



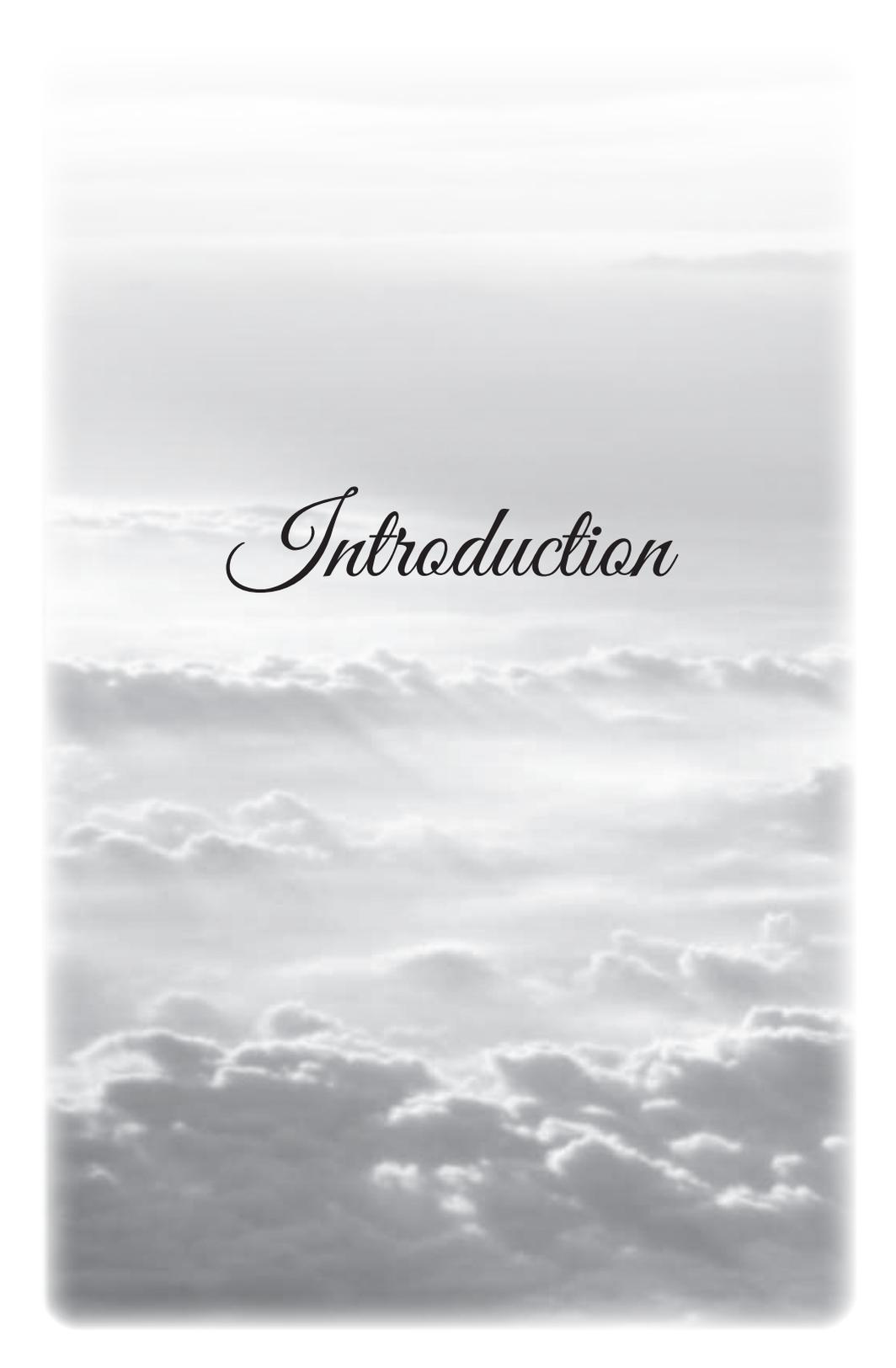
# *Where Are They Now?*

REV. ROBERT R. FLEISCHMANN



*Where Are  
They Now?*

WRITTEN BY REV. ROBERT R. FLEISCHMANN



# *Introduction*

## Revelation 7:13–17 (ESV)

*Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

The Christian faith is indeed a mysterious thing. We are sure about things we hope for and certain about things we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). Unlike philosophies and club memberships, being a Christian is not something we do but something done for us.

By the power of God the Holy Spirit, we come to faith. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to create faith; but faith, by its very definition, is not a logical deduction. It is the miraculous ability one has to believe in a Savior he has never met, in a bodily resurrection he has never witnessed and in an eternal life in heaven that he has never seen.

The death of a Christian puts faith in direct conflict with our reason. Our eyes see lifelessness where there once was life. Our hearts feel separation where there once was companionship. Yet, God’s Word tells us there is life that never ends, and there is a bodily resurrection even when a body becomes dust and is

scattered. Our eternal home is called “heaven.” What we have in God’s Word are insights into that place where our departed loved ones presently reside, as well as the place where we are going.



**The purpose of this booklet is to help those who have recently bid a loved one goodbye by answering the question, “Where are they now?” In answering that question we also contemplate the question, “What is waiting for me?”**



# *What is Heaven?*

*“In my Father’s house  
are many rooms; if it were not so,  
I would have told you. I am going  
there to prepare a place for you.”*

*John 14:2*

People often feel awkward talking about heaven. They avoid the word “heaven” in the same way they avoid talking about death. It is almost superstitious. It is as if the absence of the word in conversation somehow nullifies its reality.

As a result people conjure up all sorts of descriptions of heaven, almost always tailoring them to earthly interests. Hunters sometimes call heaven their “happy hunting ground” or their “eternal tree stand.” Avid shoppers sometimes refer to it as “the great mall in the sky.” A car salesman even described it as “the great showroom in the sky.”

But heaven is clearly defined in Scripture. When Jesus described the final Day of Judgment in Matthew 25, He called heaven “our inheritance” and a “kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

When Jesus described heaven, He said: *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”* (John 14:2)

Now ponder this: what do you consider the most important thing in life? Your family? Your career? Your prestige or riches? These are blessings in life, given in varying degrees to different people. What is most important in life is one’s relationship with the Creator.

We know that sin severed that relationship. Lacking any semblance of perfection we are dead in our sins. We can stake no claim to eternal life and a heavenly home. But the Creator solved all that. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ. He lived the perfect life God demands of all of us (Leviticus 11:45; Matthew 5:48). He paid the highest price for our sins by His sacrifice on the cross. And most importantly, God accepted that payment. The evidence was when Jesus, who had been executed

and placed in a tomb, was resurrected. God restored to us the righteousness that was lost with the fall into sin by accepting Jesus as our substitute for sin.

The Holy Spirit convinced us to believe that Jesus paid the price for our sins, and that belief is called “faith.” And because we have faith God now calls us “His children.” Because we are His children we then inherit what is His.

God is in heaven, and that is why heaven is called our “inheritance.” It is a place of “many rooms,” and there is a room prepared for each of our loved ones who died in faith – and there is a room for each of us.

# *Where is Heaven?*

*“You have come to Mount Zion,  
to the heavenly Jerusalem,  
the city of the living God.  
You have come to thousands upon  
thousands of angels in joyful assembly,  
to the church of the firstborn,  
whose names are written in heaven.”*

*Hebrews 12:22-24*

We usually think of heaven as a place UPWARD. We think that way for three reasons:

1. Heaven describes the sky. In the opening verse of the Bible we are told, “*God created the heavens and the earth.*” (Genesis 1:1)
2. We hear descriptions of heaven as being “up” – like Jacob’s ladder or stairway. In the Genesis account, Jacob dreamed of angels ascending and descending from heaven. (Genesis 28:10ff)
3. Jesus’ ascension into heaven is explained as being taken up in a cloud and the disciples looking up into the sky as He ascends. (Acts 1:9ff)

So it is easy to think UPWARD as it relates to heaven. Then in April of 1961, Yuri Gagarin, the Russian cosmonaut, became the first human to travel into space. As part of his anti-religion campaign, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev observed of the Russian’s space travel, “Gagarin flew into space but didn’t see any god there.”

Khrushchev’s conclusion seems logical. One would think that if heaven is a far-off place somewhere up above us, then eventually a spaceship would crash against the pearly gates. Perhaps heaven is further up there. Maybe it is at the end of a celestial black hole. Or, maybe heaven is not UP in a physical sense.

Remember, truths of Scripture are often expressed in terms that make them easier for us to understand. For example, the psalmist talks about longing to be with God, dwelling in His tent forever and finding refuge in the shelter of His wings (Psalm 61:4). Heaven is not camping, and God does not have wings. These are “picture words”: descriptions that help us understand what it means to be cared for by God.

The psalms often describe the “hand of God” helping and protecting us. Yet God is a spirit (John 4:24), and a spirit is not flesh and bones like a human (Luke 24:39). Again, these are picture words that help to describe a concept.

While we most commonly think of the “place” called heaven as being UP above us, consider what the writer to the Hebrews said about what happens when we become believers: “*You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.*” (Hebrews 12:22–24)

If you looked only at this passage it sounds like a description of heaven. The context, however, clearly describes what happens when we transition from unbelief to belief. This is a description of you and me: believers who are living, breathing and enjoying life on this earth. Even though we are here on earth, we are in the midst of a “joyful assembly” in the “heavenly Jerusalem.”

Jesus told us that angels watch over us (Matthew 18:10) and while watching over us they “*always see the face of my Father in heaven*” (Matthew 18:10). Angels cannot be everywhere. They cannot be “up” in heaven beholding the face of God and doing His bidding, while at the same time also here on earth watching over us. Yet they do watch over us and always see the face of the Father.

It is mysterious, indeed. Our life in this sinful world blinds us from seeing the glories of heaven, and yet we are with the “joyful assembly” while we live on earth. Angels watch over us and also see the face of God.

We commonly think of heaven as being UP and hell as being DOWN, but it appears these are picture words to help us

understand the sharp distinction between heaven as the place of God (i.e., being UP) and hell being the place without God (i.e., being DOWN). Some Bible scholars have suggested that heaven is “here” but in another dimension. The angels can be around us to watch over us and still can behold the face of God in heaven.

Appreciate the distinctive impact of heaven as the complete opposite of hell. Don't get lost in the geography. God knows where He lives, and He will get you there when the time is right.

# *How Do We Get There?*

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

*Ephesians 2:8-9*

In Revelation 3:14 we are told that those in heaven, *“have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Christ is the Lamb. John the Baptist called Him the Lamb as He walked by proclaiming, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29).

The Old Testament’s ceremonial regulations required the regular sacrifice of an unblemished lamb as a symbol of the final perfect sacrifice that would be made for all sins. That sacrifice was made by Jesus Christ Himself when He offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins.

What is important to realize is the complete nature of Jesus’ sacrifice. It was His doing and only His doing. Though mankind fell into sin, it was God who created the plan for our rescue. It was Jesus who carried out that plan by offering up His own life. It was the Holy Spirit who planted the seed of faith in us to believe this incredible message.

The Bible tells us, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We cannot do it. We cannot save ourselves. All of us are sinful. None of us meets God’s demand to qualify for heaven by our actions (Romans 3:23). We cannot take credit for our salvation. We cannot even boast that we “decided” for Christ. Left to ourselves our sinful minds are hostile to God (Romans 8:7). By ourselves we do not turn to God – rather, we challenge God. The Apostle said we were “dead” in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). There was no “life” in us to come to God.

Yet, it was Jesus Christ, whose life, death and resurrection were credited to us. He washed us in His blood (Revelation 7:14), and the purity we have is entirely because of what Jesus did.

That is why God looks at us and sees white – a purity that comes entirely from the sacrifice of His own Son. God did it all, and by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit, we believe it (Hebrews 11:1) – even though we did not see the sacrifice, the resurrected body or the place prepared for us in heaven. Even faith is God’s gift.

But let’s be honest. Even the best of believers make mistakes. Despite our salvation by Jesus we don’t always act like it. Sometimes we “slip” into acting like we are not believers in Christ. Even the great Apostle Paul wrestled with this reality. He said, *“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”* (Romans 7:19).

You and I may recall a deceased friend or loved one who professed that Jesus was their Savior. He or she may have gone to church regularly and prayed often. However, we may also recall that person’s shortcomings. Maybe our loved one had a drinking problem, swore, was unfaithful, gossiped or wrestled with other habitual sins.

Before doubting that these people are in heaven, remember two things:

1. We all sin – in big ways or little ways, habitually or occasionally, and as such we fall short of God’s glory. None of us, based on our ability to walk the straight and narrow, deserves heaven.
2. Heaven is God’s gift through faith. Believing that we are lost because of sin and saved only through Christ is how we get to heaven.

Some might be tempted to rebel against this free and undeserved love. They might feel this generous gift gives

them the license to sin continually because they are forgiven (Romans 6:1). That is not, however, how people of faith live.

The Apostle Paul knew he was a sinner. In fact, he called himself the “worst” of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). That did not give him the license to continue to sin. Rather, he wrestled with sin to beat it down so that when others saw him, they saw a life transformed by God’s love in Jesus Christ.

As each of us continues to live our days on this earth we, too, are not pure in all that we do. When others see us fall into sin, doubt is planted in their minds as to our priorities and our value of Christ’s sacrifice for us.

The Apostle Paul wrote about this when he said, *“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 3:12–14)

Never forget the eyes that hear our words and observe our actions. The day will come when our earthly life will come to an end. Consider how our day-to-day actions might also comfort people with the knowledge that we lived with faith in our hearts and that each day we struggled to live the pure life which Christ’s sacrifice purchased for us.



*When Do We  
Get There?*

*“Today you will be  
with me in paradise.”*

*Luke 23:43*

In Revelation, we are told, “*These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation*” (Revelation 7:14, ESV). When it says that they “are coming out of the great tribulation,” the original Greek language uses what is called an active participle. It means that the numbers in heaven are being actively added to on a moment-by-moment basis. It is real time.

What does this mean for you? It means that when you stood at the bedside of a loved one at the moment of death you saw the difference. It was obvious that the body no longer was alive. The color was gone, and there was no movement. At that moment, your loved one who believed in Jesus as his or her Savior joined the multitude in heaven.

The heavenly entrance does not wait for a particular day or time. It is immediate.

You saw such an indication when Jesus hung on the cross – along with the two criminals who were executed with Him. One mocked Jesus. The other was repentant of his sins and believed in Jesus as the Savior. It was to this man that Jesus said, “*Today you will be with me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43). It would not take place on the day of final judgment but rather it happens immediately.

The body, obviously, remains – but not forever.

Thanks to the Internet and graphic television programs and films we know what happens to a human body after a person dies. It immediately begins a process of deterioration. The blood coagulates, and the tissue begins to break down. In time the soft tissue disintegrates, and over a longer period of time so do the bones. It truly is “*ashes to ashes*” and “*dust to dust*” (Genesis 3:19).

This is not a foreign concept in Scripture. Various descriptions are found about the human body after death. There are, however, few testimonies as clear on this matter as that given by Job from the Old Testament. He said, *“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God”* (Job 19:25–26).

Job knew what happens in death. Yet, for God who creates life, it is no big deal for Him to reassemble the body when the time comes. Whether someone is buried in a coffin and sealed in a tomb, or cremated with his or her ashes spread over the ocean, it makes no difference. Our faith compels us to echo the words of Job – knowing the day will come when human bodies destroyed long ago by the passage of time will be reconstituted. Those bodies will join with the souls and remain together forever in heaven.

Some people have been prompted to wonder what the resurrected body will look like. Will the mind be at its sharpest and the body at its most fit? Will the person be young or old? Scripture does not tell us the answers to these questions. However, we do know that in heaven we are recognizable.

Prior to Jesus’ execution, there is the familiar account in Scripture of His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-4). You might recall in this account the disciples who were with Jesus recognized Moses and Elijah as they stood on the mountain with their Savior. Moses and Elijah lived hundreds of years before the disciples. Yet, the disciples recognized them.

In heaven, your loved ones are known by those already there. When you get to heaven you will be known by others, and you will know them. Although we don’t know how this can be, we know it is *how* it will be.

# What is Heaven Like?

*“They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

*Revelation 7:15-17*

So what is it like for our loved ones in heaven now? We know what happened with their body, yet we also know a bodily resurrection will occur on the Day of Judgment. But their soul is in heaven, and we want to know what it is like.

Revelation 7 gives us some insight into life in heaven:

*“They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple”* (v. 15).

This passage prompted a young confirmation class student to say, “That doesn’t sound like much fun to me!”

Admittedly, worship and service for eternity may not sound like much fun, based on our earthly standards.

The best way to imagine this would be to think of the one time when a Scripture reading or sermon spoke directly to you. Think of the time when it captured your attention, and you hung on every word. Think of the time when you sang that one spiritual hymn, and it really impacted you. And think of the time you felt good about helping out on a project.

Now, combine all of those times and perfect them: that is what it will be like in heaven. There will never be a dull sermon. You will always like a hymn. You will find the greatest pleasure in serving. That is heaven!

*He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them* (v. 15).

No, this is not camping! This is the visual language God uses to help us understand things that are otherwise difficult to understand. In heaven we are in God’s house. We are with Him forever, and it is there, under His roof, He will take care of us.

*Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst* (v. 16).

Remember all of those times your loved one prayed in the

Lord's Prayer for "daily bread"? Well, in heaven God does that around the clock. No one goes hungry or thirsty.

*The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat* (v. 16).

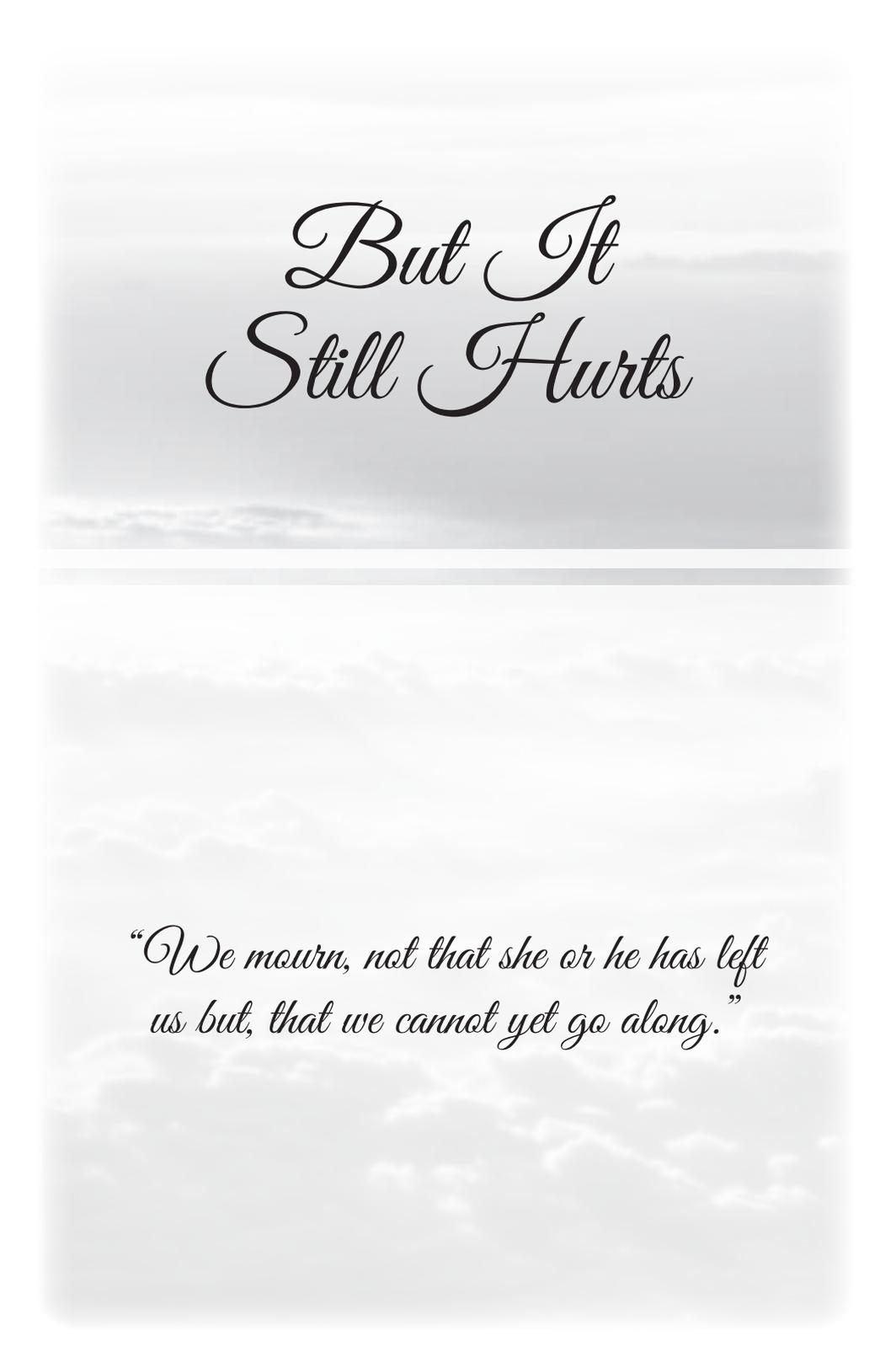
I suppose if the Apostle John lived in a cold climate and knew brutal winters he would have been inspired to also write that there would be no frigid cold or frostbite. The point, however, is very clear – there is no danger from a hostile climate. We are fully cared for.

*For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water* (v. 17).

The analogy of God as a shepherd is used often in Scripture, and it is perfect. The late author, Phillip Keller, wrote a wonderful book entitled *A Shepherd Looks at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm*. In it he described the incredibly devoted nature of a shepherd and tied it to the description of our Heavenly Shepherd in the words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. In heaven we are cared for as a shepherd cares for his sheep. It is loving, persistent and endless.

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes* (v. 17).

This is more than just wiping tears away. In heaven God wipes away everything that is wrong, harmful and painful. God removes all that would cause tears.



*But It  
Still Hurts*

*“We mourn, not that she or he has left  
us but, that we cannot yet go along.”*

Heaven is beautiful and wonderful. Yet, as we think of our loved ones who have died and live in heaven, our hearts ache. Sometimes the advice is well-intentioned but off-base. Coping with the loss of a close friend or family member is not just something a person can easily overcome. In reality we continue to feel the pain, but we learn ways to cope.

A valuable coping method is to remember what Christian living is supposed to be. Jesus instructed us to love one another. We are to think more of others than ourselves. We are to care for the sick and troubled, because we know what God did for us in Christ.

It is our first impulse when someone dies to measure what we lose. The Word of God, however, challenges us to think differently. Rather than focusing on all that we have lost after the death of a loved one, consider what they have gained through Christ.

Consider this challenge: your dearest departed loved one remains constantly on your mind. Perhaps you fall asleep with tears remembering what he or she meant to you and try to make sense of your life with the huge void. Now imagine God giving you a choice. He reveals to you where your loved one is right now. He makes evident the beauty and peace that is in heaven. Knowing what is revealed about heaven, and knowing our faith compels us to think more of others than we do of ourselves, would you beckon that loved one back from heaven to be with you? Would we steal away those who live eternally in heaven to bring them back to this “vale of tears”? It is common for people to say that children should bury their parents but parents shouldn't have to bury their children. In this world of sin sometimes parents do bury their children. Martin Luther had to bury his 14-year-old daughter. He understood the pain

of an aching heart and yet the certain optimism of faith. As Magdalena's days on earth neared their end, Luther said, "I'd like to keep my dear daughter because I love her very much, if only our Lord God would let me. However, his will be done! Truly nothing better can happen to her, nothing better."<sup>1</sup>

It is the paradox of an aching heart and the certainty of heaven that compels our optimism in the saddest of times. Paraphrasing Luther I often say, "We mourn, not that she or he has left us but, that we cannot yet go along."

Heaven is for real, and it is the place where those are who have died in faith now reside. They have not left us but have gone ahead of us. There will be a reunion. We will see them again. We will be with them forever. This is the peace which surpasses all mortal understanding. This is the peace we ultimately have by faith in Jesus as our Savior. Heaven is for real, our loved ones are with our Lord, and we will be with them. Therein lies great comfort.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, vol. 54, Luther's Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 432.





## *Meet the Author:*

### **REV. ROBERT R. FLEISCHMANN**

The Reverend Robert Fleischmann currently serves as the National Director of Christian Life Resources, Incorporated. The organization's primary mission is to educate on life and family issues. Its ministry consists of 17 pregnancy resource centers and one maternity home.

The organization also helps people to understand and make Scripturally-guided decisions in medical matters, particularly as they apply to beginning- and end-of-life concerns. The Bible is central in this ministry which seeks to save lives both for now and eternity through education on such critical issues as abortion, infanticide, suicide and euthanasia. Christian Life Resources, Inc., is one of the largest single-denominational pro-life agencies in the United States. Though its theological position reflects that of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), the agency serves people of all faiths.

Robert Fleischmann was born in Pleasanton, California in 1956. He was raised in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin where he attended public grade schools and high school. He considers First Ev. Lutheran Church in Lake Geneva his home congregation and was confirmed from there in 1970.

He became involved with life issues in 1976 while a student at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. He later graduated from Bethany in 1979. That year he began working with Wisconsin Citizens Concerned for Life (the precursor to Wisconsin Right to Life) where he served as the volunteer co-editor of the organization's state newsletter. He also helped form the Wisconsin state affiliate of Lutherans for Life.

During his seminary years, he began working in the area of life issues within the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). He attended the May 1983 formation of what is today Christian Life Resources and was one of the original signers of the organization's constitution.

Pastor Fleischmann marked his entrance into the pastoral ministry in 1983 upon his graduation from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin. He was called to serve as the pastor of Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church in Plymouth, Wisconsin. In 1988 Pastor Fleischmann was called to serve as the first National Director of Christian Life Resources, a position he holds to this day.

Pastor Fleischmann's responsibilities include administering all programs and staff for Christian Life Resources, Inc. In 1993 he founded *New Beginnings - A Home for Mothers* which operated in Denver, Colorado, for nearly 21 years. In the summer of 2014 that ministry relocated to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where it continues to care for single mothers and babies.

Pastor Fleischmann speaks throughout North America on the Biblical approach to various life and family issues. He writes on a wide variety of life issues and counsels people with God's Word in making medical decisions.

He is a member of the ministerial staff at St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church in Slinger, Wisconsin. He is an Adjunct Professor of Philosophy in the Bioethics Department at Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin. He is presently serving an advisory role on a forthcoming PBS television documentary on palliative care entitled, "Best Care Possible," based on Dr. Ira Byock's book by the same title.

Pastor Fleischmann and his family live in Hartford, Wisconsin, and his parents live next door.



Suggested donation \$3.00



**CHRISTIAN LIFE RESOURCES**

Box 56 • Richfield, WI 53076

(414) 376-0594

[info@christianliferesources.com](mailto:info@christianliferesources.com)

[www.christianliferesources.com](http://www.christianliferesources.com)