



How Believing in Heaven Makes YOU Different

John Tanner, December, 2024

Believing in Heaven makes a big difference in how we live today!

Are you wondering why I chose this topic? Maybe you have already concluded that I think a lot more about Heaven because I am getting older! Perhaps you are right about that. But there is a better reason why I am writing these thoughts. I have learned only recently how important it is for every believer to think about Heaven regularly. What we believe about Heaven changes everything! But what I want you to understand is how it changes the way we live today. It has practical impacts on our daily lives. It influences every decision that we make. It guides us in forming relationships. It teaches us life values that will shape all of our days.

Most People Believe in a life after death

Read more about –

- **Majority of people are secretly spiritual**
- **More than half of Australians believe in life after death and Heaven**

Today, Irene and I followed a middle-aged man through the checkout at the supermarket. Irene said, "Let's just wait back here until he goes. I don't want to get any closer to him!" I looked more carefully at the graphics on the back of the man's shirt. The pictures were terrible. The words proudly proclaimed, "I am never alone – my demons are always

with me!" Then I glanced up at the man's face and I believed the message on his shirt!

People say that Australia is no longer a Christian country. Australia is now known to be a secular country, owning no particular faith. Our population now contains a significant proportion of followers of Islam and Hinduism. We are influenced more by the undeclared values of our educators, our politicians and the media than by any Church. We, as a nation, no longer live by to the teachings of Jesus or the Bible.

Despite all this, people still cling to certain beliefs drawn either from their own religion or from some past knowledge of the Bible. The man in the supermarket was one example of the deeply held beliefs of people, despite the onslaught of the teachings and values of secularism today. Think about it. Recall the last time you saw an interview with a family member of a fatal accident on the TV news. Did you notice how often people say that their loved one is watching over them? Have you seen sportspeople on TV honour a deceased loved one by pointing upward when they score points for their team? It happens often doesn't it?

People don't want to believe that death is the end of life

Deep down, people do not want to believe that death is the end of life. They want to believe that life continues on somewhere close-by. And that belief brings comfort in their loss and a purpose for them to go on living.

An Australian survey taken in 2021 called "Losing touch with God," reported that 57% of Australians believed in God, 55% believed in life after death and 50% believed in Heaven. We could ask if this is true, then why aren't we better people? Why are we experiencing so much violence? Why have our youth resorted to so many crime sprees often resulting in the loss of their own lives or the lives of others? Why is it that we have become so selfish? Why are we as a people losing trust in our political and business leaders? And why is there so little hope that things will change for the better?

Many failings evident in our society are indicators that our beliefs in a god of some kind, and a Heaven someday, are based merely on wishful thinking and not on strong convictions about the truth. If we truly believed these things our lives would be different. Do you agree?

What do we believe about Heaven and how should that belief shape our daily lives?

The Truth about Heaven

Read more about-

Is Heaven all spirits and clouds or is it a place with buildings and streets?

What is the best thing about going to Heaven?

Will I be with my believing friends and family there?

What happens to children and babies who die?

Is Heaven my home for ever?

We have all heard stories about people who have died and seen a shining light or have entered Heaven only to return to earth to tell their stories. I do not doubt that some of the stories are true and that God has a purpose in allowing them to happen. But these stories in themselves are not enough to give us a confident belief in the reality of Heaven. Nor can the scientists prove in their test tubes that a place like Heaven exists! Yet almost one-third of the world's population live with a strong belief that Heaven exists and that it will become the home of believers when they pass from this world. Where does this confident belief come from?

It comes from the Bible. The Bible begins with the history of the origins of all things that exist. It tells about the wonderful, intelligent, creative activity of the Divine Being who existed before anything else was made. "In the beginning God created – everything." (Genesis 1:1.) God who is pure Spirit lived somewhere before anything tangible existed! The final chapter of the Bible describes God's City filled with Angels, heavenly creatures and believers who have been transported from earth. The city has no night and day. There is no sin there. Nor is there any sickness or death. In this beautiful City, believing people from all the nations of the earth are gathered around "the throne of God and the Lamb." They are there to serve God and they are so close to Him that everyone can see His face. (Rev.22:3,4) They bear His Name and they share His reign for ever and ever!" Yes, the Bible teaches us much about Heaven!

Here are just a few ideas of Heaven from the Bible to refresh our memories.

Heaven is a literal place – a location.

Sometimes I need to ask the GPS in my car to tell me the way when driving in an area that is new to me. If I make an error and insert the wrong suburb after the street name, then my computer tells me "No such location exists – try again!" Well, if you are looking to go to Heaven you will never receive that message! Heaven is a place, a definite location. How do we know?

We know because Jesus said so. In John chapter 14:1-4, Jesus revealed to His disciples what was about to happen to Him and their faith wavered. To encourage their faith Jesus told them, "Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Jesus used the word "place" twice to indicate Heaven. In the Greek language, the word translated "place" means a geographical area that can be

located. Heaven is not spirits drifting along in the clouds in a kind of spirit world where nothing has substance.

In other places, the Bible refers to Heaven as a country; as a celestial city that has buildings, walls and structures; a place where nature flourishes and whose citizens have activities; and as a Kingdom where there is government and order.

Jesus said, "In my Father's house." This speaks of family, love and intimacy of knowing everything. But most of all it speaks of "home." Heaven is where all the true children of God belong. It is where they will enjoy His peace and His presence eternally. When we love Jesus we can live with the joyful anticipation of going to live in the home that He has prepared for us.

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**Read more about Heaven in
Revelation Ch 22:1-5**

Heaven is where we will meet Jesus.

Heaven would not be Heaven if Jesus was absent. Do you agree with me? From my Bible study about Heaven I can report that it is filled with many wonders! There are sights and sounds that we cannot yet comprehend as humans. There is worship like we have never experienced before. But I must be honest with you and say that all I really want to do when I get to Heaven is to see Jesus face to face and to worship Him. Yes – if I have a million years to do that it will still not be enough! Will Jesus be there or will He be off saving another race on another planet?

Hebrews 9:24 says, "For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary (the Jerusalem temple) that was only a *copy* of the true one, He entered

Heaven itself (the real temple of God), now to appear for us in God's presence." So when we enter Heaven and we stand in God's awesome presence, we will see Jesus right there beside the Father. He has been there since He returned to Heaven from earth, interceding for us continually. Do you remember reading about the scene from Revelation chapter 22? In the previous chapter (ch. 21:22 ff) John gives more detail of that scene when he says, "I did not see a temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it because the glory of God gives it light and *the Lamb is its lamp!*"

Make no mistake about it! When you get to Heaven by God's grace, you will meet Jesus, the Lamb of God. Think of the joy that will come to us when we get to Heaven and meet the One who gave His life for us so that we could spend eternity in His heavenly home!



Read Revelation 5: 8-13 Jesus is the Lamb of God! Why is He the centre of attention for all the crowd in Heaven?

Heaven will be filled with our loved ones

Jesus promised in John 14 that all those who put their trust in Him will be with Him one day in Heaven. This truth is a wonderful source of comfort to believers. When someone that we love passes from this life to Heaven we experience a sense of loss. Sometimes the separation from our loved ones is tragic. Perhaps they have been taken from us suddenly through a car crash. Or it may be that we were unable to be with them

when they “fell asleep.” Irene and I are among the many parents who have lost a baby. Death is separation in the final sense. It leaves us feeling shocked and somehow diminished because someone who was greatly valued has been taken away from us.

The good news for all believers is that the loss is only temporary! There is a glad day coming when we will be reunited with all those that we love. When we meet again in Heaven, loved ones who passed away in their old age will be perfect and strong again! All the babies and children who passed away prematurely will have grown up and been made perfect – no sickness or death there! And best of all, we will recognize each other and be reunited as families and friends!

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Who are you looking forward to meeting again in Heaven? Why are they so special to you? What have you learnt from them? What expectations did they have of you?

Heaven will be our permanent home

Do you have a passport? If you look carefully at its first page you will see all the important details that are essential for you to travel outside of your country. Your passport records true information about your name, your date of birth, your home place and when your passport expires. When I travel to another country, my passport declares that I am a citizen of Australia.

Did you know that as a believer, your permanent citizenship is not in your place of birth, but in Heaven? Paul told the believers in Philipppians 3:20, “Our *citizenship is in Heaven*, from where we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul taught the believers that their real life - their eternal existence was already based in Heaven and they

were to live as representatives of the Government of Heaven in their daily lives. More about this later.

For now, we can be confident that once we arrive home in Heaven we will be at home permanently. That means forever! Some believers worry that they might sin in Heaven and find themselves expelled from that beautiful place. No need to worry. There is no sin in Heaven, no sickness, no sadness and no death!

Heaven – living with Jesus forever!

Towards the end of the great prayer that Jesus prayed just prior to His death, Jesus expressed His concern for all those who would come to faith down through the ages. In John 17 verses 20 to 22, Jesus prayed for us. “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one... so that the world will believe that you have sent me...I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may all be one.” Then, in verse 24, Jesus prayed, “Father, I want those *you have given me to be with me where I am* and to see my glory.” Take comfort from these words. Jesus’ great desire for those of us who have put our trust in Him, is for us to be with Him in Heaven and to see His glory forever!

Some years ago, Irene and I travelled through the United States and Canada. All of our accommodation was prebooked from home. But when we arrived at our hotel in Vancouver from Alaska we received some disturbing news when we presented our documents at the front desk - a large group had booked in before us that night and they were unable to honour our reservation! Fortunately the hotel had made an arrangement with another hotel across the street to take us for one night until there was a room for us the next day.

Many thousands of people will go through life thinking that their reservation in Heaven will be honoured when they arrive at the Gate. Some people have put their faith in their own (supposed) good works and generosity; others have put their faith in Church rituals; others depend on the fact that they were born into a “Christian” family. All of

these reservations will be rejected. People will discover to their horror that they have no reservation in the Heavenly Home.

It is only faith in Jesus resulting in a personal walk with Him that secures our reservation in Heaven! Hear again the words of Jesus from John 14. *"Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* If you are reading these words and you are not sure that your reservation in Heaven is secure, then I urge you to pray right now. Confess your sins and your need of a Saviour. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as your only Lord and Saviour and yield your life to Him. Then you can know the assurance of your salvation and the certainty of your future in Heaven with Jesus.

Once we encounter Jesus and experience His salvation and His love we will live our lives differently, because we will view everything in the light of Heaven and eternity.

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Think about your own relationship with Jesus. Do you remember asking Him to save you and make you a child of God? Not every believer can tell you a day or date when they first believed. The key issue is "Do you love Jesus today?"

So far we have discovered –

- Heaven is a literal place where Jesus has prepared homes all those who believe in Him
- We will be with Jesus in Heaven forever
- All the babies and children who have died prematurely will be there all grown up
- We will recognize each other and will enjoy living with our family and believing friends
- Heaven will be our permanent home – our eternal reward

I said earlier that what we believe about Heaven will affect the way we live today. To find out how our belief in Heaven should change our lives in radical ways, read on.

Memo: To all my Fellow Citizens of Heaven on Earth Assignment

Isn't it wonderful that we have so much to look forward to in our future? It is not surprising that Paul calls this belief "our blessed hope!"

How should we live as citizens of Heaven now? For many Christians there is no apparent difference between the way they live their lives and the way their unbelieving friends live. Is this normal? Remember that Jesus prayed in John 17, "The glory that you have given to me, I have given to them (His followers)." Surely this indicates that our lives should be radically different in some ways from other people in the world.

The Apostle Peter was wrestling with this very issue when he wrote in 2 Peter 3 verse 10 ff, "But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, *what kind of people ought you to be?*"

When we are absolutely convinced about the reality of Heaven and our future role there, our lives will operate on a different level from others in the world. Because many Christians have not thought carefully enough about Heaven they try to make their earthly lives into Heaven on earth. That is foolish in the extreme! When we understand that we are heaven's citizens on our earth assignment, our lives will be different. This is not simply my assumption. It is clearly spelled out in the pages of the Bible – God's truth. Let me outline some examples of how we should live as believers today.

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How much warning will we have about Jesus coming to take believers home? How can we be “ever ready” for the great surprise that is coming? How can we warn our friends?

Read more about-

- What does it mean to live a holy life?
- In a time of financial crisis how can we live depending on God and His promises?
- What do I need to do in order to find and follow God’s purpose for my life?
- How can I avoid being tricked by those who tell me lies instead of the truth?
- What do I need to do to keep growing in my faith and relationship with Jesus?

Lives that display Purity

When we read Peter's words earlier we stopped at his question – not a good thing to do. Peter partly answered his own question in the remaining words of the verse when he wrote, "You ought to live *holy and*

*"You ought to live
holy and Godly
lives" - Peter*

Godly lives as you look forward to the Day."

In the Bible, the word "holy" is reserved for something or someone who has been set apart for God's use. For example, many of the items used in the Temple in Jerusalem were made first of all with human hands and

skills. They were just the same as common every day pots and containers used in the kitchen and the Jewish home. What was the difference between a container used in the home kitchen to contain oil for cooking and an identical container used in the Temple? Simply this, the Temple container had been taken and set apart exclusively for God's service. It could never be returned to the kitchen! In the same way, every believer is to be holy.

Peter has much to say about this requirement for all of God's people. Consider his words carefully. "Therefore prepare your minds for action: be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed... As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires that you had when you were ignorant; but just as *He who called you is holy, so be holy in all that you do.*" (1 Peter 1:13-16)

In the following chapter Peter writes about all believers collectively where he says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of He who has called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) Our family members and our friends will never know that God has moved us out of darkness into His wonderful light unless we live holy lives. Even our declaration that God has saved us will sound like empty words unless our lives are evidently different from the world!

We need to take the clay pots of our lives and surrender them to the exclusive service of God!

Paul exhorts every believer to do this in Romans 12:1,2. After declaring that we owe everything to God Paul begs us, "I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God* – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the patterns of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Contrary to popular belief, this total surrender to God is NOT optional. His perfect will for your life will remain unknown to you until your sacrifice has been offered to Jesus your Lord! Please do not wait another moment. Take all that makes up your humanity and surrender your life to Jesus. Then you can move forward into that holy and Godly life that will make a great difference in today's world.



Read Romans chapter 12:1,2. Once we were "conformed" to the world, but God wants us to be "transformed" into the likeness of Christ. The

transformation begins with a first step – presenting our whole being to God for His service. Have you done this?

Lives that Depend on God and His Promises

Do you know the Bible story about Noah in the Old Testament? God told Noah that He was fed up with the behaviour of all humanity and so He was about to send a great flood to destroy all the sinful people.

It was not all bad news. Noah was to build a large ship that could contain all the people who wished to escape God's punishment, as well as breeding pairs of every living creature on the earth. God intended to start over with people who would trust in His promises.



Noah believed what God had said. So he and his family began the huge task of building a ship far from the sea. At the same time, Noah became a part-time preacher and he often called sceptical people to believe what God had told him and join him in his mission. If you remember the story recorded in Genesis 6 God proved to be faithful to His word. When the construction work on Noah's boat was completed, Noah's family and all the animals entered the ark and the doors were closed.

Then the rains came flooding the earth and destroying the evil civilizations that had not believed Noah's warnings. Noah and His family depended on God and His promises and they survived and experienced God's blessings.

Peter implies that the same should be true for us when he writes, "But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." Do you believe that God always keeps His promises? Then you will believe that something the Bible calls "The Day of the Lord" is coming and everything will be consumed.

Nothing will remain. All of the amazing buildings that humans have erected will crumble into dust. All of the dams will break releasing giant waves of flood waters on the surrounding populations. The world's stock

markets, banking systems and all kinds of wealth will be destroyed. Natural disasters will cause everything we thought to be solid and immovable to crumble into dust. And many millions will perish. All the people who have lived thinking that they have built comfortable and secure lifestyles will be devastated because they put their faith in a world under judgment. That is what the Day of the Lord is – God’s Day of Judgment.

But believers who have chosen to live lives of purity depend on God and His promises for their security. After all, did Jesus not say, “O you of little faith? Do not worry about what we shall eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But *seek first His Kingdom* and His righteousness, and *all these things will be given to you as well.*” (Matt. 6:30-33) Are you feeling stressed about money or food, work or housing? Have these things become the priority in your thinking and your life? Relax! God knows your needs. If you seek His reign in your life and depend on Him alone, then He will provide all that He has promised to you. You may never have a mansion here but I can assure you that you will have the home in Heaven that Jesus has gone to prepare for you! Learn to depend on God and His promises.

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When we think about the future we often ask ourselves, “how can I afford to do that?” Further study, marriage and housing costs seem to be almost beyond our reach. How can you blend faith with hard work to achieve what you need? What else can you do today to depend on God?

Lives that Diligently Follow God's Purposes

Jesus was soon to appear ushering in the Day of the Lord so Peter called believers to be diligent in following God's purposes. "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, *make every effort* to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:14) The phrase "make every effort" gives the true meaning of "being diligent." Diligence requires hard work, persistence and self-discipline. A little earlier we thought about our need to depend on God and His promises. Living in dependence on God is not a reason for us to do nothing. Here we have the opposite side of the coin. We are to be diligent in personal growth, in purity and in living in peaceful relationships with all people. Both Peter and Paul felt the need to address this problem in the early Church. There were some people who believed that because Jesus was returning soon they could sit back and do nothing until He came. They were lazy, useless in community and a burden to others who were willing to work!



Do you understand what a procrastinator is? It is someone whose motto is "Never do today what you can delay until tomorrow!" Procrastinators always delay taking action about decisions to be made, changes to take place and work to be done. They are not diligent

because they are failing to make every effort! Are you someone who others think of as a diligent person? Because you know that Jesus is returning soon to take His Church away to His Home, are you diligent about your personal purity, your total surrender to the will of God, and your own personal growth?

Peter challenges us about our desire to follow God's purpose for our lives and our world and provides us with two vital tests.

- **Make every effort to grow your character.** "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to

self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7) Here we see an example of being diligent to achieve God’s purpose in personal character. It is easy to simply admit that “this is what I am like – people must accept me as I am.” This attitude lacks diligence to achieve God’s purpose. Peter’s list contains many challenges for all of us. Are we moving forward with the Holy Spirit’s help to reach the next growth goal? He wants us to be holy just as He is holy. He wants us to be loving because He is love. There can be no excuses. People with Heaven in mind make every effort to grow into Godliness. Is this your goal? Notice that Peter says that if we fail this diligence test then we may become ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:8)

- **Make every effort to grow in your relationship with Jesus.** “*Be even more diligent* to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble and you will receive a rich welcome into the Eternal Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10) This instruction from God’s Word challenges me about my confidence that I will be saved and inherit a home in Heaven one day. Peter tells us to be diligent to make our calling sure. How certain are you of your future in God’s Heaven? We have already learned that God promises a place in Heaven to all those who put their trust in Jesus and our Heavenly Father for salvation . It has nothing to do with organised religion and everything to do with our present relationship with all of God through Jesus His Son. If you are someone who has cared little for being diligent in developing your relationship with Jesus, and even less for growing a Godlike character, then you should start right away to be diligent about this second challenge. Make your call and election sure today!

God’s purposes for you are wonderful and eternal. Please do not be among the many who will miss out when Jesus reappears to take His children Home.

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Are you a diligent person who “makes every effort, or are you a procrastinator?” You may miss out on

God’s purpose for you unless you change some things. Make of list of the things that you need to change and then act on it!

Lives that Demonstrate Persistence

Diligence speaks about making every effort to make changes in order to grow and progress in our character development. Persistence speaks about guarding the truth and being alert against any attack of the enemy. In 2 Peter 3:17 Peter wrote, “Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, *be on your guard* so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men, and fall from your sacred position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Peter refers to false teachers who have come into the Churches. They are described as ignorant and unstable. They distort the Scriptures to their own destruction. The believers are instructed to demonstrate persistence in holding on to the truth of God’s Word in the face of opposition from within and without the Church. The picture that Peter paints for us here is one of a sentry in war time. The duty of the sentry is to be constantly on guard - no sleeping, no coffee breaks, no holidays and sometimes no relief! The guard must demonstrate persistence otherwise those who are being guarded from harm will suffer. We cannot let our guard down for one moment. Our enemy is like a roaring lion wandering around seeking someone to devour. Only those who are persistent in their duties will keep the enemy away!

If we fail to be on our guard then some people may fall. This is serious! So serious that a sentry on guard duty in a time of war who fails to

remain alert and active can be court-martialled and punished. If you were the only one given the responsibility to safeguard your family or your Church how safe would they be?



Paul said, "I have been knocked down many times, but never knocked out!"

Paul never gave up! Have some events in your life caused you to give up on things that God wants you to have? It is never too late to start over. How confident are you that you know the truth from God's Word to guard against the Enemy's lies? How can you persist in understanding God and His Word for yourself?

Lives that make Progress in the Things of God

This final characteristic should be self-evident from all that we have learned so far. In nature, growth is an indicator of life. I look after orchids. Every year they provide a beautiful display when they are in bloom. Irene loves to bring them inside so she can admire them every day! I have noticed that after the plant blooms for a month or two, the leaves become dry and withered from being inside. So I take them outside again and feed them with some fertilizer. Will they survive to bloom again? I always watch them closely for the next few weeks. I look carefully for evidence of new growth. Soon I notice small green shoots coming up next to the old leaves and I know that all is well! It is the same in our life as a believer. Growth is a sign of life!

Listen to Peter again in his final verse of 2 Peter, "*But grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever!*" How much have you grown since you first met Christ? If you were asked, could you list some important aspects of your own growth?

How can we grow?

1. **By cooperating with God in our personal growth.** One of my favourite verses from the Bible is Philippians 1:6. “But confident of this one thing, that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” God always completes what He begins! This holds true in creation. It holds true in getting all of His children safely to Heaven. And it is true in your life and mine if we are determined to love Him and allow Him to work His miracles in us. God wants to grow us!

2. **By conscientiously developing our prayer relationship with God.** All relationships are put under severe strain when one person is absent and not communicating. Our relationship with God will grow if we pay attention to spending time with Him regularly and having a respectful conversation with Him about His will and our own desires. In 1 Peter 4:7 Peter tells us that because we are now close to the end of all things we are to be “serious and watchful in our prayers.” I heard a disgruntled Church member complain about her pastor. She told me, “He is a terrible man. He seems to spend so much time praying.” If only more of us leaders and parents could be accused of this complaint. What a difference it would make! After listening to the unhappy Church member I think I know why he was spending so much time in prayer!

But what about us? Are we people who pray? Do we know what it is like to wrestle with God until He blesses us and our communities? This is a second way for us to grow!

3. By feeding daily on the Word of God. Paul wrote “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.” (Romans 10:17) Whether we hear the word spoken as in the Gospel being preached, or we hear it in our own words as we study it each day, the result is the same. Our faith grows! Paul made a distinction between the “milk” of the Word and the “meat” of the Word. He exhorted his listeners to devour the Word of God for themselves and grow thereby. What is milk? It is predigested food designed to benefit babies. In Church language it is preaching. Someone who has studied the Word for themselves feeds us with whatever they have found to be true. This is good for babies! But Paul told his people to desire the meat of the Word so that they could continue to grow from babyhood. The meat is what you have to chew and digest for yourself.

Grow by –

- Cooperating with God
- Developing prayer relationship
- Feeding daily on God’s Word
- Regular fellowship with other believers

Imagine if you only ate baby food once every week. How long would you survive on such a limited diet? Yet there are many Christians who have two or three Bibles in their houses that are covered in dust because they are never opened. People are starving themselves to a spiritual death and limiting their own potential to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus. The Bible is no help to our family if it remains on the shelf like some religious magic token. It must be central to our personal and family devotions. If we want to grow in our knowledge of Jesus we must study it until its teachings master us and change our lives. This is only possible with the aid of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth.

4. By joining in true fellowship with other believers. I have retained some vivid memories of children’s stories told by Solomon Islanders who are master story tellers. I recall one service when the pastor produced two stones to show the children. The first stone was

very rough and its edges were so sharp that they could cut your flesh if you did not handle it carefully. The pastor told the children that he had found this stone high up on a hill where he had been clearing the earth to start a new garden. He asked the children if any of them would like to be struck with this sharp stone. Of course, they all answered, “no!” Then he produced a second stone about the same size. But it was very different. It was round and smooth with no sharp edges. He asked the children if they preferred this smooth stone and they all replied “yes.” He explained that both these stones had originally come from the same place but somehow the second stone had been washed down into the river. It had rolled over and over, bouncing off other stones until it had no rough edges. Every part of it was smooth.

He went on to explain that this stone was like believers who met regularly together for fellowship. Then the pastor quoted Hebrews 10:24-25 – “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” When we commit ourselves to being in true, loving and honest fellowship with other believers, we grow through the open interaction, love and care of others just like in a healthy family. Honestly, believers who neglect meeting together with other believers limit their own growth potential and often fail to have those rough edges rubbed away through interaction with others. Since Covid, Church attendance has dropped away and some people have not returned to Church. They have put themselves in danger through their absence. Let us determine to grow by all means for the glory of our amazing Lord Jesus Christ.

In a Nutshell –

- **Live a pure life**
- **Seek God's Kingdom first**
- **Diligently follow God's purposes**
- **Persist in your allegiance to the Truth**
- **Grow daily in the things of God**



**DIGGING
DEEPER**



Do you know Jesus better
now than you did a year ago?
Has knowing Him better

allowed you to show more of His grace to others? What are your
personal growth goals for the next year? Do you belong to a home
group where you be supported as you grow?

A Letter to our Family

Dear Family,

Irene and I hope that you realize how much we love each one of you. You more precious to us than anything else in this world! Each one of you is unique in your personality and your talents. We know that you will all make a wonderful contribution to our world as you make the most of the opportunities that God brings to you. We pray for each of you every day, longing for you to discover the way that the Lord has planned for you to follow.

Believe it or not, I still remember what it is was like to be your age! I did not think much about the future. I lived mainly week to week. I thought that somewhere in my future I would have my ideal job, get married to Irene, and have a house and a family. I had become a Christian so I also felt a commitment to serve God in some way in the Church. I still think that all of these things are right and we should expect them to happen in God's time. I know that the present financial pressures make the achievement of these dreams more difficult for you than it could have been for me. But chase your dreams. At the same time, trust Jesus to provide His miracles for you when you need them. Your life is mainly ahead of you, be positive and brave as you live for Jesus!

How can we balance our belief in living in Heaven for Eternity and having a life here with all its challenges, privileges and pressures?

A wise pastor friend once told me, **“Plan your life as though the world will last another thousand years and live your life as though Christ might come back today!”** Remember this and live your life accordingly. We don't know when Christ will return but we do know that it will happen suddenly and without warning. Paul wrote about this in 1 Cor. 15:51,52 ⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in a flash, in the blink of an eye.

For the trumpet will sound... and we will be changed." It takes less than a second to blink. That's how long it will take Jesus to change everything. So live every day as someone who is ready to meet Jesus!

But if Jesus delays His return, live your life to the full. Follow the plan that Jesus has for you and be sure you make a difference! Jesus said that we have a choice in life. We can follow the narrow road that leads to life, or we can walk the broad road that leads to destruction. (Mt 7:13,14) I think that the broad road must be wide to contain all the possessions that the people going to destruction have accumulated. They are taking all their precious possessions to the dump to be burned! Of course, the believers on the narrow road also have possessions, but they have learned to be single minded, knowing that the only thing that counts is to love and serve the Lord Jesus. They hold all their possessions lightly in case they become a hindrance to their following Jesus.

So, plan your life as though the world will last another thousand years and live your life as though Christ might come back today!

We pray that you will use whatever time there will be between now and when Jesus returns to live your life to the fullest. Do not hold back! Find what Jesus wants you to do and do it with all your strength and for all of your days. This is your time to make a difference in our world in your own unique way. Be diligent to add to your faith all the qualities that make up a balanced Christ-like character. In this way you will be a worthy representative of King Jesus.

Life here is brief compared with Eternity. The task is urgent. Heaven is waiting for us all. Let us be faithful!

With all our love,

Your Nanna & Poppa