

The Family Trip of a Lifetime

BY DON ALEXANDER

How can we be sure to take our families to heaven?

The California State Automobile Association Tour Book has five pages of "Tips for the Tourbook Traveler" designed to make your family trip an enjoyable and safe one. Tips on what to pack, how to pack, games to take for the kids, preparing for the trip, road safety, motel safety, even what to do for your pet, should Bowser accompany the family. But the trip of a lifetime is not to Disneyland, or Six Flags Over Where-Ever. The trip of a lifetime is through life, to Heaven, for eternity (II Tim. 4:7-8). God's Word, the Bible, has 66 books with instructions to take you and your family there. A great price has already been paid for the privilege to take the trip—the blood of the Son of God (I Pet. 1:17-25). The question to consider is "How can I take my family to Heaven?"

THE TRIP HOME

In order to take our family to Heaven, we must think that a trip to Heaven is not only a trip to "Paradise" but a journey back home. "Heaven" certainly is used in the scriptures to describe the atmosphere, the realm of the sun and moon (Matt. 6:26; Deut. 4:19), but also to the place where God and His angels reside (Psalm 11:4; Matt. 5:34; Rev. 4-5). Jesus came down from Heaven (John 3:13; 6:38-59), and ascended back to Heaven following His resurrection (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11). He rules from His throne there (Rev. 12:5; Acts 2:33ff) and acts as our High Priest there (Hb. 4:14-16; 7:26). He will return from Heaven when the purposes of the gospel are complete (II Thess. 1:7-10). His holy angels live there (Rev. 5:11; Matt. 26:53; II Thess. 1:7). Heaven is the home of the soul for faithful Christians who have a "heavenly calling" (Hb. 3:1), whose citizenship is in Heaven (Phil. 3:20),

and who look for the city of God (Hb. 11:10-16; 13:14; Rev. 21:2). The hope of Heaven serves as an "anchor, both sure and steadfast" (Hb. 6:1 8-20). When death occurs, and the soul returns to God, the Christian will be fitted with an eternal clothing (II Cor. 5:1 ff). We will be changed to become appropriate for residence there (I Cor. 15:49-58). We will not be reincarnated, returning to earth over and over until we progress to perfection. We will be caught up to "meet Him in the air and so ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:12-18). We are going home. Heaven is our destiny, the reward for living faithfully (II Tim. 4:7-8). We gladly sing, "I'm on my way to that fair land where the soul never dies! Where there will be no parting hand, and the soul never dies!"

HESITATION ABOUT GOING TO HEAVEN

However, we may be hesitant about a "home" where we have never been. No Game Boys or Sega in Heaven. No Martha Stewart gardens or decor in Heaven. No NFL or NBA or PGA in Heaven. No cable, no internet, no four-wheeling, no downhill, no Tickle me Elmo in Heaven. No faxes, no pagers, no cell phones, no electronic organizers, no toys of any kind. So, what will our family do if we get to Heaven? The desire for the spiritual home begins early in life when our children can be taught dependence on God and not on toys. God who created us and knows what we need will provide for us. The tree of life will be there from which we are separated now because of sin

(Rev. 22:2). The heavenly city has huge impenetrable walls to provide maximum security for us (Rev. 21:10-22). There is the Garden, ever green, with healing for the nations (Rev. 22:1-5). The water of life is there (Rev. 22:1) from which we may continually drink. Of course, the "Lamb is all the light" and there is no darkness or night there. The glory of God will overwhelm any disappointment and undergird every expression of faith. We will serve God continually (Rev. 7:9-15; 22:3; Mark 12:25; Matt. 25:21-23). We will sing praises to Him (Rev. 1-7). And we "shall see His face" (Rev. 22:1-5). "Joy beyond measure awaits us up there... soon we will join with the angels so fair, singing redemption's song." Pure joy replaces toys in Heaven's glory!

"BUT I CAN 'T LEAVE YET!"

Let's face it. We have invested

labor, energy and time here on Earth. We have family and friends here. We are uncertain about death. We may still have unpaid bills. Like one person said to me, "I want to go to Heaven, but I have a mortgage, and I want it paid off first!" How

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earth-bound our thoughts are. We want to "tear down our barns and build bigger barns" and get to the point at which we can say with the rich farmer, "I have much goods

laid up for many years." (Luke 12:13-21). Then, we would go. It is still true of those who are not "rich toward God" that "bigger barns," with paid-off mortgages, has a stronger appeal than being in God's presence for Eternity. But whether or not we want to go to Heaven, we can't stay here. The "day of the Lord" will end material creation and all humanity will be judged (II Pet. 3:10ff; Matt.

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ration. Paul Earnhart gives us some insight into the search for the single heart that all of us what to find in our service to God.

Besides columns from each of us, we'll also take a look at how some of the so-called "church fathers" viewed the silence of Scripture. We also have a sermon outline,

some archeology updates, some news and ideas in our Shop Talk section. Naturally, we hope this issue of *Focus* will help build you up in the faith. We also hope you'll write us with your thoughts; we'd like to include them in the Reader's Response section.

The Editors

25:31-45; II Cor. 5: 10). The only other choice for eternity is Hell, with the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:31-46). Though we have labored here, our works are not lost if we have used them faithfully to God's glory. They help equip us with hearts of faith to go to Heaven (I Cor. 15:58; Matt. 25:31-46). "Here I labor and toil as I look for a home, just a humble abode among men. While in Heaven a mansion is waiting for me and a gentle voice pleading, 'Come in.'"

If you could take one trip with your family, make it the trip to Heaven. Do not be like so many parents who spend more effort for a vacation trek than they do preparing their family for Heaven. Let us consider five things we can do to better assure that our family will make it to Heaven.

1. Teach Them to Love the Truth and Obey God As the Top Priority of Life. Those who know of the "light" that comes from God's truth (Psalm 119:1-10, 106ff.) can appreciate the appeal to the light in Heaven. Those who "meditate in" the precepts of God "day and night" (Psalm 1) will long for the "endless day" around the throne of God. We need to teach our family that the gospel of Christ is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16-17) and that those who "obey not the gospel" will be condemned (II Thess. 1:7ff). Teach it, talk it, pray it, discuss it daily (Deut. 6:1-9). Teach them the importance of daily Bible study, meeting with other Christians for worship, helping others, and living

consistent Christian lives. Insist that they understand that "seeking first the kingdom" is not an addition to the main event. It IS the main event (Matt. 6:33).

2. Prepare Them for the Journey to Heaven. We need to prepare them to leave "stuff" behind (Luke 12:20-21).

It is not true that "the one who dies with the most toys, wins." Prepare them to travel a

narrow road that few travel (Matt. 7:13-14). Sometimes the trip to Heaven will be lonely; friends and family closest to us may ridicule the road we travel. Our hearts may become discouraged, but we must prepare their minds for daily travel (I Pet. 1:13ff). We need to prepare each family member to overcome the world's distractions (Heb. 12:1ff). We must also tell them that once we get there, God will richly welcome us in (II Pet. 1:5ff). This will heighten our anticipation and help us overcome.

3. Teach Them About the Consequences of Sin. Hell is "hell" (Matt. 25:31-46). Sin is not a way to glory, but a path to deceitful and destructive living (Jas. 1:13ff; I John 2:15-17). A life lived in sin is a life of shame and disgrace, resulting in the vengeance of the Creator (Luke 15:11 ff; II Thess. 1:7-10). The pay-off for the momentary pleasure of sin is "death" (Rom. 6:23). Because of sin, hearts are hurt, souls are lost, marriages disrupted, families destroyed, business relations

irreparably harmed, and governments weakened. "Sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34). We must teach them that character is more important than celebrity. That a "good name is rather to be chosen than great riches..." (Prov. 22:1).

4. Encourage Them to Be Courageous in the Face of Adversity. Suffering can help us grow stronger (Jas. 1; I Pet. 1:3-9).

Teasing and ridicule for being a Christian is more easily overcome when we know our Father loves us (John 3:16; I Pet. 4:16). Overcoming sin and social pressures is easier when we know our Savior Jesus Christ understands (Hb. 4:14-16). When our family sees indifference and hypocrisy in the church among those who profess to be Christians, encourage them to believe firmly in the genuineness of Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 6:63). We may lose more of our young people from discouragement than to drugs and overt immorality. Teach them that no matter what others may do, they can serve the Lord with honesty and faith. Teach them that no matter what physical harm may come for their adherence to the gospel, they will one day be at home with the Lord (Rev. 14:12-13).

5. Teach Them About Those They Will Meet in Heaven. Often when traveling to visit a relative's family in a distant place, parents may say,



"Now Aunt Sue is a wonderfil person. She has two sons, Jack and Tony. They are good kids. You'll like them." That helps make the trip more comfortable and increases our excitement. We will meet the Heavenly Father (Matt. 5-6) who has watched every step we've taken on Earth with care and concern. He knew every time Johnny fell off the bike or was tempted to use drugs and didn't. He knew and cared every time Mom and Dad found it hard work to keep food on the table. He always provided for their needs. The Son, Jesus Christ, who lived here among us knows and is aware of our trials (Acts 7:54-56). The Holy Spirit who "helps" us with our prayers and has revealed the Word by which we have been instructed will be there

(Rom. 8:16; I Cor. 2:8-9). The holy angels, who have watched with great interest the unfolding of God's plan for our redemption, will be there (I Pet. 1:12; Heb. 1:5ff.). Those men and women of the Old Testament were not just story characters for bedtime, but real people whose faith burned brightly as they looked toward Heaven (Heb. 11). Other heavenly hosts will be there (Rev. 4-7). Our loved ones who died in the Lord will be there (Rev. 14: 13). People like Paul, Peter, John, Timothy, Lydia, Dorcas... Need we say more? Would you not want to sit among these noble and holy ones and be counted among them?

How happy we can be if we have worked with our family so that we go to Heaven together! How sad it would

be if we drove, flew, cruised, and backpacked all over the Earth in great family vacations and spent Eternity away from the God who created the Earth! "Earth holds no treasure, but perish with using, however precious they be. But there's a country to which I am coming. Heaven holds all to me." At the very thought of Heaven, the heart leaps with joy and anticipation, so that we may sing, "Heaven's gate, open wide. I am coming to my Father, coming home. He will take me in His arms of love and never say good-bye. I can't wait to get to Heaven when I die!" And, dear loved one, I want you to go, too!

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reckoning." This is the day when we find out for sure whether our investment has been wise. Until that day, both foolish and wise investments may at times appear to be other than what they are. In the short run, silly investments may seem to pay off and sound investments may seem to work out poorly. It is only in the final analysis that the wisdom of the wise is fully revealed. In the investment of our time, even more than our money, the bottom line is that we need to spend what we have in exchange for the truly valuable equities, and not for things that perish with the using. There is just too little of life to invest any of it wrongheadedly. There comes a time when we will want to be pleased with the "basket" we have put so many of our "eggs" into for so many years. If we are not pleased then, it will be too late to change plans. Let the investor beware.

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graceful speech and that which compromises truth. We need to learn these differences if we will really be faithful servants of God. The spirit in which we do something is every bit a part of the doctrine of Christ as those more difficult issues that we so often struggle with. Teach the truth, but let's do it in the way God has told us to do it. Keep the balance. *

"Sometimes God calms the storm — and sometimes he lets the storm rage and calms the child"