

This heartfelt book from Kate Patterson is a profound exploration of what it means to live in the light of eternity, grounded in scripture and a life walked with God. A beautiful invitation to get to know the one whose eyes are on us.

MARK BATTERSON

New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Circle Maker*; Lead Pastor National
Community Church

The idea for this book was born before Kate suffered the tragic death of her beloved husband, Trevor. These reflections on God's eternal goodness and the promise of the beauty and glory of the world to come then came to fruition through the harsh reality of loss and death. It means that this is a book that deals honestly with suffering, but also contains within it a lived knowledge of the hope and promise that God has given to this world in the reality that we have our true home in him. It is a book that will inspire and comfort. I commend it to anyone needing to know more of God's love and hope in their lives.

LUCY PEPPIATT

Principal, WTC Theology

In more than three decades of ministry among the poor, we have seen every kind of suffering, grief, and loss under the sun. Daily we weep with the broken. We also rejoice daily, and the joy is greater than the pain. The one reason we are able to endure and to worship with genuine gratitude through every trial is that we know that our eternal home is with God — and our life in him, even now, is the reward without compare. This is what we preach to the great and small alike, and we have seen for ourselves that his beauty is an everlasting promise, able to change every part of life. We believe firmly that every Christian should learn what it means to live for eternity, and Kate Patterson's heartfelt meditation on this theme is a gift I warmly encourage you to explore.

HEIDI G. BAKER, PhD

Co-founder and Executive Chairman of the Board, Iris Global

Kate Patterson is a very special person whose love for Jesus Christ shines through so much of what she says and does. Few people are better qualified to write about 'living for eternity'.

NICKY GUMBEL

Holy Trinity Brompton; Founder of The Alpha Course

In the trials and troubles of life there is no greater remedy than to look up to our eternal inheritance in Christ. So I am delighted to recommend this uplifting and well-written book on eternity that is both profoundly biblical and practically helpful. Read it and rejoice!

J. JOHN

Minister, Speaker and Author

Why do we avoid thinking about the big picture of life and death, especially considering the hope we have in Jesus? I am full of admiration for how Kate has walked the difficult path of loss and for how she is sharing that journey with others now. Full of grit, gutsy honesty and gospel-filled-grace, this is a book which will lift your eyes and fill your heart with God's eternal hope.

CATHY MADAVAN

Speaker, Broadcaster and Author

The promise of eternity transforms Kate Patterson's everyday life, changing a monochrome landscape into colour. Sharing her hard-won vision of the eternal in the here-and-now, she invites us to experience God's joy even in the midst of our darkest days. Read this book and be encouraged.

AMY BOUCHER PYE

Writer, Speaker and Retreat Leader

Kate Patterson's book is a virtual visa in our passport to a place so little spoken of in our churches today. How to live our lives in the light of eternity! That's what's so marvellous about this book. Written from a biblical standpoint, Kate takes us one chapter at a time across the biblical landscape of the reality of eternity. You will find no catch phrases here just solid truth and personal testimony and learning. This is a timely book given the fear saturated world we live in today.

EDDIE LYLE

President Open Doors UK & Ireland

This book has been crafted from the story of personal pain and yet brings such hope. A must read for us all as Kate brings hope and light to anyone going through difficult times and focuses our eyes on the greater narrative of eternity.

REVD PREBENDARY MARK MELLUISH

Senior Pastor St Paul's Ealing & St Mellitus Hanwell; Assistant National Leader
New Wine; Non-Executive Director Tearfund

Reading Kate's honest reflections before God shows how she has journeyed through the valley of the shadow and the valley of tears - and come through, not bitter but with faith, hope and love in the Jesus who has life forevermore ready for us. This is an extraordinary book by an extraordinary woman that will bring you closer to an extraordinary Jesus.

SIMON PONSONBY

Theologian and Author

Christians can easily fall into binary positions; living in denial of their earthly circumstances or blind to their eternal inheritance. Kate Patterson masterfully navigates the tension between suffering and hope. She enables the reader to stand with their feet in the clay and their eyes in the clouds. Rich, raw and beautifully crafted, this book is blessed assurance in time of struggle and uncertainty, shining a new light upon the God who became flesh and moved into our neighbourhood.

REV WILL VAN DER HART

Author of *The Power of Belonging*, Director of The Mind and Soul Foundation

Living
for
Eternity

*Thou, O my God, art ever new,
though Thou art the most ancient;
Thou alone art the food for eternity ...*

*Without Thee, eternity would be another name for eternal misery.
In Thee alone have I that which can stay me up for ever ...*

*Thou alone art inexhaustible,
and ever offerest to me something new to know, something new to love ...*

*For eternity I shall ever be a little child
beginning to be taught the rudiments of Thy infinite Divine nature.
For Thou art Thyself ... the heaven in which blessed spirits live and
rejoice.*

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN¹

Living for Eternity

Knowing the
God of Forever

KATE PATTERSON



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*To my wonderful parents, Martin and Cynthia Peppiatt,
who have lived and loved with eternity in mind.*

Foreword

Someone who takes on the subject of eternity has to be a courageous person. A brief scan of the titles in a bookshop will tell you there are very few authors who have ventured into this territory. Yet you are holding a book on that subject, written by someone who can be trusted as a good guide, and one who I know has real courage. Kate Patterson has a unique perspective, as she writes only a few years after her husband Trevor's unexpected and sudden death. There is a poignant context and timing to this book – as it was agreed and conceived while Trevor was still alive. The space and time that has passed between then and now give a depth and maturity to all that Kate has to say.

Many years ago, I trained as an engineer, and was fascinated by the mathematical concept of infinity, especially as it relates to time, that is, eternity. I still love thinking about eternity as a concept, but rarely embrace it personally, perhaps because of being so caught up in the day-to-day pressures of the present. And yet when I am brought up short, through loss in my own life, or in the lives of friends or around us in the community, I realize there is so much more to explore in the midst of this life about what lies ahead.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that 'God has put eternity in our hearts.' It is not just a concept to be wrestled with in our minds, but a reality to be discovered and embraced in our hearts. Kate invites us to discover this for ourselves in a beautifully personal, accessible and down-to-earth way. She helps us see that an eternity with God is not something to be feared as unknown, but as a

destination that, if acknowledged, completely impacts and changes how we live today in a positive way.

This book will take you on a journey closer to God, as it has with me. It is ideal for people just starting out on the journey of faith and for those who have travelled with Jesus for many years. Treat this book as a travel guide, absorbing the scriptures and the stories and reflecting on the helpful questions at the end of each chapter, and it will serve you well. Kate writes a telling phrase near the end of the book, when you feel you have journeyed so far and received so much, that you have ‘barely skimmed the surface’. Just like using a good travel guide for the first time and discovering that your perspective has deepened and widened, and feeling the sense of excitement that there is so much more to discover, I think you might find, as I have, that this is one such guide. May you be blessed as you use it for your journey too!

Ric Thorpe
Islington
August 2020

Held in Eternity by Love

*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

JOHN 17:3

The past few years have been a crash course for me in the importance of living for eternity. Christianity speaks a lot about eternal life, but, like many of us, I tended to live for the short term. In the summer of 2017, I felt increasingly convinced that we miss out if we live as if this life is everything. I began to write on being eternally minded and soon accepted a book contract.

Then, in October 2017, I went away for a short break to Dorset with my husband, Trevor. On the first day, he popped out for a jog. He was an experienced marathon runner, but an hour ticked by and I became increasingly concerned. I drove down the lane to look for him and my heart lurched as I saw a trail of traffic blocking the road and an ambulance at the end of it. When I told the person at the back of the traffic jam that I was out looking for a runner, they hurried me to the front, and I knew from the expression on the face of the paramedic that it was bad news. Trevor had suffered a freak heart attack and he was already dead. The shock was enormous for me, for our sons and for our church.

I believe that it was God's kindness to us that I had begun thinking on living for eternity. For me, it is no coincidence that Trevor's last talk at our church was part of a series that we planned together on being eternally minded, although I had no idea then how much the eternal perspective would help me through the tough days ahead.

My journey of grief was transformed by discovering that the way to live for eternity is by knowing the God of eternity, the One who has carried me through the toughest time in my life.

I parked this book for a while as we began to face our grief, but returned to it because I believe that all of us desperately need an eternal perspective in this time in history, whether we are facing loss or not. What seems secure can quickly be shaken by economic instability, climate change, a global pandemic and seismic cultural shifts. This life is fragile and our click-now, consumer-driven society has no answers. More than ever, we need to know the way to eternal life – we need to know the God of eternity.

Yet, so often, we live heads down, ignoring the long view. How can we keep our eyes on eternity when daily life is all-consuming? This book grew out of my discovery that it changes how I live and grieve and hope and love when I remind myself of the joy ahead. But it gets even better than that – as we will see, eternal life begins now – because we can know the eternal God today – this side of death.

What a joy to discover that nothing about God is temporary! He is our home, now and forever, not just our Father for a moment but for eternity, not just crumbling sand but the Rock that remains, not just my good Shepherd today but forever, not only the One who created me but the Eternal Creator who is constantly working for good in my life and always will be. All that God is, God always is. It is with awe that I have written about knowing the Everlasting God, aware that these are just first steps on the greatest of journeys; his character, his love and his grace are mind-blowingly greater than these pages can contain. This book cannot begin to span the breadth of our infinite God, but above all, I hope that it may spur you on to seek to know God better.

To truly know God is to adore him. What can we do but worship when we see that our little lives are held in eternity by love?

Whatever life holds for you, may you discover the comfort, security and deep joy of knowing the God of forever. That is what sets us for heaven and sets heaven in us.

Acknowledgements

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Johnny, Connor and Ben – your loving encouragement kept me going and your insights have been invaluable.

My wonderful praying friends – this book would not be here without you and I reckon I would be in pieces. I am so thankful for our WhatsApp group and for my church, St John's.

Dad, Ali, Lucy and Kate – thank you for giving that precious gift of your time to comment and for digging me out of many holes!

My editor, Stephanie, and graphic designer, Lindy – thank you for making this book beautiful.

Gift of Blessing Trust – to all our supporters and to the Trustees and Patrons, Clare, Tristan, Rosemary, Jo and David, Bishop Ric and Bishop Richard – thank you for freeing me to write and cheering me on. And thank you so much Ric for the kind foreword!

Above all, all thanks to God – Father, Son and Spirit – now and for eternity.

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Introduction

How do you begin to open up the subject of eternity? Much ink has been spilled discussing eternity and I have not attempted to cover all the theological and philosophical disputes. The heart of this book is that everyday life becomes eternal life when we know the eternal God. It is designed to be read prayerfully, with a response at the end of each chapter. You may want to read it in short sections over a week as part of your devotional time with God or you could perhaps read it with a friend or in a small group and discuss the responses together.

The book is divided into two parts:

Part One, 'Eyes on Eternity', is about why it matters that we live with the long view. God has set eternity in our hearts and we are designed to live with our eyes on the glorious future ahead. When we set our lives towards the eternal, we live differently – anticipation of the destination changes the journey! But we discover that living for eternity is not only about the future. Eternal life is found not in a place but in a person – in knowing the ever-present eternal God.

Part Two, 'Knowing the God of Forever', is a series of reflections on the eternal character of God. God wants to reshape the warped pictures that we carry in our hearts and minds of who he is because he longs for us to know him. Here is eternal life. Here is incomparable joy!

PART 1

Eyes on Eternity

Here is an invitation to embark on the most wonderful journey of all – eternal life. How can we possibly live for eternity? Only by knowing the God of forever. Because when it comes to eternity, God is not only the destination, God is the way!

*This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

JOHN 17:3

Chapter 1

Eternity's Song

God has set eternity in the human heart

FROM ECCLESIASTES 3:11²

AN ETERNAL MINDSET

One evening a few years ago, Trevor and I were driving to a speaking engagement in Sussex. We were faithfully following the satnav, as it was a little out of the way, but as the country road narrowed to the point that both wing mirrors brushed the overgrown hedgerows, I began to worry that we had taken a wrong turn. Around the next bend, we saw that the potholed lane was heading steeply down towards a ford running dangerously high with muddy water. There was no way that we could drive through it. The meeting I was due to speak at started at 7.30pm. I looked at my phone – it was 7.25. There was no reception. We had no map. I began to get panicky and finally double-checked the postcode that I had given Trevor to put into the satnav. It turns out that just one digit wrong can be a lot of miles in the wrong direction. There was some lively discussion as to who was to blame, but of course, you cannot have an argument when you are about to preach! I did finally get to the meeting, just in time to speak, having discovered that it is worth setting the satnav with care.

If we don't set our internal satnav with care, for eternity with God, we get lost. Every day brings new demands. We hurl ourselves into the whirl of life's distractions. Our social media age says that this instant is what matters and we lose sight of the long view. But if we are not transformed by God's eternal purposes, we conform to the temporary values around us. We end up passively blending into our consumer society, treating the Creator of the galaxies like just another item to stuff into our crammed cupboards.

Why do we struggle to set our lives for eternity? Is it because we have a distorted idea of what awaits us? For many, eternity is no more than a vague promise of pearly gates in the sky. As a child, I thought it sounded worryingly like an over-long church service. Heaven sounded dull. Pictures of chubby cherubs strumming harps on the clouds did nothing for me. Who wants to make that the focus of their life?

What we are offered is infinitely better – God himself is our eternal destination! The Maker of our wild and wonderful universe, of bouncing kangaroos and sculpted desert dunes, of shooting stars and intricate snowflakes, of flame-brushed sunsets and a baby's chuckle, is anything but boring. He is the Creator of music and art and drama and parties. He is the ocean of truth waiting to be explored – all science and philosophy is his. His love is the source of all the richest parts of our lives – laughter and friendships and intimacy. We will want to live for eternity when we grasp that eternal life is all about knowing him.

HOMESICK

When we set our internal satnav to know the eternal God, it brings us home. God is our true home and we will be homesick without him. In Charlie Mackesy's heart-catching book, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, there is an exquisitely simple line drawing of three little figures heading along a curving pathway under a natural archway of interlocking trees. The drawing is in black and white but

somehow, I imagine them heading to a sunrise. Underneath the picture are these words,

'I think everyone is just trying to get home,' said the Mole.

Deep down, we all want to come home to God. The wonderful truth is that God is our eternal home and that means that we can come home *today*. There is no need to wait till we die.

I still remember my first camp away from family, feeling desperately homesick. Oh, the relief when I saw my dad arrive! He gave me a huge hug, bundled me into the car and brought me home. Today and every day, our heavenly Papa's welcoming bear hug is waiting for us. In Luke 15, Jesus told us this is what God is like: God is like a father who waits at the door, looking every day for his child who has run away. From far off, God comes running to meet you, to throw his arms around you, to bring you home – forever.

From him we come,
in him we are enfolded,
to him we return.

JULIAN OF NORWICH³

Many people have told me that when they first gave their lives to Jesus, it was like coming home. CS Lewis pictures this vividly when he describes the remaking of Narnia,

I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here.
This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never
knew it til now ... come further up, come further in!⁴

God is longing and waiting for us to come home to him. The needle of the compass of our hearts will keep swinging, until we direct our steps homeward bound. As Augustine wrote, our hearts are restless until we find our rest in God.⁵

ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

Although we can come home today to our Father God's embrace, Christians often express a longing for their eternal home. When you have a taste of the air that you breathe when you come home to God, you want to breathe it all the time.

When I was a child, we had several summer holidays in Cornwall. The motorway to the South West was yet to be built so we were dragged out of bed at the brutal hour of 5am to beat the holiday traffic leaving London. It seemed endless – that bone-rattling, joint-stiffening journey in a battered old Peugeot with no seatbelts. There were no screens to distract us and we plagued my parents with the incessant wail, 'Are we nearly there yet?'

What about us? Are we nearly there yet?

There is a delicate balance to this answer, which swings between yes and no, now and not yet. When we entrust our lives to Christ, yes, we are instantly welcomed home to God. There is no need to wait until you die to run into the Father's arms. Even when the journey feels achingly long and life is like the back of a bumpy Peugeot, there is deep joy to be found in God. The essence of life forever is knowing the One who is forever and that can begin right now.

However, we are evidently not quite there yet if 'there' is Paradise. The King of kings has not yet returned to set all to rights. War and injustice darken our news bulletins. A pandemic has power to devastate healthy families and economies. If you are not struggling with sadness, someone dear to you probably is. All creation is groaning, out of kilter, longing for the day when Christ returns. Earth has rejected its rightful ruler and instead of righteousness, joy and peace, the rule of the evil prince of this world is all too evident.*

* John 14:30.

So why doesn't God act? Surely God could click his fingers, send a lightning flash and impose his reign by force? God chose another way because the King of Love seeks willing guests for the eternal house party. God sent invitation after invitation through the prophets calling his people back to himself until finally his Son brought the invitation by hand.* In Christ, God came himself to bring it, so humbly. Now, we have the brief span of our lives to RSVP.

One day, when Christ returns, every knee will bow before him and this world will be renewed, but until that day, we live in the tension between the now and the not yet.⁶ Like the people of Israel in the wilderness, we have been freed from slavery but we are still on a desert journey to the Promised Land. Constantly, God reminds us of our eternal destiny; constantly, Satan attempts to clog our ears with noise and fears. What can we do? Those who have gone before us show us the way; they deliberately reminded themselves of where they were heading. Samuel Rutherford, the seventeenth century theologian who suffered greatly for his faith, describes us as being like mistreated immigrants in this life, but then offers blazing hope,

Our fair morning is at hand, the day-star is near the rising, and we are not many miles from home.⁷

In the relative comfort of the Western world, it is tempting to snuggle down into our cosseted lives, stick our fingers in our ears and avoid talk of eternity because it means facing the reality of death. Perhaps that is why 30 million adults in the UK are yet to make a will. The millennial motto is YOLO, 'You only live once – so make the most of it!' But there is a cry in our hearts that says we have not reached the final destination. We are 'longing for a better country – a heavenly one' and we cannot smother eternity's song.**

* Matthew 21:35–37.

** Hebrews 11:16.

FREED FROM A CONSUMER LIFESTYLE

The recognition that this life is fleeting frees us from the unending, enslaving and exhausting pressure to build a bigger barn or conservatory or career or bank account or social media following. Long ago, King David wrote that we are but a breath and our days are but a fleeting shadow. We are temporary residents, God's tenants not owners; our permanent home is still to come.*

That urge to invest in the temporary is an age-old problem. King David's son, Solomon, knew all about the pointless drive to accumulate stuff – he rivalled Bill Gates with a yearly income of 666 talents of gold, worth trillions today, but in the book of Ecclesiastes, he reminds us that we all come from dust and to dust we all return. That makes our manic consumerism empty and meaningless, as rewarding as chasing the wind.**

Have you ever tried to catch the wind? We once experienced the drama of a mini tornado in our local park and tried to chase the spiral of leaves that was higher than the towering oak trees. It left us spinning, struggling to stand. Chasing the wind takes you nowhere.

CHASING THE WIND

Why would you chase the wind?
So desperate to please!
Why strive to catch the breeze
when at each swirling gust, another handful of dust
is falling grain by grain beyond your grasp?
If you dare to stop, you'll see
all our paltry towers come smashing, crashing down.

* Psalm 144:4, Leviticus 25:23.

** Ecclesiastes 1:14.

Could you quieten yourself to listen
 to the song of eternity?
 The Everlasting God has set it in your heart.
 Our flesh will fail but his love endures,
 the end of our story is held in trust,
 hemmed in by infinity, each thread secured by Christ,
 glory rises from the dust.⁸

Why spend our lives chasing the wind? Despite the illusion fostered on our screens and in our glossy magazines, wealth and fame never satisfy. In 2014, Markus Persson, creator of the computer game, Minecraft, sold it for \$2.5 billion only to tweet, 'Hanging out in ibiza with a bunch of friends and partying with famous people, able to do whatever I want, and I've never felt more isolated.'⁹

What a gift to discover that there is more to life! Buried in the bleak ground of Ecclesiastes is the brightest of jewels,

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

How can my tiny heart contain eternity? Can I stuff a cloud into an egg cup? Yet somehow, God has set eternity in our hearts. These words are wings to fly on, carrying us to soar high above the confines of our own little lives. They awaken the knowledge in the core of our being that we have an eternal destiny. They explain why the material world cannot fill the void within, why we dream of more. Science may elegantly explain the workings of our universe, but it cannot begin to tell why my parched soul so thirstily drinks in the beauty of an inky sky scattered with stars. Why is my heart stilled by an amber morning

mist resting over the fields? Why should I have been enthralled by a lightning storm flashing across foaming waves while unseen gusts buffeted me until I fought to stand? When buildings and busyness are not crowding our lives, the heavens eloquently declare the glory of God.* We have no excuse not to join the eternal song,

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

ROMANS 1:20

If we dare to face the fact of death head on, we know that we are made for more. We may just be dust in the cosmos but somehow this dust has an expectation of eternity. We long to be eternally loved. Of course, to paraphrase CS Lewis, the thirst for the eternal cannot prove that the eternal exists any more than thirst for water proves that water exists, but it is a giant arrow pointing towards it.

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to ... suggest the real thing.

Even the best of our blessings are merely pointers of what is to come, and so, as Lewis goes on to say:

I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same.¹⁰

Eternity is in our hearts. If we dare listen, our hearts tell us that there is more to life than these days of ours that disappear in a flash, these spluttering candles that burn away to nothingness.

* Psalm 19:1.

Eternity is in our hearts. Travel across the world and every culture has some sense of the divine.

Eternity is in our hearts. If we deny it, we are no more than a random bunch of molecules and all our morals and manners have no firm foundation.

Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

ECCLESIASTES 3:19–20

Eternity is in our hearts. Even kids are hardwired for eternity. In my time as a school chaplain, I saw how death puzzles them. They struggle with why our bodies stop working, asking questions like, 'Can we put sandwiches in Granny's coffin in case she gets hungry?' Death is a stranger to their thinking.

We resist our mortality because eternity is in our hearts. Ageing comes as an unwelcome shock. Yesterday, I was on an exercise treadmill, wired up like a robot, having my heart checked. Inside, I want to be 25, imagining that I will go on forever. No wonder it is said that death is the fear beneath all fears. After all, who wants to imagine their body burning in a crematorium or rotting in the ground, where, as John Donne, rather too vividly, writes, 'the worm shall feed, and feed sweetly upon me'? Without God in the picture, death is petrifying,

I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday,
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror.¹¹

JUDGE AND SAVIOUR

Why should death bring ‘such terror’ to so many? Is it the prospect of an endless void, or because we fear that death will bring a final reckoning? Unless we are hardened, our consciences twinge painfully when we face our unwelcome tendency to selfish thoughts and acts. We were made in God’s image but fail to live up to it. We may look down on others to try and convince ourselves that at least we are better than them, but, as Bishop Handley Moule wrote, even if they stand at the bottom of a mine while you are on the crest of an Alp, ‘you are as little able to touch the stars as they.’¹²

The Bible is clear that there will be a final judgment on our lives. John writes,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

REVELATION 20:11–12

It is hard to write about judgment, partly because I am a child of a culture that judges nothing so harshly as being judgmental, but above all, because we care about the eternal destinies of those we love. I used to flick past verses on judgment, drawn instead to the Saviour who commands us not to judge, who welcomes the prostitute and the tax collector and refuses to stone an adulterer. Yet, that same Saviour preached fearlessly about judgment, warning us of the day when all will be called to account.¹³ The Bible takes judgment so seriously that the book of Hebrews describes it as an ‘elementary’ teaching.* The theologian, Tom Wright, calls it a ‘vital and non-negotiable Christian belief’.¹⁴

* Hebrews 6:1–2.

My friend Marie suffered horrifically in the Rwandan genocide. In 1994, close to 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by Hutu extremists who were targeting the minority Tutsi community due to long standing rivalries. Tragically, Marie's husband was murdered, as was her beloved grandfather who had helped to bring her up, and her brother and sister. In her village alone, sixty-seven people died. Her loss is unimaginable. She describes one harrowing night,

'The horrors of the past were laid out around me, literally. I remember sleeping beside people wrapped in binbags; dead bodies. You would try to block them out while you tried to sleep, but they were there, those bodies, and you knew that you might be next. Life is unfair to some. It's unfortunate I have to say that, but it's true. Life is unfair. But one day there will be a judgment day. There has to be, surely, because there can't be any in this world. Not on the earth. But there will be!'

There will finally be justice – for Marie and for all who are abused, for the slaves, the poor and the hungry. It all matters to God; it will be judged.¹⁵

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

It is against this dreadful and dark backdrop that the light of the gospel shines with blazing brilliance, revealing that God is both Judge *and* Saviour. We discover that God always planned the rescue operation of the cross. Simon Ponsonby puts it beautifully, 'Judgment is God's final word, but mercy was his first.'¹⁶ When we see the judgment to come, how can we not be filled with wonder that the Judge of all always planned to take all judgment on himself?

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

JOHN 3:17

In Christ, God went to the cross so that we could be forgiven. Such is God's love for you and for me. God so longed to bring us home that he came to earth to fetch us.

If you are yet to know the incomparable, unbeatable joy of coming home to God, Jesus calls you as he called the very first disciples, saying, 'Follow me', 'Trust in me', 'Make your home with me'. Those first followers left everything to follow the Saviour and we can do the same. On our own, we cannot reach the stars, but the Lord of the galaxies can lift us up into his arms.

RESURRECTION HOPE

God loves us so much that with the gift of his Son, he gives the gift of eternal life. It is indeed a gift. It is not that we have earned it but simply because we are loved with a love that surpasses all others,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

Receiving this gift changes how we view death and how we live life. For us, it changed how we grieved. It gave us hope that held us through the hardest moments. When I climbed the steps into that ambulance to sit beside Trevor's body, I remembered how Trevor had told me that when he had visited people who were dying and prayed with them in their final hours, he had always known that only an empty shell remained after the moment of death. In that traumatic moment, I was reassured that Trevor himself was no longer there, that he was with God. Trevor's heart may have failed but he is alive because Jesus promises us,

'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,'

JOHN 11:25 (ESV)

Did that assurance remove all our sorrow? We have still grieved deeply but found unexpected joy in our tears. Grief is changed when we know that we are not heading for a dead end. We have the hope of eternity with God. Paul's words have rung true for us, we 'may not grieve as others do who have no hope.'^{*} We grieve with hope – that God will tenderly wipe away every tear and that all will be made new. We grieve with hope because as Thomas Moore wrote long ago, 'earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.'¹⁷

Without the hope of eternity, death is a fierce enemy. Our days pass like a puff of steam from a kettle, a soon-forgotten sentence in the epic story of history. I have no idea of my great grandparents' names. The pages of life turn so fast.

For many of us, it feels as if the pages turn too quickly but there is great comfort that the story is not finished. The end belongs to God. Jesus Christ left the grave empty and death is defeated. The finale is not oblivion. There is no need to drown out eternity's song because we have the wonder of forever with the One who loves us with an everlasting love.

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
 my body also will rest secure,
 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
 nor will you let your faithful one see decay.
 You make known to me the path of life;
 you will fill me with joy in your presence,
 with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

PSALM 16:9–11



* 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ESV).



A PRAYER

Father God, I am full of wonder that you have set eternity in my heart. You made me in your image to live for your glory. I am sorry for the times that I have lived for myself instead of for you, my Maker and Saviour. Today, I put my trust in you, my loving God. Thank you that I can leave my sin and shame at the cross and can come home to you. I praise you that I am forever forgiven and eternally loved.

Amen

If you have prayed that prayer for the first time, please take a look at the Starting the Journey resource page at the end of the book. God is full of joy over you!

TO CONSIDER:

God has set eternity in your heart. Does this resonate, does it ring true with you? Why do you think that might be so?

What is your internal satnav set for? What would it look like to check and reset it for eternity?

Why, and how, do we sometimes try to silence eternity's song?

Can you see yourself running home to God today?

Do you know that you are loved, eternally? Do you believe it? How does this make a difference to your everyday life?

Read Psalm 16:9–11 and thank God that death has lost its sting.

Have I got a decision coming up that would change if I made it in the light of eternity?