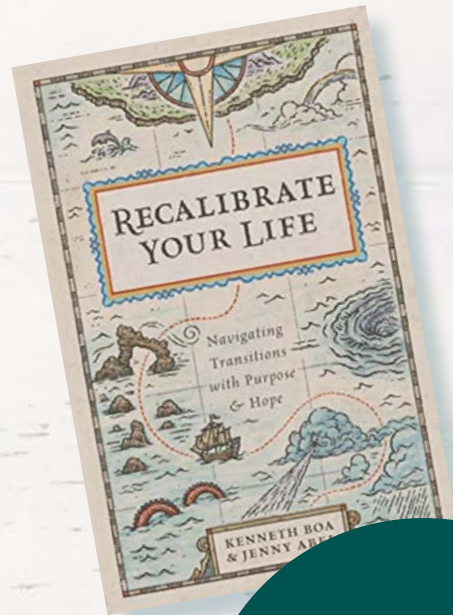


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**GOD'S PROMISES**

## PROCESSING OUR PAIN

One of the universal languages in this world is pain. We all know about it, we all experience it, and we all look for ways to manage it.

Our desire to control pain is normal. But it can lead to trouble when the source of the pain is beyond our control. We often find ourselves willing to do whatever it takes to bring the pain to an end. Like the weakling third-grader who pays off the playground bully every day with his lunch, we are tempted to do whatever the “source” of the pain demands. Like the Israelites in this passage, we may be tempted to try to manipulate God-saying what we think He wants to hear-in order to bring an end to our suffering.

The nation of Israel tried this unsuccessfully. God had brought His hand of discipline to bear on the people, and they were hurting. Their pain had its origins in their own sin and their failure to repent in spite of numerous warnings from God’s prophets. When God carried out His discipline, Israel had a “foxhole conversion,” saying, in effect: “God, get us out of this situation, and we’ll serve You from now on.” The Israelites actually thought that two days of repentance-at the most three-would convince God to graciously restore the nation to wholeness. But God saw right through their scheme: “Your loyalty is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early” (Hos. 6:4). Needless to

say, they were not restored in three days with that approach.

Our focus in times of suffering should not be on our pain, but on our Father in heaven. We should strive to determine His purposes, His plans, and His priorities rather than trying to plan our escape route. Don’t think naturally when you’re in pain-”How do I escape?” Think supernaturally-”How can I hear what God is saying through this experience?”

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**God’s Promise:**  
There is a blessing in everything He allows in your life.

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FEBRUARY 2025

# REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



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## WORSHIPING GOD IN ALL THINGS

You have called me to participate in Your purposes through the work I have been given to do during my earthly sojourn. May I do my work with care and excellence in the desire to be pleasing to You. I realize that all things become spiritual when they are done in Your Name. May I honor You in my choices and activities and view the works of my hands as a mode of worship. I want whatever I do in thought, word and deed to be honoring to You and edifying to others. I ask for a clearer sense of purpose and calling, and for the power to accomplish that for which You have placed me on this earth.

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# OUR REAL CITIZENSHIP

## *Heaven: A Pious Fantasy*

If any of us could be transported to heaven for even a five-minute visit, we would never be the same after our return to earth. For the first time, we would have a true perspective on the frailty and brevity of life on earth and the absurdity of giving our hearts to things that will not last.

John White observed that, “It is want of faith that makes us opt for earthly rather than heavenly treasure. If we really believed in celestial treasures, who among us would be so stupid as to buy gold? We just do not believe. Heaven is a dream, a religious fantasy which we affirm because we are orthodox. If people believed in heaven, they would spend their time preparing for permanent residence there. But nobody does.”

Is White overstating his case? Does the biblical teaching on heaven have no reality in our lives? Most believers acknowledge the existence of heaven because it is affirmed in Scripture, but intellectual assent falls short of the full meaning of faith. With few exceptions, heaven is a vague concept that has little bearing on the way people live their lives.

## *Heaven: A Life-Changing Hope*

The apostle Paul was gripped by the prospect of a new quality of existence in the manifest presence of the living God for eternity. In contrast to those “who set their minds on earthly things” (Phil. 3:19), he wrote, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (3:20). This image of another citizenship or commonwealth would have special meaning to the Philippians, since Philippi was actually a Roman colony on foreign soil. Although they lived in Macedonia, the people of Philippi enjoyed the privileges of full Roman citizenship.

The spiritual analogy to this foreign colony is that the church of God is a colony of heaven on earth. Every child of God has a dual citizenship on earth and in heaven, but our greatest allegiance must be to our real

fatherland which is heaven. Each of us is a citizen of an earthly country, but in comparison to our heavenly citizenship, we are really resident aliens who are temporarily dwelling in a foreign land.

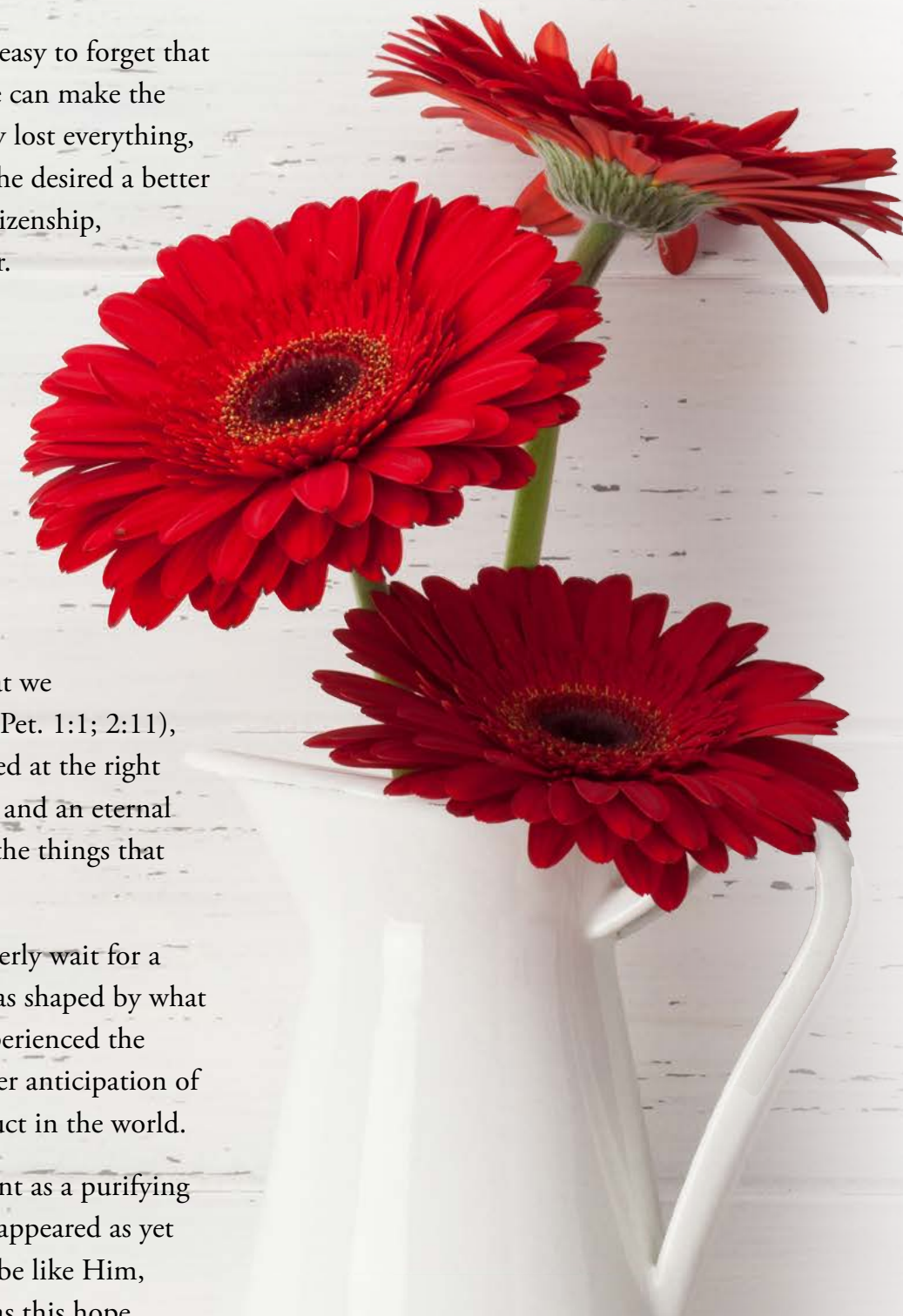
Just as it is easier to walk by sight rather than faith, it is also easy to forget that we are sojourners and aliens on earth. Our grasp of this issue can make the difference between a Lot who chose the world and eventually lost everything, and an Abraham who chose God’s portion for him, because he desired a better country (Heb. 11:9-10, 13, 16). When we forget our real citizenship, we work harder for our comfort than we do for our character.

What do you crave more than anything else? What do you long for and dream about? What is your value system, and is it consistent with your true citizenship? We will either seek first the satisfaction of our own appetites and desires or we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. There will always be a struggle, but we cannot have it both ways.

We must remember our citizenship and live in accordance with it. As we allow Scripture to define us and remind us that we are pilgrims and aliens on this earth (Heb. 11:13; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11), we will begin to seek “the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). The difference between a temporal and an eternal perspective is the difference between the primary pursuit of the things that are on earth and the things that are above.

Paul understood the present power of a future hope: “we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” What he did in the present was shaped by what he knew Christ would do in the future. Like all of us, he experienced the pressure of daily obligations, but his expectant hope and eager anticipation of the coming of Christ motivated him and governed his conduct in the world.

The return of Christ is always presented in the New Testament as a purifying hope. “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). To walk in wisdom, we must remember our real citizenship and focus on Him whose promised return is as certain as tomorrow.



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