

PREPARING
for
GLORY

Biblical
Answers to
40 QUESTIONS
on Living and
Dying in Hope
of Heaven

ELIZABETH
REYNOLDS TURNAGE



P U B L I S H I N G
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Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV’s alternate, foot-noted translation of *adelphoi* (“brothers and sisters”).

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

This book includes stories from the author’s life. It reflects the author’s present recollections of past experiences. Some names and characteristics have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been re-created.

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In memory of

Mary Jacqueline McIntyre Reynolds

(1938–2021)



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INTRODUCTION

Preparing for Glory

When I tell people I'm studying and writing on the biblical view of death, dying, and eternal life, I sometimes see *the look*. "Why?" says the look. "Are you sick? Are you morbid?" So far, no one has asked these questions out loud, but the look says it all. In case you're wondering too, I assure you—I'm not sick as far as I know, and I'm not morbid (in my opinion).

The reason I wrote this book may be similar to the reason you picked it up. It's the book I've needed as I've ventured repeatedly into the valley of the shadow of death over the last five years or so. In that valley, I've learned how much we need to be able to face our fear of death and dying with the hope of heaven. We need to prepare for death spiritually and practically. We need to know how to grieve with hope. We need to prepare for glory. I'll share a few of my stories from the valley because in them you may find your own.

I saw our need to prepare for glory when my seventy-eight-year-old mom faced a surgery to implant a pacemaker. The night before, she cried as she told me, "I'm afraid to die. I don't know what happens when I die. I don't even know if I'll like being in heaven." My mom was a new believer at the time, and, as is the case for many believers, what she'd heard

about heaven didn't convince her she wanted to spend eternity there. My mom needed to know that if she died in surgery, she would immediately wake in the welcoming arms of her Savior. In the hospital with my mom, I saw our need to know the real hope of heaven: the hope of everlasting peace, everlasting joy, and everlasting rest.

I saw our need to prepare for glory when my eighty-one-year-old father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. In the two years before his death, I saw his fear of death and his need for forgiveness. I also saw my own need for wisdom as I encouraged him to prepare an advance directive. I needed him to give me guidance about his end-of-life wishes, because his life was indeed ending. In my father's dying, I saw our need to prepare for death—spiritually, emotionally, and practically.

I saw our need to prepare for glory when our twenty-two-year-old son was diagnosed with a brain tumor and faced four life-threatening surgeries in a seven-month period. In that season, my family needed to know that what we affirmed was true: "My only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own but belong—body and soul—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."¹ In that harrowing season, I saw that we need to be ready for death at any and every age.

I saw our need to prepare for glory when I received the 2 a.m. phone call that my eighty-three-year-old mother had died unexpectedly of COVID-19. I became the executor of her estate, and, as I navigated numerous details amid deep and complicated grief, I saw our need for practical preparation (she left me the kind gift of a clear guide), and I saw our need for Jesus's companionship on the journey of grief.

There are so many questions we rarely ask and often avoid discussing. What happens when we die? How do we

leave legacies that will bless our loved ones when we are incapacitated or die? Do we really believe that our days are numbered? How do we grieve, and how do we help the grieving?

In the valleys of grief, sorrow, and affliction, I have discovered that the Bible offers profound hope. Friend, this life is a millisecond in a marathon. But we are headed toward eternal glory, when every day, day in and day out, we will know the joy for which we were designed: the joy of loving and serving God, the joy of loving and serving one another. When we know the true hope of eternal glory, we will have the courage to face death and dying. We will live intentionally so that we might die intentionally, all to the glory of God.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to address some common questions and emotions that surround the difficult topics of death and dying. Feel free to turn to the chapters that seem most relevant—they can be taken in any order. Each chapter includes a Scripture verse; a prayer; suggestions for further reading, listening, or watching; a verse from a classic hymn; and a reflection question. Read biblical passages for further encouragement as time allows. If possible, discuss your reading and reflections with others or, at the very least, journal about them.

The “Further Encouragement” resources are linked by QR code for easy access. You can also go to www.prpbooks.com/book/preparing-for-glory to access a list of all the links in the book.

The short Q&A format cannot comprehensively cover every nuance of the complex topics discussed. You will find a bibliography of helpful resources at the back of the book, tagged by topic.

Dear reader, I realize that some of the topics we will consider together may be painful for you, especially if loss is fresh. While I have tried to write with sensitivity about difficult topics, you may find that you need to skip some selections, coming back at another time.

I want you to know that I have prayed for you: that the Holy Spirit would speak to you the words you need to hear, would guide you to the Word you need to know, would comfort you with the comfort of Christ, would strengthen you to face your mortality, and would encourage you with the hope of glory. Jesus is coming soon. What joy we will know in that day.



PART ONE

Eternal Glory, Death, Christ's
Resurrection, and Heaven

1

What is glory, and do we really need to prepare for it?

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

Glory is a wide and weighty word. It is used throughout Scripture to refer to the glory of the triune God. But for the purposes of this book, we are using the word *glory* as many Christian writers did historically, as a shorthand for “eternal glory.” I propose this summary of eternal glory:

Eternal glory is a *place* and an *age* and a *state of glory* where glory is given to the glorious Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by glorified saints and where the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is enjoyed by glorified saints for all eternity.

As we see in 1 Peter, we have been called to eternal glory by “the God of all grace . . . in Christ.” Eternal glory is the future glory “to be revealed to us” after “the sufferings of this present time” (Rom. 8:18). We and all creation “groan inwardly” as we “wait eagerly” for eternal glory (Rom. 8:23). The sufferings of this world prepare us for eternal glory. Eternal glory is so weighty that it will one day prove our sufferings to have been as light as a feather (see 2 Cor. 4:17–18).

In one sense, of course, we have already inherited this eternal glory if we are in Christ: “Those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). And yet, our glory’s full fruition awaits the day of Christ’s return: “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

Where are we headed? To eternal glory. To heaven, and to the new heavens and the new earth. To looking fully on the face of Christ. To hearing the welcome of our Father and to enjoying the embrace of his Son. To truly believing and clearly seeing God’s love for us. To living fully into our creational calling to bear God’s image and to rule as servants in Christ’s kingdom. And we will do so forever.

As Charles Spurgeon proclaimed, “You and I, when we once enter glory, shall receive what we can neither lose nor leave. Eternity! . . . If you never sang before, yet sing this morning—‘God has called us unto his eternal glory,’ and this is to be our portion world without end.”¹

Do we need to prepare for eternal glory? If so, why? It is true that in one sense, we are already prepared for eternal glory by our union with Christ. And yet it is an essential part of our journey as Christians to think about, meditate on, wonder about, and practically prepare for the day we will leave this world as we know it to be welcomed by

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in heaven. When we prepare for glory, we more eagerly anticipate the joys that await us there. When we prepare for glory, we live and leave the legacy that will draw others to the hope of the gospel. When we prepare for glory, we love our friends and family well by giving them clarity to guide them in their season of grief.

The sands of time are sinking;
the dawn of heaven breaks;
the summer morn I've sighed for,
the fair sweet morn awakes;
dark, dark has been the midnight,
but dayspring is at hand,
and glory, glory dwelleth
in Emmanuel's land.

Anne R. Cousin

With eternal, everlasting, wondrous joy and glory in mind, we can face the “light and momentary afflictions” of death and dying, aging and illness, grief and loss. We can learn about death’s beginning and death’s end. We can explore our future state in heaven and our forever state in the new heavens and the new earth. And yes, we can face the agonizing reality of judgment and hell.

We can get practical about our possessions, and we can make end-of-life plans to lessen our loved ones’ burden of grief and guilt. We can forgive and ask forgiveness, we can say thank-you, and we can share our stories of redemption. We can learn how to lament, and we can step into the journey of grief. While these tasks may intimidate us, we can approach them confidently with the hope of eternal glory. I invite you to join me in this wonderful journey.

PRAYER

Eternal and triune God, how we look forward to the day we will join you in eternal glory. Enliven our imaginations

What is glory, and do we really need to prepare for it?

so that we can anticipate that day with joy. Encourage our hearts so that we can prepare for such glory, both spiritually and practically. In Jesus's glorious name, amen.



FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT

Read Romans 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; 1 Peter 5:10–11.

Read “Glory” by Charles Spurgeon.

FOR REFLECTION

How may thoughts of your future in eternal glory encourage your heart as you consider facing death?

2

Why do people have to die?

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:16–2:17)

Why did she have to die? Even though my mother was eighty-three years old when she died, and even though she had lived a full and long life, I still asked this question. In our heartache, many of us have raised the seemingly unanswerable question—if God loves us, why do we die? We cannot soothe the fiery pain behind this question, but as we see God’s merciful response to the sin that introduced death into the world, we find hope for redemption even in the curse of death.

In the beginning, God formed Adam from the dust, Eve from Adam’s rib, breathing life into the first man and woman and shaping them in his image, with the potential to live forever (see Gen. 1:26–27; 2:7). He called them “very good” (1:31). God generously invited Adam and Eve to eat from every tree of the garden except for the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil (see 2:16–17). If they disobeyed his command and ate from that tree, he warned, they would die (see v. 17).

Genesis 3:1–6 tells us how the serpent, Satan embodied, approached Eve (and Adam, who likely was standing right beside her), tempting her to eat from the only forbidden tree. When she objected, the serpent scoffed: “You will not surely die” (v. 4). Adam and Eve did eat the fruit of the tree, but they did not die physically—at least not immediately. Instead, their eyes were opened, they discovered they were naked, and they felt shame. They hid from God as he walked through the garden seeking them.

As it turned out, the first death was a spiritual one that broke the relationship between God and his beloved creation. And yet, through sin, physical death would also enter the world (see Rom. 5:12).

If the story had ended here, there would be little point for us to prepare for death and dying. But by God’s grace, it did not. Even before God told Adam and Eve the consequences of their sin, he addressed Satan, telling him that he would one day send a child to crush him (see Gen. 3:15). Genesis 3:15 is the first proclamation of the gospel hope in Scripture. We know this promised child would be God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, and he would defeat Satan forever by dying on

O Christ, be thou our lasting joy,
our ever great reward!
Our only glory may it be
to glory in the Lord.

John Chandler

a cross. Death itself would be redeemed by his sacrifice.

We should grieve death and dying. Death is unnatural—it is one of the devastating consequences of the fall.

And yet, because God allowed his own Son to die, God’s people have hope. It is in this hope that we can face the harsh reality of death and dying.

PRAYER

Creator God, thank you for making us in your image, for shaping us for life forever with you. Thank you for providing a way out of sin and death through the death and resurrection of your beloved Son, Jesus. As we prepare for dying and death, may we hold tightly to the hope we have in him. In the name of the resurrected Christ we pray, amen.

FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT

Read Genesis 1–3.

Read “Why Must We Die?” by
Eddie Mercado.



FOR REFLECTION

God planned for the redemption of death even as humanity’s sin brought death into the world. How might this encourage you?