



IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE

WHAT'S BEYOND THIS LIFE?

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CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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To
Peggy and Dorothy
from whose sorrows
love has grown





INTRODUCTION

According to the pollsters, belief in heaven is actually on the increase. Perhaps that is no surprise. After all, large numbers of people still go to church and sing about heaven. Many people probably still say the 200 year-old prayer from which the title of this book comes, asking to get to heaven. Although ours is supposed to be a very secular society, the vast majority of people still seem to believe in heaven and also expect to go there.

Despite heaven's so-called popularity, it is probably true that people give less concentrated thought to it than they do to the location of the annual family vacation. Only when events rudely awaken us are we pressed into asking more serious questions.

Sometimes our children force us to think about death. Apparently they do not share the embarrassment we feel about discussing it. They want to know what happens when a person dies. What do you say when you are asked, 'Where has Grandma gone now?' Whatever private thoughts we may have, we probably respond by saying something like, 'Grandma is in heaven now; she isn't in pain.' We hope, perhaps, that these few words will satisfy young enquiring minds that have





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not yet discovered the reluctance that adults feel when thinking and talking about death.

The other day one of our children – fascinated by how things happen – asked how caskets are lowered into the ground. Uncluttered by the web of experience and emotion that we adults experience in bereavement, everything seems matter-of-fact to a child. Only later does the subject of death become such an embarrassing taboo that we are reluctant to talk about it. We hope our children's probing questions about life after death will be answered to their satisfaction with a brief reply, 'heaven.' But is this all heaven means to us? Is it merely something that is 'there' for us when we have no other answer to our children's haunting questions? While we moderns regard our forefathers' supposed prudery on the topic of sex with a sense of slightly cynical superiority, would they be astonished by our apparent prudery on the subject of death?

This world seems so real and weighty, and so busy. Heaven seems distant in space and time, unreal in experience – it can wait. Sadly, though many of us believe in heaven, not so many of us seem to know very much about it. No wonder we feel so uncertain, even insecure, when our children innocently probe a little further with their eager and inquisitive questions.

The Christian faith has an amazing amount to say about the life to come. We have written *If I Should Die Before I Wake* to share some of this Christian teaching with people who have unanswered questions or who feel confused, in distress, or anxious.

We know that many secretly experience deep anxiety when they think about death – their own, or that of





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others. Secret fears lurk deeply in the hearts of even the most apparently composed and successful people.

Perhaps you feel that you know almost nothing about what the Bible teaches about heaven. You may be uncertain about what you have to do to get into heaven. You may not even be sure whether there is anything you can, or even need to do, to get there. You may not even be at all sure that you are going to heaven. You may question, 'Am I good enough? Is it even possible to be sure about something like that?' If you are like most others, you may be reluctant to think about heaven at all because it reminds you of death.

The mental panic that the thought of death creates is probably the greatest single reason we do not think much beyond it. For all its popularity as a final destiny, heaven remains an unpopular topic of conversation.

If I Should Die Before I Wake discusses death and explains why no one really dies of 'natural causes.' It asks the question: 'Why do you expect to get to heaven?' and looks at false and true answers. We hope it will help explain what the Bible has to say about the future and about what heaven is like.

These pages are also about living. Facing death enables us to face life, for assurance about our future in heaven makes an enormous difference to our lives in the present. In the quaint words of the title song of a long-forgotten book of many centuries ago, this is a 'plain man's path-way to heaven.'

We have both experienced the great pastoral privilege of being brought into the very center of families in times of bereavement and sorrow. If you are reading these pages at such a time, we count it a





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privilege to enter into your life in this way. Seasons of acute grief are not unusually the times to begin the quest to understand biblical teaching. We hope that these pages will bring light and hope at such times, but we also want to encourage Christian living that is marked by a heavenly spirit and an assurance that will transform everything – in times of either sorrow or joy.

Our joint prayer is that *If I Should Die Before I Wake* will help and encourage you.

