

“With engaging stories and scriptural truth, Chris Morphew lifts our eyes and hearts to see God, who is bigger than our biggest questions. His rescue mission through Jesus will not disappoint us!”

BARBARA REAOCH, Former Director, Children’s Division, Bible Study Fellowship; Author, *A Jesus Christmas*

“Chris Morphew is like Tim Keller for teens. In this short book, he tackles some of today’s tough questions with Scripture, wisdom and clarity—and just the right amount of fun to keep young readers turning the page. I cannot wait to put this book into the hands of my three children.

CHAMP THORNTON, Pastor; Author, *The Radical Book for Kids and Why Do We Say Good Night?*

“What an excellent series—seriously excellent! I am certain Chris Morphew’s chatty style, clear explanations, relevant illustrations and personal insights will engage, inform and equip tweens as they work through some of the big questions they and their peers will be asking. Rather than rattling off short, simplistic answers, the books allow the readers to question and unpack the evidence. I am delighted to see such great material being produced for those at a pivotal stage of life and have no doubt they’ll also be a fantastic resource for those working with this age group.”

TAMAR POLLARD, Director for Families, Children and Youth Ministry, Grace Community Church, Bedford

“Questions about death can be hard to ask. And sometimes the answers aren’t clear or just don’t seem to ring true. Well, here comes Chris Morpew to help us! By taking us through the Bible’s answers to lots of our questions about death, he draws us to think about the world, God, what he is like, what we’re like—and why, when it comes to death, Jesus changes everything!”

COLIN BUCHANAN, Singer/Songwriter

“Chris is the teacher you wish you had. He gets where you’re coming from and takes your questions—and you—seriously. If this is your question, or if you just want to know more about God and the meaning of life, this is the book for you.”

DR NATASHA MOORE, Research Fellow, Centre for Public Christianity

WHAT
HAPPENS
when we
DIE?

CHRIS MORPHEW

Illustrated by Emma Randall

The logo for The Good Book Company, featuring the text "the good book" in a lowercase, sans-serif font with a curved line above "good", and "COMPANY" in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font below it.

the good book
COMPANY

*For Harriet,
may you never know a day without
the great hope of the resurrection.*

What Happens When We Die?

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Chapter 1



THE PROBLEM WITH HEAVEN

Imagine you're hanging out at home one day, when suddenly there's a knock on the door. You open it, and find your friend standing there with this ridiculous grin on her face, like she's got incredible news that she's *bursting* to share.

"Hey," you say. "What's up?"

But at first, she's so excited that all she can do is beam at you.

After a long silence, you finally lose patience and say, "*What? What's going on?*"

"I'm going to the greatest place in the *entire universe*," she says, like she might pass out from happiness, right there in the doorway, "and I want *you* to come with me!"

"Oh, ok. Great!" you say. "Where are we going?"

The words come out in a gasp, like the very thought of it makes her short of breath: “The waiting room—at the *dentist!*”

“Wait—what? Why? Is there something wrong with your teeth?”

“What do you mean?” She tilts her head, confused. “Why would there be something wrong with my teeth?”

“Well, isn’t that why most people go to the dentist?”

“I’m not going to the *dentist*,” she says. “I’m going to the *waiting room*.”

“Oh,” you say. Then, when it’s clear she’s expecting you to say something more, you add, “*Why?*”

“Because it’s *wonderful!*” she says, voice choking up. “It’s all clean and sparkly and shiny, and the people who work there wear these cool white outfits, and *all day* you get to just sit around, thinking, ‘Isn’t this *great?* I can’t believe I’m in the waiting room at the dentist!’”

A single, joyful tear streams down her cheek. “Doesn’t that sound *amazing?*”

You stare at her, realising how absolutely serious she is about this.

“So, what are you waiting for?” she asks, in a voice like she’s just offered you a billion dollars. “Aren’t you coming with me?”

“Um...” You start easing the door shut as politely as possible, trying to remind yourself of how exactly you became friends with this person in the first place. “Thanks so much for the offer, but I think I’d rather just stay home.”



The problem with the way most people talk about heaven is that they make it sound like the waiting room at the dentist. Actually, they make it sound *worse* than the waiting room at the dentist, because at least at the dentist, you’re still alive.

To be fair, not *everyone* talks about heaven this way—for example, Jesus never did—but for some reason, when most people imagine the Bible’s description of what happens when we die, it goes something like this:

If you live a good enough life while you’re here on earth, then when you die, God will take you far, far away to a place called heaven. Heaven is this place in the clouds with golden gates and golden streets, and it’s all clean and sparkly and shiny, and the people who work there wear these cool white outfits, and all day you get to...

You get to...

Um.

Actually, these descriptions are usually pretty short on details about what you’re supposed to *do* all day in a place like this. Probably a lot of singing and praying and maybe learning to play the harp.

Or maybe we'll just kind of *float around*—because the other thing most of these descriptions have in common is that they make heaven sound all ghostly and spiritual and way less *real* than life here on earth.

Which leads me to a question...

How in the world is anyone supposed to get excited about a place like that?



Let's change our dentist story up a bit.

Imagine you're hanging out at home one day, when suddenly there's a knock on the door. You open it, but this time it's not your *friend* standing there. It's a fireman.

"Quick!" he says, urgently. "There's a fire coming! In 15 minutes your whole street is going to burn. We're evacuating everyone to the dentist across town. They've opened up their waiting room for people who've lost their homes to the fire. You can take shelter there."

That changes things a bit, right?

If it's a choice between going to the waiting room at the dentist or getting burned up in a fire, of *course* you're going to choose the dentist—but only because that's the *least bad* option.

I mean, sure, being in the dentist's waiting room is *way better* than burning up in a fire—but it's still way worse than if your real home never got burned up at all.

And as you sit there in the dentist's waiting room, reading an old celebrity gossip magazine or whatever, I doubt you'd be thinking, "Isn't this *great*? I can't believe I'm in the waiting room at the dentist!"

My guess is that you'd mostly be thinking, "I wish I had my real home back."



Something people often do to make this floaty-cloud-place called heaven sound at least a bit good is to start talking about this fiery-cave-place called hell.

Hell is the other half of what most people imagine the Bible says happens when we die. The picture usually goes something like this:

If you live a bad enough life while you're here on earth, then when you die, God will send you to a place called hell. Hell is this place deep down in some caves with never-ending fire and never-ending lava, and it's all dirty and dark and terrifying, and the people who work there wear these scary red outfits, and they spend all day hurting and punishing you for all the bad stuff you did while you were on earth.

Which sounds completely horrible, right?

And so if that's what heaven and hell are really like then, sure, heaven sounds way better than hell—but, to be honest, it still sounds way *worse* than the life we have, here and now, on earth.

If only there was some option to say, “Thanks so much for the offer, but I think I’d rather just stay home.”



But maybe this *hell* idea is the whole reason you picked up this book in the first place. Maybe you’ve got a hunch that there really *is* a place like that, and you’re afraid you might end up there.

Or maybe for you it’s not even about the *where* question. Maybe the idea of being *anywhere* forever just seems exhausting or overwhelming—or even kind of scary.

Or is that not it either? Do you actually have the *opposite* worry—that the people who believe in heaven and hell have got it all wrong, and that there could be *nothing* on the other side of death?

Meanwhile, I’m guessing that for some of you reading this book, these aren’t just interesting questions about what’s going to happen *later*. For some of you, these questions matter *right now*, because someone you love has already passed away, and so your real question is, “Are they going to be ok?” or even, “Are they going to be anywhere at all?”

And if *that’s* the case, you’ve probably noticed that, so far, I’ve left out one really important piece of many people’s picture of heaven—and that’s the idea that, when you get there, you’re reunited with all your friends and family who have died.

And so what if you're *not* just in a floaty-cloud-place? What if you're in a floaty-cloud-place with the people you love?

Well, obviously, that would be a massive upside.

But that still brings me back to my original question. If there really is some kind of eternal life after death, why does it have to be boring and floaty at all?

Not to sound ungrateful or whatever, but is that *really* the best God can do? If he really is going to reunite us with our loved ones forever and ever, why does it have to happen somewhere so *lame*?



What if I told you it doesn't?

What if I told you that heaven and hell are both absolutely real—but they're not what you think they are?

What if I told you that the good news about the future that God offers us is way, way better than you think—and that *truly* understanding that good news could completely transform not *just* the way you see the future but also the way you live your whole life, here and now?