encounter?

**If time permits:** In the space of a very short time, the widow of Nain experienced many emotions. Identify some of those emotions.

What do you speculate the widow did following this up close and personal encounter with Jesus? What about her son?

How does our Savior Jesus give us new life? See John 3:16.


Grief … to joy! Read Ephesians 2:4–10. How are our lives changed through the new life that Jesus has given to us in Christ Jesus? What actions in our lives show others this life-giving change?

**Faith Talk:** How does the knowledge that we inherit eternal life for the sake of Jesus affect our life here on earth? Share with a partner or in a small group.