

BRIGHT HOPE FOR TOMORROW



HOW ANTICIPATING
JESUS' RETURN GIVES
STRENGTH FOR TODAY

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A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN REFLECTIVE

Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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CHAPTER 1

DARK DESPAIR AND BRIGHT HOPE

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe your level of eagerness and excitement toward Jesus' return? Be honest and specific—you have to identify where you are on the map!
2. For comparison, think over the last year. What events have you anticipated the most? What emotions did you feel leading up to those events? How might you experience a similar enthusiasm for Jesus' return?
3. What issue causes you to feel despair? How do you react when someone makes the "Maranatha!" comment about that issue?
4. When you think about Christ's return and your assumptions about heaven attached to it, what are the images and impressions that immediately come to mind?

5. According to the following passage, what is the defining experience of our salvation? “Though you have not seen [Jesus Christ], you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8–9).
6. How could this truth change how you view heaven, and create excitement for Jesus’ return?



CHAPTER 2

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Questions for Reflection

1. The Bible portrays both a holy, wrathful, and sovereign God and a loving, merciful, and near God. Do you tend to focus on one set of attributes over another?
2. Is there any aspect of God's holiness, wrath, or sovereignty that you struggle with? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Our hope is in the fact that God's judgment on our sin has already been poured out on Christ at the cross. Describe the emotional responses this stirs in your heart as you think about the coming day of the Lord.
4. Think through the overview of your life—relationships, work, church involvement, how you spend money and free time, and so on. Choose one of these and ask God how anticipating the day of the Lord should transform that area of your life.



CHAPTER 3

THE LORD'S APPEARINGS

Questions for Reflection

1. What have you seen in the physical creation that was so brilliant and beautiful it nearly terrified you? As you recall that experience, what other emotions did you feel when you beheld it?
2. Read slowly through the Mount of Transfiguration account in Matthew 17:1–7. (It also appears in Mark 9:2–10 and Luke 9:28–36 if you want a fuller read.) Imagine yourself with Jesus on the mountain. Describe what you experience as you behold Jesus in his unveiled glory.
3. What event, encounter, or experience are you looking forward to the most in the next six months? Without minimizing its importance, how does it compare in splendor when set against the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? Rather than distracting from Jesus' appearing, how might your six-month anticipation help point you toward this ultimate hope?

4. What do you fear the most as you look to the next six months?
How will seeing Jesus embolden you to say, “It was worth it”?
5. As you meditate on the following words, ask the Holy Spirit to help you feel and hear the assurance of Jesus that he gave to those who saw his glory.
 - “But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and have no fear’” (Matt. 17:7).
 - “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last’” (Rev. 1:17).



THE WARRIOR KING

Questions for Reflection

1. Is the image of Jesus as Warrior King congruent with or at odds with the understanding of Jesus you had coming into this chapter? How do you understand his justice to relate to his mercy and kindness?
2. What afflictions or opposition have you faced from others, whether in general or for your allegiance to Jesus?
3. How do you typically respond to those afflictions? You could include emotional or physical responses, habits you turn to (healthy or unhealthy), and the kind of support you receive from others.
4. Now work through the thought experiment in this chapter. How does this experiment transform how you view those who have harmed you? What do you feel at the thought of standing before such a King?

5. While there are some ways in which you have experienced powerlessness, there are other ways in which you have power now. What next step is God calling you to take—pursuing legal action, sharing your story with others, advocating for the afflicted, or some other proactive step?



CHAPTER 5

THE BRIDEGROOM

Questions for Reflection

1. How does your experience of joy and difficulty in your marriage or singleness affect how you think of Jesus as the Bridegroom?
2. What part of the story of God's relationship with Israel resonates with your experience with God the most?
3. Think of times when you have rejected or discounted God's expressions of kindness and loyalty to you in the pages of Scripture or through events in your life. Why do you think you found it difficult to receive his love?
4. How does understanding the jarring removal of the Bridegroom from the wedding feast change how you anticipate Jesus' return?



CHAPTER 6

THE JUDGE

Questions for Reflection

1. What initial reaction does the thought of Jesus' return as Judge bring up for you? Why do you think that is?
2. Are you facing unwarranted criticism? How could fixing your hope on Jesus' return as Judge change how you handle that criticism? How might it free you from comparing yourself with others?
3. What would it look like for you to be motivated both by a desire to please the Lord and by the fear of the Lord—both flowing out of a life of trust in Jesus?
4. As you think of the “building” work God has called you to, are you building with the gospel, pointing the people to whom you minister to Jesus Christ and him crucified? If not, what would it look like for you to start doing so?



CHAPTER 7

THE RESURRECTING ONE

Questions for Reflection

1. What physical groaning do you feel right now, whether in your body or in the hurts of those in your closest circles?
2. How does Jesus' personal engagement with the deterioration of our world—through his joining the dead and rising again—speak to your situation?
3. If you are one with Jesus by faith, you will receive a resurrection body like his: permanent, imperishable, glorious, and spiritual. Take a couple of minutes to write out what it will be like to live in such a body.
4. What groaning of the whole creation are you observing right now (for example, earthquakes, forest fires, disease, drought)? How might these propel you to greater hope in Jesus' return?

CHAPTER 8

GATHER

Questions for Reflection

1. Did you bring any disillusionment with the church into reading this chapter? If so, reflect on the yearnings for Christian fellowship you feel after reading it.
2. How might the pursuit of hope in Jesus' return change how you listen to sermons or Sunday-school lessons?
3. In what relationships can you disclose the sin that threatens your hope? If you do not have such a relationship now, what is a next step you can take to developing that with a trusted believer?
4. Have you ever confronted someone about their sin? How was your admonition received? Based on what we saw in the examples of Caleb and the Corinthian church, would you do anything differently?
5. Jesus promised that he would eat the Lord's Supper "new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). How can meditating on this promise help you anticipate Jesus' return when you take communion?



CHAPTER 9

FAST

Questions for Reflection

1. What are two good things and two hard things that have diminished your anticipation of Jesus' return?
2. If you do not currently fast, from what do you think you should fast to nurture a love for Jesus' appearing?
3. What do you plan to do when you are fasting? It could be something from this chapter or something else God leads you to do.
4. Who can you tell about your fasting plan—someone who can both encourage you and provide perspective if you find the venture challenging?



CHAPTER 10

REST

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you take a weekly day of rest? If not, what are some of the barriers to regularly ceasing from labor?
2. Do you find it difficult to disconnect from productivity? If so, what do you think this says about your relationship with work?
3. What activities feel like play to you? How might you incorporate these into your weekly day of rest?
4. On our days of rest, we anticipate what Jesus will bring about at his return: the redemption of work, God's eternal rule, and eternal delight. Which of these do you need to nurture most on your next day of rest? How might you do that?



CHAPTER 11

PURIFYING OURSELVES

Questions for Reflection

1. Think about the promises from this chapter. How does the assurance that God will sustain you to the end impact you?
2. What is one area of your life where your sinful actions force you to ask, “What do I truly believe?” Write out what you do believe and how you pray your actions will align with that belief.
3. What lulls you to sleep spiritually and dulls your spiritual senses? (These could be good or sinful things.) How can you fast periodically from these things to heighten your anticipation of Jesus’ return?
4. What are the greatest distractions that keep you from abiding in Christ? What steps can you take to prioritize allowing his words, his love, and his joy to abide in you?



CHAPTER 12

DOING THE MASTER'S WORK

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe the scope of the ministry God has called you to?
2. Write out the names of the three people you identified whom God has called you to invest in spiritually.
3. Walk through the mental exercise in this chapter. Describe what you see and how you feel.
4. How might this vision motivate you to focus on nurturing the faith of those you serve?
5. How might this vision motivate you to share the gospel more intentionally and yourself more freely with them?
6. It is ultimately the Spirit's work to produce lasting fruit in people's lives. Write out a prayer for the three people you listed, asking God to grow faith and love in their lives through your labor.



CHAPTER 13

PERSEVERING THROUGH AFFLICTIONS

Questions for Reflection

1. In what situations have you been on the receiving end of injustice with little power to change what is wrong? How might James's call to prophetic patience sustain you through those kinds of afflictions?
2. Whether or not you are suffering afflictions now, how can you lend a prophetic voice to injustice you see in your context?
3. Where are you tempted to direct your grumbling when you face affliction? What do you think grumbling reveals about your heart in that moment? How could focusing on Jesus' return as Judge address your temptation to grumble?

4. The key to experiencing joy in afflictions is experiencing joy in Jesus. Yet afflictions can overwhelm us such that we forget to prioritize our time spent with Jesus. How can you create more space in your day for Scripture meditation, prayer, listening to worship music, or spending time with spiritual mentors?