



IMAGINE HEAVEN

Devotional

100 REFLECTIONS TO BRING
HEAVEN TO YOUR LIFE TODAY

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BakerBooks

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Books
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakerbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Burke, John, 1963—author.

Title: Imagine heaven devotional : 100 reflections to bring heaven to your life today / John Burke and Kathy Burke.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Publishing Group, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018009829 | ISBN 9780801093623 (cloth)

Subjects: LCSH: Heaven—Christianity—Prayers and devotions. | Future life—Christianity—Prayers and devotions. | Near-death experiences—Religious aspects—Christianity—Prayers and devotions.

Classification: LCC BT848 .B779 2018 | DDC 236/.24—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018009829>

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This book contains original material as well as excerpts from *Imagine Heaven: Near-Death Experiences, God's Promises, and the Exhilarating Future That Awaits You* by John Burke (Baker Books, 2015).

Some names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



John Burke and Kathy Burke, *Imagine Heaven Devotional*
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This book is dedicated to those who courageously shared
their stories of Heaven, trusting their sacred journeys
would point people toward God and his relentless,
amazing love and mercy available for all willing people.



Introduction

SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” (Col. 3:1–2 NLT). That is the purpose of this devotional—to help us truly set our minds on the magnificent promises of Heaven, so that it will change how we live today.

But Christians often have a very poor view of Heaven. Too many imagine Heaven far less pleasing than earth, and as a result, they live their lives for what is temporal rather than what is eternal. Our desire in writing this devotional is to help you live today with awareness and confidence of your life’s eternal value.

Heaven and near-death experiences (NDEs), where people died, were resuscitated, and claimed to have had a peek into the afterlife, have been a hot topic. Usually we are asked to just take a person’s word for it. But I’ve never been one to gullibly believe every story of seeing Heaven. As a result, it took thirty-five years to write *Imagine Heaven*. Over that time, I studied close to one thousand near-death accounts (there are millions out there).

The Gallup Poll estimates that one out of every twenty-five people have had a near-death experience. After studying or interviewing so many people who had NDEs, amazing commonalities appeared across stories—intriguing, detailed descriptions by doctors, professors, commercial airline pilots, children, people from other countries—all giving different angles to what started to look like a similar picture.

During that same thirty-five-year time frame, I went from a career in engineering to becoming a pastor, and the more I studied the Christian Scriptures, on my own and in seminary, the more intriguing and confusing reading about NDEs became. Intriguing because so many of them described the picture of the afterlife found in the Scriptures; confusing because individual interpretations of their experiences could wildly vary and even seem at odds with the Scriptures.

After studying enough near-death experiences, I started to see the difference between what the people *reported* experiencing and the *interpretation* they might give to that experience based on cultural background or worldview. While interpretations vary, when evaluated together, the core elements of their testimonies point to what the Scriptures say. In fact, the more I studied, the more I realized that the picture Scripture paints of the exhilarating life to come is the common experience that many NDErs (near-death experiencers) describe.

In the book *Imagine Heaven*, I put together the evidence for the validity of NDEs. I show why so many skeptical medical doctors became convinced the afterlife is real because of what NDErs reported while out of their physical bodies, but still in the room where their resuscitation took place. I also show how their experience of the doorway of Heaven correlates with the amazing picture of the life to come painted in the Bible.

Imagine Heaven uses the stories of NDErs to help us imagine what the Bible describes. We believe the Bible should be the

authority and framework for understanding Heaven and interpreting NDEs. We encourage you to read *Imagine Heaven* for a better understanding of the bigger biblical framework surrounding these stories and for answers to many of the questions commonly asked.

The *Imagine Heaven Devotional* has been written for personal application of the biblical promises of Heaven, in hopes of bringing Heaven's blessings to your life today. My wife, Kathy, has written one hundred inspirational daily reflections, filled with God's truth and wisdom, to encourage you as you go through the challenges of life here on earth.

Kathy and I have served as partners in ministry together for twenty-nine years, beginning as college pastors, to missionaries overseas, to founding and serving in Gateway Church in Austin for the past two decades. She has contributed significantly to all the books I've written. That is why I'm so excited to have you hear directly from her. Kathy has amazing gifts of encouragement and teaching that breathe life into everyone she encounters. In these devotionals based on my research, you will experience that same life-giving inspiration, affirmation of your immense value to God, and daily hope for living. In this devotional, you will be inspired by stories included in *Imagine Heaven* along with new stories, all from the perspective of the promises of God in the Bible.

We are told by the apostle Paul to imagine Heaven—to set our minds on the realities of Heaven, so that it changes how we live today. These daily reflections will help you set your mind on what God has promised in his Word and live with an eternal perspective, as you are reminded of the reality of Heaven's blessings by those who claim to have gotten a glimpse. We are praying that God uses this devotional to deeply encourage you and to help bring more of the peace and joy of Heaven into your life each day.

John Burke

1

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9 NLT

CAPTAIN DALE BLACK had always dreamed of being a pilot. As a young man, one fateful day, his plane lost power after takeoff and crashed into a 75-foot-high aviation monument at 135 miles per hour. Everyone died except Dale, who came back to tell about it. At first, Dale found himself suspended in midair, hovering over the wreckage of his body and the plane. Then he began traveling at a great speed, accompanied by two angelic escorts.

I was fast approaching a magnificent city, golden and gleaming among a myriad of resplendent colors. The light I saw was the purest I had ever seen. And the music was the most majestic, enchanting, and glorious I had ever heard. I was still approaching the city, but now I was slowing down. Like a plane making its final approach for landing. I knew instantly that this place was entirely and utterly holy. Don't ask me how I knew, I just knew. . . .

Below me lay the purest, most perfect grass, precisely the right length and not a blade that was bent or even out of place. It was the most vibrant green I had ever seen. If a color can be said to be alive, the green I saw was alive, slightly transparent and emitting light and life from within each blade. The iridescent grass stretched endlessly over gently rolling hills upon which were sprinkled the most colorful wild flowers, lifting their soft-petaled beauty skyward, almost as if they were a chorus of flowers caught up in their own way of praising God.

The fragrance that permeated heaven was so gentle and sweet, I almost didn't notice it amid all there was to see and hear. But as I looked at the delicate, perfect flowers and grass, I wanted to smell them. Instantly, I was aware of a gentle aroma. As I focused, I

could tell the difference between the grass and the flowers, the trees and even the air. It was all so pure and intoxicating and blended together in a sweet and satisfying scent.

In the distance stood a range of mountains, majestic in appearance, as if they reigned over the entire landscape. These were not mountains you wanted to conquer; these were mountains you wanted to revere. . . . Next I heard the faint sound of water rushing in the distance. I couldn't see the water, but it sounded as if it were rivers cascading over a series of small waterfalls, creating music that was ever changing. . . .

[The city wall] stretched out to my left and right as far as I could see in both directions. . . . A powerful light permeated the wall, and you could see all the colors of the rainbow in it. Strangely, whenever I moved, the colors moved ever so slightly as if sensing my movement and making an adjustment.¹



Hebrews 8:5 says that Moses's Tabernacle was “a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.” All we love about this earth is merely a shadow of the greater reality to come!

Think about all we desire on earth: beautiful landscapes and homes in a picture-perfect setting, all the time in the world to be with the people we love, endless energy to experience all the things we enjoy, and opportunities to work on fun and challenging projects in line with our passions. Even though this life falls short, our desires for these things point to the Creator of every good gift, and our longings point to what Heaven will bring.

When you think about your dreams in life, start including more than just your earthly dream house, vacation, career, or lifestyle. Imagine also the beauty and excitement waiting for you in your eternal life to come, and prioritize what matters most—loving God and loving others. Today, fix your eyes on the prize God has for you that lasts forever.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for every good gift you've given me to enjoy now, and I look forward to the eternal blessings I will enjoy forever in Heaven!*

2

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

Isaiah 41:10 NLT

DR. MARY NEAL, an orthopedic spine surgeon, was on a white-water kayak trip in Chile when she plunged over a waterfall. The nose of her kayak lodged between two boulders, trapping her beneath a cascading torrent of water.

I very quickly knew that I would likely die. At that point I completely surrendered the outcome to God's will. The moment I asked that God's will be done, I was immediately and very physically held by Christ and reassured that everything would be fine. . . . I love the water still but I'd always, always feared a drowning death. . . . but at no point did I ever have fear. I never felt air hunger. I never felt panic. I'm a spine surgeon. I certainly tried to do those things that would free me or free the boat, but I felt great. I felt more alive than I've ever felt.

The very moment I turned to Him, I was overcome with an absolute feeling of calm, peace, and of the very physical sensation of being held in someone's arms. . . . I knew with absolute certainty that I was being held and comforted by Jesus.

After fourteen minutes under water, Mary's body finally broke free from the kayak, and she experienced a feeling of release.

It felt as if I had finally shaken off my heavy outer layer, freeing my soul. . . . I was immediately greeted by a group of . . . people, spirits, beings. . . . I absolutely knew that they were there to welcome me and greet me and make me feel loved and comfortable. . . .

My arrival was joyously celebrated and a feeling of absolute love was palpable as these spiritual beings and I hugged, danced,

and greeted each other. The intensity, depth, and purity of these feelings and sensations were far greater than I could ever describe with words and far greater than anything I have ever experienced on earth. . . .

I knew that I was going home. My eternal home. . . . I glimpsed back at the scene on the river bank. My body [which had now been recovered but “dead” for thirty minutes] looked like the shell of a comfortable old friend, and I felt warm compassion and gratitude for its use. . . . I heard them [friends kayaking with Mary] call to me and beg me to take a breath. I loved them and did not want them to be sad, so I asked my heavenly companions to wait while I returned to my body, lay down, and took a breath.¹



Just imagine, the experience you fear most—the death of your earthly body—actually frees you in a way you never dreamed it could. How liberating to know that you have absolutely nothing to fear—not even death!

As 1 Corinthians 15:54–56 (NLT) promises, “Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’” Death has no power over us, for our real lives will have just begun!

In the same way, there is nothing else to fear on earth, knowing Heaven is in store. No matter what insecurities you face, Jesus wants to walk with you every minute of every day to bring comfort and peace to your heart, to displace even your greatest fears imaginable.

Jesus is with you always! Whatever your fears may be, release them to him, for he is faithful. Fill your heart and mind with the confident assurance that you are eternally safe with Jesus by your side.

Prayer: *Jesus, I surrender my fears that are holding me back from experiencing the joy you have for me. I trust in your promise to strengthen me and help me.*