

i can only imagine

June 2006

*I can only imagine, what will it be like
When I walk by your side...
I can only imagine, what my eyes will see
When your face is before me.
I can only imagine.*

—Bart Millard

I have always been afraid to imagine what Heaven is like, because it seems that everyone creates an image of Heaven according to their own version of paradise. They couldn't all be right, and the Bible doesn't support the idea that Heaven consists of individual paradises created by and for each person. Since Paula's passing I have another reason for being cautious about creating my own fantasies about Heaven, because I am desperate to know that she is well, and that might drive me to envision something unbiblical, just to feel better.

Friends have attempted to comfort us with comments like "You have your very own angel in Heaven now," "I feel her presence," and "She's happier now than she ever has been." Others say, "She's praising God forever now." A friend whose wife died said that his friends would tell him "Oh, she's fishing up in heaven!"

While all these comments have grains of truth in them (even the fishing thing?), the truth is that Paula never was and never will be an angel. The Bible describes angels as beings who are very different from resurrected humans. Paula is a saint, just like she was on Earth, as are all of us who are God's redeemed children.

*When I heard that I was in the wrong place,
my soul sang for joy. I knew now... why I
could feel homesick at home.*

—G.K. Chesterton

But saint or no saint, I wonder if Paula would be happy spending eternity doing nothing but praising God. I know my daughter—at least as she was here on Earth—and she wasn't happy just any place. Certain elements had to be present for her to find life interesting, and she had to be actively and creatively influencing her environment. So I ask myself, what is Heaven really like? And what in Heaven would Paula find wonderfully satisfying?

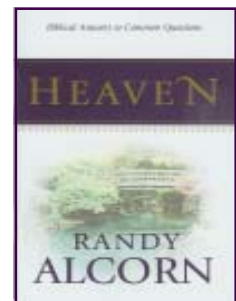
I have been helped to envision Heaven by a

book with the same name: *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn. The book woke me up to allegorical and realistic depictions of Heaven in the Bible, as Heaven exists now and as it will be at the renewal of all things with the creation of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

—Matthew 19:28

God has used this book to help me understand that the primary purpose of Heaven is to restore His original creation. Our happiness in Paradise is best viewed as a byproduct, not as the primary purpose of Heaven. Many of the same things that give us pleasure here will also be a source of eternal joy there.



We will still be people when we die and go to Heaven. What we love about this life are the things that resonate with the life we were made for.

—Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

Alcorn suggests that, if the eternal Heaven will be a New Earth, we can look to the current Earth for indicators of what Heaven will be like:

"The Bible describes Heaven as a city (Hebrews 11:10; 13:14). We understand cities. Cities have buildings, culture, art, music, athletics, goods and services, events of all kinds. And of course, cities have *people* engaged in activities, gatherings, conversations, and work."

Revelation 21-22 describes many earthly things in Heaven, like atmosphere, mountains, water, trees, people, houses, cities, buildings, and streets. The amazing thing is that when the New Heaven comes down to the New Earth, God comes to dwell with Man forever.

We can only hope for what we desire.

John Eldredge

We can only desire what we can imagine.

Randy Alcorn



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You have been a great encouragement to us through your generous gifts, letters, books, and cards. Thanks!

Seeing God will be like seeing everything else for the first time. He will be the lens through which we see everything else.

—Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

Now that our family has an even bigger investment in Heaven, we find ourselves eager to get there, and we try to imagine what Paula may already be experiencing. As Randy Alcorn says, “We can only desire what we can imagine.” So we are daring to imagine. And we are envisioning Paula enjoying many of the same things there that she did here: people—lots of people—beauty, creativity, affirmation, God’s unconditional love, and the presence of Jesus.



Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

—Revelation 21:1

*meanwhile,
life goes on...*



Heaven, by Randy Alcorn, is a hefty 456 pages, but there is a summary booklet, called *Heaven: Biblical Answers to Common Questions*. Alcorn also has a Web site: www.heaveniq.com. The books offer thought-provoking ideas on:

- ~ *What will Heaven be like?*
- ~ *What will we do for all eternity?*
- ~ *Won't Heaven be boring?*
- ~ *Will there be animals on the New Earth?*
- ~ *Will we have our own homes in Heaven?*
- ~ *Will time no longer exist in Heaven?*
- ~ *Can those in Heaven see events on Earth?*
- ~ *Will we recognize loved ones in Heaven?*

Paul, David & Daniel



Thank you for praying for us during the days before, during, and after Paul’s bypass surgery, and for the cards and phone calls. Even though his recovery has been

slower than we expected, you can see from the photo that you really can’t keep a good man down, even on the third day after open-heart surgery!

Everything went exceptionally well with the surgery, but Paul had a few complications afterwards—excess bleeding, blood clots in two of the four bypasses, and a heart attack while still in the hospital—but we are thankful that his doctors and nurses did a great job of caring for him, and he was able to come home after eight days in the hospital. On June 22 Paul had another heart catheterization to place two stents. His two main bypasses are clear and working great, so this is more like fine-tuning, which should make him good-to-go for quite a few more years. Everybody needs a tune-up now and then!

We had another medical procedure this week, too. Our son Daniel had been having severe stomach pain and vomiting blood, so he had an endoscopy yesterday. Apparently he has an erosion of the esophagus from acid reflux. We are thankful that medication is helping. Thanks for keeping us in your prayers.



↑ *Always something to laugh about, even in ICU.*