

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Life After Death*

Have you ever heard someone at a funeral say, "Death is so final"? It can be so depressing and morbid to think it's over when a person's heart stops pumping, the brain action ceases and the respiratory system shuts down. Of course, life is over on earth, but the soul lives forever. This Pathway series will explain from the Bible what happens to us after this life, and how we can be confidently prepared.

DAY ONE — Life After Death

Hiding It in My Heart: Hebrews 9:27 is an important Bible verse to understand. Memorize it today.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

Prayer: Thank the Lord that life doesn't end with death. Then ask Him to help you this week to understand more about life after death through this Pathway series.

Today's Verse: *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23).*

The Reality of Death

"I am really confused," admitted Susan. "I always thought I understood life and death, but now I'm really mixed up."

"What's the problem?" asked Jamie.

"Well, I've always believed that everyone lives, and then dies. There was never any doubt about that, until now. One of my friends has been reading all those 'New Age' books, and Shirley MacLaine says death is an unreality. I can't understand what she means."

Bill is very depressed. His father just died last month. Bill is having trouble understanding the concept of life after death. Before, he never really thought much about it. But now, someone Bill loved has died, and he's having trouble sorting out his fears and concerns about what happens after death.

Gary is living for all the pleasures this life has to offer. He's involved in premarital sex. He's partying and drinking all the time. He lives for the moment. When confronted about his lifestyle, he says all that matters is having a good time. Once you die, it all ends! So, you might as well get all you can now.

Your understanding of life and death determines how you are going to live and what values you hold in life. Suppose there is no heaven, no hell; all that matters is what this life has to offer. ***In the space below, list five things that would be most important to you if there were no life after death.***

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Does that list reflect the lifestyle of some people you know? They may be making those choices because they have a false understanding of life after death.

A Look in the Book: The Bible has a lot to say about life after death. The reality of death is sure. God's Word clearly teaches that all must die. **Read Genesis 2:16-17.** *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."*

What were the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit?

Grab your Bible and read Genesis 3:1-24. Summarize what happened.

From that time on, every man and woman would die. Death is a result of sin. Because all are sinners, all are born spiritually dead (out of fellowship with God). Not only so, they die physically as well. In Genesis 3:19 we find: *In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.* Clearly this is a reference to physical death.

How many times do people die physically? Shirley MacLaine would like you to believe your soul is reborn in a new body over and over again. But it is very clear in Hebrews 9:27 that this is not true. *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*

Rewrite this verse in your own words. _____

Although Christians don't need to fear death, it is important to understand and take seriously what follows after death. ***If we have to answer to God some day, what things do you think should be important to us? List five of these below.***

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Are these your priorities? As you study life after death this week, think about what is really important to you.



DAY TWO — Life After Death

Prayer: Ask the Lord to help you understand this difficult subject about life after death. Thank Him for His Word that teaches you the way to heaven.

Today's Verse: *Enter ye in at the straight gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).*

Two Destinations

Imagine you're on vacation in Los Angeles. The brochure you hold in your hands provides a list of things to do. There's Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, Universal Studios, the Los Angeles Zoo, Dodger or Angel baseball, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, ocean beaches ... the list goes on and on. You find it extremely difficult to choose just one of these activities for the day. "It sure would be a lot easier if there were only a couple of choices," you admit.

Much of life involves making choices. Each day you must choose what to wear, what to eat, where to go, how to act and what to say. Life is full of choices!

If you were to take a survey to find out what people think about death, you would get many answers. Some people think death is the end of all existence. Some believe there is life after death, but don't know any details. Some believe in various stages of suffering and comfort, depending upon how good they were in their first life. Some even believe life after death consists of hard work, trying to earn your way out of "hell" and into "heaven."

Life after death could be any of these, so take your pick. Right? Wrong! Life after death is not a guessing game. It is not even a long list of choices or options. The Bible is very clear about where people go after death. There are only two destinations - heaven or hell. Your decision in this life determines where you will spend eternity. That limits the choices, doesn't it?

A Look in the Book: *Read Luke 16:19-27. There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And 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." But Abraham said, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou*

art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Then he said, "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house."

Jesus used this story to convey the importance of a proper response to God. **How many destinations are referred to in this passage?**

Describe each. _____

Don't get lost in the details of this passage. Notice some important truths. There are only two destinations after death: a place of torment and a place of glory. Everyone who dies goes to one place or the other.

Trying to imagine life after death can be very confusing. Yet, the Bible tells us we can be sure there is an existence beyond the grave. Every person who has ever lived will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Refusing to believe in heaven or hell doesn't change the truth. It doesn't matter what people want to believe. Many may not like it, but the Bible tells us that hell is for real.

The purpose of the biblical teaching on hell is not primarily to scare you, but to warn you. Yet, if you are without Christ, you have every reason to be frightened. If you have accepted Christ as Savior, then your future is exciting!

You will hear many false teachings. But the message of the Bible is that all must die once, and then the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). After death there are two destinations, and they are permanent dwelling places. There will be no working your way from one to the other. The biblical picture is clear and should be taken seriously.



DAY THREE — Life After Death

Prayer: Thank God for saving you from eternal punishment in hell. Ask Him to give you an opportunity this week to share the way of salvation with someone who is lost in sin.

Today's Verse: *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36).*

A Literal Hell

The fire was burning out of control. Flames were consuming the house. The power in the blaze was incredible. Window panes were blowing out of the upstairs windows. Glass was shattering everywhere. Suddenly, to everyone's horror, a voice cried from the upstairs window. It sounded like a woman's voice calling for help. Within seconds, two firemen were up the ladder. Risking their own lives, they rushed into the burning house. In a few minutes, they were out again, carrying a young woman. They carefully carried her down the ladder and laid her on the front lawn away from danger. She was badly burned and in intense pain.

Fire holds a strange fascination for most people. Although they enjoy a fireplace in their home, a fire raging out of control strikes fear in its observers. Burns are among the most painful of injuries. The healing process is long, and often filled with infection and complications.

The Bible speaks of hell as an awesome picture of torment and suffering! People tend to avoid speaking of hell because it isn't a pleasant subject. Yet, Jesus spoke of hell many times during His life on earth.

A Look in the Book: *Read Mark 9:42-48.*

The word for hell is the Greek word "gehenna." It refers to a place called Gehenna where human sacrifices were offered. It was also a dump where there was a continuous burning of rubbish. The Jewish people of the day fully understood Jesus' teaching on hell. It was a place of constant torment in judgment of the wicked.

In your own words, explain Jesus' message in Mark 9:43-48.

Jesus is making it very clear that man's existence goes on after death. Anything in this life that keeps a person from coming to God should be taken out of the way. It would be much better to suffer now and come to God than to have a great time and burn for eternity.

What are the requirements for entering hell? Can you list them?

Read Revelation 20:11-15.

All those whose names were not found written in the Book of Life were condemned to hell forever. What do you have to do to get into hell? Nothing. Because of sin, every person deserves hell. How can you have your name written in the Book of Life? By taking the way of escape a merciful God has provided. Find it in John 3:16. *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Also, read 2 Peter 3:9. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

Describe God's plan for saving hell-bound people.

Knowing the horror of hell makes the message of John 3:16 very precious, doesn't it? Receiving God's Son as your personal Savior is receiving life. But those who choose to ignore Christ and His salvation choose a terrifying fate.

DAY FOUR — Life After Death

Prayer: Ask God to give you a real desire to serve Him. Pray that God will enable you to spend your life doing the things that really matter for eternity.

Today's Verse: *In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:2-3).*

Here Today, There Tomorrow

Have you ever wondered about your own death? For most people, it's a ghastly thought. But if you are a Christian, what's there to fear? Sure, you have some questions. How long does it take? When do you actually leave your body? What is heaven really like?

God has not left us completely in the dark. He has revealed enough about life after death to bring us comfort and encouragement.

A Look in the Book: The Bible gives believers comfort and hope beyond the grave. **Read *Philippians 1:21-26*.** *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.*

Paul was torn between wanting to die and be with Christ, and wanting to live and minister to the church at Philippi. Verse 21 is the key. To live is to serve Christ, to die is to be face-to-face with Him. Heaven was not some place Paul hoped to be someday. It was a home where he knew he was going, and he longed to be there.

There is no "waiting room" for heaven. When a believer dies, he or she goes directly into the presence of God. Paul's choice was between two places, earth or heaven. Isn't it wonderful to realize that tomorrow you could wake up with the Lord in your forever home? The future is full of hope for Christians. Even death holds no threat to those in Christ.

Read *2 Corinthians 5:6-8*. *Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

What is true of believers when they are alive in their earthly bodies.

From both of the previous passages in *Philippians* and *2 Corinthians*, what was Paul's chief desire?

What are your desires today? What is most important to you? Write the five most important things in your life today. (Be honest!)

Now put a check by those things in your list that would really matter if you were to die today. If most Christians were honest, they wouldn't have many check marks on that list. Paul had a great longing and desire to finish his work for God, and then go home to heaven to be with his Savior.

For Paul, death was a homecoming celebration. He couldn't wait to see Jesus. Isn't that a great way to face death? Instead of fearing it, Christians can look forward to the day when their work is done, and God calls them home to heaven. If you are reading this, you are absent from God and at home on this earth. But remember, you could find yourself in heaven in the presence of God tomorrow, or even yet today. What a great thought! Here today, and there tomorrow!

DAY FIVE — Life After Death

Hiding It in My Heart: Paul said it best in 1 Corinthians 15:57:

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Commit this verse to memory today. Thank God for the victory believers have in Christ (not just victory in this life, but in the life to come as well). Christians have eternal victory over sin and death.

Prayer: Offer your body as a living sacrifice to God. Ask Him to help you use your energy to bring Him glory until He calls you home.

Today's Verse: *And as we have borne the image of the earthly [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [Christ] (1 Corinthians 15:49).*

Heavenly Bodies

People everywhere today are concerned with their physical appearance. They diet and work out all the time. Health clubs and gyms are springing up everywhere. TV commercials and magazine ads promise a new body if you just buy their products.

Most young people would change something about their physical traits if they could. Some would like to be taller. Some would like to be shorter. Some would like blue eyes, and some would like black hair. Some would even like more hair. **Describe below what you think would be the ideal for each of these categories:**

Height _____ Weight _____ Hair color _____ Eye color _____

Physical (athletic) abilities _____

Now, describe your picture of the ideal teen (athletic, intellectual, sense of humor, musical, etc ...).

Chances are, you fall short of your description of the ideal person. But here's good news! Eventually, every believer will have a heavenly body. It will be a body that will last forever. It will not be too thin or too fat. It will never get sick or grow old. Bible scholars call it a glorified body.

A Look in the Book: Many of you would like your glorified body right now. Maybe you suffer from some physical disorder or handicap. Maybe you are just dissatisfied with the way you look. The psalmist says we are *fearfully and wonderfully made*. But sin has taken its toll on the human body.

When will you get your new body? Paul answers that in 1 Corinthians 15:35-50. Just as a seed will not produce another plant until it dies, so this flesh-and-blood body must die before you can put on the glorified body. In verse 51, Paul states that the exception to this will be those who are living at the time when Jesus comes (often referred to as the Rapture). **Read verses 51-53.**

At the Rapture, what will happen to believers who are still alive? To the bodies of believers who have died?

Paul concludes this section in verses 54-57. *So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

For believers, the victory is forever. Death has lost the battle. Once you receive your eternal body, death can no longer touch it.

What can your glorified body do? **Read Luke 24:36-43.**

This passage describes Jesus in His resurrected (glorified) body. What did He do?

Now read John 20:19-20, 24-29, which also describes Jesus' glorified body.

But for most of the details, you will have to wait until you are with Jesus. You will be like Him and see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

At the moment of death, you will be with the Lord. At the Rapture of the Church (when Christ comes to take all believers home to be with Him in heaven), you will receive a glorified body which never dies. What you have in between that time is a mystery. It really doesn't matter, though, does it? Rest assured that God has it all planned out, and that His plan is perfect.

Whether you like your physical body now, or would like a different one, be encouraged! God has a new, heavenly body waiting for you. Until that day, take care of your body, and use it to serve the Lord.



DAY SIX — Life After Death

Prayer: Praise the Lord for His goodness and mercy to you. Thank Him for preparing your eternal dwelling place. Take time to tell Him how great He is.

Today's Verse: *And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as His work shall be (Revelation 22:12).*

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Picture in your mind the most beautiful place you have ever been. Perhaps it was in the mountains where you saw a beautiful lake reflecting the snowcapped hills, peaceful and quiet like the first day it was created. Perhaps it was at the ocean, as you watched the steady roll of the waves against the rocks. It could even have been somewhere indoors where you observed beauty beyond your ability to describe.

Our world is filled with wondrous things created by God. The most talented artists in the world are fortunate if they can capture on canvas a fraction of the beauty of the Lord's creation. God is a God of beauty and majesty, and these attributes are reflected in His works.

Describe the most breathtakingly, beautiful scene you have ever seen.

All the beauty in this world will seem dull in comparison to the beauty of the new heaven and the new earth yet to come. **Take time right now to list everything you know about heaven. What will it be like? What will it look like?**

A Look in the Book: In John 14:1-6, we find one example Jesus gave us of heaven when He was on this earth. *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.”* Thomas saith unto him, *“Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?”* Jesus saith unto him, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”*

What did He tell His disciples He would do while He was away?

Verse two of John 14 has often been misunderstood. The original means “dwelling places,” and not mansions. God is preparing for you an eternal dwelling place like nothing you can imagine. It will be for His glory, though, and not yours.

There are many questions the Bible does not answer. What age will people be in heaven? What will they look like? What will everyone do for all eternity? (We can be sure that our eternal life with God will revolve around worshipping the One who made our salvation possible.)

These questions and others will be answered when you get there, and not before. For now, it's exciting just to imagine the description given to us in Revelation.

On My Own: Take a tape recorder or a pen and notebook and ask several people who know the Bible well what the Bible says heaven will be like. Record what they say.

Begin to imagine the wonder and beauty of what lies ahead. Remember, as a sinner, what you deserve is hell. Because of Christ, however, what you will receive as a believer is an eternal home more beautiful than words can describe.