

IMAGINE HEAVEN

Relationships in Heaven

Saturday, 9/19/20 at 4:00 | Sunday, 9/20/20 at 9:00

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: *We are all blessed with relationships!* In other words, *we have people in our lives!* To some extent, *they know us and we know them.* *But there is much more!* Relationships involve ✓ caring about each other, ✓ spending time together, ✓ being patient with each other, ✓ communicating with each other, and ✓ encouraging each other.¹

Since relationships can be very important now, do you think they will continue and even improve in heaven? Let's see *what the Bible says and what some people have experienced.*

For anyone who has not yet **read** or **heard** last week's sermon, *please do so A.S.A.P.* – since that sermon is the basis for this sermon!

1. **Our Most Important Relationship:** It's *with the Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and intended to be for now and forever!* Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven: **“This is eternal life, that they [my followers] may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”** (John 17:3 NAU). In

¹ <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/this-what-being-relationship-really-means-2.html>

other words, *when we have a God-given relationship with God the Father and God the Son*, then we have God's gift of eternal life!

- a. Think about this: When we were **dead** in our sins and **uninterested** in God, **He** loved us, so **He** took action to make us His holy children through Jesus! Now, *being in God's family*, we can pray: "**Our Father** who art in heaven..."
- b. Having a relationship with God **changes** everything for eternity *and should radically transform our lives as we live here on earth!* Think about this profound statement by 20-year-old Ally Breedlove: **ETERNAL LIFE is God's gift to us, while THIS LIFE is our gift to God!**² Therefore, as we ponder the **length** of eternal life and the **amazement** of eternal life, *let us live this life for God!*
- c. Now, God is in heaven and we are on earth, but what is coming in the future? Jesus said to those who believe in Him: "**In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also**" (John 14:2-3 NAU). // Now, *being in Christ*, we are members of God's family and, *in the future*, we will be with Him in His house forever and ever!

2. **Earth Relationship Problems:** Here on earth we all have a HUGE problem: SIN! It takes the wonderful

² Ally Breedlove, sister of Ben; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEhAtP2Fnb8>

things God has made and makes a HUGE mess of them!
Here are some troubled relationships from the Bible:

- a. Cain and Abel: ^{NAU} **Genesis 4:3-6, 8** Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel... brought [an offering] of the [firstborn] of his flock... And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry... And... when they were in the field... Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. // Unbelief and jealousy can lead to horrible things!
- b. The Israelites and Moses: ^{NAU} **Exodus 17:1-4** ...all the congregation of the sons of Israel... camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people... grumbled against Moses and said, "Why... have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." // The people **had** lost their trust in the LORD and **were** focusing on their bodily needs!
- c. Mary and Martha: ^{NAU} **Luke 10:38-40** ...a woman named Martha welcomed [Jesus] into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations;

and she came up to [Jesus] and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” //

Mary was doing the best thing – *listening to Jesus*, but Martha became angry – *since her sister was not doing what SHE wanted!*

- d. Paul and Barnabas: ^{NAU} **Acts 15:36-39** After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and see how they are.*” Barnabas wanted to take... Mark.... But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along... And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another... // Whenever sin gets the best of us, *let us repent!* And whenever others sin against us, *let us give them the gift of forgiveness!*

3. **Three Situations**: ♣ Here and now, ♣ in heaven before Jesus’ return, and ♣ with God after Jesus’ return:

- a. Here on earth: We have a physical body – *which is temporary*, as well as a soul and a spirit – *which are eternal*.
- b. In heaven – between now and Jesus’ return: For those who die in Jesus, their physical bodies remain on earth, but their souls and spirits are taken to be with God in heaven.
- c. With God after Jesus’ return: When Jesus comes, He will ♣ raise all bodies, ♣ make them immortal, and ♣ reunite them with their souls and spirits. Regarding that final body, the Bible says: “...the Lord Jesus Christ... will transform the body

of our humble state [the body that lived and died on earth] into conformity with the body of His glory..." (Phil. 3:20-21 NAU). Then we will have glorified bodies for all eternity!

4. **Heaven Relationship Blessings:** We all know people who have died in Christ, *and we miss them!* When they were here, we could talk with them and spend time with them, *but death has brought about a JARRING SEPARATION.* When Jesus returns, *we will have the fullness of eternal life*, which will include restored relationships forever and ever. But what can be said about heaven now, before Jesus' returns?

a. Dr. Mary Neal: Before her NDE (near-death experience), *she was a Christian*; then, *when she was kayaking*, her kayak became wedged between two rocks and she was completely underwater for 15 minutes; then *her body was dead on the shore for another 15 minutes.*

i. Being a medical doctor and trying to understand what happened, she said: **"After going through every bit of research that I could come up with..."** (Video clip 1: 5 – 28).

ii. She explained how she was welcomed: **"When I arrived..."** (Video clip 2: 3:39 – 4:19). Dr. Neal related her welcoming party to the **"great cloud of witnesses"** mentioned in **Hebrews 12:1 (NAU)**.

b. "Gathered to his people": **Examples:**

i. **Abraham:** ^{NAU} **Genesis 25:8 ...breathed his last... and he was gathered to his people.**

- ii. **Ishmael:** ^{NAU} **Genesis 25:17** ...breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.
 - iii. **Isaac:** ^{NAU} **Genesis 35:29** ...breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people...
 - iv. **Jacob:** ^{NAU} **Genesis 49:33** ...breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.
 - v. **Aaron:** ^{NAU} **Deuteronomy 32:50** ...died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people...
- c. “Gathered to his people”: **Meaning:** The LORD said this in regard to Josiah, *one of the few good kings of Judah:* ^{NAU} **2 Chronicles 34:28** “...I [the LORD] will gather you [your soul and spirit] to your fathers [in heaven] and you [your physical body] shall be gathered to your grave in peace... Compare that with this NDE of Rev. Don Piper when he died: “...a light enveloped me, with a brilliance beyond earthly comprehension... In my next moment of awareness, I was standing in heaven. ...at that moment I became aware of a large crowd of people. They stood in front of a brilliant, ornate gate.... As the crowd rushed toward me... I [saw] people I had known. ...I knew instantly that all of them had died during my lifetime. ...every person was smiling, shouting, and praising God. ...I knew they were my celestial welcoming committee.... Some hugged me and a few kissed my cheek, while others pumped my hand. Never had I felt more loved. One person in that greeting committee

was Mike Wood, my childhood friend. Mike was special because he invited me to Sunday school... Mike was the most devoted young Christian I knew. He was also a popular kid and had lettered four years in football, basketball, and track.... When he was nineteen, Mike was killed in a car wreck. It broke my heart... Now I saw Mike in heaven. As he slipped his arm around my shoulder, my pain and grief vanished.... Everything felt blissful. Perfect.”³ What does it mean to be gathered to our people? To join those people in heaven!

- d. Bodies: Now our bodies are physical; when Jesus returns our bodies will be raised and immortal; however, what about those who are in heaven now?
- i. Dr. Richard Eby gave this description of his body during his NDE: “I was the same size, the same shape, as the person I had seen in the mirror for years.... In amazement I could see through my body...”⁴
 - ii. Dean Braxton gave this description of Jesus’ body during his NDE: “Jesus is pure light... He is brighter than the noonday sun, but we can still look at him in Heaven.”⁵ Doesn’t that sound like Jesus when He was transfigured? The Bible says: ^{NAU} **Matthew 17:2 [Jesus] was**

³ John Burke, *Imagine Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 84-85.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun...

Conclusion: Jesus said, “**I am the Light of the world**” (John 8:12 NAU). Jesus also said to His followers, “**You are the light of the world**” (Matthew 5:14 NAU). As Jesus shines as bright as the sun, *we are called to reflect His light to others in this sin-darkened world!*

Then, *to encourage us*, the Bible says, “**Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the [sky above], and those who lead the many to righteousness [to be righteous in God’s sight through faith in Jesus], like the stars forever and ever**” (Dan. 12:3 NAU).

Remember: ETERNAL LIFE is God’s gift to us, while THIS LIFE is our gift to God! Therefore, **rejoicing in our Savior and caring about the eternal wellbeing of others, *let us reflect the light of Jesus in all we say and do!***

Let Us Pray: Dear Father in heaven, we thank You for Your great mercy upon us now and for the amazing place called heaven! Help us to **long for it, live for it, and invite others to join us there through Jesus!**

Book Reminder: Imagine Heaven is available in the Narthex; to cover the cost, please put an extra \$10 in the offering plate. Thanks!