

**ONE  
MINUTE  
AFTER YOU DIE**



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The content of this book was adapted from the “One Minute After You Die” sermon series by Pastor Tim Gilligan. This series title was inspired by *One Minute After You Die* by Dr. Erwin Lutzer (Moody Publishers, 1997).

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**AND AS IT  
IS APPOINTED  
FOR MEN TO  
DIE ONCE, BUT  
AFTER THIS THE  
JUDGMENT, SO  
CHRIST WAS  
OFFERED ONCE  
TO BEAR THE  
SINS OF MANY.**

**HEBREWS 9:27–28A**

**OUR MISSION  
IS TO HELP  
PEOPLE MOVE  
FROM WHERE  
THEY ARE TO  
WHERE GOD  
WANTS THEM  
TO BE.**



**Meadowbrook**  
CHURCH

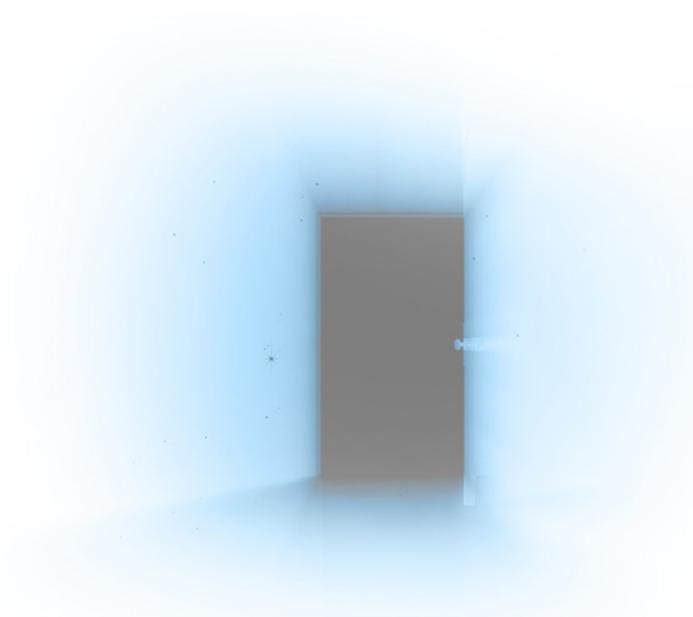
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# INTRODUCTION

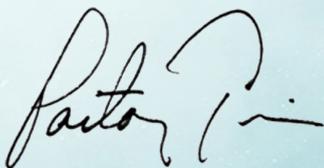
Most people don't like talking about death. It can be a morbid or upsetting topic. But death is a fact of life.

This resource was born from a responsibility and a desire I feel as a pastor to help people become more aware of and ready for death.

There are many beliefs about what death and the afterlife might look like. Science cannot really explore or validate such beliefs; it can only observe and understand the natural world, rather than supernatural subjects like death and the afterlife. Meanwhile, most religions offer their own answers for what happens during and following death.

These are heavy concepts to cover. In the pages to come, I'll let the Bible do the heavy lifting.

I know the inevitability and mystery of death can feel scary. But, through Jesus, Christians can also experience a sense of peace and confidence about the topic of death, inspiring them to live with eternity in mind.



Pastor Tim



# 1

## With Eternity in Mind

The first part of Ecclesiastes 9:2 (NIRV) tells us, “**Everyone will die someday. Death comes to godly and sinful people alike.** It comes to good and bad people alike.”

In Scripture, Christians find a couple notable exceptions to this. For instance, the Bible tells us of Enoch, who was “taken away so that he did not see death” (Hebrews 11:5), and of the rapture, when believers will be “caught up together” to “meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Yet, for *almost* everyone in human history, life ends in death.

### Absent from the Body

We’ll anchor in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (NLT) to learn a few key things about death and the afterlife. This passage reads:

“For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it’s not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by

life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.”

Here’s a foundational lesson from these verses: When you die, the *real you* doesn’t really die.

**You are a spirit. You have a soul. And you live in a body.** When you die, your physical body ceases to function. Your spirit and soul then separate from your physical body. We don’t know all the details—but Christians can take courage that “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The story of Jesus’ own death points to this reality, through the conversations He shared with the two thieves who were crucified alongside Him. When one of the thieves asks Jesus “to remember me when You come into Your Kingdom,” Jesus replies, “Assuredly, I say to you, *today* you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42–43, emphasis added).

Jesus was not just assuring this man (an unnamed, treacherous thief, no less!) that, because of his belief, he had received grace and salvation. Jesus also knew they were all about to die very

soon, and His words hint at just how quickly they would get a taste of eternal life on the other side: *Today*.

For believers, death delivers on the promise of heaven quickly, if not instantaneously.

**Everybody dies. Everybody spends forever  
*somewhere*. And everybody needs a Savior.**

## Two Judgments

There is another key detail of the immediate afterlife offered in 2 Corinthians 5: “We must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body” (verse 10, NLT).

**We will *all* face judgment—believers and nonbelievers alike.** And the Bible paints a picture of two judgments after death.

The first judgment occurs at the “great white throne.” In Revelation, we read, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (20:11-12, 15).

The judgment at the great white throne distinguishes those who are nonbelievers. The Book of Life only contains the

names of the *living*, or those who have been born again and received the new life that Jesus offers. Anyone who has not accepted Him has rejected Him and is not born again.

More than what you do on earth—or even what it *looks* like you do—your faith in Jesus is what will matter most in eternity. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus urges, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

**What you believe about Jesus in this life determines what you will experience once you die.**

Dr. Erwin Lutzer—a pastor and author of *One Minute After You Die*, which inspired the title of this resource—once wrote, “One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ, or be catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable.”

**For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not  
of works, lest anyone should boast.**

**—Ephesians 2:8–9**

The second judgment occurs at the seat of Christ. This is for believers, for those whose names *are* written in the Book of Life. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (NLT) says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

At this judgment, works *do* matter. Not for salvation—believers can trust that Jesus has already paid the price for their sins, redeeming them once and for all. However, **having been saved by grace, Christians are then rewarded for their works.**

Believers’ works will have value that lasts, or they will be consumed. In 1 Corinthians 3:11–15, we read, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

When the New Testament refers to the judgment seat of Christ, the Greek word used for *judgment* is *bema*. This could be translated to something like the Olympics—think of end-of-race rewards. Among all those who run, many finish, but *how well they run* determines their place. The judgment seat of Christ does not determine if believers are righteous; it examines the right things that they did. It asks believers, how well did you run? How did you finish the race?

**And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord  
and not to men. —Colossians 3:23**

With eternity in mind, we should be taking inventory of our works and motives—both what we do and how we do it: *How do I treat people? How do I handle money? Do I work hard? Am I honest? Am I caring? When I do good things, am I trying to bless people or impress people? Am I trying to serve or to be seen?*

As we walk through what the Bible reveals to us about death and eternity, two urgent principles emerge: **Give your life to Him—and then live for Him.** In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:9, “Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.”

# 2

## Don't Just Avoid Hell— Choose Heaven

Hauntings. Purgatory. Reincarnation. There are many inventive ideas about death and what follows it. Some people believe in a sort of in-between or holding space for humans after death. Scripture, however, indicates that, when we die, our bodies shut down, and our spirits are immediately present elsewhere.

For believers, that means being present with the Lord.

For unbelievers, there is a different destination.

If talking about death is unpleasant, talking about hell is even more so. But wrestling with this topic is essential to living with eternity in mind.

### What *Is* Hell?

There is a misconception that hell is like the devil's headquarters. But hell was initially formed by God *for* the devil (Matthew 25:41). In fact, we're told that the devil and his demons will be tormented there forever (Revelation 20:10).

Though it was not the original intent for hell, unbelievers also go there after they die. Scripture speaks of hell as both *Hades* (a New Testament Greek term) and as a "lake of fire." Specifically, the lake of fire is where unbelievers are sent after the great white throne judgment, when their names are not found in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:15). This is sometimes referred to as "the second death."

## What Is Hell Like?

Hell has been dramatized, even in cartoonish ways, throughout history and across cultures. But we find very serious, sobering descriptions of hell in the Bible.

Hell is depicted in Scripture as a place of torment, fire, pain and thirst. It is a sensory nightmare: loud, smoky, with a stench like burning sulfur. Jesus sometimes used the word *Gehenna* for hell, referring to a valley outside town known for its continuous burning of trash, waste, bodies and sewage (Matthew 10:28, 23:33).

In Luke 16, we read an account of a man who was sent to hell: “And being in torments in Hades ... he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame’” (verses 23–24). Abraham replies, “Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us” (verse 26b).

We learn a few things about hell from these verses alone: In hell, people are conscious and aware, even while “tormented in this flame.” Their destination is irrevocably set, like a “great gulf fixed.” What’s more, those who are in hell understand their judgment is just, and they want nobody else to experience it. In this case, the man begs for someone to go warn his loved ones about this place of torment (verses 27–28).

Generally, hell is, as one writer described it, “the land of no more good.” No more beauty. No laughter. No rest. No relief. No peace. No friendship. No joy. No hope. No second chances.

Mercifully, for the believer, life on earth is the most hell they will ever experience.

Unfortunately, for the unbeliever, life on earth is the most heaven they will ever experience.

## A Plan of Escape

If God is good and loving and kind ... why do people go to hell?  
Does God send people to hell?

Most people—Christians and non-Christians alike—wrestle with this question.

Let's start with the problem of sin: We *all* sin. Any unforgiven sin creates distance from God, who is holy and pure. Sin severs relationship with Him.

Some of the most well-known and crucial passages of Scripture tell us of God's solution to this sin problem: to send His Son, Jesus, to forgive and save humanity, to restore relationship with God and to allow people to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. —1 Peter 3:18a*

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. —John 1:12*

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. —John 5:24*

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we*

*have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! —Romans 5:8-9*

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. —John 3:16-18*

## God has made a way to heaven and a way of escape from hell.

To be clear, God does not want anyone to be condemned to hell. He *loves* everyone—but people can reject His love.

People were created with free will, to accept forgiveness through Jesus and choose a relationship with God. God gives everyone the space and time to exercise that free will. In 2 Peter 3:9, we are told that He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Yes, some people *are* condemned—but not because God does not love them. It is because they do not believe. Think of it like a rescue boat coming near a group of people who are at risk of drowning. The Rescuer has a plan. He is ready with life vests. He is reaching out his hand.

To believe in Jesus is to take His hand. To be saved.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 6:23

### Reckoning with Reality

Despite the gravity of what hell is and represents, many people do not believe in it.

About three-quarters of U.S. adults believe in heaven; meanwhile, three in five U.S. adults believe in hell. More specifically, among those who are religious “nones” (meaning,

people who identify as atheists, agnostics or nothing in particular), only about one-quarter believes in hell.<sup>1</sup>

It only serves the devil's purposes for people to not take hell seriously or to not see it as a threat.

**The goal in accepting Jesus isn't just to avoid hell—it is to *choose* heaven!**

Choose God's presence. Choose His mercy, His kindness and His help.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/views-on-the-afterlife/#majorities-of-u-s-adults-say-they-believe-in-heaven-hell>

# 3

## Beyond Our Imagination

People can be very creative and imaginative—but heaven exceeds even the wildest thing anybody could dream up.

As 1 Corinthians 2:9b (NIV) puts it, “No human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him.”

A believer’s death—and their transition to heaven—is the most pivotal moment of their life. It is a big deal to God. We’re told “the death of His saints” is “precious” in His sight (Psalm 116:15)—so precious that Scripture even indicates believers are transported to heaven by angels (Luke 16:22).

Christians don’t *really* die. They blink their eyes and open them suddenly to behold the presence of God and His eternal glorious heaven. **For the Christian, life does not end at the grave.** Death is closing the door to earth and opening the door to heaven. Death is going to sleep on a cold, wintry night and waking to find the sun always shining.

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

—2 Corinthians 5:1

## What Is Heaven?

Scripture actually refers to three “heavens.”

The first is heaven in an atmospheric sense: the sky, the clouds, the air that surrounds us (Genesis 1:20).

Second, the Bible refers to “heavenly places,” meaning a supernatural realm, specifically of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:12).

Finally, there is the primary understanding of heaven as the habitation of God and the destination of believers. Some authors of Scripture also tell of firsthand experiences in heaven, such as when Paul was “caught up” (2 Corinthians 12:2) or when John wrote the Book of Revelation.

## What Is Heaven Like?

Generally, we have a sense of heaven being above us—being *up*. For instance, some accounts of heaven in Scripture are directional: Jesus both descended from and ascended to heaven. The Spirit descended from heaven at Pentecost. Christians will ascend to heaven.

Heaven contains things we’re familiar with. After all, consider its Creator! **Earth is God’s taste—and we can assume heaven will also reflect His style.** Throughout the Bible, passages like Ezekiel 47 and the Book of Revelation offer vivid descriptions of life in heaven. We are assured that heaven also includes food, trees, parks, rivers, seas, colors, animals, gems, rainbows, streets and rest. Heaven will reunite loved ones and allow believers to live in the presence of God, Jesus and angels.

Heaven also contains much that we *aren't* familiar with. While writing Revelation, John sometimes could only attempt to explain what he saw in heaven or try to draw comparisons. He offered some awe-inspiring literal descriptions as well: a square city, measuring 1,400 square miles, with walls of jasper, streets of pure gold and 12 gates made of pearls (Revelation 21:16–22).

Perhaps just as important as what *is* in heaven is what *is not* in heaven. In heaven, there is no more pain. No death. No sorrow. No sickness. No failure. No fear. No stress. No anxiety. No sleepless nights. No enemies. No trouble. No tears. No night. No sun nor moon. No locked gates. No abuse. No heartache. No violence. No injustice. No strife. No discord. No evil. No hate. No pride. No lust. No lies.

**Heaven is the absence of everything bad, painful and evil. It is the presence of everything good, holy and glorious.** Nothing and no one can mess it up.

In heaven, the primary activity is worship. This worship is vibrant and loud (Revelation 19, Psalm 150). It involves music, bowing down, raising hands and dancing. It is a joyful celebration, prompted by awe and wonder. This worship is not required or scheduled. Rather, it overflows from a constant and overwhelming awareness of God's beauty, goodness and greatness.

**Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." —John 14:6**

## A True Home

Christians live with the knowledge that this world is not their home. They are more like pilgrims, merely passing through. **Christians are temporary residents, whose ultimate citizenship is in heaven.**

Believers might also think of themselves as ambassadors of heaven. Their support, protection, safety and standards come from their true homeland.

But citizenship in heaven is not a given and is not earned through any personal goodness. Good people don't go to heaven; forgiven people go to heaven. And that forgiveness is only possible through Jesus.

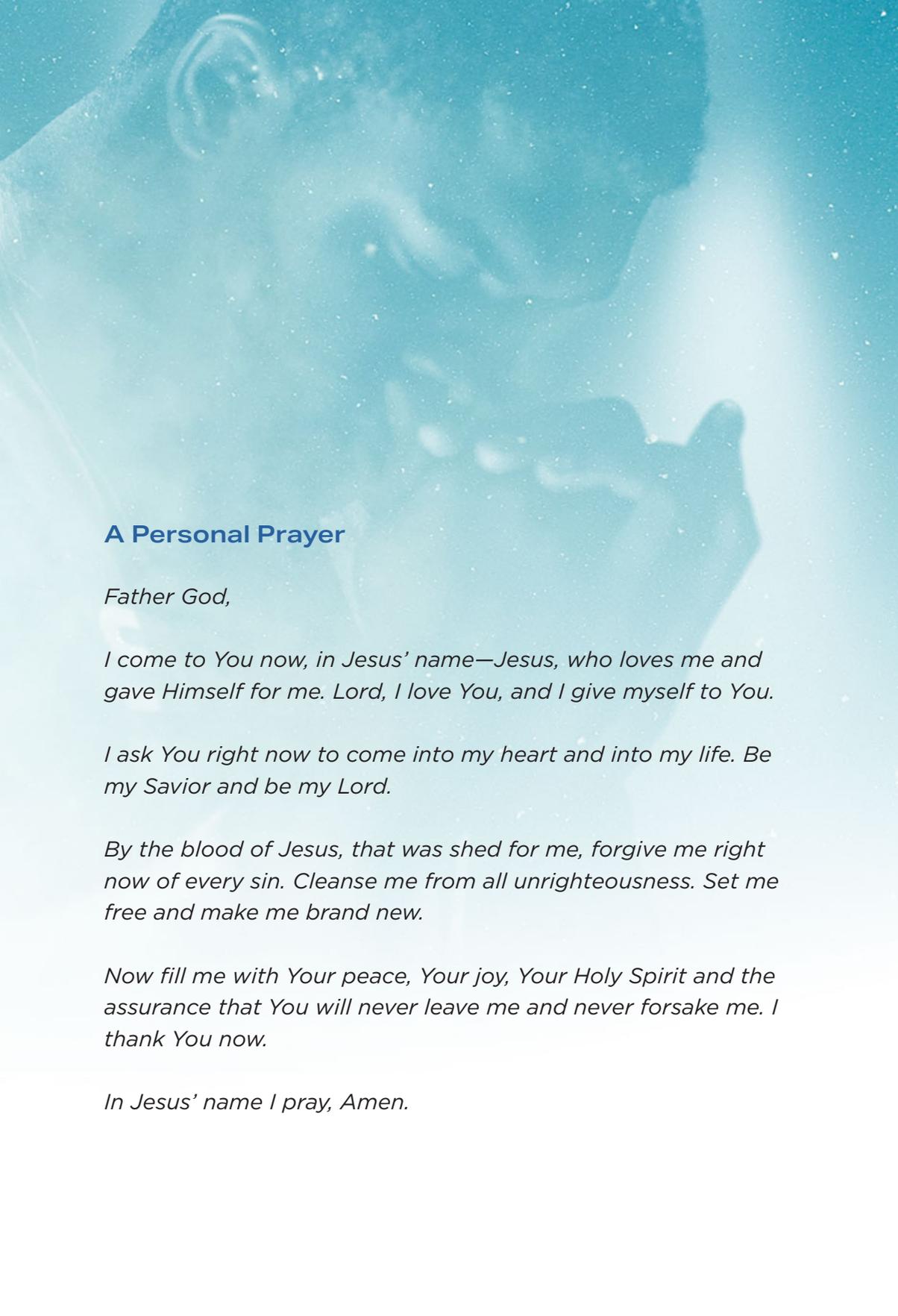
*Give your life to Jesus.*

*Live your life for Jesus.*

And, one day, *share* eternal life *with* Him in heaven.

**PRAYERS  
FOR  
ETERNITY**





## A Personal Prayer

*Father God,*

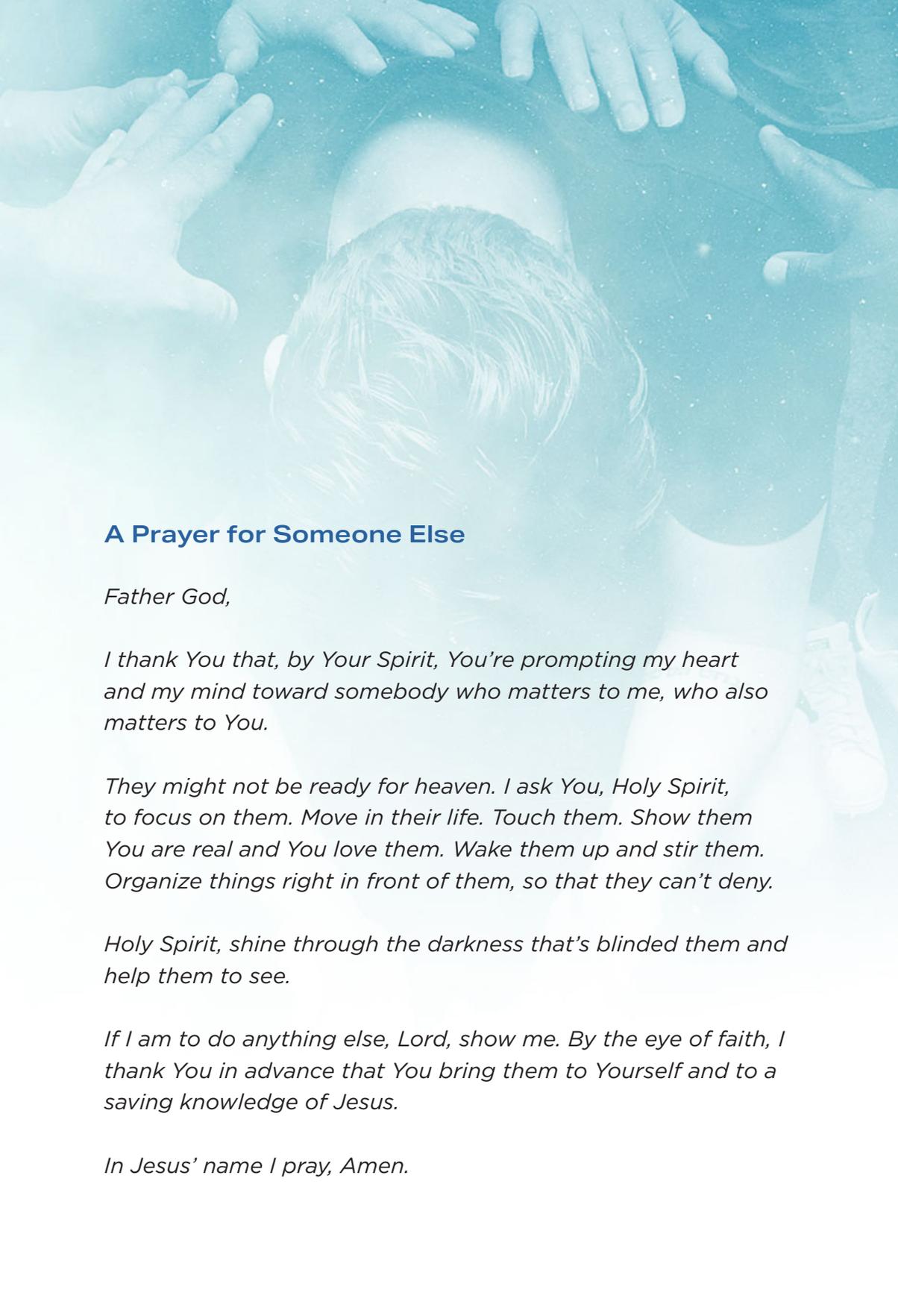
*I come to You now, in Jesus' name—Jesus, who loves me and gave Himself for me. Lord, I love You, and I give myself to You.*

*I ask You right now to come into my heart and into my life. Be my Savior and be my Lord.*

*By the blood of Jesus, that was shed for me, forgive me right now of every sin. Cleanse me from all unrighteousness. Set me free and make me brand new.*

*Now fill me with Your peace, Your joy, Your Holy Spirit and the assurance that You will never leave me and never forsake me. I thank You now.*

*In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



## A Prayer for Someone Else

*Father God,*

*I thank You that, by Your Spirit, You're prompting my heart and my mind toward somebody who matters to me, who also matters to You.*

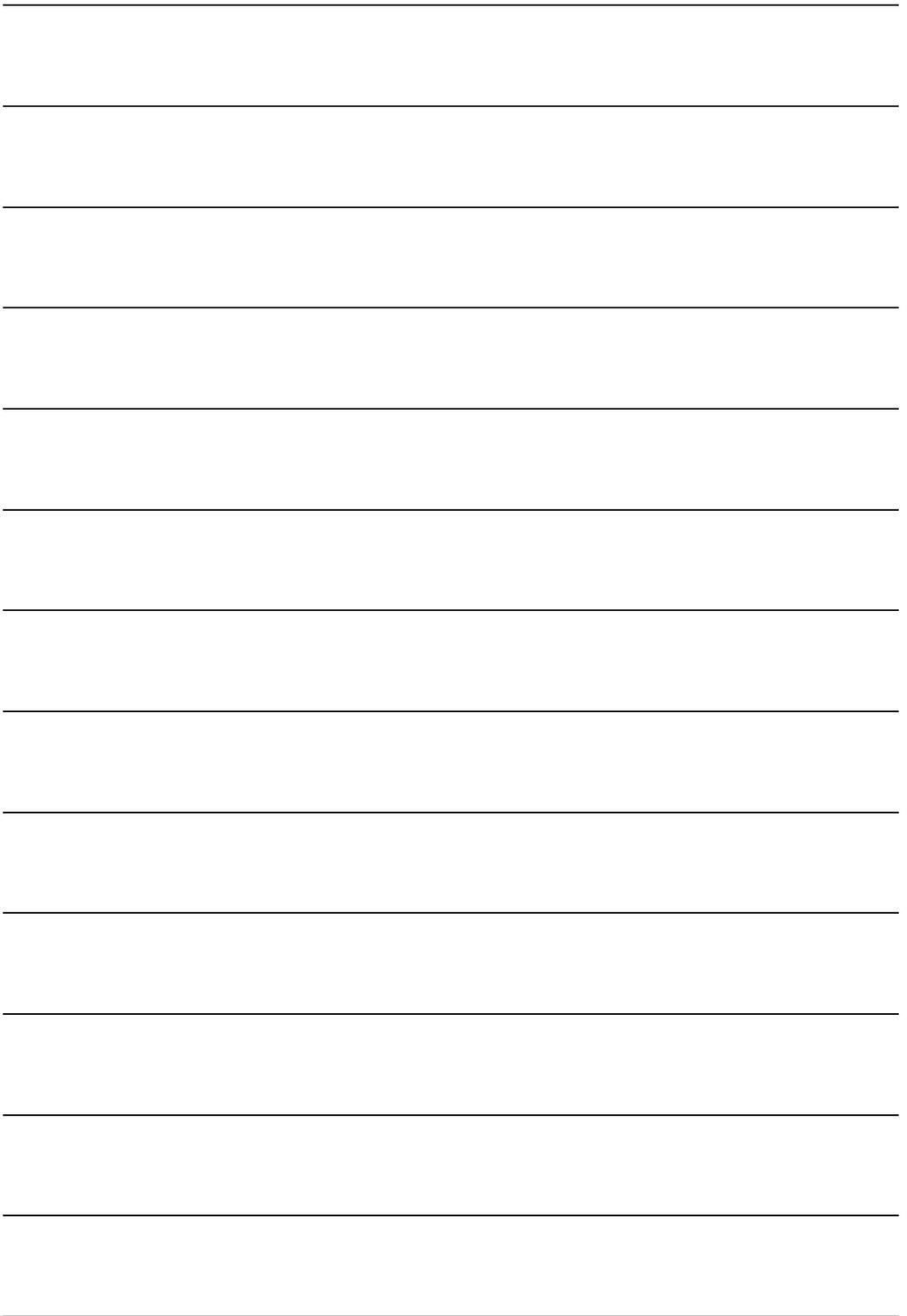
*They might not be ready for heaven. I ask You, Holy Spirit, to focus on them. Move in their life. Touch them. Show them You are real and You love them. Wake them up and stir them. Organize things right in front of them, so that they can't deny.*

*Holy Spirit, shine through the darkness that's blinded them and help them to see.*

*If I am to do anything else, Lord, show me. By the eye of faith, I thank You in advance that You bring them to Yourself and to a saving knowledge of Jesus.*

*In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*







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