

Looking Forward to Heaven: Daily Doses of Hope

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Estimated Release: January 16, 2024

Do you ever wonder what heaven is like? Or do you think it is so far beyond your imagination that you've quit wondering? God has given us hints about heaven in the Bible, and he wants us to imagine its rich treasures, eagerly anticipate living there, and lean into that hope through our trials.

In this **six-week study**, Wendy Neill weaves her own experiences of chronic pain, loss, and hope with extensive research from the Bible and scholars. After reading this study **on your own or with a group**, you will have an "informed imagination" that can picture the marvelous place God is preparing for you.

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Excerpt

Week 3, Day 3 - Sacred Secrets

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.

(Revelation 2:17 NKJV)

It seems odd to me that we choose names for children before they are even born. How can we possibly know what name will “fit” a child when we don’t even know what they will look like, what their gifts will be, or what they will be interested in? My husband, Kelly, and I spent hours poring over pages of baby names when we were expecting our first daughter. She was my miracle. We had wanted a child for several years only to be disappointed time and again. But God had his own timing, and this once barren woman was expecting a baby.

My requirements for a name were simple and shallow: I wanted it to be easy to spell and for the gender of the name to be obvious. My husband’s requirements would prove far more daunting. Our child’s name could not remind him of any troublesome student he had ever known. It took a long time to pass that test, but I finally found a name that didn’t have a negative connotation for him. He said he wanted to think about it a little longer. I prayed that he would approve so this child wouldn’t go through life without a name! Soon thereafter, I found a bouquet of flowers on my dining room table. The card attached said, “I can’t wait to meet you, Mommy! Love, Crystal Diane Neill.” It was Kelly’s sweet way of telling me that he agreed, and this special name would cross our lips for years to come.

Once we had chosen the name, it was our little secret. We didn't want to hear disparaging words about the name we had selected or suggestions from family members. "You should name her after your Aunt Ethel" or "I've always thought Florida would be a nice name for a girl." It was our right as her parents to choose her name.

As our daughters grew, their personalities blossomed. We developed pet names for them. Grandma dubbed Kendra "Sunshine and Rainbows" because she made everyone smile. Later, pet names evolved from shared family experiences. But those are TOP secret—my girls would kill me if I put them in print!

Does your name have a special meaning? Do you have a pet name?

I love my girls' names, but I feel a little sheepish that I didn't put more thought into picking names with special meanings. God is much more intentional. He chose a very special name for his son. Where Kelly gave me flowers to announce Crystal's name, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to announce his son's name: "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:31-33). Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, which means "The Lord saves." I have ornaments on my Christmas tree with various other names for Jesus, such as Immanuel (God with us), Christ (Anointed One), and The Prince of Peace.

Throughout the Bible, we see God giving new names to his children that reflect his love and purpose.

- From Abram (exalted father) to Abraham (father of many nations) - Genesis 17:5
- From Jacob (deceiver) to Israel (he struggles with God and has overcome) - Genesis 32:27-28
- From Simon (to hear¹) to Cephas/Peter (rock) - John 1:42

I love this one tender verse in Isaiah, where God expresses his deep love for his people by promising them a new name. "No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married" (Isaiah 62:4). Hephzibah means "my delight is in her" and Beulah means "married."

Have you been given a negative nickname? Or have you been labeled unfairly?

Maybe you have been saddled with a destructive label like "Deserted" or "Desolate." Let today's overcomer verse, Revelation 2:17, remind you that you are dearly loved. Jesus left heaven and died a brutal death because he loves you. He knows you better than anyone on Earth. He knows not only who you are, but who you are meant to be. He has chosen a sacred, secret name just for you.

Dan B. Allender, in his book *To Be Told*, talks about Revelation 2:17 by saying,

When I stand before God, I will be given a new name in a moment of tender, inconceivable intimacy. No one will speak that name but the Most High God. No one will whisper that name to me but my divine Lover. It is worth living our life well in the midst of the darkest heartache and the greatest uncertainty just to hear that name spoken.²

¹ Tony Scialdone, "What does Simon mean?," *GodWords*. <https://godwords.org/what-does-simon-mean> (accessed January 29, 2023).

² Dan. B. Allender, *To Be Told* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1996), 30.

Why is it written on a white stone? The John Brown commentary says the white stone might refer to an ancient “custom of voting for an accused criminal with a black and a white stone. If the white stones outnumbered, the criminal was set free!”³ David Guzik writes, “the use of a white stone had many associations. A white stone could be a ticket to a banquet, a sign of friendship, evidence of having been counted, or as a sign of acquittal in a court of law.”⁴ I am encouraged by each of these possibilities! They all point to God’s forgiveness and acceptance. That complete acceptance, coupled with the promise of a secret new name, is another reason I am looking forward to heaven.

Sample Questions for Group Study

*If you are meeting in small groups, feel free to discuss the **bold** questions found in the chapters as well as these:*

1. Why don't we talk about heaven more often?
2. Which Bible verses or ideas from this week sparked your imagination?
3. How has your mental picture of heaven changed this week?
4. What is your favorite feast memory? Was it a backyard BBQ with friends and family? A picnic for two? A seven-course Italian meal? What made it a special memory? In what ways do you think the heavenly feast will be similar, and how will it be different?
5. I'll ask you the same question I asked my ladies' class: “What person from the Bible would you like to sit beside at the feast in heaven? What loved one would you like on your other side?”
6. How does viewing the church as the bride of Christ change your perspective on your brothers and sisters at church? Read Colossians 3 while pondering that question.

³ John Brown, “Revelation 2:12-17,” *Blue Letter Bible*. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/brown_john/Rev/Chap_02c.cfm (accessed Feb. 6, 2022)

⁴ David Guzik, “Jesus’ Letters to the Churches,” *Blue Letter Bible*. https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Rev/Rev-2.cfm (accessed Feb. 6, 2022)