

The background of the cover is a serene landscape. At the top, a blue banner contains the title. Below the banner is a decorative border with a repeating floral pattern. The main image shows a calm lake reflecting the surrounding green forest and distant mountains. The sky is a warm, golden yellow, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

WE SHALL SEE
GOD

— © —
Charles Spurgeon's
classic devotional thoughts on Heaven

RANDY
ALCORN

WE SHALL SEE GOD



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We Shall See God: Charles Spurgeon's Classic Devotional Thoughts on Heaven

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To my sons-in-law, Dan Franklin and Dan Stump

What a joy and privilege to have entrusted, ten years ago, our precious daughters, Karina and Angela, to the lifelong care of two godly men who seek to honor our Lord Jesus. Nanci and I couldn't be happier with the fathers of our treasured grandsons, Jake, Matthew, Tyler, and Jack! As lovers of the deep things of God, I hope you both will profit from the insights of Charles Spurgeon I've enjoyed assembling for this book. I look forward to our friendship and fellowship in the days ahead, and eternal Christ-centered adventures on God's New Earth. I anticipate that someday we will sit down together at dinner with King Jesus and Spurgeon and many others and have some incredible conversations!

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INTRODUCTION

Who Was Charles Spurgeon?



Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Essex, England, on June 19, 1834, and after forty-one years as a preacher in London, died January 31, 1892. Spurgeon's early preaching ministry took place while the American Civil War was being fought "across the pond." He was born a year before Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and died a year before Henry Ford completed the first automobile.¹

Spurgeon came to faith in Christ at age fifteen, when a snowstorm forced him to take shelter in a Methodist chapel where a service was in progress. There his heart was opened to salvation in Christ. The text that moved him was Isaiah 45:22 (NKJV): "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."

He preached his first sermon at sixteen and began his work as a full-time pastor at seventeen. Then, starting at age nineteen, he became pastor of London's New Park Street Chapel. By age twenty he was preaching to crowds of up to two thousand. The

biblical depth and theological insight of the messages Spurgeon wrote and preached at that age seem almost unbelievable, yet for one and a half centuries, his words have stood the test of time.* Later, upon completion of the much larger Metropolitan Tabernacle, he preached to crowds of six thousand.

No matter where Spurgeon spoke, nearly every seat was filled. When the Metropolitan Tabernacle was being repaired, the church rented the immense Agricultural Hall in another part of London. The hall was filled to capacity each week, with twenty thousand people in attendance to hear him preach. When he spoke at the Crystal Palace, the exact size of the crowd was counted by turnstile: 23,654. And all this was happening at a time when there were no microphones and no public address systems! Imagine the toll it took upon Spurgeon to project his voice so the crowds could hear him, especially later in life when he was frequently very ill.

Four times a year he asked his church members to stay away on a Sunday evening so unbelievers could fill the seats and hear God's Word.

To say Spurgeon's church was ministry minded is an understatement. The Metropolitan Tabernacle stayed open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days a week, offering not only spiritual training but also many social programs to assist the needy. Additionally, a thousand church members regularly conducted ministry meetings outside the Tabernacle.

Spurgeon's impact is inseparable from the faithful laborers of his church. Once, when asked for the secret of his success, Spurgeon replied, "My people pray for me."²

* See his sermon "The Immutability of God," which he preached at age twenty, and you'll see what I mean (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0001.htm>).

Though he wasn't college educated, Spurgeon eventually founded, gave direction to, and taught at a two-year pastors' college. His book *Lectures to My Students* reveals that many of his lessons were full of spiritual insights as well as practical ways for students to develop their voices so their congregations could hear them. By 1866 Spurgeon's trainees had begun eighteen new churches in London alone. He modeled hard work for his student-pastors and said to them, "Ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labor of our inmost soul."

During his lifetime, Spurgeon founded and maintained sixty-five different institutions, including orphanages, social welfare services, mission groups, and homes for unwed mothers. He also established organizations for distributing literature. He sent people door-to-door to distribute Bibles, Christian books, magazines, and tracts—mostly ones he'd written. His tracts were widely circulated at Oxford and Cambridge, as well as to individual homes. In 1878 alone, ninety-four of these literature distributors made a total of 926,290 home visits. They didn't simply sell books; they talked about spiritual questions and shared the gospel with the people of London.

Charles was twenty-one when he married Susannah Thompson. (She was at first unimpressed when she heard him preach, but she learned and grew under his teaching before they began a courtship.) They had twin sons, Thomas and Charles, who also became preachers. Susannah was a great support to Charles, praying for and encouraging him. After a serious illness she became a semi-invalid and was rarely able to attend church. But she remained active in ministry, collecting funds to supply free resources—her husband's books and those of Puritan writers—for poor pastors. She recorded that she sent books to missionaries around the world, including places such as Ceylon, China,

Jamaica, India, Trinidad, Russia, the Congo, Canada, Argentina, the Cayman Islands, Spain, Damascus, Nigeria, Timbuktu . . . and even my home state, Oregon.

Spurgeon preached to perhaps 10 million people in his lifetime, often speaking ten times a week at various locations, including congregations his own church had planted. He wrote out his sermons fully before preaching but brought into the pulpit only a note card with an outline. As he spoke, stenographers would take down the sermon as it was delivered. Spurgeon then had one day to revise the transcripts before they were sent off for publication. In those times of telegraph, his messages became available across the Atlantic, in America, within two days and around the world within a week. Hundreds of thousands of copies were sold weekly, for a penny each.

Spurgeon's 3,561 sermons are bound in sixty-three volumes. They are contained on thirty-eight thousand pages of small print and total about 20 million words. In addition to his sermons, he wrote many books, including a four-part autobiography; a massive, seven-volume series on Psalms called *The Treasury of David*; books on prayer and other single topics; and the classic devotionals *Morning by Morning* and *Evening by Evening* (best known in their combined form, *Morning and Evening*).

For his book *Commenting and Commentaries*, Spurgeon read three to four thousand volumes of reference works, then chose a mere 1,437 of them to critique for the benefit of pastors and Bible students. (Wondering if he ever slept, I was relieved to discover he had research assistants!)

Spurgeon's book *John Ploughman's Talk* uses homespun, somewhat humorous language about virtues and vices. He addresses practical issues such as hard work and idleness, gossiping, and spending. He also produced a magazine called *The Sword and the Trowel*.

Starting when Spurgeon was twenty-one, his sermons were published in annual volumes. These volumes went to press for sixty-three years, the last of them put into print twenty-six years after his death. In the span of six years alone, from the time Spurgeon was twenty-one until he was twenty-seven, his books sold over 6 million copies. It's possible that even today no author, Christian or otherwise, has as much material in print as Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

His preaching and writing affected his world far and wide while he lived and continue to do so even today. His sermons have been printed in Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic, and many other languages. Today, some 120 years after his death, Spurgeon's works are still read and studied and preached on by Christians of various backgrounds and denominations.

Why Spurgeon's Sermons about Heaven?

I quoted from Spurgeon here and there in my book *Heaven*, but I have since found a wealth of additional material about the subject in his sermons. Spurgeon preached dozens of sermons primarily about Heaven and many others in which Heaven plays a prominent role. Spurgeon never wrote a book on Heaven, but what he said about it could fill several books. Compiling his writings on the topic has been my happy task. When placed side by side, Spurgeon's teachings about Heaven are some of the most poignant, moving, and biblically insightful I have ever read on the subject (and I've read over 150 books about Heaven).

Though there have been a few compilations of his sermons on Heaven, they are not easily accessible for readers. *Twelve Sermons on Heaven*, published in 1899; *C. H. Spurgeon's Sermons on Heaven and Hell*, published in 1962; and *The Father's House: 25 Spurgeon Sermons*

on the Subject of Heaven are all out of print, and many of Spurgeon's most powerful words about Heaven don't appear in them.

Even if these sermon compilations were still in print, they wouldn't gain the audience they deserve. Why? First, Spurgeon's sermons are often around seven thousand words, a third the size of a small book. Second, they are difficult to navigate, partly due to extraordinarily long paragraphs and sentences. Third, changes in the English language from Spurgeon's time until now make understanding him a challenge. And fourth, Spurgeon's messages sometimes deal with issues that relate to London in his day and to his own church. He names people, places, and events unfamiliar to the modern reader.

I've found that many people who say "I love Spurgeon" haven't read any of his sermons. Most of his readers are familiar only with *Morning and Evening*, by far his most popular work. Yet most of Spurgeon's richest words can be found in his sermons. This book is my attempt to help readers access wonderful Spurgeon insights into Heaven they might otherwise never know.

Why an Abridged Form?

My desire for this book is to give to readers Spurgeon's words in a form they are likely to read. To do so, I've sought to select the most relevant content out of even obscure passages and pare it down to a more accessible size.*

In the published versions of his sermons, Spurgeon's paragraphs are usually more than three hundred words and sometimes more than six hundred. That means about one paragraph break per page

* Readers who wish to can look up the complete sermons in printed volumes or find them online in various places, including the marvelous Spurgeon archive at www.spurgeon.org. (A complete collection of Spurgeon's sermons is available at www.logos.com/epm.)

and sometimes two whole pages without a single paragraph break. That practice, acceptable in the 1800s, is a serious obstacle for today's reader. For this reason I have divided the average Spurgeon paragraph into five. This allows some of his more powerful statements to stand out rather than disappear in a sea of words.

Similarly, I have shortened sentences to clarify them. (I did not, however, shorten one particular 161-word sentence, because I thought it was both beautiful and clear.)

I've sometimes substituted words to more plainly communicate Spurgeon's thoughts to a contemporary audience. These changes amount to less than 3 percent of the overall material. My intent is to restore Spurgeon's meaning for today's reader who might otherwise miss it because of the unfamiliar language.

My original goal was to alter not a single word of Spurgeon's. Yet as a writer of thirty years and of thirty-some books, I learned long ago that others' edits can and nearly always do help my writing considerably. If this is true when my editor, my audience, and I share the same dialect, how much more is it true when the English language has changed so significantly in the past 150 years? With his desire for as many people as possible to hear the truth, Spurgeon would not, I believe, object to having his more antiquated words updated for a new audience. I hope Spurgeon lovers are consoled by my respect for his word choices and my reluctance to change them except when necessary.

What Kinds of Changes Have Been Made?

In cases where Spurgeon's phrases could be confusing for contemporary readers, explanatory information is offered in brackets. For instance, when Spurgeon's text says covenant seal, I have added [circumcision] to clarify the meaning. There are some expressions Spurgeon uses often for which repeated brackets

would be distracting—for example, Sabbath, by which he means not Saturday but Sunday, when his three score years and ten has been changed to seventy years, kith and kin is now friends and family, ere is before, calumny is denigration, habiliments is clothing, and methinks is I think.

Some of the punctuation practices of nineteenth century England, such as dashes preceded by commas, are not followed today. In order to prevent readers from being distracted, these marks have been standardized. I've changed Mount Sion to Mount Zion; Elias to Elijah; builded to built; cometh to comes; and thee, thou, and thine to their modern equivalents.

In some cases I have replaced unfamiliar words or phrases with more understandable ones. For example, the cockatrice den is now the serpent's den. Spurgeon said the New Earth will be clothed with verdure; I've changed this to clothed with lushness. Hastening amain becomes hurrying full speed; works of supererogation is now works of moral superiority. The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth is now the Lord God Almighty reigns. In a strait betwixt becomes torn between the two, conflagration becomes fiery destruction, and chiliasm becomes a thousand years.

Though the word is lowercase in Spurgeon's original, I have taken the liberty of capitalizing Heaven, as I have done in my other books, because it is the proper name of a real place, just as Saturn or Portland or New England. We need this reminder because Heaven has become so vague and ethereal in the modern mind that many don't think of it as a real place at all.

Occasionally I italicize a word or a phrase when it appears to me that Spurgeon would have emphasized it as he spoke.

The typical excerpt in this book is approximately one-seventh the size of the sermon from which it's been taken. The biblical

text Spurgeon used for each sermon is included at the beginning of the first excerpt from that sermon. Other excerpts from the same sermon begin with a different biblical passage, chosen to correlate with the content.

Instead of the King James Version (KJV) that Spurgeon used, I cite the English Standard Version (ESV) for clarity. The King James Version was an excellent translation for its day, but now, four hundred years later, many of the words are obscure and unfamiliar to modern readers. Plus, important ancient manuscripts have been discovered since then that give us a more precise understanding of what the original inspired biblical manuscripts said.

I have selected from Spurgeon's sermons what I consider the best material related to Heaven. I have omitted paragraphs and sometimes whole pages of surrounding material, but I have sought to be contextually sensitive in this process, and I believe what has been left out does not differ from the meaning of the included material. For the sake of flow, I decided not to include ellipses to indicate missing text.

Trust me when I say I have no illusion that Spurgeon needed my help to be more eloquent! The only advantage I have on him is that I share a common vernacular with the readers of today, and I understand that they might disconnect from a wonderful message if they were to come across words such as habiliments, trysting, calumny, kith and kin, and even speaketh and saith and persevereth. Without these minor edits, methinks many modern readers would not stay with Spurgeon long enough to fall in love with his Christ-exalting passion and his unparalleled insights into Heaven.

Why Spurgeon?

Spurgeon's reputation and influence centered on his unapologetic declaration of Scripture. This made him the subject of

continuous conversation by those who loved him and by those who despised him. Sometimes called “the last of the Puritans,” Spurgeon preached about God’s greatness and sovereign grace and spoke openly about Hell and the need for repentance, making himself unpopular with many newspaper writers who took every opportunity to portray him in the worst light. He reluctantly yet boldly pointed out the doctrinal errors in the Church of England and among his fellow Baptists.

God’s words, as Spurgeon well knew, are far more valuable than anything people have to say. God promises that his Word “shall not return to [him] empty, but it shall accomplish that which [he purposes], and shall succeed in the thing for which [he] sent it” (Isaiah 55:11). God does not make that promise about your words or my words or Charles Spurgeon’s words, but only his Word. However, Spurgeon took great pains to conform his preaching to God’s Word, and he did so in the face of severe criticism. We need to hear Spurgeon’s voice because he was faithful to speak God’s Word, and today there aren’t nearly enough voices like his.

One of the highest compliments was paid to Spurgeon by a public enemy who spoke of Spurgeon’s faithfulness in standing up for God’s Word: “Here is a man who has not moved an inch forward in all his ministry, and at the close of the nineteenth century is teaching the theology of the first century, and . . . is proclaiming the doctrines of Nazareth and Jerusalem current eighteen hundred years ago.” Spurgeon’s response was to smile and say, “Those words did please me!”

Why the Additional Content?

The final aspect of this book that requires comment is one that makes me squirm a little. Originally I handed in to the pub-

lisher a book that was, aside from this introduction, 100 percent Spurgeon. My publisher asked me to supplement Spurgeon's meditations with some of my own thoughts about Heaven, a number of them drawn from my multiple books on the subject. I resisted this, primarily because I thought it presumptuous to coauthor a book with a man who not only towers over me but could not be reached for permission!

But in the end I was won over by the thought that readers familiar with my writing may be introduced to Spurgeon for the first time, and perhaps I could offer those who already love Spurgeon some additional insights they might appreciate. (I also think he would like the fact that 100 percent of the royalties from my books, including this one, go to further Christ-centered, Kingdom causes; hence, I am not making money off Spurgeon's efforts.)

In each of my portions, I refer back to something Spurgeon has said in his sermon. Sometimes I integrate stories from Spurgeon's life that help give context and personal meaning to his words. I also quote other authors whose books Spurgeon read and loved, including Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Richard Baxter, and Jonathan Edwards.

To say that I am the junior contributor in any venture involving Spurgeon is a vast understatement. Nevertheless, I trust that Spurgeon would approve of this work and would welcome giving more people the opportunity to read and understand his uncommonly insightful words.

Whether you know Spurgeon's works or not, you are in for a treat. Learn about Heaven at the feet of one who was called the prince of preachers and whose knowledge of God was equaled only by his passion for God.

Randy Alcorn

DYING IS BUT GOING HOME



Excerpted from “Why They Leave Us”
Sermon #1892

Suggested by the death of Charles Stanford, D.D.,
minister of Denmark Place Chapel, Camberwell
Delivered on Lord’s Day morning, March 21, 1886,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

Charles Spurgeon delivered this sermon just three days after the death of his friend and fellow pastor Charles Stanford. In it, he encourages his congregation to view death as a home-going, as the gateway to full union with Christ.

*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may
be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given
me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

JOHN 17:24



SPURGEON ⇄ Breathe the home air. Jesus tells us that the air of his home is *love*: “You loved me before the foundation of the world.”

Brothers and sisters, can you follow me in a great flight? Can you stretch broader wings than the condor ever knew and fly back into the unbeginning eternity? There was a day before all

days when there was no day but the Ancient of Days. There was a time before all time when God only was, the uncreated, the only existent One. The Divine Three—Father, Son, and Spirit—lived in blessed camaraderie with each other, delighting in each other.

Oh, the intensity of the divine love of the Father to the Son! There was no world, no sun, no moon, no stars, no universe, but God alone. And the whole of God's omnipotence flowed forth in a stream of love to the Son, while the Son's whole being remained eternally one with the Father by a mysterious essential union.

How did all this which we now see and hear happen? Why this creation? this fall of Adam? this redemption? this church? this Heaven? How did it all come about? It didn't need to have been. But the Father's love made him resolve to show forth the glory of his Son. The mysterious story which has been gradually unfolded before us has only this one design—the Father would make known his love to the Son and make the Son's glories to appear before the eyes of those whom the Father gave him.

This Fall and this redemption, and the story as a whole, so far as the divine purpose is concerned, are the fruit of the Father's love to the Son and his delight in glorifying the Son.

That [the Son] might be glorified forever, [the Father] permitted that he should take on a human body and should suffer, bleed, and die. Why? So that there might come out of him, as a harvest comes from a dying and buried grain of wheat, all the countless hosts of elect souls, ordained forever to a joy exceeding bounds. These are the bride of the Lamb, the body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Their destiny is so high that no language can fully describe it. God only knows the love of God and all that it has prepared for those who are the objects of it.

Beloved, I am lost in the subject now. I breathe that heavenly air. Love surrounds all and conquers grief. I will not cause the

temperature to fall by uttering any other words but this—hold your friends lovingly but be ready to yield them to Jesus. Don't hold them back from the One to whom they belong.

When they are sick, fast and pray. But when they are departed, do much as David did, who washed his face and ate and drank. You will go to them; they cannot return to you. Comfort yourselves with the double thought of their joy in Christ and Christ's joy in them. Add the triple thought of the Father's joy in Christ and in them.

Let us watch the Master's call. Let us not dread the question—who next, and who next? Let none of us start back as though we hoped to linger longer than others. Let us even desire to see our names in the celestial roll call. Let us be willing to be dealt with just as our Lord pleases.

Let no doubt intervene; let no gloom encompass us. Dying is but going home. Indeed, there is no dying for the saints. Charles Stanford is gone! Thus was his death told to me: "He drew up his feet and smiled." Likewise you and I will depart. He had borne his testimony in the light, even when blind. He had cheered us all, though he was the greatest sufferer of us all. And now the film has gone from the eyes, the anguish is gone from the heart, and he is with Jesus. He smiled. What a sight was that which caused that smile!

I have seen many faces of dear departed ones lit up with splendor. Of many I could feel sure that they had seen a vision of angels. Traces of a reflected glory hung about their countenances.

Oh, brothers and sisters, we shall soon know more of Heaven than all the Christian scholars can tell us! Let us go home now to our own dwellings, but let us pledge ourselves that we will meet again. We will meet with Jesus, where he is, where we shall behold his glory.



ALCORN ⇄ Charles Spurgeon, always God centered rather than man centered, starts this message on Heaven with an emphasis on the triune God, whose eternal fellowship among Father, Son, and Spirit is the basis for all our relational capacities and longings and joy.

Spurgeon, speaking this message at age fifty-one, passionately anticipated Heaven. He speaks with a warm fondness for his colleague Charles Stanford, who lived and preached in south London, not far from Spurgeon. Stanford had been blinded by glaucoma five years before his death, but he continued to write with the aid of a typewriter until his life ended, just before Spurgeon's message.

Notice Spurgeon's confidence that Heaven is the place of great union with Christ and reunion with redeemed loved ones. As a caring pastor, Spurgeon desires his people to understand that embracing the gospel should change their view of death. He says, "Let no doubt intervene; let no gloom encompass us. Dying is but going home." Only six years later, at age fifty-seven, Spurgeon himself would go home to Jesus, joining his friend Charles Stanford.

Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death, "so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14-15, NIV). In light of the coming resurrection of the dead, the apostle Paul asks, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55, NIV).

We should not romanticize death. But those who know Jesus should realize that death is the gateway to never-ending joy.

Grasping what the Bible teaches about Heaven shifts our center of gravity and radically alters our perspective on life. This is why we should always seek to keep Heaven in our line of sight.

In 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped off Catalina Island, California, into the waters of the Pacific Ocean, determined to swim to the mainland. An experienced swimmer, she had already made history as the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways.

The weather that day was foggy and chilly; Florence could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam steadily for fifteen hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water, her mother, in a boat alongside her, told her that she was close and that she could make it. But Florence, physically and emotionally exhausted, stopped swimming and was pulled into the boat. It wasn't until she was on board that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At a news conference the next day, she said, "All I could see was the fog. . . . I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."³

When you face discouragement, difficulty, or fatigue, or when you feel surrounded by the fog of uncertain circumstances, are you thinking, *If only I could see the shore, I could make it?*

Set your sights on Jesus Christ, the Rock of salvation. He is the One who has promised to prepare a place for those who put their hope in him, a place where they will live with him forever. If we can learn to fix our eyes on Jesus, to see through the fog and picture our eternal home in our mind's eye, it will comfort and energize us, giving us a clear look at the finish line.

When the apostle Paul faced hardship, beatings, and imprisonment, he said, "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ

Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14, NIV). What gave Paul the strength and perspective to “press on toward the goal”? A clear view of Heaven.

Ask your Savior for his grace and empowerment, and keep your eyes on the shore. By his sustaining grace, you’ll make it.