

THINKING *Heavenward*

Living Daily in Light of
our Eternal Home

SAMPLE PAGES:

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Lesson One, Days One through Four

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Lesson *One*

Embracing Heaven

“Lord, you know I love You and I want to go to heaven and live forever in Your presence, but please, before you return or take me home, please let me experience what it is like to be kissed by a boy...and to find a wonderful man to marry...and have a wedding that is just like I’ve dreamed. And please let me have time to experience the joys of married life, and please...”

My teenage prayers betrayed the immaturity and ignorance of my faith. While I loved my Lord, I had little understanding of His majesty and greatness, the happiness which accompanies His presence, His sovereignty over all situations in life, the glories of His eternal kingdom, and the relative unimportance of earthly pleasures and desires.

I was not focused on storing up treasure in heaven...I was desiring all the earthly treasure I could get before going to heaven.

And though I cannot say that I do not still have moments when I once again think earthly-minded and self-centered thoughts, I am thankful that God has done a work in my heart. I now desire Him and His presence more than anything on this earth. I long for heaven. I long to see Him. I long to be like Him: to be holy, not only in my standing before Him, but in actuality and practice. I want His plans to come to pass. I want His will to be done, on earth, in heaven, and in my heart and life.

With the psalmist, I want the continual thoughts of my heart to be

O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup...
You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

“Set your mind
[affections, KJV]
on things above,
not on things on the earth.”

Colossians 3:2

DAY ONE

“Set _____ [affections, KJV] on things _____ ,
not on _____ .”

Colossians _____ :2

Hebrews 11 is well-known as the “Hall of Faith” chapter in the Bible. Within its verses, we find examples and explanations that encourage and teach us to live faithfully in this present age. Even though I know this chapter well and have read it many times, it has recently taken on new meaning for me. Today, enjoy a brief look at one profound verse from this remarkable chapter.

1. Speaking of believers such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah, the author of Hebrews says:

*“These all died in faith, not having received the promises,
but having seen them afar off were assured of them,
embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”*

Hebrews 11:13

a. What do you learn about these believers and “the promises.”

b. What did they “confess?”

2. The mind set (confession) that they were “strangers” and “pilgrims” on earth actually appears in their own words and writings in the Old Testament. In fact, it seems that they passed this truth down from generation to generation. Below, match the quote on the right with its speaker.

David

“I am a stranger and a sojourner among you...” —Genesis 23:4 KJV

Abraham

“...The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.” —Genesis 47:9

Jacob

“...For I am a stranger with You, A sojourner, as all my fathers were.”
—Psalm 39:12

3. A word study on the meaning of the words “stranger” and “pilgrim” in the original language provides the following definitions:¹

Stranger— “Strange, foreign, not of one’s family...a guest...It generally means a stranger from another place...[one] coming from another country.”

Pilgrim— “A stranger, sojourner; not simply one who is passing through, but a foreigner who has settled down, however briefly, next to or among the native people.”

a. Is this the way you have thought / currently think of your lifetime on earth? Explain.

b. Do you think most believers today see themselves as strangers and pilgrims on this earth? Why or why not?

4. In their pilgrimage, the faithful believers of Hebrews 11 “embraced” heaven and all the promises which accompany it. To “embrace” something means **to hold it tightly, to hold it dear, to show affection for it, or to be closely and intimately connected**. Embracing something could also be described as **a movement of the body in response to the affections of the mind and heart**.

a. Reread the bolded words above, taking a moment to meditate on what it means to embrace heaven.

To embrace heaven means...

b. Now here are the primary questions as you begin this course on *Thinking Heavenward*:

_____ Do you see this world as the place of your pilgrimage?

_____ Do you think of yourself as a sojourner and your life as a journey to heaven...or are you comfortable and at home in this world?

_____ Do you “embrace” heaven? Do you embrace heaven on a *daily* basis?

_____ Do you embrace *the promises* of heaven?

_____ Do your words and life show affection for heaven? Would those closest to you (including your children) describe you as one who desires and looks forward to heaven?

_____ Does your heart love heaven, and the promises of heaven, so much that it daily affects the movements (actions, decisions) of your life?

c. If you answered “yes” to the questions above, then the lessons to follow will strengthen, stir up and excite your affections!

If you answered “no” to any of the above, then the next question is: Would you like to have answered “yes”? If so, then this course will get you well on your way to fully embracing the promises of God and living faithfully in the light of your eternal home!

5. As you begin this course, what are the desires of your heart? Record either your prayer or a list of your desires. When finished, initial the box. (Additional space is available on page 26.)

DAYS TWO through FOUR

“_____ your mind [_____ , KJV] on _____ above ,
 _____ on _____ on the _____ .”
 _____ 3 :2

The doctrine of heaven is a subject that should be of great importance to every Christian. It is the place where we will dwell for eternity; therefore, we ought to become well acquainted with it now!

1. In the average month, approximately how often do your thoughts turn to heaven?

almost never once or twice sometimes many times daily many times per day

2. When you think of heaven, what thoughts most readily come to mind?

3. In the *Scripture at a Glance* section of this study (pages 141 through 151) you will find several passages which speak about, or give insight into, our eternal home and the way things will be in that eternal state. These scriptures will be your focus for the next three days of study. Take a minute now to glance at these pages.

As you looked at the *Scripture at a Glance* pages, you may have noticed that several passages have bolded words or phrases which highlight some of the **names which refer to our eternal home**. Return to these pages, reading each bolded name out loud.

a. Which two names do you think are the least heard or used in everyday thought or conversations about heaven?

b. Do you know of other names by which heaven is referred to in Scripture? If so, record one or two.

4. Again using the *Scripture at a Glance* pages, begin reading **slowly and meditatively** through all the passages. As you read, look for and **mark things Scripture indicates we will have or experience in heaven**. Underline these truths with an orange colored pencil. After reading and underlining, return to each marking and make a list using the chart on page 20. (There may be some passages with no underlining. The list on page 20 has been started for you. Remember, you have three days to finish this assignment. Memory verse boxes for Days Three and Four are provided on page 156.)

What we will have or experience in our Eternal Home

Psalm 16 *God's presence*
fullness of joy
pleasures

Psalm 23 *forever*

5. What was your initial response as you completed your list?*

- a. Was your response as you would desire it to be? If not, how do you wish your response had been different?
- b. Were there verses or thoughts which surprised you? Were your thoughts about heaven enhanced or kindled? Explain.
- c. In your reading, did you notice any repeated thoughts or phrases? If so, what?

* If several of the passages were new to you, do not be overwhelmed! In the weeks to come, as you study these truths little by little, they will become more clear and precious to your heart.

6. The ultimate goal of reading and marking is not the listing, but the focus and meditation that takes place during your study...and the prayer and response that flows out of it.

Think for a moment about the names by which heaven is referred, for example:

The house of the LORD
The Paradise of God
The city of the living God
A kingdom which cannot be shaken
A homeland
A place (prepared) for you

With these names in mind, review the list you made on page 20 and turn your heart to prayer and prayerful application² asking yourself,

Do I *really* believe these truths about heaven?

If I do, what difference will it make:

In my love for God?

In the way I love my neighbor?

In my focus and behavior?

In my speech?

In what I teach/how I disciple others?

In how I will love my spouse?

In how I love my children?

In the way I view or complete my responsibilities at home?

In the area of personal purity (thoughts and actions)?

In my self-control?

In my kindness to others?

In my submission to my husband?

In seeing myself as a stranger and a pilgrim here on earth?

If you have not already done so, write out an answer to at least three of the above questions.

7. Spend your remaining time prayerfully focusing on the greatness, generosity and goodness of our eternal God. Initial the box as the “Amen” to your prayer.

END OF SAMPLE