

Children

Have you ever wondered what heaven looks like? Maybe you've asked people you know and they've described heaven as big and beautiful, with fluffy clouds and angels and harps. Maybe someone has told you that heaven has streets paved with gold and that there are fancy jewels everywhere.

The Bible actually *does* describe heaven as big, beautiful, and full of jewels. Revelation 4:1-6, for example, lists jasper, carnelian, emeralds, and a sea of glass, clear as crystal. Now, you might not think of glass as being special. After all, most buildings today have many glass windows. But remember that in Bible days, glass wasn't so common and that clear glass was very rare. To someone who was living in Bible days, a sea of glass would be very, very special.

Heaven is described as having many beautiful jewels, and that tells us what heaven *looks* like, but what is *being* in heaven like?

Imagine for a minute that one of your friends is coming over for a sleepover. You'll probably clean your room, put fresh blankets and sheets on the guest bed or fix up the family room so you and your friend can "camp out" in sleeping bags. You'll plan your friend's favorite foods for supper and breakfast and hunt up all the pieces to your friend's favorite board game. When someone special comes over, you go out of your way to make sure everything is just right for the visit.

Now imagine that you're going over to a friend's house. Your friend will probably try to make you feel welcomed, too. But when you visit, do you look forward to examining the wallpaper or sitting on the furniture? While it's true that you might be excited about playing with your friend's new toy, eventually that feeling wears off. What you are most happy about is getting to spend time with your friend. *That* is what heaven is like.

(Show the card stock printed with the scripture reference and verse and read it.) The Bible tells us in John 14:2, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" Jesus tells us that heaven is like a mansion with many rooms. It's big and it's beautiful, and he's fixing a special place for each one of us. Being in heaven will be like going to visit a friend — your best friend, in fact. Heaven will be big and beautiful and full of very fancy decorations, but what will be most important is that we'll be with our best friend, Jesus, forever and ever.

The next time you wonder what heaven will be like, imagine going to spend the day with your best friend. Then remind yourself that that friend is Jesus and that heaven will last forever. That is what heaven will be like.

Adult

Since this is Mother's Day we want to honor all our Moms and in this Mass we are remembering all of your mothers. God knows who they are. We are more grateful to you than you can imagine. This Thursday, the Chaplains had a "happy hour". It was a zoom conference after hours. One of the questions that we were asked to share was a happy memory of our mothers. It was heartwarming to hear stories from 13 chaplains sharing the impact that their mothers had on their lives.

Our message for today is on the "Secret to Happiness." I believe that I could say without fear of contradiction that one of the secrets to happiness is to have a good Mom. That's not always possible, but for those of us who have been so fortunate, we can say that it is one of the great blessings of life. And so today we salute those women who have loved us and poured their lives into ours.

In 1816, a small group of miners claimed to have mined a large amount of gold and silver from the Rocky Mountains. They hid their wealth and swore each other to secrecy. And, for the most part they kept their secret. But one of the miners, a man named Thomas Beale, wrote a letter pinpointing the exact location of the gold and silver. The only catch is, Beale wrote this letter in code. (1)

Eventually, all the members of the mining party died, including Thomas Beale. And guess what? No one has ever been able to crack the code in Thomas Beale's letter, and since none of the others miners divulged their secret, his treasure remains hidden somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. Is anyone interested in getting up a search party to find all that gold? The rest of us could stay behind and pray for you—as long as you promise to tithe 10% of whatever you find.

Some of us probably envy these treasure hunters and would like to join the hunt. On the other hand, others of us may think these treasure hunters are crazy for spending their time, energy and money chasing a dream. Most treasure hunters get a reputation for being kind of kooky—until they find the treasure. Then we change our tune.

These stories of treasure hunters make me think of how many of us spend our lives searching for happiness. We organize our lives around maximizing our happiness. And we all define it differently. I am reminded of the song that so many look for happiness in love and the some that comes to my mind is looking for love in all the wrong places. At least the folks searching for actual treasure have a map or set of clues to follow. All we have are our own ideas about happiness to follow.

To some people, happiness means having the perfect family life, or an enviable career, or a big bank account, or a list of accomplishments, or the respect of others. And the list could go on.

But here's my question: has anyone found the secret to happiness in this life? Has anyone cracked the code? Let's be honest—most of us are exhausted by the hunt. We do a good job of hiding it. We would rather confess to almost any sin or failing than this one: we are deeply unhappy and we don't know why. We don't know what we're missing. We can't find the answer. And it feels like we are the only one who feels this way.

And that brings us to our Bible passage today from John 14. The Book of John chapters 13-19 all take place on the last night of Jesus' life before his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus tells his disciples that he will be betrayed, and that he is going away. His disciples are upset. They don't understand. And so he tells them that he is going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them and he will come back to take them to their new home in his Father's house. In fact, Jesus won't just show them the way to his Father's house; he declares that he **is** the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through him. And Philip catches this glimmer of hope, and he insists, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." What a wonderful statement that is: "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

"Enough" is really the hidden treasure that all of humanity is seeking. The Hebrew word "Shalom" is usually translated "peace" by Gentiles. But it embodies this state of tranquility that comes from peace, fulfillment and completeness—in other words, enough. (2) One of the greatest gifts on earth is shalom, enough.

Several years ago there was a newspaper cartoon that showed two fields separated by a fence. Each field was the same size and each had plenty of lush green grass. In each field there was a mule whose head stuck through the wire, eating grass from the pasture on the other side, even though it was hard to reach.

In the process of reaching the grass on the other side, the mules' heads became caught in the fence. They panicked and brayed uncontrollably at being unable to free themselves. The cartoonist wisely described the situation with one word: "Discontent." (3)

So much of human history has been driven by discontent. It has been driven by the quest for more—more money, more security, more power. And this whole treasure hunt that consumes our lives is really a form of idolatry. It's a way of seeking happiness and significance and security in our desires and achievements, not in God's plans and God's provisions. If it were possible for us to find happiness and significance this way, then why haven't we? Why doesn't anyone have enough?

There is one question at the heart of every human being that drives our search for enough. The question is, "Does God exist?" Because if there is a God, then all of our meaning and purpose and identity and destiny flow from the character of God. Philip knew that. That's why he said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Do you disagree with Philip? Then let's assume for a moment that there is no God. If there is no God, then you are a random collection of cells. Your identity and worth come from how you define yourself, or how society defines or values you. If you decide that right-handed people are superior to all others, then you are right. If a majority of people around you decide that right-handed people are inferior, then they are right too. But as a random collection of cells, you are required to make up your own meaning or purpose for your life. Otherwise, your life is just a random series of meaningless events that may or may not meet your criteria for happiness.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Swiss philosopher and author who followed this line of thinking. In his influential book *Émile*, he wrote that a man's own feelings are the source of all truth and values. A quote from his book reads, ". . . in the depths of my heart, traced by nature in characters which nothing can efface. I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do;

what I feel to be good is good, what I feel to be bad is bad.” (4) Is that the way to find happiness—depend entirely on my feelings? If it feels good, do it?

Serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer agreed with this view. He based his sense of morality on his own feelings. During police interrogations after his arrest and confession, he commented, “If it all happens naturalistically, what’s the need for a God? Can’t I set my own rules? Who owns me? I own myself.” (5)

So if we remove God from the equation of the universe, then human beings have no inherent identity or worth, our life has no inherent meaning or purpose, and our values of right or wrong have no actual foundation to support them.

So how do people usually respond to a meaningless universe? By seeking control. By seeking to be first or best in everything. By grasping after anything that will give them identity, purpose or meaning in the moment. And we call that happiness.

But if there is a God, and God is the source of true meaning and purpose and identity, then what is God like?

Author Philip Yancey tells of driving through rural Georgia in the 1960s. He saw a roadside stand that read, “Jesus is the answer.” Beneath this slogan, someone had written, “So, what’s the question?” (6)

Remember Philip’s implied question, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us”? **Jesus is the answer to the questions, “Does God exist?” and “What is God like?”** Jesus answers Philip, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”

In Jesus, we see a God who understands us. God has tried to communicate with us and have a relationship with us from the beginning of time. Through promises and prophets, God tried to reach out and bring us back to His original plan for us. And when none of that worked, God came in human form in the life of Jesus. He grew up in a poor family. He worked hard for his daily bread. He lived under an oppressive Roman government. That’s why Jesus knew what was in his disciples’ hearts. That’s why, just hours before his own arrest, Jesus was comforting them. He understood their situation.

Back in 1988, the eyes of our country were upon Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Gallaudet is the nation’s only institution of higher education that is dedicated to deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

In all of its history, Gallaudet University had been led by presidents who could hear. In 1988, however, the student body protested the perceived disrespect in the appointment of yet another president who was not deaf like his students. And the administration listened. They removed the new president and replaced her with Dr. Irving King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University.

Immediately after Dr. Jordan was appointed as the new president, he met with the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and the Student Body President to discuss the future of the university. When they came out of that meeting, the President of the Student Body turned to the new President of the University and said with tears in his eyes, “There was no interpreter.”

Think about that for a moment. “There was no interpreter.” The students of Gallaudet finally had a president who understood their struggle. They had a leader who spoke their language. (7)

So it is with us. In Jesus, we see a God who understands us. In Jesus, we see a God who speaks our language.

In Jesus, we see a God who has a plan for us. Jesus begins this Bible passage by saying, “My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

We have to understand a little more about ancient Middle Eastern culture to get what Jesus is saying. In Jesus’ day, extended families often lived together in the same house. When a young couple was betrothed to be married, the bridegroom would go back to his father’s house and build on some extra rooms for his new bride. Once the building project was complete, he would come to claim his bride and take her back to his newly-expanded house. The wedding would take place only after the bridegroom had completed the building project and prepared a new home for his bride. When I was in Egypt in the poor areas, I would see homes that were incomplete. The tour guide explained that when a man was young he would frame with his father’s help his home for when he got married. He doesn’t complete it until he has found his bride.

When Jesus says that he is going to his Father’s house to prepare a place for us, he is talking like a bridegroom to his beloved. He is making a promise to return for us and bring us to our new home—eternal life with God. Only he can make this promise because he is, as he told his disciples, the only way to God.

Ginger Sprouse, a business owner in Nassau Bay, Texas, drove by the same homeless man on her way to work every day. The man, Victor Hubbard, paced up and down the sidewalk and occasionally spoke to passers-by. One day, Ginger gave in to her curiosity and stopped to talk to Victor. She discovered that he struggled with mental illness. He paced back and forth on this particular stretch of road because he was waiting for his mother. Victor believed that she was coming back to get him, and so he waited. For three years, he had been waiting for her return.

Ginger, touched by Victor’s story, began stopping by to visit with Victor. When the weather turned cold, she and her husband invited Victor to stay with them. Ginger even started a GoFundMe page to raise money for Victor. Soon, he had food and clothing and a few other necessities. But he still didn’t have the one thing he needed: a home. So after much discussion, Ginger Sprouse and her husband invited Victor to live with them.

She said, “We kind of had to make that decision. Is he really a part of our family? Do we really mean it when we say that he’s going to be in our lives for the rest of it if that’s where he wants to be? And we said, ‘Yes, he is.’” (8)

Jesus didn't have to make a decision about us. From the beginning of Creation, God had a plan to make us a part of His family. God planned for us to be a part of His life forever. That's why God came in the form of Jesus to show us who He really is. He came to show us how much He loves us. And God came to show us that He has always had a plan for us—to prepare a place for us in His eternal home, and to bring us back to be with Him someday. And the way to this place of eternal life with God is through accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” If you are still searching for meaning and purpose in your life, then know that you can find all these things in knowing the Father who knows you, who speaks your language, and who has a perfect plan for your life. Then for the first time in your life you will be able to say with great happiness, “Enough.”

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1. “15 Real-Life Hidden Treasures That Haven't Been Found Yet” by Lauren Cahn, *Reader's Digest*, <https://www.rd.com/true-stories/hidden-treasures-havent-been-found-yet/>.
 2. “The True Meaning of Shalom” by Doug Hershey, Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries, <https://firm.org.il/learn/the-meaning-of-shalom/>.
 3. Keith Wagner, http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Wagner/NT01matt/Matt_21.1-11_Rules.htm.
 4. Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus* (Harper. Kindle Edition).
 5. *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science* (Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition).
 6. Philip D. Yancey, *The Bible Jesus Read* (Waterville, ME: Walker, Large Print, 1999), pp. 309-310.
 7. “Interview with Gallaudet University President I. King Jordan” by Chet Cooper, Editor-in-Chief, *Ability*, Magazine.
 8. “Feel Good Friday: Woman helps homeless man build a new life” by Shamar Walters and Scott Stump, *Today*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.today.com/news/woman-gives-homeless-man-job-helps-him-build-new-life-t109210>.