

## **The Cure for Troubled Hearts (Part 1)**

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John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 14:1-6

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.*

The Message version of the Bible says it really well,

*Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust in me.*

John 14:1, this one little verse, contains some of the best mental health counsel than any of us could ever hear at any time in our lives. *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; [Jesus says] Trust also in me.* Don't let this throw you. Trust God. Trust also in me.

The reason I say this is some of the best mental health counsel that you could ever receive is because in chapter 14 of the gospel of John, Jesus offers us the cure for our troubled hearts. Is there anything more common to our emotional life as human beings than the experience of "troubled hearts?" We know that we are vulnerable. We know that our loved ones are vulnerable. We know that what we care about and what we are depending upon for our happiness is vulnerable. We know that there are forces in this world entirely outside of our control, and so we have troubled hearts.

How could you not have a troubled heart as you look at the state of this world? We live in a world of terrorist threats and declining economy. We live in a world of AIDS and West Nile viruses. Every time you get bit by a mosquito in the summer, or your child gets bit, you may wonder if the mosquito was carrying something. We live in a world of cancer-causing agents, schools that can't teach, parents who won't parent, pop idols who urge our 8 year old daughters to dress and act sexually seductively. How could your heart not be troubled as you live in this world?

I wonder, are any of you coming to church today with a troubled heart? I wondered, as I prepared this message, if any of you feel simply overwhelmed by a situation you can't fix? A storm you can't stop? A relationship you can't mend? Money that you need, but don't have? Regrets over past choices that you cannot now change?

Do any of you have troubled hearts today? Perhaps you are troubled about one of your children who is not making good decisions or whose life is going off the rails. Or perhaps you are troubled because one of your loved ones is physically in danger. Perhaps you are troubled about your finances; your expenses are way beyond your income. You may be facing bankruptcy. Or you are troubled

about the state of your marriage. Or you are troubled because you may be facing a lawsuit, some kind of legal action.

Perhaps today you came to church and are troubled about your health or the health of a loved one. Or you are troubled as you now face the prospect of being alone and never getting married. Or you are troubled about nagging regrets or guilt over the past. Or you are troubled because you can't seem to break a destructive habit, an addiction – something you know is wrong, but you can't break it no matter how hard you try.

Do any of you have troubled hearts today? And if not today, how about last week, or last month, or last year? In John 14:1 Jesus gives us some of the most remarkable mental health counsel that anyone could ever hope to hear.

Now the chapter division in John 14 is really unfortunate. We've seen this from time to time as we've read the Bible. As some of you know, the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible were not written by the Bible authors. The present chapter divisions for both the New and Old Testaments weren't decided upon until the year 1200. And the New Testament verse divisions didn't happen until a Parisian printer in 1551 added them to the New Testament as he rode on horseback in the rain from Paris to Lyon to meet a printer's deadline. Chapter and verse divisions in the Bible are definitely not inspired. And the chapter division between chapters 13 and 14 in the gospel of John is definitely an example of an uninspired break in thought.

See, we need to capture the context of Jesus' statement, "Do not be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." The context is what Jesus has just finished telling the disciples in John 13. He tells the disciples, first of all, that he is about to be betrayed by one of them sitting around the table. One of them is a traitor and is going to hand Jesus over to death. He then goes on to tell his disciples that he is leaving them and they can't follow him now. After three years of the closest kind of bonding that men have ever had with each other, the General is telling his troops, the Father is telling his sons, "I am going away. I'm going to leave you and you can't follow me now."

And then worst of all, Jesus tells his followers, "My leaving is going to be so traumatic; it's going to be so fear-inspiring that even you, my closest disciples, will deny me. Peter, my best friend, you will deny me three times."

Three shattering announcements that hit his disciples like combination punches to the head. "I'm going to be betrayed by one of you." "I'm leaving you and you can't follow me." And "Because of the pressure brought to bear, you will deny me three times."

The disciples are reeling emotionally as they listened. If you put yourself in the scene, there would be an array of emotions you might feel as you listen to Jesus'

words. Certainly fear, perhaps some indignation. Why doesn't Jesus trust in me more? Perhaps some shame – he knows something about me that causes him to lack confidence in me. Certainly confusion and worry.

The word Jesus uses in John 14:1 is "troubled." *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* Don't let your heart be unsettled. The picture is that of a boat caught at sea. It is storm-tossed boat, battered around, going up and down.

Some friends of mine in the home fellowship group that I lead on Wednesday night told me that over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July they and five young children were in a 20 foot boat on Lake Erie traveling from the shore of Lake Erie to Kelley's Island. It was supposed to be about a half-hour trip, but they were caught in a massive thunderstorm and the pilot of the boat was new and didn't know how to navigate the boat with 6 to 8 foot waves. There were five children in the boat as young as age 1. They were afraid the boat was going to break up on the rocks. It was absolutely terrifying going up and down in the waves.

This is the picture of the disciples' emotions and this is the picture of our emotions that Jesus speaks to in John 14 when he says, *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* I've called today's talk, "The Cure for a Troubled Heart." Since I believe that all of John 14 speaks to our troubled hearts, I'm going to do this talk in two parts. The second part will be next week. Let's pray.

John 14:1-6 *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 maybe where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

Again, Jesus gives us some of the most remarkable and wonderful mental health counsel that we could hear. He offers us the cure for our most common emotional affliction, a troubled heart. What is his counsel?

Well, first of all, Jesus shocks us with this command: Don't let your hearts be troubled. This is written as an imperative. Stop it. Stop being troubled in heart. Knock it off.

We immediately say, "I can't stop it. I can't stop the storm. I can't control my future. I can't stop feeling vulnerable. I can't fix this relationship, or heal this illness, or undo my past choices. I'm stuck. I can't stop it, Jesus. I have to feel this way. I must feel troubled."

Now, note Jesus doesn't say, "Don't let yourself have any troubles." He says, "Don't let your hearts be troubled." Jesus doesn't command us to fix our circumstances or have total control over all that happens to our lives or the lives of our loved ones. But he does tell us that as followers we can choose our responses to the situations life throws us.

You know, one of the continual themes that we encounter in the Bible that cuts across the grain of our culture is that we who are followers of Christ have our hearts liberated by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible continually tells us that we who are Christians can choose how we are going to respond to whatever life throws our way.

Now, friends, outside of the Bible, outside of Christianity, every other philosophy, every other thought form, every other culture is entirely deterministic. The determinism could be that of the communists. Your life and future are determined by your economic situation. Determinism could be that of Islam. It's all up to the will of Allah. The determinism could be that of astrology. It's all up to the movement of the stars, planets, or fates. Or it could simply be the psychological determinism of popular American culture. American culture communicates to you that you have no choice regarding how you feel given the way you were raised, the home you grew up in, what happened to you when you were 11, your health, finances, your genetics, your spouse. Given what you have been through, you have to have a troubled heart.

Your emotional responses, in other words, according to America, have been grooved out in the road ahead of you, and you have no choice but to have the wheel of your heart travel in these grooves forever. You cannot bounce out of the rut that has been grooved out ahead of you.

Now, speaking biblically, this picture of having grooved out emotional ruts running ahead of us is absolutely true. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 2, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.* The tires naturally go into the rut. Or as The Message version of the Bible puts it, *You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live.* The Bible does teach that our wills are bound. That we are enslaved, tied up in a straitjacket until the Holy Spirit enters our lives in the born again experience.

Most of us really don't understand the profound transforming power of the born again experience. We don't really know what it does to a human being to be born again. Paul says one of the most dramatic things that happens is that your heart gets set free. In 2 Corinthians 3:17, the apostle Paul writes, *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* What the larger culture does not understand, what whole fate-driven, deterministic world, whether it is psychological determinism, or genetic determinism, or religious determinism –

what this world doesn't understand at all is that your will and my will can become unbound. That you can be liberated from having to feel a certain way, or having to have a certain reaction, or having to have certain moods, or having to have certain responses, no matter how you were raised.

In Christ you do not have to feel what you feel, or respond the way you've always responded. And this applies even if you consider yourself temperamentally or habitually given to worry, fear, or discouragement. You can be set free, Jesus says, from living with a troubled heart. No matter what your circumstances are today you can be set free from living with a troubled heart.

Jesus says, indeed, he commands you to choose to not be troubled. In other words, you are commanded to not freak out about your finances. You are commanded to not stay up late at night fretting about work. You are commanded to stop spending your emotional energy regretting your past. You can be set free from worrying about your family, or being tossed about by the situations in the world. If you are born again, if you have welcomed the divine presence of Christ into your heart, the Bible says you can choose to live as a free person.

Friends, do you have any idea how radical the transformation is for the person who has gone through the born again experience? Imagine not having to relate to life the way you always have. Imagine not having to respond to pressure with your typical responses. Imagine being kinder, being able to get beyond yourself, being able to be others-centered, the way you want to be instead of consumed by your own feelings. Imagine being more peaceful, less angry, more confident, more whole than you've ever been.

How does this happen? Is Jesus just giving us some simplistic positive platitude like the song says, "Don't worry, be happy"? Just put on a happy face. Get some of those happy face stickers and put them around your papers and on your office walls. Repeat some self-help formula to yourself. No matter what's going wrong, feed yourself with some comedy.

Jesus' mental health counsel is not self-help. He is not saying to us, "Find some inner resources to hold on to. Lash your storm tossed hearts onto some anchor in yourself." Jesus is not giving us four steps to inner peace. Just get a facial or massage and everything is going to be all right. No, Jesus doesn't command us to do what most people do when their hearts are troubled. What do most of us do when our hearts are troubled? We escape. We can't deal with what life is throwing at us right now. I can't deal with this overwhelming problem, how I feel about myself, how I feel about my life or future, or my finances, so I will escape. I'll just turn on the TVerse. For those of you who are TV addicts, who always have the TV set on, or you always have the radio on in your car, are you trying to escape the pain of a troubled heart? You just don't tend to think very long because when you are alone with your own thoughts you feel bad? You have to stop the thought processes by escaping into TV, or escaping into entertainment.

What do most Americans do when they have troubled hearts? I'll tell you what we do. We shop. We go buy a bigger car. We fix up our homes...again. Escapism. We escape. We move from one bad relationship to another. We escape into sex or drugs or alcohol. Some people try to escape their troubled hearts by working longer and longer hours, spending more and more time at the office.

Jesus' mental health counsel is not "Don't be troubled, try self help. Find the resources within yourself." He doesn't say, "Don't be troubled, escape into the same pain-dulling behaviors that you've always escaped into in the past." Rather, Jesus gives us a second command linked to the first. "Don't let your hearts be troubled, trust in me."

This is the second command addressed to our wills. He says you can control your responses. You do not have to live with a troubled heart. You can be liberated to feel and respond differently. And then he says the way you do that is to choose to lash your storm-tossed emotional boat, lash your overwhelmed hearts, lash your regret-filled, worried life to me. Trust in me.

I think of the old Beatles song, "Let it be" when I read these words.

*When I find myself in times of trouble  
Mother Mary comes to me.  
Speaking words of wisdom  
"Let it be. Let it be."*

I paraphrase John 14:1 this way:

"When I find myself in times of trouble  
Jesus Christ comes to me  
Speaking words of wisdom  
'Trust in me; trust in me.'"

Jesus says the cure for the troubled heart is the believing heart.

Let me connect this up for you. Currently, most people do not think that what you believe about almost anything really matters. In America right now what is real to us, what really counts, are our feelings. Beliefs count for nothing. You are never permitted to hurt someone's feelings or challenge another person's feelings. On the other hand, beliefs? Oh, that's just what you believe. Our intellectual heritage sharply separates our beliefs from our feelings and behaviors. And for most Americans beliefs are unreal, they are changeable, they don't affect us very much. In fact, in our pluralistic culture, one of the worst things you can do is believe something really strongly. People get afraid of strong believers. You could be a fanatic.

But Jesus looks at life completely differently than we do in America. He says that beliefs are all important. What you believe according to Jesus completely affects the way you live. What you believe is the foundation of what you feel.

See, we all have beliefs about the way life really works, about what's real, fake, about ourselves, other people. Whether or not you can articulate exactly what you believe, you do have a belief system that determines how you live and what you feel and what your behavior is going to be. We all have beliefs about the nature of reality. And these beliefs completely affect the way we live. And so if someone was to follow you around for a week or a few weeks and watched every thing you did, everything publicly and privately, they could get a pretty good idea about what you believe about life.

For example, do you pray? If you go day after day without praying, you are demonstrating what you really believe about life. No matter what you say, or what you discuss in a Bible study, you are demonstrating by the fact that you don't pray that you believe that you can do life well on your own. That you have enough resource in yourself and you have enough trust in your own capacities that you don't need God's assistance in life. If you don't pray, then you probably believe that prayer offers less real help than your own busy actions. That taking a half hour away from your busy activity in order to pray is less helpful than using that half hour to produce something on your own.

Our beliefs completely affect the way we live and the way we feel. Again, if you really believe that it doesn't matter what you do, that no one cares, that no one is watching, if you believe that you are not responsible to please anyone other than yourself, then you likely will spend your days and nights in self-indulgent, self-pleasing behaviors.

If you believe that life is primarily about pleasing yourself, then you might, for example, get promiscuously involved with a number of sexual partners. Why wouldn't you? And if you believe that it is more important to please yourself than to please others, then maybe you will walk away from your commitments to your spouse, your children, your job, or your boyfriend or girlfriend. If you believe that life is fundamentally about pleasing yourself first, then maybe you will steal or cheat when you have the opportunity, or lie when it's convenient.

On the other hand, if you really believe that there is a God who speaks the truth about life and reality; if you believe deeply that this God who speaks the truth loves you completely and absolutely wants what's best for you; if you absolutely believe that God is going to hold you accountable for your actions; and if you further believe that life only works well in the context of trying to please God and not yourself, and that life only works well in the context of loving other people; if you believe that your own satisfaction is going to come as a by-product of loving and pleasing God and loving other people, then you would likely keep your

commitments. You would likely deny your immediate pleasures for the sake of others. You might choose to deny yourself. You would reject in your life what God says is wrong. You would embrace for your life what God says is right.

What you believe matters more than anything because your beliefs determine the way you live.

And your beliefs take on special importance, friends, when you are in a crisis. It is especially crucial to examine what you believe when your heart is troubled. You say you are troubled; you are thrashing about; your emotions feel like that family that I described before – caught in a boat in a storm. Why not stop and ask what you really believe about life? What do you believe about God? About the future? Instead of escaping or dulling your troubled heart, instead of just trying to think positively, why not pause for a moment and say in the midst of your troubles, “What do I really believe?”

And I’ll tell you something, no matter how well your life is going right now, even if you’ve come to church today and your heart is not troubled, the truth is you are vulnerable. A storm will hit your life. This world is profoundly insecure and no amount of advanced planning can provide enough safety nets for you or me to protect ourselves from storms that will inevitably come our way.

Now, what should we believe? If beliefs are all-important, what should we believe? Why should we believe?

There’s only one reason to believe anything. When you are choosing your beliefs, there’s only one reason to believe anything. It is not because something is popular or unpopular. Don’t believe something because everyone in your high school or college class says it’s so. It doesn’t matter what 95% of other Americans believe. The polls go up and down in the United States on different things just like the temperature. Don’t choose your beliefs because the media portrays something in a certain light. Don’t choose your beliefs because you prefer certain ideas to others. I’ve talked to people who simply back up their beliefs in terms of personal preferences. “Well, I just like to believe that something is the case.” Or, “I just don’t like the thought that...”

There are things that you may not like that you should believe. And there are fantasies that you may enjoy that you should not believe in.

There is only one reason to believe anything: because it is true. However unpopular something is, however undersold or neglected the truth is in our culture, whatever anyone says, the reason to believe something, the basis for a sane, stable life is believing what is true.

Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus claims to be the bringer of truth. Starting way back in John 1:14, *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among*



*us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus says in John 8:45, *Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?*

In John 14:6, Jesus says, *I am the way and the truth and the life.*

And in John 18:37, when Jesus stood before Pilate, he said, *You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*

Believe something because it is true. So what does Jesus tell us to believe when our hearts are troubled? In verses 2-3 we read, *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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.*

When you feel vulnerable, or worried out of your mind, or left alone, or isolated, or regretful, or fearful, believe that Jesus is preparing a future for you that is unimaginably wonderful and that he will come back a second time and take you to be with him. Here, in two verses, is the Christian's answer for the troubled heart – the hope of heaven and Jesus' promise to take us there. Now Jesus' mental health counsel is so counter-cultural, it is so absent from our worldview, that his words couldn't be more foreign to us than if they were spoken to us by an alien or Martian from outer space. These sound like words from a man who has recently been unfrozen from a glacier after 2000 years.

I started this series several months ago with the title "The Jesus I Never Knew" because throughout the gospel of John, Jesus says shocking things to us that cut crossways against the grain of our culture. He speaks words and he does things that you never hear, that you never see anyone else say or do. Jesus offers a cure for troubled hearts in John 14:2-3 that no one, certainly no psychologist, no educator, no popular magazine, no physician, indeed, almost no church that claims to follow him ever says.

He says if your heart is troubled in this world, focus your attention on heaven. Believe with all your heart that I am preparing heaven for you. Think about heaven. Pray about heaven. Cultivate your appetite for heaven. Spend time meditating upon heaven.

Immediately everything in our 21<sup>st</sup> century bodies rebels. Heaven? Jesus coming again to take us to be with him? I've got real problems now. You say that you have car payments. You have a kid smoking pot. You have a boss

breathing down your neck. You have to go to the beach in two weeks and you are 25 pounds overweight.

One of the most striking things about the way Christianity is taught and practiced in America right now is that Christianity is almost entirely different from the way it was taught and practiced in the first 18 centuries, or the way it is taught and practiced today in South America, Africa, or Asia. And specifically, the difference can be found in the almost total absence of discussion, study, belief, or focus upon heaven in America. Read the words of Jesus in the gospels. He spoke about heaven and hell more than anyone else in the Bible. He always referred to heaven and hell.

Go to any old cathedral in Europe. I've been to dozens of European cathedrals and churches. Tour a museum and go into the medieval Christian art section. What are the dominant themes of ancient Christian art? You will see painting after painting, fresco after fresco, sculpture after sculpture of the Last Judgment. Portraits of the blessedness of the righteous in heaven, or the misery of the wicked in hell. You will see carved angels, carved demons, symbols of what is going on in heaven. Christians, for 17-18 centuries, were entirely absorbed with a world beyond this one.

Read old sermons, or old Christian books. They're dominated by the themes of heaven and hell. Listen to the old creeds. The Apostle's Creed declares that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. The Apostle's Creed proclaims the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Go outside this country, as I have, to the other parts of the world. Go to India, Africa or South America, and you will hear lots of preaching about heaven and hell. But in the US, there is almost an embarrassed silence about heaven, or about the second coming of Christ. Virtually the only time we talk about heaven is at a funeral. But never, never do we say that the ultimate cure for our own troubled hearts in the present, in this life, in this world, is the promise of heaven.

Why is that? Peter Kreeft, one of my favorite writers, who is a Catholic professor of philosophy at Boston College, says, "We've lost the hope of heaven because we've lost the love of heaven." Let me repeat that statement. "We've lost the hope of heaven because we've lost the love of heaven."

I think Peter Kreeft is dead right. Almost no Christian that I know loves heaven. Almost no pastor that I've ever met, no priest, no mature Christian, no spiritual person, almost no one with the stark exception of elderly Christian brothers and sisters do I know of who love heaven.

So, friends, why have we fallen out of love with heaven? Let me share with you a few reasons.

We believe that discussions about heaven, a focus on heaven, attention given to heaven is impractical. We're 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. And we, as a people, are total pragmatists. Give me something for living life well now. Give me financial counsel for handling my debt. Give me marital counsel or child-raising help for my family. Help me to blend my family together. Give me dating tips on locating a spouse. We Americans want something practical. Tell us how to form positive friendships, or to find good jobs.

You've got real troubles. Maybe you are having a lesion on your back biopsied or you have a lump in your breast. We love practical solutions. Quick, readable articles. Have you noticed how short magazine articles are getting? We want a column with seven managerial tips for showing employees appreciation. We want easy formulas and recipes for losing weight. We believe that heaven is impractical.

But, as I said before, Jesus talked about heaven and hell more than anyone. Read the Sermon on the Mount, that great sermon on Christian ethics that commands us as Christians to not judge each other, to treat our neighbor as ourselves. Throughout this great moral teaching, Jesus talks about hell five times. He ties his moral teaching to the threat of us going to hell if we disobey it. Jesus was an amazingly practical teacher. Nothing that Jesus said was impractical. He always cuts right to the root of the issue. He doesn't just deal with the symptoms. He doesn't put Band-Aids on cancer. He doesn't ever divert our attention one iota from reality, from the way the world really is.

Nothing is more practical, according to Jesus, than that you regularly think about heaven and hell. You see, Jesus understood something that we Americans don't understand at all. He understood that your experience of life now is almost entirely determined by your beliefs of your future. We live so poorly because we have no sense of the past and no view of the future. We think that we can have a happy present by just living in the present without ever thinking about the future.

Where are you headed? What road are you on? What can you expect for your life in the future? These are incredibly practical questions and will impact your emotions now. Your view of the future will affect the state of your heart now. That's what Jesus is saying.

Immigrants who traveled on crowded, filthy boats to the United States a century or two ago experienced that travel differently based on one simple fact: whether they were white or black. If they were white, traveling on a crowded filthy boat might have been for them the greatest adventure of their lives. They were going to America – the land of opportunity, the land of freedom. America, they heard, was paved with streets of gold.

If a person was black, they were looking forward to the greatest disaster that had ever hit their lives. America, the enslaver. America, the separator of families. America, the taker of lives.

In everything, friends, your view of the future determines your present experience. If things are tough in your marriage right now, but you know that this is just a temporary rough spot, you know it is just the present circumstances of having a new baby, or a job change, or the stress of graduate school, you can be joyful now. You can respond well now to the temporary trouble in your marriage.

But if things are tough in your marriage, and you look at the future and you have no hope for change at all, then your present is going to be almost unimaginably unendurable. If you feel like you have been given a life sentence in prison by remaining married, it's hard to stay put. Do any of you feel that way today? Do you feel like you've been given a life sentence in prison, that you have no hope for change? Do you feel Pain? Sorrow? Worry?

Troubled hearts are practically changed by a view of the future.

Marlene and I have had two grandchildren in the past year. We've had an opportunity to visit hospital maternity wards often just in the past nine months. And if you walk down a hospital maternity ward, you will hear the cries, the groans, the moans of women who are in great pain. And yet in the midst of all that pain, there is extraordinary joy mingled in. Why? Because of what's coming. Because a baby is coming. On the other hand, if a woman goes into a hospital with a mass in her stomach and the mass is not a baby, but a tumor, the pain that she feels is not going to be mingled with joy.

Friends, there is nothing more practical than you capturing a view of your future, the future for your family, the future for this planet. That absolutely does affect the way you feel right now.

We believe heaven is escapist. Karl Marx said that heaven was the opiate for the masses. It was just wishful thinking, a diversion from the problems of this world right now. But you know, heaven is escapist only if it's a lie. If you call heaven escapist, then you are assuming the truth of atheism, or materialism. But if heaven is real, then you are escaping when you don't think about it. It is realistic to think about heaven if heaven is real. Don't believe in heaven because it makes you feel better, because it's a nice thought. Believe in heaven because it's true. Because this world is not all there is.

And listen, concern for heaven does not devalue or demean concern for life right now. A pregnant woman who is concerned about her baby's future will get great prenatal care, she will value that baby in the womb, she will sing to the baby, talk to the baby in her womb, and take care of herself. A concern for the future actually increases the value of the present. On the other hand, if that same

woman is planning to get an abortion, if she has no view for the baby's future, then she may not care about the effects on the baby from smoking, drinking, or using drugs.

As Peter Kreeft says, "If life ends with death, with a cosmic abortion, then we will care for the earth not more but less than if we believe that life in this world is a womb for eternity."

That's what this world is, friends. This world is a womb for eternity. All the bumps, all the squeezes, all the rattling around, you are being formed and birthed for eternity – either in heaven with God and with lovers of God, or eternity in hell all by yourself.

Kreeft comments saying, "The roads to the California goldmines were always well cared for and paved. The only roads that were ever neglected were roads to ghost towns." If you think you are headed to a ghost town, then you don't fix the road. If you are headed for a gold mine, then you care for the road that you are on.

But you know, I believe the most significant reason why heaven is so neglected in contemporary discussion or thought, why we Christians don't love heaven, is because at the deepest part of our beings we have become convinced that heaven will be boring. This is the great tactic of Satan in all of life. Satan cannot take away God's joy, but what he can do is rob you or me of joy. And he does this by one simple lie that he repeats over and over again. God's will for your life is joyless and your will for your life is joyful. Satan regularly communicates to your mind that what God has in store for you is dull; it's unfulfilling; it's boring. But what you plan for yourself is exciting and vibrant and satisfying.

Look at the way that movies portray sin and compare it to the way movies portray virtue. Sin is exciting. This woman has a passionate affair and comes alive. Everything tastes better and feels better. Senses are awakened and the heart is touched in ways that it's never been touched before. Life is finally good. She's discovered freedom through this affair. On the other hand, what was life like with her husband? It was stifling. It was boring. It was routine. Her life before the affair was painted in grays and blacks and whites. Now it's in reds, yellows and oranges.

Look at the way the media portrays teenagers losing their virginity or getting revenge. Man, it feels so good.

The Bible tells us a few things about God. The Bible tells us that God is love. The Bible tells us that God wills your joy. And the Bible tells us that the way we find joy is by surrendering ourselves to God.

Heaven will not be boring. It is not going to be an eternally long church service. Church can be boring. Singing can be boring. But God will not be boring. And you will be with God.

What will heaven be like? Why is the best mental health counsel that you could ever hear to focus on heaven?

Because heaven will provide us with perfect justice. Our hearts are often troubled because life in this world is so unfair. It is so hurtful. The innocent get trampled on. The powerful seem to get away with everything.

I just read one of the saddest newspaper articles I think I've ever set my eyes upon in the Friday edition of the New York Times this past week. The article was titled "Help, But Not Enough, For Girl Who Began and Died in the Trash." Here's how the article begins:

*It was only a week ago that the tiny body of Stephanie Ramos was found in a plastic bag in a garbage truck in the Bronx, discarded by a foster mother who told the police that she panicked when the severely disabled girl died. It was an ugly ending by any measure, but particularly cruel in this case because the little girl's life began the same way: wrapped in a plastic bag and discarded on a New York City by-way.*

*In September 1994, days after her birth, Stephanie was discovered in a plastic bag near her parents' home. The lack of oxygen in the bag likely contributed to mental retardation so profound that even when she reached 8 she had only the awareness of a child less than 1.*

Stephanie was taken away from her parents who put her in a plastic bag at birth. She was turned over to a foster mother who intensely loved her for six years, devoting herself to Stephanie's care. But because there was no adequate social service help given to this mother – she was a poor woman, who was paying neurologist bills and everything out of her own pocket – she finally had to turn Stephanie back over to the Foster Care System. And when she was turned over to the Foster Care System, she was given to another couple, who disposed of her body, again, by wrapping it in plastic at age 8. They are being investigated on a variety of criminal charges.

Stephanie Ramos, days after her birth, put in a plastic bag in a garbage pail. And eight years later, dead, wrapped in plastic in a garbage pail.

Now, I don't know how your heart could not be troubled when you read a story like that, apart from the hope of heaven. When I watch the evening news, when I hear stories in my office concerning the kinds of abuse children have suffered, when I watch people get rolled over by folks too strong for them, I think, "How could my heart not be troubled except that this world is not all there is?" I look

forward to heaven for Stephanie Ramos, for millions of children around the world like Stephanie. I look forward to God's perfect justice. God will vindicate the truth. God will heal little Stephanie's broken body. Many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.

Heaven will be perfect forgiveness. What is it that gives us troubled hearts? Is it not the remembrance of choices that we've made that we cannot undo? Regret continues only when there is no possibility of change. When we are stuck with the results of our past. But in heaven, when we finally experience God's forgiveness, all of our sins will not only be covered, but be annihilated forever. God will not only forgive our sins, but will forget them so that we can forget them.

Heaven is perfect fulfillment. What you were created for, the shape that God has given to your individuality, will be fulfilled ultimately in heaven. C.S. Lewis, my favorite Christian author, wrote brilliantly on the subject of our own individuality being perfectly fulfilled in heaven. He said, "No one in heaven will be superfluous. If God had no use for all of our differences, I do not see why he should not have created more souls than one. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance. Your soul is a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. Each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the divine beauty better than any other creature can."

Your individuality will shine forth. You will have a resurrected body because God will redeem your nature. He will be able to entrust you with great power and great authority. Part of the reason we lack power and authority right now is because we'd be perfect monsters if we had much power. But in heaven, all that you long for – perfect love, perfect freedom, perfect adventure, perfect excitement – it's all going to be there.

And heaven is going to be a perfect homecoming. I love scenes of men coming back from war where they hit the shores of the US and kneel down on the shores of America, kissing the ground. Their wives run up to them wearing pretty dresses and leaps on their husbands. The kids have their arms thrown around their daddies.

There is a marvelous new movie out titled Antwonne Fisher. It starred Denzel Washington. Antwonne grew up as a radically abused young man in Cleveland. His father was killed before he was born. His mother was a drug addict, who gave him up to a foster family, where he was abused. His whole life, he dreamed of being welcomed by his family. He dreamed of another home. He finally found his father's family.

Don't you want that? Don't you want a homecoming like that? Perfect communion with loved ones, perfect embrace in the family of God, an eternity spent getting to know other people who love you and care about you and

welcome you as you welcome and love them and get to know them? A perfect homecoming with God your Father and with Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit?

How do we get to heaven? Jesus says in verse 4, *You know the way to the place where I am going.* Thomas said to him, *Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?* Jesus answered, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

What is the road to heaven? Jesus says that he is the road. There is, in fact, no other road. There is no side road, or detour, or mountain pass around Jesus. The God who has the biggest heart in the world tells us that there is a narrow road that leads to his heart. Just as I believe Jesus regarding the wideness of God's love and heart for this whole world, I also believe the same Jesus who said there is a narrow road to enter the heart of God.

This is not church bigotry. This is not religious intolerance. This is Jesus who is speaking truth to us. Jesus, in this passage, tells us two shocking truths. The first truth is that the key to mental health is to recognize that heaven awaits you. The doors of heaven are opened to you.

The second shocking truth is that only by exercising the gift of faith in Christ will we, who are confused and troubled and fighting and bickering with each other, be carried into heaven. Every other way won't get us there. Our good intentions won't get us there. Our best deeds won't get us there. Meditation won't get us there. Social service won't get us there. Heroic religious practices won't get us there. But Jesus will, if we come to him. If we trust in him. Here's the cure for the troubled heart. Trust in God, Jesus says, and trust also in me. Let's pray.



## **The Cure for Troubled Hearts (Part 1)**

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Rich Nathan

July 19-20, 2003

John: The Jesus I Never Knew Series

John 14:1-6

- I. The Best Mental Health Counsel Ever Given (Jn. 14:1)
  - A. Don't Let your Heart Be Troubled!
  - B. Trust in Christ!
- II. The Most Neglected Mental Health Counsel Today: The Hope of Heaven (Jn. 14:2, 3)
  - A. Objections to Heaven
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    - 1. Perfect Justice
    - 2. Perfect Forgiveness
    - 3. Perfect Fulfillment
    - 4. Perfect Homecoming
  - C. How Do I Get to Heaven? (Jn. 14:4-6)