

Think Much About Heaven

The most heavenly-minded man who ever lived—Jesus and other biblical characters excepted—may have been Richard Baxter. He was a remarkable Puritan pastor/writer who lived for seventy-six years (1615–1691), despite suffering with one physical malady or another almost constantly. During the winter of 1646, ill health forced him to spend several lonely months in a house far from his home and family. His condition was so grave that he was “sentenced to death by the physicians.”¹

With his life ebbing away, Baxter began thinking much about Heaven. As he put it, “I began to contemplate more seriously on the everlasting rest which I apprehended myself to be just on the borders of.”² As he was able, and so “that [his] thoughts might not too much scatter in [his] meditation,”³ he wrote down his reflections that he might review and be comforted by them. These were the beginnings of perhaps the most important of his 140 books, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, published four years later. He found his extended times of meditation on Heaven so helpful that, after his recovery, he continued them for the remaining five decades of his life. For half-an-hour each day, usually while walking before dinner, Baxter disciplined his mind to focus on the world to come. As a result of becoming so heavenly-minded, he became one of the most earthly-good men of his or any other time. Many of his books, as well as the example of his pastoral method (recorded in *The Reformed Pastor*), continue their influence centuries after his death.

Fixing your thoughts on Heaven can be a powerful practice, since there is nothing on earth to compare with the beauty, splendor, and joy of that place. To think rightly about Heaven is much more

than anticipating the rest and reunions there. That’s not distinctively Christian thinking; even atheists want those things. In addition to these wonderful blessings, Christians yearn to gaze on the irresistible face of Jesus and to bask in the undiminished glory of Him whose countenance is “like the sun shining in its strength” (Revelation 1:16). We groan as we longingly imagine the glorious freedom of a mind and body without sin, “eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body” (Romans 8:23).

So “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). Let your Scripture-guided imagination wonder what living in that perfect world will be like. Doing so will simplify your spiritual life by helping you to see your spirituality (and everything else) more from the perspective of eternity. It will clarify your priorities. It will remind you of a coming glory that’s worth any suffering here, knowing that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Thinking much about Heaven—“heavenly meditation” as Richard Baxter called it—will transform us, just as it transformed him. Baxter’s example of thirty minutes daily may be unrealistic for most, but thinking about the greatest, most magnificent, and most alluring of all objects is worth all the time we can devote to it.

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¹ Richard Baxter, *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, abridged by J. M. Lloyd Thomas, ed. and with an introduction by N. H. Keeble (introduction and notes, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1931; reprinted with revisions, Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), p. 94.

² Baxter, p. 94.

³ Baxter, p. 94.