



GRIEF EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION COURSE

WEEK 9:

The Hope of Heaven



Notes from the Grief Educator Certification Course taught by Dr. David Page through The School of Grief.

A white cursive signature that reads 'Dr. David Page'.

WEEK 9: THE HOPE OF HEAVEN

“We may speak about a place where there are no tears, no death, no fear, no night; but those are just the benefits of heaven. The beauty of heaven is seeing God.”

~ Max Lucado

Most Americans Believe in an Afterlife

A recent study found nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults say they believe in heaven. Two-thirds of U.S. adults believe that deceased people are reunited with loved ones in heaven. And yet there are many people who do not believe in an afterlife. Some believe in oblivion after death, while others believe an individual is reborn into this world and begins the life cycle over again, likely with no memory of what they have done in the past.

Why is a Belief in the Afterlife Significant When Dealing with Grief?

A belief in the afterlife is significant in dealing with grief because it provides a sense of meaning and comfort by reassuring us that death is not the end. It affirms the promise that we will be reunited with our loved ones in an eternal space, which can alleviate feelings of loss and separation, potentially easing the pain of bereavement; essentially, it helps people make sense of the loss and cope with the reality of death by offering hope for a future connection with the deceased.

Heaven is a Wonderful Place

Heaven is a wonderful place. Jesus said, “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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3 NKJV).

The Seventh Need of Grievors

The seventh and final need of grievors is the need for an afterlife and being reunited with our loved ones. Heaven is the ultimate hope for every believer, to “dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6). In our grief, we need to hold onto the hope of heaven.

A Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3 says believers have a “living hope.” The Greek word for “hope” means “an eager, confident expectation.” Unlike the empty, dead hope of this world, this “living hope” is energizing, alive, and active in the soul of the believer. We live with great expectation. Our living hope originates from a living, resurrected Savior. Peter’s living hope is Jesus Christ.

Grieving with Hope

All of us will grieve at some point in life, but Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that believers should grieve slightly differently than the world, because we have this living hope. There is a joy that can be found even in the midst of great sorrow – knowing that if we know Christ, this separation is only temporary. We will be reunited, and therefore, as believers we don’t grieve as the world grieves. Instead, we grieve as those who have something real to look forward to.

Both 1 Peter 1:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13 speak about the hope of Christians in the resurrection of Jesus, but they focus on different aspects: 1 Peter 1:3 highlights the living hope that believers have in Christ, which is anchored in the promise of eternal inheritance in heaven, while 1 Thessalonians 4:13 emphasizes the comfort and reassurance of this hope for believers who have lost loved ones.

The Blessed Hope

In the Bible, "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) refers to the anticipation of being taken to heaven at the second coming of Jesus Christ, essentially signifying the future inheritance and eternal life believers will experience in heaven, making it the core of their hope for the future; it is considered a "blessed" hope because it signifies a complete and joyful reunion with God in a perfect place.

A Glimpse of Heaven

Jackie loved animals and always wanted a hamster as a pet. My wife and I are not fans of the rodent, especially living in our home. But Jackie was going to die soon, so I said, "What the heck?" Sometimes, that's just what you need to say.

Carrie assigned me the task of going to the pet store with Jackie to let her pick out a hamster. It turned out to be the greatest job I ever had. I don't think I've ever seen Jackie more excited. We drove to a large pet store in Roseville, and she carefully examined all the hamsters, picking up most of them. She finally chose one baby brown and white dwarf hamster. It was a girl. She named her Emily.

Jackie held Emily on our drive home from the pet store. It was a sunny day. The sunroof on my Volvo was open and the sun was shining down on us.

Out of the blue, Jackie turned and looked at me quizzically. "Daddy, when I get to heaven, will I see Jesus right away?" she asked.

"Yes, you will, sweetie," I replied. I assured her that she would indeed see Jesus immediately.

She smiled. A few seconds later, she asked, "When I get to heaven, will I get to see Grandpa?"

Her grandpa, my dad, had passed away a year earlier. She really loved him, and it was the first time Jackie ever lost someone she loved.

I assured her that she would get to see Grandpa in heaven and be reunited with him.

Then, she paused for a moment, turned and looked at me while holding Emily in her right hand, and asked, "Daddy, can I take Emily with me to heaven?"

The first two questions were easy. This one was a bit more difficult to answer. I thought for a moment. I knew the correct theological answer, but I responded, "Yes, Jackie, you can take Emily with you to heaven; we can arrange that." She grinned from ear to ear.

I thought to myself, What's going on here? So, I looked over at her and asked, "Sweetie, you don't really think you're going to die, do you?"

She looked at me, smiled, and said, "Silly daddy, we are all going to die someday."

Wow. Her answer took my breath away. God was giving Jackie a glimpse of heaven. She had a spiritual sixth sense that she was going to be arriving in heaven soon. She would be leaving our home, which she dearly loved, to go to her ultimate eternal home in heaven, and she was okay with that.

I will never forget that conversation as long as I live. Over the years, I have reflected on this brief conversation more than any conversation I have ever had with anyone. Her response still fascinates me and brings me great comfort.

Looking back, I believe God was preparing my baby girl for what she was about to face by giving her some glimpses of what heaven would be like. As her transition day approached when she would pass from this life to the next, instead of being afraid, Jackie was ready to go to heaven, meet Jesus, and be reunited with her grandpa.

For only being five years old, Jackie had a deep curiosity about heaven. She asked Carrie if angels were going to accompany her to heaven. "Absolutely," Carrie said. Again, God was preparing Jackie for her journey to eternity.

God Put Eternity into Every Human Heart

Have you ever felt like there is something else after death? C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."

The band, Switchfoot, echoed this thought in a song called Meant to Live: "We want more than this world's got to offer We want more than the wars of our fathers And everything inside screams for second life We were meant to live for so much more."

The wise King Solomon wrote that God has "set eternity in the human heart" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). And with this awareness of eternity comes a hope that we can one day find a fulfillment that is not afforded by the vanities in this world.

"In the human heart" is talking about our mind, soul, and spirit. I believe we are spiritual beings, first and foremost, that live in physical bodies.

Our spirit is eternal while our bodies on this earth are temporal. Yet we will receive new bodies in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1-5). Solomon says God places eternity into our heart and soul.

The word "eternity" is the Hebrew word *olam*, referring to an eternal longing within the human heart. I believe this longing is twofold. It's a longing to know God and it's a longing to spend eternity with God in heaven.

A Longing to Know God

This longing to know God is expressed by St. Augustine in his Confessions, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” Animals don’t have a longing to know God or for heaven. Humans possess an innate knowledge that there is something more to life than what we can see and experience in the here and now.

Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1-2). Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Jesus knows how burdened we can get in this life and offers an open invitation to anyone who is laboring under a heavy toll and seeks rest for their soul. Who better to carry our load of grief than Jesus? He can carry what you are not able to carry.

In Revelation 7 we have a bit of insight into Heaven: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on 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 7:16-17 NIV).

Someday we will never hunger or thirst again, physically or spiritually. Deep inside every man there is a thirst for God. John tells us that God will lead them to springs of living water. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the water he gives will be a gushing fountain of endless life, and that those who drink it will never thirst again. The woman asks Jesus to give her the water, so she wouldn’t have to return to the well.

Over the Rainbow - A Longing for Heaven

Our longing for heaven is exemplified in a song, voted the song of the century, none other than Over the Rainbow, which was sung by Judy Garland in the movie The Wizard of Oz. The lyrics were written by Yip Harburg, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants. His real name is Isidore Hochberg. What you may not know is that the first verse of the original tune was omitted from the movie. The popular version starts with the chorus. Songs don’t normally start with the chorus, but this one does. Here are the lyrics to the original song that you’ve probably never heard before:

Over the Rainbow (Original Version)

“When all the world is a hopeless jumble,
And the raindrops tumble, all around,
Heaven opens a magic lane.
When all the clouds darken up the sky way,
There’s a rainbow highway to be found.
Leading from your windowpane to a place behind the sun,
Just a step beyond the rain.

Then the song goes into the chorus:

“Somewhere over the rainbow, Way up high
There’s a land that I heard of Once in a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow, Skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true.”

The song is about hope. It’s called Over the Rainbow. God created rainbows as a sign of hope. This song speaks of a yearning for another place, a better place; but there is a sadness in the realization that this place isn’t situated on earth. Somewhere over the rainbow is a great description of heaven, a place where our dreams really do come true.

Heaven is Our Home

I always wanted to get a dog—a big dog! But there were always problems. Either our home was too small, or the kids were too young. The main problem, however, was the lack of enthusiasm on the part of my wife because from her perspective, she had one slobbering shedding beast, and she didn’t need another one.

Now, I realize what I’m about to say is going to offend some of you but here goes: Small dogs are not real dogs. Small dogs don’t bark; they yelp. They don’t eat; they nibble. They don’t lick you; they just sniff you. I wanted a real dog, a man’s best friend kind of dog.

And then came Ari. Ari is a pure breed Siberian Husky, black and white with blue eyes. Ari was a gorgeous dog we got from a family in Santa Clarita. My daughter, Jessica, picked her out of the litter. So, we gave her a name and cleared out a place in our house where she would live. Before Ari was born, she had been claimed and named and a place had been prepared for her.

Sound familiar? Before you were born, you were named by God; you had been claimed by God, and a place had been prepared for you. And while you’re here, another place is being prepared for you. That’s what the breeder did with Ari. We had to wait six weeks before we could take possession of Ari because the breeder wanted to wean her and train her a little bit.

God is weaning us from earthly affections and is training us for our new home. He has prepared a place for us. At some point, we’ll do what Ari did. Ari traveled from her home in Santa Clarita ultimately to our home. We, too, will go to from this earth to our home in heaven. We don’t know our departure date and we don’t know our flight number, but you can bet your puppy chow that it won’t be long until you see your master’s face!

This is the promise Paul gave us in Philippians 3:20-21: “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”

Paul says our true citizenship is in heaven. One translation says, “Our homeland is in heaven.” There truly is no place like home when heaven is your home. Every believer has a divinely implanted awareness that our souls live forever. This world is not our home; we are only passing through this life on earth.

Songwriter Bob Sobo wrote, “My trust is not in earthly things to satisfy my soul; my hope is set in Christ my king and heaven is my home.” (Song: *Heaven is My Home*).

Jesus Overcomes Death Through His Resurrection

Jesus promised, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). The Bible links sin with death. It says, “The sting of death is sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56) and “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Death stalks the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. Death is no respecter of persons. Its shadow haunts us day and night. We never know when the moment of death will come for us.

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the answer to the great question of the ages originally posed by Job: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). The Bible teaches that because Christ lives, we also shall live. The greatest truth we will ever hear is that Jesus Christ died and rose again, and that you, too, will die but can rise again into newness of life.

The only hope we have for dealing with death is the resurrection of Jesus and it’s the only hope we need. The Bible teaches the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a spiritual resurrection, as some would have us believe. Jesus’ physical body was raised by God from the dead, and someday, we will see him.

Since Jesus died and rose again, death cannot separate us from the love of God. Paul said, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life ... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38- 39).

When Jesus died, death was destroyed. Satan, the one who holds the power of death, will someday also be destroyed. Death and sin no longer have mastery. This is why Paul says, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The death of Christ means victory for those who believe in Him. Eternal life and immortality come to all those who believe in him.

The Reality of Heaven

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). The moment we take our last breath on earth, we take our first in heaven. Heaven is a wonderful place but there are several misconceptions about what heaven is like. You won’t become an angel, and neither will your lost loved one. You won’t have wings. You’re not going to be a little chubby cherub, wearing a white robe and floating on clouds.

Below are Four Realities about Heaven:

1). Heaven is where God lives.

The Bible calls heaven “the dwelling place of God.” Billy Graham said, “The most thrilling thing about heaven is that Jesus Christ will be there. I will see Him face to face. Jesus Christ will meet us at the end of life’s journey.”

2). Heaven is where God rules.

Jesus calls heaven “the Kingdom of God,” so heaven isn’t just where God lives; it’s also where he rules. The Psalmist wrote, “Lord, I look up to you, up to heaven, where you rule” (Psalm 123:1 GNT).

3). Heaven is a literal place.

Heaven isn’t a state of mind or a state of being. The Scripture says there will be streets, trees, water, and homes in heaven. Some Scripture passages allude to the fact that animals are there. You’ll have your physical body, renewed through your resurrection. And there will be a real place for your real body to live. Jesus said, “There are many rooms in my Father’s house. I wouldn’t tell you this unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you” (John 14:2 CEV).

4). Heaven is designed for his followers.

God didn’t design heaven for Himself. Jesus said, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you” (Matthew 25:34). Heaven is a place God designed for His family, and heaven is an expression of His love. People aren’t meant to live on earth forever. You and I were made for heaven!

Hebrews 13:14 says, “For this world is not our home; we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven” (Hebrews 13:14 TLB). The Apostle Paul wrote, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9 NLT).

Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

The absence of our loved one has allowed us to tap into a new depth of love, one we didn’t know even existed until their loss. I believe yearning, an intense longing for what we lost, is the most dominant feeling after a loss, more than the typical emotions associated with grief.

This absence is a depth of love we couldn’t access while they were still alive. It’s a love built on the void they left in the world when they passed. In the gap between what I couldn’t ever imagine, and my present reality lies a type of love I met for the first time in my grief. It’s a void I couldn’t have imagined before she passed.

When Jackie died, her absence became its own presence. It represented all that is gone, all that I loved, and all that I missed. I hate the reality it represents but I also love the reality it represents: that my love for her is so great that she is still here, even though she is no longer physically here. I grab hold of her absence and cling to it as tightly as possible. I visit our memories, knowing they hold both the deepest joy and deepest pain.

With Jackie's absence, I learned something I couldn't know while she was still living. I learned just how deeply I was capable of missing her. I learned how much pain her void in my life caused me. And I learned how willing I am to lean into that pain to keep her close. I still feel connected with her, still talk to her, and in my prayers, I ask God to give her a hug for me.

I marvel at the depth of my love because of her loss. But deep down in my soul, I want to see her again and have the pain cease.

Reunited with Our Loved Ones

The hope of heaven and being reunited with my daughter is a thrilling certainty that will completely satisfy the yearning I have in my heart to see her again. The hope of being reunited with our loved ones brings tremendous comfort to those of us on earth who have lost a loved one.

King David lost his newborn son to illness but said with confidence: "He will not return to me but (one day) I will go to him" (2 Samuel 12:23). Jackie will not come back here to earth, but I am confident I will one day go and be reunited with her in heaven. We will recognize our loved ones in heaven, even though my daughter was only five years old when she passed.

Someday soon, I will be reunited with all those in my family who are already there, including my daughter. And when that happens, we will fellowship around our Father's throne, finally meeting him face-to-face. And the family of God, our brothers, and sisters in Christ, will be there. What an emotional reunion it will be! Our yearnings will be satisfied.

Poem: "Heaven" by Jessica Page

My oldest daughter, Jessica, wrote a poem about heaven and Jackie when she was 12 years old, five years after Jackie passed. The poem is simply called Heaven.

Heaven

By Jessica Page

Mommy, what's wrong with me?
My head hurts so bad.
You take me to the doctor's and tell me that I'm sick.
Why do you and Daddy look so sad?
I don't want any more radiation, Mommy.
Please get me out of this place.
I want to talk to you, but my mouth won't move.
All I can do is watch your crying face.
Mommy, I can laugh and smile again!
Guess who I can see?
Jesus is calling me towards Heaven.
You always said it is such a great place to be.

Mommy, I'm getting closer now.
I'm walking through big golden gates.
Stop crying for me Mommy cause I will see you again.
And I will be happy up here as I wait.

Leaping into the Arms of God

Jackie loved announcing to the neighborhood that Daddy was home and then jumping into my arms. She enjoyed climbing onto the kitchen counter and asking me to back up so she could take a flying leap into my arms.

At the end of her battle with cancer, she was able to stand one last time and jump into my arms. In the same way she jumped into my arms as her earthly father, I picture her jumping into her Heavenly Father's waiting arms.

My baby is now in heaven, safe in the arms of God.

The Apostle John said, "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them'" (Revelation 21:3). God is always with us. God became human in Jesus and is called our Immanuel, which means, "God with us." Jesus came to earth to heal the brokenhearted.

Our comfort comes in knowing we are not alone. God is fully present with us in our pain and loss. He wraps His arms around us and whispers in our ears, "I love you."

A New Day is Dawning

Irish poet Thomas Moore said, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

The first followers of Jesus spoke about a day in the future when God would restore everything—you, me, everything in heaven and on earth. (Acts 3:21). The resurrection of Jesus conquered our greatest enemy, death itself, and points to a day when all those in Christ will be raised again to live forever with him in heaven and be united with the people we love.

On that day, the Apostle said, "He (God) will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. Look, I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:4). God is making everything new, including you.

May you hold onto the hope of heaven and realize God is sitting Shiva with you, fully present, grieving your loss. But also restoring everything. And in that, we find hope.

THE END



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