

Thinking *Heavenward*

Living Daily in Light of
our Eternal Home

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SAMPLE PAGES:

Table of Contents
About this Study
Lesson One

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Table of Contents

About this Study 9

Lesson One	<i>Embracing Heaven</i>	15
Lesson Two	<i>When Old Becomes New</i>	29
Lesson Three	<i>Glimpses of the Heavenly</i>	41
Lesson Four	<i>The Praises of Heaven</i>	53
Lesson Five	<i>Perfect Humility</i>	63
Lesson Six	<i>Where God Dwells</i>	77
Lesson Seven	<i>Truth Matters</i>	89
Lesson Eight	<i>Give Me Your Heart</i>	101
Lesson Nine	<i>Purifying Love</i>	115
Lesson Ten	<i>Longing for Home</i>	127

Scripture at a Glance 141

Appendices 153

Endnotes and Bibliography 161

About this Study

Thinking Heavenward is a ten-week course designed to help you set your mind and affections on heaven in such a way as to impact your daily life on this earth. In order to help you understand the focus and scope of this course, the following explanations should be helpful.

Heaven:

As you come across the word “heaven” in this study (and you often will!), understand it to mean:

- the dwelling place of God and the believer’s final, eternal state of life in His presence.
- the invisible realm of God’s kingdom and reign which will appear at the glorious return of Christ.

Eschatology:

“Eschatology” refers to the theology of final matters, including heaven, hell, and the eternal state. Christians throughout the years have disagreed regarding how to interpret certain Scriptures in regard to this issue, and as a result they have developed a number of different eschatological positions or frameworks. Yet believers can disagree about the specific details of the end times while still continuing to fellowship around the shared truths of the gospel message of repentance unto salvation through Christ alone, and the hope of an eternal life with our Lord.

Thinking Heavenward does not outline the major eschatological positions, and in general it deals with the final, eternal state of believers in Christ Jesus rather than how or when the eternal state will come into being (and as such, it avoids many of the major areas of disagreement). Yet, depending upon your eschatology, you may understand a few Scripture passages in certain lessons to refer to a time prior to the eternal state. Where this is the case, do not become unduly confused or distracted as you complete the lesson. Instead, consider these passages as still being able to provide certain insights into the eternal state of man, and move on with the day’s work. If, once you complete the lesson, you have questions about how to interpret specific passages of Scripture, speak with a pastor or discipler.

Required materials:

A Bible

A pencil or pen

A set of colored pencils

This *Thinking Heavenward* course book

A three-ring binder to hold the pages together (*Technically not essential but definitely helpful!*)

Does it matter what version of the Bible I use? Quotations throughout this book come from the New King James Version of the Bible. It is fine to use another translation, such as the English Standard Version, the New American Standard or the New International Version, to answer questions. However, paraphrases, such as The Living Bible, will be more difficult to use for study.

You can join a study group already in progress.

In order to lay a good foundation for study, first complete Day One and Day Five of Lesson One, then jump ahead to the lesson the class is currently completing. At the end of the study, you can come back to the beginning and work through any lessons you missed.

Remember that prayer is essential as you study.

In our busy world, it is all too easy to plunge right in and begin studying without pausing to ask God's blessing on, and help in, our Bible study endeavors. Always begin your time of study with prayer. . . and continue with a prayerful attitude, talking to God as you read, meditate and formulate answers!

Shorter study options

In several lessons, a section contains an assignment that is longer than usual. In these cases, both boldface and non-boldface passages appear. If you have limited study time, complete only the boldface passages. Doing so will give you a good overview of essential truths. For an example of boldface entries, see page 56.

Scripture memorization

Each lesson contains a memory verse related to the topic of study and intended for you to use in your meditations and prayers. Verses appear in their entirety opposite Day One of each lesson. Work to memorize the verses by completing the fill-in-the-blank activities. Try to complete the blanks more and more by memory as the week progresses.

Helps for meditation

You will often find encouragement to spend time meditating (pondering, thinking) on Scripture. Meditation is essential for spiritual growth, for God-honoring life change and for prayer. To help with this, there are two pages (for example, pages 26-27) at the end of each lesson that you may use during times of study/meditation. You may choose to record insights, prayers, personal applications, study notes, questions and other thoughts that come to mind as you think on Scripture. The study itself will not usually direct you to use these pages; they are designed for personal use.

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have comments or questions, or if you would like to share what the LORD has done in your life as you have studied His Word in this course, please contact us at:

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*May the LORD bless your study,
Kristie*

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.

Psalm 16:5, 11

*“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 mindset (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 any 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.

DAY FIVE

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

Much like the apostle Paul (who wrote the words of your memory verse), the early Puritans knew the importance of putting their thoughts on “things above,” and they exhorted their fellow believers to do so in daily life and meditations. Below are some excerpts from *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* written by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)—one of God’s men whose writings have had great impact on my life and heart.³

1. Because of its unfamiliar, older style, the reading to come may initially seem overwhelming. But I think you will find it so helpful and thought-provoking that “overwhelming” will not be how you will ultimately describe this assignment. So, please begin with an open mind and a willing heart! (*If time is limited, read only quotations beginning with bolded letters.*)

As you read the following quotations, underline thoughts which stand out to you. Then, in the space beside each quotation, use eight words or less to summarize Baxter’s reasons for setting our mind and affections on heaven.

Why keep my thoughts on heaven?

A. “Is there a rest, and such a rest, remaining for us? Why then are our thoughts no more upon it? Why are not our hearts continually there? Why dwell we not there in constant contemplation? . . . ask your hearts in good earnest, What is the cause of this neglect? Are we reasonable in this, or are we not? Hath the eternal God provided us such a glory, and promised to take us up to dwell with himself, and is not this worth the thinking on? Should not the strongest desire of our hearts be after it, and the daily delights of our souls be there?”

B. “Whoever thou art, therefore, that readest these lines, I require thee, as thou tenderest thine allegiance to the God of heaven, as ever thou hopest for a part in this glory, that thou presently take thy heart to task: chide it for its willful strangeness to God: turn thy thoughts from the pursuit of vanity; bend thy soul to study eternity; busy it about the life to come; habituate thyself to such contemplations, and let not those thoughts be seldom and cursory but settle upon them; dwell there; bathe thy soul in heaven’s delights. . . If ever I shall prevail with you in any thing, let me prevail with you in this, to set your hearts where you expect a rest and treasure.”

C. “Should not our interest in heaven, and our relation to it, continually keep our hearts upon it. . . Why, there our Father keeps his court. Do we not call him ‘Our Father which art in heaven?’ Ah! ungracious, unworthy children, that can be so taken up in their play below as to be mindless of such a Father?”

D. “Consider, A heart set upon heaven will be one of the most unquestionable evidences of thy sincerity, and a clear discovery of a true work of saving grace upon thy soul. . . A heart therefore set upon heaven is no more but a heart set upon God, desiring after this full enjoyment; and surely, a heart set upon God through Christ, is the truest evidence of saving grace. External actions are easiest discovered, but those of the heart are the surest evidences.”

E. “Consider, A heart in heaven will be a most excellent preservative against temptations, a powerful means to kill thy corruptions, and to save thy conscience from the wounds of sin. . . when we are idle, we tempt the devil to tempt us: as it is an encouragement to a thief, to see your doors open and nobody within. . . but when the heart is taken up with God, it cannot have while to hearken to temptations. . . A heavenly mind is freest from sin, because it is of clearest understanding in spiritual matters of greatest concernment. . . Further, a heavenly mind is exceedingly fortified against temptations, because the affections are so thoroughly prepossessed with the delights of another world.”

F. “Consider, The diligent keeping of your hearts on heaven, will. . . put life into all your duties. It is the heavenly christian that is the lively christian. It is our strangeness to heaven that makes us so dull. . . Oh, what life then would it put into a christian’s endeavours, if he would frequently forethink of his everlasting treasure. We run so slowly, and strive so lazily, because we so little mind the prize.”

G. “If the Lord of glory can stoop so low, as to set his heart on sinful dust, sure one would think we should easily be persuaded to set our hearts on Christ and glory, and to ascend to him in our daily affections. . . Oh, if God’s delight were no more in us, than ours is in him, what should we do?”

H. “Consider, If thou make not conscience of this duty of diligent keeping thy heart in heaven, First, Thou disobeyest the flat commands of God: Secondly, Thou lovest the sweetest parts of Scripture: Thirdly, And dost frustrate the most gracious discoveries of God.

God hath not left it as a thing indifferent, and at thy own choice, whether thou wilt do it or not. He hath made it thy duty, as well as the means of thy comfort, that so a double bond might tie thee not to forsake thy own mercies. . . The same God that hath commanded thee to believe, and to be a christian, hath commanded thee to set thy affections above.”

I. “Reader, I entreat thee to ponder it, why God should reveal so much of his counsel, and tell us beforehand of the joys we shall possess, but only that he would have us know it for our joy? If it had not been to make comfortable our present life, and fill us with the delights of our foreknown blessedness, he might have kept his purpose to himself, and never have let us know till we come to enjoy it, not have revealed it to us till death had discovered it, what he meant to do with us in the world to come. . .

But it hath pleased our Father to open his counsel, and to let us know the very intent of his heart, and to acquaint us with the eternal extent of his love; and all this that our joy may be full, and we might live as the heirs of such a kingdom. And shall we now overlook all, as if he had revealed no such matter?”

J. “Consider, There is no man so highly honoureth God, as he who hath his conversation in heaven; and without this we deeply dishonour him. Is it not a disgrace to the father, when the children do feed on husks, and are clothed in rags, and accompany with none but rogues and beggars? Is it not so to our Father, when we who call ourselves his children, shall feed on earth, and the garb of our souls be but like that of the naked world? . .

But, oh! when a christian can live above, and rejoice his soul in the things that are unseen, how doth God take himself to be honoured by such a one! The Lord may say, Why, this man believes me; I see he can trust me, and take my word: he rejoiceth in my promises, before he hath possession: he can be glad and thankful for that which his bodily eyes did never see: this man’s rejoicing is not in the flesh: I see he loves me, because he minds me: his heart is with me, he loves my presence: and he shall surely enjoy it in my kingdom forever.”

K. “Say not, We are unable to set our own hearts on heaven, this must be the work of God only, and therefore all your exhortation is in vain; for I tell you, though God be the chief disposer of our hearts, yet next under him you have the greatest command of them yourselves, and a great power in the ordering of your own thoughts, and for determining your own wills in their choice: though without Christ you can do nothing, yet under him you may do much, and must do much. . . ”

L. “Consider, There is nothing else that is worth the setting our hearts on. If God have them not, who or what shall have them?”

2. Of all the reasons Baxter gives for setting your thoughts on heaven, which do you find most motivating? Why?

3. If Baxter is right and believers lack a continual heavenly focus (a focus on “things above”), what subjects most often occupy our minds and hearts? Why would these tend to take precedence over thoughts of heaven?

Subjects

Why these tend to take precedence

4. In your memory verse, the word translated “*Set your mind on*” implies setting “not only thought but also the affections. . .”⁴

a. As a rule, do you think your *affections* are truly set on things above? Explain.

b. Is “setting your affections” an action? If so, what does it look like?

c. In Colossians 3:1-4 (the context of this week’s memory verse), Paul gives reasons for setting your mind / affections above. What are they? (*After recording answers from the passage, you may consult a reliable commentary for additional insight.*)

5. Other than completing this course, what would be one practical help for more frequently putting your thoughts and affections on heavenly things?

6. Given all you have looked at on heaven, spend your remaining study time in prayerful meditation, making your thoughts known to God. Initial the box when you are finished.

Lesson One

Meditations of my Heart

LORD, may the eyes of my understanding be enlightened, that I may know the hope of Your calling, the riches of Your glory and the exceeding greatness of Your power... Adapted from Ephesians 1:18-19a

DAY ONE

DAYS TWO through FOUR

DAY FIVE

Notes:

MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

“ _____ [affections, _____] _____ ,
_____ .”
_____ :