



PHILIPPIANS 3:20

ON THE WAY  
*to heaven*  
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2019





## On the way to Heaven

The shared theme of Women's Ministries throughout the world in 2019 is 'On the way to Heaven'. Paul writes to the Philippians 'But our citizenship is in heaven' (Philippians 3:20).

This theme will look at how our heavenly citizenship influences the way that we live here on earth and gives us a direction and meaning to our life as we are on our way to Heaven. We will celebrate and rejoice in our own diverse cultures but will emphasise the things that unite us. It is all about Kingdom culture and the spiritual values that we see in Jesus.

These studies are designed to be flexible and allow for the addition of material that is relevant to your culture and context.

Each study includes four sections that can be explored with your group, as follows:

**1. What the Bible says** – where you explore 'What does the text actually say?'

It is important that you read the Bible carefully and allow it to speak to you and guide the content of your study.

**2. Our lives today** – considers questions such as:

- What does the Bible reading tell you about your life?
- Does it highlight any problems in society?
- What challenges are there for the way you live your life?

**3. Discussion questions** – depending upon where you are using the studies, you may choose to select one or two questions that seem most suitable for you, or ask different groups to discuss other aspects and possibly, if you have time, share what they have been speaking about.

**4. 'Our journey to Heaven'** – this is designed to give you something to take away and do before you meet again.

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## Heaven is real

### Bible reading – John 14:1-4

*'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.'*

### What the Bible says

The words of Jesus are precious to us, but when it comes to Heaven we may be unsure about what it is all about. Jesus understood that we might be uncertain about what life will look like after we die, and so he tells us not to be troubled and reassures us that there is a place where we will go, if we choose to trust him, and that place is very real.

Heaven is where God is, and Jesus describes it as a house with many rooms. In the ancient Middle East when sons married, they would build an extension on to their father's house and live there. That is the kind of warm welcome that there will be for us.

Heaven is a place that we can enter if we live righteous lives, but that righteousness has to be real and not just something that looks good.

'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:20).

How we live our lives on earth now is important for entry to Heaven.

'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (Matthew 7:21).

Discovering the will of the Father and doing his will is something we need to be getting on with now.

We understand that heaven will be very different to life as we now know it, the things that make our lives difficult on earth; like pain and sadness and dying will not be there, it will be better than anything we can imagine (Revelation 21:4).

Heaven is not just for some other time and place, there is a great deal of contact between heaven and earth and the Bible gives us a partial view.

The Bible tells us that angels are actively involved in our earthly lives. Jesus said that there are angels looking after children (Matthew 18:10) and it seems possible that angels are still looking after us when we are adults 'For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways' (Psalm 91:11).

### Our lives today

Think about times in your life when you were led to do or not to do something, and with hindsight you realise how disastrous that other way could have been. Angels were looking after you! If there are angels guarding us, then we are not alone because they are watching from day to day. Allow yourself to enjoy that lovely thought, we are being guarded and aided to do what is right.



The Bible tells us there are many things we are not aware of and that even when we have guests for a meal, we might be showing hospitality to angels (Hebrews 13:2).

Does that not give you an idea how precious your life is to God? It allows us to realise that the way we live, act and respond to God is significant to 'angels' that we do not know.

In 2 Kings 6:8-18, there is an amazing story of enemy forces sent to capture Elisha and it looked as though the Israelite army would not be strong enough, but God opened the eyes of Elisha's servant to the unseen forces of Heaven which surrounded them. We are not always aware of the support around us each day. The forces of Heaven are real and on our side.

#### **Discussion questions**

1. Why do you feel we are reluctant to discuss Heaven?
2. Can you think of times when an angel may have intervened in your life?
3. How do you feel about the prospect of an angel being available to guard you from harm?

#### **Our journey to Heaven**

When confronted with a challenge this week, ask God to reveal his purpose and plan for that situation, trusting that he will send his angels to guard you in all your ways.

*Colonel Chris Webb, IHQ from the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland (having served in the United Kingdom, Papua New Guinea and now working at the Centre for Spiritual Life Development).*

As Secretary for Spiritual Life Development, I am passionate that people might enjoy all the richness of the love of God, the example of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit this side of Heaven.

## Heaven's sacrifice

### Bible reading – Hebrews 9:26-28

*'So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.'*  
(verse 28)

### What the Bible says

Hebrews reminds us of how the blood of an animal was used for atonement. Once a year on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered into the holy of holies and sprinkled the blood of a sacrificial offering for the atonement of peoples' sins. Even before the high priest began his priestly duties, he would cleanse himself by bathing his whole body and then be clothed in white linen to represent purity.

The high priests offered sacrifices that could not take away sins 'It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins' (Hebrews 10:4). The way was not open for man to have free access to God and fellowship with him until atonement was made by Jesus.

God demonstrated his endless love towards mankind by offering Jesus as a sacrifice 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

The sacrifice has been made but we need faith, 'Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need' (Hebrews 4:16).

### Our lives today

Sacrifice simply means to give up something highly valued for the sake of other considerations. Christ sacrificed his life for the atonement of our sins. As our high priest, he went into the holy of holies, the throne room of Almighty God and settled the case once and for all.

The sacrifice of Jesus brought salvation to the whole world. 'He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world' (1 John 2:2).

The death of Christ has:

- Cleansed and released us from the bondage of sin
- Given us free access to come boldly before the throne of God
- Reconciled us into full fellowship with God
- Set us free from guilt and condemnation. Hallelujah!

As Christians, we know that sacrifice is not a concept that anyone really enjoys, but Jesus through his life gave us an example. Sacrifice involves giving up our sinful ways and living a life of holiness. To be like Jesus, we must be willing to give up anything that can hinder us from possessing eternal life. 'Fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart' (Hebrew 12: 2-3).



Therefore, since Jesus has made a sacrifice for us to have an eternal home in Heaven, may we do away with sin and 'let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another' (Hebrews 10: 22-25).

However, if you are passing through persecutions or experiencing difficulties due to your faith in Christ, whatever the challenge may be, do not give up! 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal' (2 Corinthians 4: 17-18).

#### **Discussion questions**

1. Share about difficult things that you have to let go because of your faith?
2. In what practical ways can you demonstrate selfless love to others?
3. How can you offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God?

#### **Our journey to Heaven**

- Sacrifice your time to pray for unsaved people around you
- Think of someone in need you can help either spiritually or materially
- Tell someone about the love of Christ

*Captain Loveth Onuorah – IHQ from Nigeria Territory*

Jesus sacrificed all to save me and so will I not withhold anything and sacrifice all there is of me to him. Making the most of every opportunity to tell someone about the love of Christ is my main goal.

## Heaven's citizenship

### Bible reading – Philippians 3: 7-12

*'But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

*What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

*I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.'*

### What the Bible says

Paul writes this letter when he has been in prison or placed under house arrest for almost four years, first in Caesarea and then in Rome. For him, talking about losing everything is not just theory, but true reality. Philippi was a Roman colony where Roman law, culture and tradition were established and being both a Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul himself knew how much people could gain from that. So it is a strong comparison and parallel when Paul does not acknowledge any of these benefits or rights. Rather, he consciously forsakes and throws them away for the privilege of having heavenly citizenship. Everything else will lead to destruction Paul writes 'Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction' (Philippians 3:18-19).

The mostly non-Jewish recipients of his letter – 'all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi' – were also aware of severe suffering and what they had to give up to follow Christ. The young Christian fellowship in the city of Philippi in Macedonia was the first Christian community in Europe and at that time, they had been persecuted all though their existence. It had been a 12-year long road filled with trials and fear. Still Paul's inspiring letter is overflowing with hope, joy and encouragement. 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Philippians 1:21) summarises the whole letter and connects well with Paul's thoughts in Philippians 3:7-12.

### Our lives today

As a Christian, I sometimes feel like an alien – not that I am green or have my own spaceship parked in the garage! – but it seems I do not really belong here. It happens when I end up in conversations where everything feels strange – like another language or different planet – and I wonder what is wrong with me? In the word's deepest and best meaning, I am an alien and do not belong here because I am heading for another goal. As a Christian alien, there is also a risk that I behave strangely and set myself aside instead of being part of the everyday life around me. It is a challenge to live here and still be a citizen of Heaven. Like the apostle Paul we need to consider what value we put on to our relationship with Christ. If we are aiming for citizenship in Heaven we need to realise how important it is to put Christ first. That will always come at a cost in how we prioritise and live our lives. Jesus tells us to 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Matthew 6:33). If we want to be like Paul and say: 'But our citizenship is in Heaven' then nothing can be more important than our life in Christ.





### **Discussion questions**

1. How would you explain the idea of 'Heaven's citizenship' to someone else?
2. How can we prioritise our everyday life to put Christ first?
3. How can we as Christians have our citizenship in Heaven, still take part in earthly life and not act like 'aliens'?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

Life in Christ is worth more than we ever can grasp or explain. During the coming week try to use Paul's word from Philippians 3:7-12 translate them into your own life and explore more about how important God is to you. What are you willing to give up or forsake?

*Commissioner Eva Kleman – IHQ, from Sweden and Latvia Territory (having served in Finland and Estonia).*

In my role as Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries in Europe, I often cross borders and have to identify myself and my citizenship. Every time it becomes more and more precious to know I have my strongest and most important inner identity in Christ and his Kingdom.

## Heaven bound

### Bible reading – 2 Peter 3:14

*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*

### What the Bible says

The Bible makes it very clear that, as Christians we have a strong hope for certain things to happen and we 'must make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him' (2 Peter 3:14).

To understand what Christians look forward to, we need to read other verses in the Bible. 'To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires' (2 Peter 1:1-4).

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul emphasises the need for Christians to remain focused on the heavenly hope and promise when he says in his closing words: 'May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' In Philippians 2:15 he writes: 'So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky'.

### Our lives today

Most people strive to be clean, smart and decent in their daily lives. As Christians, we need to repent and seek for cleansing from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. We should not dwell in sin and evil acts that damage and destroy our lives, but rather fix our eyes on Jesus who is able to save and lead us to Heaven. God is faithful and his promises are always true and fulfilled. We must guard ourselves against sin and worldly distractions that will make us stray. 'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful' (Hebrews 10:23). Just as we keep our bodies clean, let us also keep our hearts clean and focused on Jesus. 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me' (Psalm 51:10). This should be the prayer of everyone who wants to enter God's Kingdom. As Christians, we are on a journey to Heaven and we need to live as heavenly-minded people who are not easily swayed by evil but focused on Jesus who will keep us blameless, holy, spotless and peaceful as we wait for his second coming.

The journey to Heaven is not easy, but we have a helper, the Holy Spirit who leads us all the way. Our safe arrival is guaranteed if we truly trust and obey God.



### **Discussion questions**

1. How can Christians be blameless and spotless yet live in a challenging and unclean world?
2. What are some of the things that cause us not to live holy lives?
3. What can we do to remain focused on Jesus Christ?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

- Throughout this month let us think of what we can do to make us strong in faith and blameless and spotless in the eyes of God.
- Can we perhaps study God's word in a more systematic way?
- Should we fast and pray more?
- Can we seek to listen more to God's direction as we journey to Heaven?

*Major Anne Siundu - IHQ, from Kenya West Territory*

As an administrator in the International Health and Schools office I am blessed to have an opportunity to serve God and people through the services offered. I am amazed and challenged how God through The Salvation Army reaches out and touches people's lives around the world.

## Heaven on earth

### Bible reading – Galatians 5: 22-26; 6: 8-10

*...whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.  
Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will  
reap a harvest if we do not give up.  
(Galatians 6: 8-9)*

#### What the Bible says

The Bible teaches us that our faith in Christ Jesus gives us two essential gifts. We are adopted into God's family and we receive the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. (Galatians 4: 5-6). These two provisions are the foundation for our lives as Christians and the entrance into a new way of living.

When Christ's followers give themselves intentionally to his service, glimpses of Heaven can be seen and felt on earth: 'You are a letter from Christ... written with the Spirit of the living God' (2 Corinthians 3: 3); 'We are the pleasing aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:15); 'You are the light of the world' (Matthew 5:14); 'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up' (Galatians 6: 9).

Our ministry is sustained through a life marked and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit and we are called to live by the Spirit. This is a relationship where love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are considered to be the expected fruit (Galatians 5:22-23).

The fruit process begins with salvation, when Jesus enters our hearts, and it unfolds throughout our journey. 'Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful' (John 15: 2). This process is also known as holiness. It is about Jesus forming and influencing our mind, character and personality.

#### Our lives today

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' own empowering presence in the believer, the fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of a transformed life. Heaven is revealed when wisdom from above guides our mindset and priorities, when we allow values from God's kingship to rule in our hearts and minds. The values that reign in Heaven's realm are the opposite of those that dominate this world. If our longing is to make Heaven a current reality, the best model is to be found in the life of Jesus. He shows us patience, humility, meekness, obedience, mercy and love (Matthew 5:3-8) and we are called to follow his example (Philippians 2: 5-8).

The nine characteristics of God the Holy Spirit, as listed in Paul's letter to the Galatians, were all present in Jesus and by God's grace they can also grow within us. Jesus reminds us that 'Apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). We need more than just his help to follow him; we also need his life. Our capacity is solely his life in us, and his fruitfulness through us. We carry his presence in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives, but we trust him to shine through our brokenness and cover us with his merciful love.

Christ is present in the world today through his Church. We long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord, but until then we will preach the salvation



gospel and meet human need in his name. As we serve, we pray that the world will see a reflection of Jesus, and a glimpse of Heaven, in all we do.

‘Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven’ (Matthew 5:16). Let us not become weary in doing good.

### **Discussion questions**

Visualise your life with its daily routine and the plans you are making.

1. Is there any room in your day for following the promptings of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you have any examples to share of when God intervened and changed some of your intended plans?
3. Reflect on Galatians 5:22-26. What might God be saying to you? Pray about it and seek his guidance.

### **Our journey to Heaven**

On our journey through life God walks with us. Let us carefully listen to his voice and in all things, ask for his perspective. A listening obedient heart will help us to keep in step with the Spirit.

*Colonel Lisbeth Welander – IHQ, from Norway, Iceland and The Færoes Territory (having served in the Philippines, and Denmark and Greenland Territory)*

Serving as Under Secretary for Programme Resources Department at International Headquarters I am fortunate to hear many stories about Heaven reaching down and touching lives today. It is often about people coming alongside each other sharing light and hope in difficult times. Jesus himself drew near, through ordinary people with a Spirit-filled heart.

## Heaven's ambassadors

### Bible reading – Luke 4:17-21

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.*  
(2 Corinthians 5:20)

### What the Bible says

During his time on earth, Christ was Heaven's ambassador. Like ambassadors of our world today, Christ served to represent the interests of his home, while living abroad. Luke 4:17-21 reveals to us Christ's mission and the work he came into the world to do. The Scripture that Jesus read aloud in the synagogue was originally given to the prophet Isaiah to encourage the Jews, who had been taken into captivity by Babylon following their continued disobedience and rejection of God. Isaiah's message was a promise of reconciliation with God for the Jews and restoration for Israel. Jesus would further reveal God's plan of reconciliation, now made for the whole world, and a promise of restoration that would lead God's people to Heaven.

While Isaiah spoke of good news for the poor, freedom for those imprisoned and oppressed and sight for the blind, Jesus became this Good News. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is seen breaking down social barriers, healing infirmities, and speaking out against injustice in order to draw his creation back home to God. Jesus lived out the values of his heavenly home, evidencing God's love and mercy by purchasing our salvation through his death and resurrection.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul refers to Christ-followers as ambassadors. When Jesus dwells in a person's heart, he also empowers the person to share the good news of Heaven, doing the very things Jesus did when he was on this earth. In fact, Jesus prayed for those who would be Heaven's ambassadors in sharing God's message of reconciliation and restoration. 'They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world' (John 17:16-18).

### Our lives today

For Christians, being an ambassador is challenging, because we have to accept that the world we live in is not our home. This requires a culture shift that begins when we become citizens of Heaven. Just as we are adopted into God's family, we must adopt a kingdom perspective. As Heaven's ambassadors we continue to live in this world, but our purpose changes in order to present the message of our King and represent the culture of his Kingdom to those we encounter. This 'being in, yet not of the world' requires discipline and watchfulness so that we do not fall prey to the lures of the world by which we are surrounded.

Yet being an ambassador is not just about representing one's own culture in a foreign land. It is also about understanding the culture and customs of the land in which you are living, so as to connect and build meaningful relationships between the two. Too often we want to engage the world on our own terms and from our comfort zones. Heaven calls us to be in the world, to move in and connect with our neighbours and communities. We cannot do this from behind closed doors.

The media today reflects a world in which ambassadors of the Good News are still desperately needed. The concerns of oppression, poverty, ignorance, and corruption continue to plague the



communities in which we live, preventing people from experiencing God's reconciliation and restoration work. People remain poor as seen by homelessness and hunger. They are bound, as seen in human trafficking and drug addiction. They are blind to the truth that can set them free and fail to see the needs of others that can be met.

As ambassadors for Christ, we can reflect Heaven right where we are, living out God's message of love for a world for which he gave his life. We can share the Good News that we have experienced and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to accept their reservation to the promise of a heavenly home that awaits.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What kingdom attitudes do you need to adopt in order to be a more effective ambassador for Christ?
2. What are the closed doors in your life that prevent you from connecting with others?
3. Where are the places in your community that are still unreached for Heaven?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

Consider one person in your community, who is overlooked and possibly disconnected. Over the next few weeks work to build a relationship with them through acts of service and kindness. Then pray for an opportunity to share the Good News of Heaven with them.

*Major Erica Helton – IHQ, from USA Western Territory*

As the Assistant Under Secretary in the Americas and Caribbean Zone, the opportunity to serve away from my home has provided me with a deeper insight into the responsibility of an ambassador and a greater appreciation of the importance to remain firmly rooted in my relationship with Christ, so as to be an effective representative of Heaven.

## Heaven's rest

### Bible reading – Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:1-7

*'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*

#### What the Bible says

Every person in this world needs rest and every soul looks for solitude. Soon after the Fall in the Garden of Eden man was lost and the Lord God called to him: 'Where are you?' The lost soul looks for rest but cannot find home until the Lord himself reaches down from Heaven and says: 'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28-30). When our souls are weary and heavy laden, he is still calling us and we may come to him for rest.

When we are physically weary, we may experience thirst. What a rest when you quench your thirst with a drink of cool water! As the deer pants for streams of water our soul pants for God to quench this thirst. I remember the words of one missionary officer who worked in India's extremely hot climate for many years: 'I always dream and long for the cool water back home' – but the problem is that one gets thirsty again. This must be the reason why Jesus said: 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life'. There is nothing like the living water of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said: 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10). He came to this world so that we can have abundant life, which is a life of contentment. When you find contentment, you are indeed at rest. Only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can our soul find perfect peace. When our lives have been changed by the power of Christ, that change affects all of our life's perspectives.

#### Our lives today

People who live in cold places may not comprehend resting under the shadow, but those who live in extremely hot climates can understand how relaxing it is. To rest under the shade of a tree is refreshing, after a long, tiring walk with a heavy load, in the hot sun. We are in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91:1), a restful place from danger and harm because under his shadow the soul finds rest and security in all circumstances.

One day I called a friend of mine who was critically ill, and asked how she was. Instead of speaking about her deteriorating condition, she answered positively saying that since she was hiding under the 'good shade' and no storm could harm her. Her words clearly explained that although her illness was painful, her spirit was at rest in Christ.

Another day I sat beside a dying man who said: 'This world is wonderful and all creatures are amazing, but all the houses, streets and works of art are manmade. The place where I am going and the mansion where I will be living are prepared by God, who is the Creator of heaven and Earth. I want to go there now'. While he was dying, he peacefully rested because of the assurance of his salvation and the assurance of a place prepared for him.





There are people who are miserable and disappointed at what they have or do not have – they may be burdened by yokes of oppression. Let us remember that Jesus promises to take away our ill-fitting yoke and invites us to learn from him.

Human hearts become troubled quickly and our bodies wear out and die. That's why Jesus prepared a heavenly home for heavenly bodies where we will be transformed and be like him. Heaven is our eternal home and rest. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain' (Revelation 21:4-8).

### **Discussion questions**

1. Why do we believe that we can enter God's rest here on earth?
2. How do you know that Jesus spoke the truth when he said 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light?'
3. Share your experience of resting in the arms of God.

### **Our journey to Heaven**

Heaven is the dwelling-place of God, yet the Bible tells us that he is Immanuel, God with us. Heaven begins when he dwells within us. Let us rest in him.

*Lieut-Colonel Lalhimpuii, IHQ, from India Eastern Territory*

Serving as the Under Secretary in South Asia Zone, I rest upon Jesus in whom I put my faith and trust, and who never fails to keep his promises.

## Heaven's protection

### Bible reading – Ephesians 6:10-18

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.  
(James 4:7)*

#### What the Bible says

The Christian life is a joyful adventure, but it is not always an easy journey. The Bible teaches us that we should not expect this. In God's word we find important lessons about our journey from earth to Heaven as one of spiritual warfare.

In Ephesians 6:12 we learn about a struggle that is very real, and that is part of every Christian's daily life. This struggle is not against any human beings or human forces, but against spiritual forces – Satan and his helpers. We are sometimes hesitant to think about this and may even be afraid of Satan, but if we read Genesis 3:1-5 and 1 Peter 5:8, we see that he is real.

Fortunately, we do not have to face this enemy unarmed! The Bible teaches us about the weapons we have at our disposal to defeat Satan. Ephesians 6:11-17 provides a description of the armour of God that we may all wear and use effectively whenever temptations come our way.

We are not alone in this struggle. God is always watching over us, and James 4:7 tells us that when we submit to God, Satan will flee from us. The Bible also contains interesting teaching about angels (see Bible Study 1), God's messengers who help to protect us (Psalm 91:11, Hebrews 1:14).

#### Our lives today

It is great to know that we can have the assurance of salvation, and that Heaven is a real place where our journey will end in ceaseless praise! Does Heaven play a role in our lives while we are still walking this earthly pathway?

Some time ago I found that it was becoming increasingly difficult to read; my eyesight was failing and the letters were not clear. My optician informed me that I needed bifocal spectacles (a small lens inserted into the lower part of the spectacles in order to make reading easier), I discovered that bifocal spectacles are a great invention. They help me to see things that are far away, but also, if I look through the lower part of the lens, they help me to see objects that are close by. Let's look at Heaven through bifocal 'lenses'. Heaven is something to anticipate in the future, but at the same time it is very much a part of our daily environment.

We face temptations and trials and Satan would love to cause us to trip and fall, but let us take heart. As we put on the armour of God daily (Ephesians 6:10-18), we may be sure of his complete protection:

- The helmet of salvation protects the mind.
- The breastplate of righteousness protects the heart.
- The belt of truth that holds the armour together is Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).
- The shoes of the gospel of peace help us to tread rough roads, and to stand firm, ready to share the Gospel.



- The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It is double-edged, protecting against the blows of the enemy and giving us power to fight back and turn evil into good.
- The shield of faith prevents the arrows of evil and temptation that fly towards us, from penetrating our lives and causing harm.

We have the presence of God to comfort and guide us, the armour of God to protect us, and angels to guard us and minister to us. We are safe, and blessed.

### **Discussion questions**

1. Reflect on Ephesians 6:10–18. As you bring to mind each part of the armour, think about how you can put on the armour of God daily.
2. Share, if and how the two commands in James 4:7 are relevant in your daily life.
3. Is there a specific verse in the Bible that assures you of God's protection and makes you feel safe? If so, you may wish to share this verse with the group.

### **Our journey to Heaven**

Although we are still on earth, facing many trials and temptations, Heaven is already at work within us. Let us intentionally put on the armour of God every day and live victorious lives without fear.

*Commissioner Marieke Venter, IHQ, from Southern Africa Territory, (having served in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka).*

As Zonal Secretary for Women's Ministries in the South Asia Zone, I thank God for his protection against evil and danger, and I feel completely safe as I journey from Earth to Heaven.

## Heaven's treasures

### Bible reading – Matthew 6:19-21

*'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'*

### What the Bible says

This passage forms part of the extended Sermon on the Mount where Jesus addresses a large gathering of people. Jesus cautions his original hearers, do not let your focus – the things you treasure the most – be things from this life that can easily be damaged, destroyed or stolen; such things are of no lasting value. Instead, Jesus challenges them to treasure the things that have eternal and heavenly importance. These will not be destroyed or taken away, but are heavenly treasures that will remain.

Jesus' final remarks emphasise that wherever you treasure is, that is where your heart is found. For your heart determines what is important to you, why you value these treasures and the passion in which you invest into them. Essentially Jesus seeks our investment of time, energy and passion into our relationship with God. This is of paramount importance, now and for eternity.

### Our lives today

In the film *Leap Year* one of the main characters asks: 'If your house was on fire and you had 60 seconds, what would you take?' Sixty seconds is not long! It is only a short time to decide which precious and treasured possessions you would want to save. Would it be photos, important papers or books? Or would it be something that has passed from one generation to another in your family? We treasure those possessions either because of how much they are worth or for their sentimental value, but we are challenged to consider our heavenly treasures. Do we spend the time to think about what they are? I think, to some extent, the answer lies in what happens at the end of the film *Leap Year*. The fire alarm rings in the main character's house – false alarm, no fire! Suddenly she faces the question and responds: 'When my 60 seconds came around, I realised, I had everything I ever wanted, but nothing I really needed'.

It comes down to the things we need, not the things we want. There will always be something else we want that we believe will make us happy, but at the end of our life these will be of no eternal significance. They will be just things that we have collected over time. By contrast the things we need, the treasures that will last, are the intangibles of our faith.

Our faith keeps us strong in times of weakness and offers hope in despair and grace in times of need. It provides us with unconditional love that affirms and embraces our identity as God's beloved children. Our faith gives a joy that cannot be quenched despite our circumstances, whether good or bad. It assures us of God's continual presence in our lives. These are the treasures that keep our eyes focused on what is of worth. They remind us of God's provision – physically and spiritually – for our daily needs and of the heart relationship that exists between God and us, as individuals. We may live busy lives, with many competing demands and sometimes what really matters, especially our relationship with God, can be crowded out by urgent things that demand our attention.



### **Discussion questions**

1. Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-11 where reference is made to 'treasure in jars of clay'. What do you understand about treasure in this passage?
2. How would you describe the treasure that is within you?
3. How do you nurture and make your relationship with God a priority?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

As we continue our journey to Heaven, there are times when we need simply to prioritise and value the treasure that lies within us. In the coming week, set aside some time as a priority to spend with God. Schedule it as an event in your calendar and experience a deeper awareness of God in your life. Take the time and make the investment.

*Lieut-Colonel Kalie Webb, IHQ, from the Australia Southern Territory (having served in Australia Southern, Pakistan and at IHQ)*

As the Assistant Chief Secretary (Personnel) responsible for Leader Development, I want to see people reach their full potential not only in their ministry, but especially in their deepening, active and vibrant relationship with God.

## Heaven for all nations

### Bible reading – Genesis 11:1-9; Luke 13:23-30 and Acts 2:1-12

*'People will come from east and west and north and south,  
and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.'*  
(Luke 13:29)

#### What the Bible says

In the first chapter of Genesis when God created Adam and Eve, he gave them the mandate to populate the earth. After the fall of mankind and the great flood, God once again reiterates to Noah and his sons to populate the earth (Genesis 9:1). Through the sons of Noah we see the birth of the nations. As human beings began to grow in numbers, they wanted to make a reputation and legacy for themselves, attempting to define their identity outside of the identity of God. So they began to erect a tower that would reach to the heavens and show to everyone that they were equal to God and frustrated his plan of filling the whole earth.

The interesting thing to note in this rebellion is that they were unified in their goal to build this tower. There were no barriers or frustrations, they were one in purpose and in language. The human spirit with its arrogance and pride was the motivation behind the building of the tower of Babel.

God, who saw them hard at work accomplishing this mission, knew that this endeavour would only lead them further away from him. In his infinite grace he bestowed on them the gift of language. God's plans will not be frustrated and so this diverse group of people now with different languages were forced to go out into the world, just as God had decreed.

When Jesus ascended into Heaven (Matthew 28:19-20), he gave his disciples the great commission to go and make disciples of all nations, which fulfilled the promise made to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

At Pentecost (Acts 2) we are told that God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven were in Jerusalem celebrating the feast of weeks. The disciples were gathered together when the gift of the presence of Holy Spirit was given. They began to speak in other languages and were understood by Jews who were attending the festival.

On the day of Pentecost we see the gift of languages come full circle. The first time the gift was given, it was a barrier causing division and confusion, but as the Holy Spirit came and gifted the disciples with the ability to speak other languages, it became a unifying agent. The barrier was down and the command to go and make disciples of all nations was still part of God's decree.

Scripture tells us that the nations will be represented in Heaven. John 3:16 reveals God's love shown through the gift of his Son and that 'whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'.

#### Our lives today

We do not have to travel far to go to 'all nations' because many communities are multicultural. It is not difficult, with the refugee situation that the world is facing, to meet someone who is from another country or a different culture.



Some of us respond like the people who built the tower. We feel scared and want to stay with what is familiar to us. In Luke 13:27-28 we are told that those who think they have the right to Heaven will be disappointed when they find themselves on the outside.

As citizens of Heaven we are called to a different world view and to see the world as God sees it and live our lives according to his heavenly principles. We are called to a ministry of reconciliation as we take the Gospel to all nations.

### **Discussion questions**

1. Share how you live out Matthew 25:34-36?
2. How culturally diverse is your circle of friends?
3. Can you say how you would encourage someone to engage with people from other cultures?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

As one body in Christ, we need to live our lives holistically in our relationships with each other. Worshipping in a cross-cultural context is a reflection of how we will be praising God when we get to Heaven. Let us not be satisfied with staying in our comfort zones, but go to all nations, even if it is just across the street.

*Major Ana Frazer IHQ, from USA Eastern Territory now serving at the Centre for Spiritual Life Development*

As the Assistant Secretary for Spiritual Life Development I want everyone I build relationships with to be like the five wise bridesmaids who were prepared for the arrival of the Bridegroom and entered Heaven.

## Heaven's music

### Bible reading – Revelation 15; Zephaniah 3:17

*'The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.'*  
(Zephaniah 3:17)

#### What the Bible says

Music can be found throughout the Old and New Testaments. Scripture tells us that David played the harp to calm the nerves of Saul. In the Psalms you find songs that were sung during times of sorrow, joy, worship, everyday living and as people walked up into Jerusalem. Music in Scripture was used to worship God, to show love to one another and even to literally bring walls down, remember what happened at Jericho?

In Zephaniah we see God with his people in whom he takes great delight. He rejoices over them with singing! How comforting to know that God takes delight in us and even sings.

In Revelation there is a lot of music. Songs of worship at the throne of God in Heaven, the angels and the saints are singing and all who know and love God are giving him adoration, praise and joy.

In some translations, and in some languages, the verse found in Zephaniah 3:17 says that 'he rejoices over you with shouts of joy'. What an amazing picture of the God of the universe being so excited about us, that he shouts with joy. Do you know those kinds of shouts? Maybe when a new baby is born, or when your favourite sports team scores an important goal, or perhaps you have shouted for joy when new soldiers or enrolled, or when someone who has been struggling, makes a decision to follow Christ. Just as we rejoice in those things here on earth, God also shouts for joy as he rejoices in who we are – daughters and sons of the Most High King.

#### Our lives today

I love music. In fact I am one of those people who is almost always humming or singing aloud. Sometimes it is songs of praise, or a chorus or song I remember from my youth. Many times, it is just in response to something someone says, and what they say triggers a song in my head. Most of the time I don't just start singing out loud, but every now and then, I will. A friend I work with at IHQ does the same thing, someone will say something and it makes us both break out into song. A few years ago, I went through a time of mild depression, and the music stopped. I did not realise it, until one day someone mentioned to me that I did not sing any more. It took almost two years before I started singing again. Music in worship moves me and many times when I cannot express my feelings or my thoughts in prayer, I will sing. I am not the best singer, in fact sometimes I just make up the words, but I still raise my praise to the Lord who loves me.





### **Discussion questions**

1. What is your favourite worship song and why?
2. What types of songs do you think God is singing over you and how does that make you feel?
3. What is the song that pops into your head right now? Can you sing it out loud and see if others will join in?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

Our journey to Heaven is never an easy one. It will not be all fun, laughter and worship. Sometimes the road is hard, long and full of difficult days with health issues, lost relationships, loneliness, and more – but today, you can choose to sing as you find God in the difficult places. You are not alone because he is singing over you!

*Commissioner Dawn Heatwole – IHQ, from USA Central Territory*

As Strategic Mission Secretary at IHQ, my goal is to create community, encourage employees and officers to live out their testimony in the workplace, and to live my life in a way that will draw others to Jesus to spend eternity in Heaven.

## Heaven's glory

### Bible reading – Revelation 21:1-7, 9-26

*'He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'*

*(Revelation 21:6-7)*

### What the Bible says

When people think of Heaven, they anticipate a place of unimaginable glory, with streets paved with gold and mansions with rooms for everyone.

Revelation 21 beautifully describes Heaven as having a wall of jasper, foundations decorated with precious stones, gates of pearl and a street of gold. Yet, there is so much more to Heaven than things we simply hope to see. In verse 3 we discover that Heaven is where God will dwell among his people and in verse 4 "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'.

David, in Psalm 16:11, likely speaking about when we will dwell with God in heaven, says: 'You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.'

It is revealed in Isaiah 35:1-2 that the desert and 'will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy' and in verses 5-7, 'Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.'

Heaven is a place of unspeakable beauty, but its true glory is found in being worthy of the inheritance that God has left for us.

### Our lives today

I recall one winter day in Arizona, where I had my first experience of overnight snow. I woke to see a blanket of white covering the entire city. I had never seen such a thing, and was in awe of God's glory on earth. I am often reminded of earthly glory when I step outside to see the stars in the night sky, or sense the smell after the desert rain. Some days truly feel like Heaven is on earth, but we know that it is not.

Heaven is a real destination for believers and within grasp for non-believers. In Heaven, we are forgiven of our sins, and will sin no more. We are healed, and will no longer feel the pain of our earthly bodies. There is no more crying or mourning and as children of God, we will dwell with him for eternity, worshipping him and singing his praises. This is our inheritance, Heaven's glory.

It should be our desire to ensure that those we love, and those entrusted to us by God also learn of Heaven's glory.

'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Philippians 1:27). As a community of believers, we are directed to live a life worthy of entering the kingdom of Heaven, so that others will see Jesus in us. We are the living testimonies of God's grace in a dark world.



As Christians, we can share the good news of our inheritance, so that everyone can experience Heaven's glory and have the opportunity to spend eternity in the place where God dwells with us (Revelation 21:3).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you most look forward to about Heaven?
2. What are you doing to draw others to want to experience the glory of Heaven?
3. How can you challenge yourself to be more heavenly-minded?

### **Our journey to Heaven**

As you anticipate your journey to witness Heaven's glory, consider the words of Paul when he wrote to the Colossians, motivating them to be less earthly-minded and more heavenly-minded. 'Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory' (Colossians 3:1-4).

*Major Angela Strickland – IHQ, from USA Western Territory*

In my role as Editor of The Year Book, I see much of the worldwide work of The Salvation Army. I read about people following God's command to love one another and spreading his gospel to the far reaches. I too, am motivated to share the message of being heavenly-minded, and to live my life worthy of dwelling in the glory of Heaven.

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## *Notes*

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ON THE WAY  
*to heaven*  
WOMEN'S MINISTRIES 2019