

"This book calls us to keep our eyes up. To keep the big things the big things."

—MAX LUCADO, *pastor and author*

Bringing HEAVEN to EARTH

You Don't Have to Wait for Eternity
to Live the Good News

Discussion Questions
Inside

JOSH ROSS
and
JONATHAN
STORMENT

Foreword by Scot McKnight

Praise for
Bringing Heaven to Earth

“Oh, the difficulty of balance in this walk of faith. We tend to lose it. At least I do. I find myself on the side of the path, entangled in small issues and controversies. This book calls us to keep our eyes up. To keep the big things the big things. The authors offer a much needed and much welcomed reminder.”

—MAX LUCADO, pastor and author

“For many Christians, heaven is just some place we fly away to. But Ross and Storment clear the clouds to reveal the ways in which heaven matters in the here and now. Earth is full of heaven, they say, but you have to know where to look and how to participate in it. Finally, a concept of heaven worth believing in!”

—JONATHAN MERRITT, author of *Jesus Is Better than You Imagined* and senior columnist for Religion News Service

“Christians need to get past all views of the future that do not impact the present. That is how Jonathan and Josh help us; they call us to a view of ‘then’ that matters ‘now.’ *Bringing Heaven to Earth* is a timely challenge to a church in need of a new way of telling time.”

—RICK ATCHLEY, senior minister at The Hills Church of Christ,
Fort Worth, Texas

“It’s about time someone dismantled the view that Christianity and the church exist to be God’s waiting room until we make it to heaven. Jonathan and Josh dismantle the fairy tale of heaven being a place of naked, winged babies playing harps on clouds. They replace that with the vision that Jesus and the New Testament both expect heaven to burst forth out of the church.”

—TIM HARLOW, senior pastor of Parkview Christian Church,
Chicago

“In *Bringing Heaven to Earth*, Storment and Ross show us that how we think of heaven truly matters only when we are able to see how it impacts the way we live, day in and day out. This book doesn’t disappoint.”

—COLT MCCOY, NFL quarterback and coauthor of *The Real Win* and *Growing Up Colt*

“For believers and nonbelievers alike, the idea of heaven often seems sentimental, escapist, and irrelevant. But in this powerful and inspiring book, Jonathan Storment and Josh Ross make heaven and earth collide. The good news is that

heaven is a party already in full swing. So pull up a chair to the banquet table and be sure to bring a friend.”

—RICHARD BECK, blogger, author, and professor of psychology
at Abilene Christian University

“There is good news for those who feel they are done with church: God is not done with us! Josh Ross and Jonathan Storment marvelously describe a world to end all worlds—the world that is on its way. And they show how we are to live in the meantime. This book will revive your hope and electrify your imagination.”

—IAN MORGAN CRON, best-selling author of *Chasing Francis:
A Pilgrim’s Tale*

“*Bringing Heaven to Earth* is proof that the Bible is extremely relevant in the past and present, and especially in our future. Reading this book will challenge you to look for opportunities to show God’s love to everyone you encounter.”

—BOB SMILEY, Christian comedian

“This cultural ‘crash’ between heaven and earth is so needed in a world that has been stuck between two extremes of trying to explain heaven away or making an escape to heaven through hopes of an early rapture. This life we live is just a rehearsal for the consummation of heaven uniting with earth one day. When we put works with our faith, we are giving our neighbors a taste of glory divine.”

—STACY SPENCER, senior pastor at New Direction Christian
Church, Memphis, Tennessee

“We live in a world that faces innumerable challenges, and the authors remind us that faith in Jesus gives us the power to be his holistic witnesses to the restoration and reconciliation work found only in Christ. You will be inspired and equipped by reading this book.”

—DANIEL HILL, author of *10:10: Life to the Fullest* and senior
pastor of River City Community Church, Chicago

“Jonathan and Josh will widen your view of heaven and the scope of God’s mission on earth. This book will make your heart beat faster and your soul grow bigger for the things God cares about most.”

—GENE APPEL, coauthor of *How to Change Your Church
(without Killing It)*

Bringing
H E A V E N
to
E A R T H

You Don't Have to Wait for Eternity
to Live the Good News

JOSH ROSS
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STORMENT

Foreword by Scot McKnight



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Foreword

There will be a first hour in heaven. Mind you, I don't know how long it will last and when it will happen. It might happen the moment we die, or the moment of the resurrection, or the first hour in heaven. But it will happen.

What will happen in that first hour in heaven? *All things will be made right.* That's precisely what heaven is.

All things means *all* things. Our relationship to God, to self, and to all others—parents, spouses, siblings, children, friends, neighbors, and community members—and to the world and cultures around us. Nations will be right with other nations. I'm looking at Americans who hate Arabs, at Protestant and evangelical Christians who raise their eyebrows about the Russian Orthodox or Italian Roman Catholics. All will be made right with one another.

The hour all things are made right is the hour we are reconciled, and for that to happen two other things have to happen in the first hour: we have to own up to what we have done with utter and eternal truthfulness, and we have to embrace the other with utter and eternal forgiveness. Yes, that too. All will be made right.

The task of Christians today is to live into that first hour. For some, that first hour is something to wait on. Recently, I was speaking at a church about heaven as a place where we will be reconciled with all

others. A woman came up to me and said, “I have someone to forgive. But I’ll wait until the first hour. It’s too hard to think about now.”

All will be made right in that first hour, but we are called, as Jonathan Stortment and Josh Ross teach so well in this wonderful book, to bring heaven down—or to bring it from the future into the present.

Sad to say, some who will be in heaven will do their best to pout their way through that first hour. They’d rather heaven be more like now, where we can silence our way out of a relationship, or segregate ourselves from people of a different political view, theological persuasion, or ethnicity or cultural worldview. But heaven won’t be like that because all things will be made right. All things, not just some things and some people. You and God and you and your spouse and you and your parents and you and all others you know.

Do you want to live into that kind of heaven? If so, this book is for you. *Bringing Heaven to Earth* aims to make those who believe in heaven take it so seriously they begin to live for it and in it now.

Scot McKnight

Professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary

Author, *The Heaven Promise*

Introduction

Good News for a Change

This is not another book that offers *Proof That Ninety Seconds in Heaven Is for Real*. Enough trees have been killed to make the point that sometimes people have near-death experiences. And sometimes they see things that would confuse even the writer of Revelation.

This isn't one of those books.

Strangely enough the Bible doesn't talk all that much about heaven or hell. Jesus rarely mentioned them, and much of what we think about the Age to Come is pure conjecture—aided by images from movies or writers of medieval fiction or dreams that people have after eating pizza late at night. Let's be honest: what happens after we die remains largely a mystery.

Rather than try to describe heaven in detail, this book looks closely at what heaven has to do with earth. The world we live in matters. And what we think about tomorrow impacts how we live today.

In his great book *The Skeletons in God's Closet*, Joshua Ryan Butler asks his readers to do a little experiment. Go to BibleGateway.com and search for the words “heaven and hell.” If you do this, Butler points out, you will have zero search results. Because in the Scriptures there is not a

single verse where heaven and hell appear together. Hell isn't heaven's counterpart.

This might shock you, considering the amount of times we've heard those two words in the same sentence. From preachers to bloggers to people standing on street corners with billboards. Most of us have just assumed that heaven and hell belong in the same category, but that's not the gospel story the Bible is telling.

But if you were to search Bible Gateway for "heaven and earth," you would have over two hundred results. Because hell isn't the counterpoint to heaven in the Bible—earth is. The two belong together. God made both heaven and earth; they are both current realities; and from Genesis to Revelation, the story is God bringing them back together.¹

At the risk of being blunt, Christians have largely left behind the basic Christian story line in favor of something related to what the earliest Jesus-followers would have called heresy. Christians have misrepresented the gospel by emphasizing marginal themes at the expense of the central truths. The tragic result is that people have stopped thinking of the gospel as good news.

We wrote *Bringing Heaven to Earth* because we are Christians who are concerned about the church's witness. Many Christians care a lot about saving people's souls. We care about that too. Yet what we observe is that they want to introduce more people to Jesus, but they find themselves at a loss when it comes to living a robust life of discipleship. We don't believe the primary purpose of following Jesus is to enjoy the gift of heaven. Rather, it is to be united with Christ in His love and mission. The call to conversion in the New Testament isn't a decision for salvation, but a decision for Jesus. It is more than a change in status; it is a shift in allegiance, passion, and calling.

Some Christians care a lot about justice and mercy ministries. They

want to change the world by serving the “least of these” but often find themselves angry at those who don’t see things the way they do. There are a lot of people who set out to save the world—for a few months or even years—but oftentimes they eventually grow bitter and weary. We think they need a bigger, and *far better*, story to enter into.

Jesus taught us to pray for His Kingdom to come right here on earth as it is in heaven. Both of us pastor churches filled with eager, sincere, committed Christian people. One of the congregations is in a college town, Abilene, Texas, and we find that young-adult Christians are looking for ways to follow Jesus that make a difference in the here and now.

The other congregation worships and serves in a transient, multicultural community in Memphis, Tennessee. We don’t have to hunt around to uncover injustice, suffering, and great need. The struggles that people face are evident. The question is this: What is a Christian’s responsibility to bring to bear God’s will in this corner of the world, so that people throughout Memphis might come to experience a hint of what life is like in heaven?

We wrote this book because, in our experience, Christians are the best reason for someone to follow or not to follow Jesus. And right now, at least in the Western world, it seems like the evidence for the latter is stacking up. How many Christians do you observe and then think: *I want to be like them*?

They are said to follow the Prince of Peace, so why do Christians have a knack for coming across as divisive, anxious, fearful, and angry? For people who follow a Man who kick-started His ministry with a wedding party that rivaled Woodstock, Christians often are perceived as resentful, sour, and against anything that might resemble a celebration. For a group of people who follow a God who entered the world in the flesh, we often seem like we can’t wait to escape this world.

We realize we are painting with a broad brush, and this may not be your experience. But from people who are on the outside of the Christian faith looking in, these are the observations we hear most often.

“Christians are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.” I’m sure you’ve heard that saying. But what if the problem isn’t that we’ve thought too much about heaven, but that our thinking about heaven is too separate from our life on earth?

When the topic of heaven comes up, too often it focuses on who’s in and who’s out. That is not what this book is about. We wrote *Bringing Heaven to Earth* because we believe there are core tenets of the gospel that have been lost in Western Christianity. While that has resulted in many people feeling that the gospel is no longer good news, they wish it still was.

We believe that in the end, God is not going to let Satan and his friends win anything. We wrote this book because we believe the clock is ticking on injustice, and we are convinced that it’s time for some good news *for a change*.

And we wrote this book because we believe that the real good news leads to all kinds of change in this world.

Part 1

A Reintroduction to Heaven

We often miss the link between the beginning of Genesis, the creation account, and the closing of Revelation, a picture of the new heaven and the new earth. If you read these accounts together, it's almost as if the first book of the Bible and the last are in conversation with each other.

Revelation calls to mind the Garden of Eden, then tells us: “No longer will there be any curse” (22:3). With all of our being we want this to be true, but it's hard to grasp. No one on earth has lived in creation that is not tainted by a curse. All we know is a world in which we age, our bodies wear out, people die, and the Yankees and Red Sox get all the attention every summer.

God wants to reacquaint us with His creation as it was at the start. The garden one day will be restored. God will reverse the curse.

I don't know anyone who would not welcome this. Still, life in heaven seems distant. And the prevailing belief is that we will have to die before we can experience freedom from the curse of the garden.

But Jesus saw things differently. When He spoke about the Kingdom of God—and He spoke about it a lot—He was talking about the way His followers could bring heaven to earth. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Assuming Jesus was intentional about the words He included in the model prayer—and we both do—then the life of heaven can somehow be brought to earth. Not at the end of time when God comes to set things right, but today, in everyday life. Even in the midst of suffering and violence and poverty, God's Kingdom can reveal the life of God to those of us who live on earth.

We can introduce aspects of heaven to people in our cities, communities, neighborhoods, families, and circle of friends. Let's take a look at how that can be done.

When Heaven Comes Home

Jesus Taught Us to Pray for Heaven-Earth Collisions

Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.”

— Acts 10:27–28

■ (Josh) was finishing preparation for a Christmas sermon when I heard the tragic news that a young man had opened fire on school children in Newtown, Connecticut. Twenty-seven people died, including the killer. Feeling numb and confused, I tried to finish what I had planned to say about Jesus’s coming into this world to make things right. I needed the hope of Jesus’s first arrival to once again nurture and tend to my heart.

Another time when I was writing—completing work on this chapter, in fact—I heard more disturbing news. ISIS was on the move, Ebola

was striking fear in human hearts, and no matter how you interpreted the events in Ferguson, Missouri, something had gone badly wrong.

Sometimes I feel like hope is dangling on a piece of thread, but at least it dangles. It has not been severed. And sometimes, I don't need a burning light; I just need a ray of hope. A simple reminder that Jesus has won—*and will win*.

There are days when it looks to us as if evil is winning and running up the score. I'm not sure what to make of it. And what should our response be? Should we take our children out of public schools? Remove ourselves from public places? Give in to fear? Many choose some or all of these options as a means of escape.

But Jesus didn't escape risk. One of the best meals He served took place in an open field where thousands of hungry people had gathered. Jesus fed them. All of them. And before the food was served, He healed the sick who were there. Some of the people who sat down to this all-you-can-eat buffet were enjoying their first meal without chronic pain, nagging arthritis, and other ailments. These weren't just people who were eating; they were restored people.

Did you know this is the only miracle that is recorded in all four Gospels? It often escapes our notice that just before Jesus carried out these acts of healing and then feeding the masses, He found out that John the Baptist, His relative, had been beheaded. "When Jesus heard what had happened [to John], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place" (Matthew 14:13). Driven by grief, Jesus was looking for solitude. Yet, as He wiped tears from His eyes, He could see people coming from a distance. Thousands of people were coming toward Him.

The miracle that is described four times in Scripture was born from a moment of mourning. Jesus knew that even in the midst of tragedy, heaven falls to earth. God's life collides with the broken parts of earthly life that need to be restored.

Jesus taught us to pray prayers of engagement. He instructed, commanded, and commissioned His disciples to march into arenas of injustice and to lavish those spaces with love. When Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done—and for God's Kingdom to come—to “earth as it is in heaven,” He taught us to pray for collisions (Matthew 6:10). Jesus has told us to pray that heaven will merge with earth.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Paul Haggis is a Hollywood director, producer, and screenwriter. After cutting his teeth writing for television shows such as *Diff'rent Strokes* and *The Facts of Life*, he helped create a number of television series. The most notable for me, as a born-and-raised Texan, was *Walker, Texas Ranger*.

Paul and I have never met, but in 2005 we both celebrated some great accomplishments. My buddy Kevin and I won the World Series in MLB 2005 on Xbox, and Paul won two Oscars. Okay, so his achievement may have been a little bigger than mine. Paul Haggis was honored for his work in two films he wrote. In fact, he became the first individual to have written two Best Picture Oscar winners in consecutive years.

Even if you aren't a movie fan, you probably have heard of both of these award-winning films. One is *Million Dollar Baby*. The other was based on the Hollywood producer's personal experience. In 1991, Haggis's Porsche was carjacked outside a store in Los Angeles. Though he wasn't in the car when it was stolen, it was an event that wouldn't leave him. More than ten years after losing his Porsche, Haggis would write one of the most creative, raw movies of the last decade. For the title he settled on one word: *Crash*.

This is not a movie you'll want to watch with your family sitting around the Christmas tree next to a fire while eating gingerbread cookies.

It's rated R for good reason. There are sexually explicit, violent, intense, and suspenseful scenes. But the genius of the movie is that it tackles twenty-first-century racism in a way that doesn't make any one race, nationality, or social class the hero. Every group has noble traits and glaring flaws. And the characters in the movie who were born on third base and thought they had hit a triple are challenged to the core to redefine what it means to be human.

The movie begins and ends with automobile collisions. They are minor fender benders, but there is meaning in each one: the only way some people come into contact with others who are unlike them is to literally experience a crash. A collision. An unexpected encounter. An unplanned relational appointment. That makes this movie rich in meaning and insight.

A GOOD STORY BRINGS US TOGETHER

Beginning with Jesus's birth, the New Testament is jam-packed with heaven-earth collisions. Through Jesus, heaven came to permeate earth. You don't catch images of God strapping devices on the backs of humans to transport them out of the world and into space. Instead, you are bombarded with images and stories of heaven colliding with earth.

When Jesus was born, news of His birth reached the ears of shepherds, astrologers, and religious figures. The news also reached King Herod, and it's an understatement to say he was troubled. Angels kept showing up saying things like "Don't be afraid." But think of Mary. Of course she was afraid! Being greeted by an angel had never been part of her morning routine.

Angels announced a collision, and it was made known to the rest of us with the arrival of Jesus. Ever since, heaven has been invading earth.

Mary and Joseph received a baby blessing from Simeon when they

presented Jesus in the Temple. The blessing doubled as a prophecy: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against” (Luke 2:34). What kind of baby blessing is that? This tiny infant was to be a sign that would be opposed?

No one would have blamed Mary if she had responded, “Well, thank you,” then turned to Joseph and whispered, “I told you we should have been blessed by the priest at the Third Synagogue instead of here.” But Simeon knew something that most of the world didn’t: heaven was coming to make earth right.

MOVING INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Kayci and I (Josh) moved into the Binghampton community of Memphis in the summer of 2011. It’s a neighborhood with rich diversity and culture. And for the first few weeks after we moved there, I took Mondays off as a family day.

One Monday afternoon in the fall, after I had just come in from playing baseball with my two boys, I noticed two police officers walking through my yard. They both had hands on their guns. I moved to open the door to ask what was going on. One of the officers raised his hand, telling me to stay inside. I told Kayci to take the boys to their room and to play on the floor. I reached for Truitt’s Dallas Cowboy helmet. (Truitt was five at the time.) I was ready to go to war. Then I thought about how disappointing the Cowboys had been playing and decided it wouldn’t help much.

I watched as the officers jumped fences, looked behind sheds, and crept around houses. I felt as if I was in the middle of an episode of *LAPD*.

Come to find out, there’s a neighbor not too far from my home who has a boyfriend who beats her. She’ll call the cops, and then when they

show up to arrest the man, she decides not to press charges. After kicking him out of the house for a few days, she lets him back in. Then he beats her again, and the cycle is repeated.

She sat on her front porch with a bleeding face. I wanted to grab her by the shoulders and ask her, “Do you not know that you were created for more than this? You don’t have to take it! You were made in the image of God. He adores you. Don’t you know that?”

Maybe this neighbor needs God to visit her in a dream like He did Joseph (see Matthew 1:18–25). Or maybe she needs a God-given friend who can speak life into her soul. We know she needs a God-appointed collision. With some things in life, it takes a collision to make you stop and ask what really matters. A place where an unexpected encounter gives birth to a friendship that transcends superficial talk. Such collisions can lead to the healing of a broken heart.

THERE AREN’T ENOUGH CHAIRS? GET A BIGGER TABLE

Peter, who is known as an outspoken disciple of Jesus, had a collision with a man named Cornelius. The two were not friends. In fact, Peter and Cornelius couldn’t be friends. This is why the story told in Acts 10 would make a great Broadway show.

Peter was a devout Jew. Even though he had seen Jesus cross racial lines to extend compassion, he still found himself immersed in Jewish tradition and custom. Jews were careful about what they ate and with whom they associated. Cornelius, on the other hand, was a Gentile and a Roman. Even worse, he was a Roman army officer. But he prayed to God regularly, he gave to the poor, and he feared God.

Try to find fault with that résumé. Still, Peter could not associate with this Gentile. They would never sit at the same table at a banquet. They would never shoot a game of pool together. Since Peter was a Jew,

he knew who was in and who was out. Cornelius was an outsider. He ate forbidden things, like pork ribs and seafood gumbo.

But the beauty of this story is found in the collision. Two lives collided because of the main Character in the tale—God. A vision came first to Cornelius, the Gentile, and then to Peter. By now it shouldn't surprise us that God visited the outsider first. Following the dream, the servants of Cornelius went to Peter, and Peter gave them lodging. Think about that. If Peter's Jewish friends found out Gentiles had been invited to sleep under his roof, there would be some explaining to do.

Later, Peter met Cornelius and the impossible happened. The Roman soldier, enemy of the Jewish people and a Gentile at that, invited Peter to stay for several days. Peter stayed with Gentiles, slept in their home, ate with them. His Jerusalem buddies would have a fit when they found out.

Here's what often is missed in the story: Cornelius *and* Peter get converted. Cornelius is converted to Jesus. For Peter, it's not that he's converted and saved, but he definitely experiences a deeper conversion into the mission of Jesus. A Jew and a Gentile, both believers, became part of the same community: the family of God. They both enlisted in the same movement: the Jesus Way.

This should have been nothing new to Peter. Jesus taught him to pray for collisions such as this one. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He didn't ask God to snatch His people from this world. It was just the opposite. Jesus prayed for the behavior of heaven to invade the space we occupy right now. We are told to ask God to infuse the earth with His power, values, and principles.

Two thousand years later, on another continent and in a very different time and culture, a man named Oshea Israel got out of prison. Upon his release, a woman named Mary Johnson threw a surprise party. Together with some nuns she had gathered, they welcomed Oshea back into society. The party was a way to welcome him home.

Oshea had been locked in prison for years for second-degree murder. When he was a teenager he had gotten into a fight with a young man named Laramiun Byrd and had killed him. Now Oshea was thirty-four and starting over, and Mary Johnson thought this was something worth celebrating.

The twist in the story is that the man whom Oshea had killed was Mary's son, her only child. After Oshea was convicted, Mary knew she couldn't forgive a killer. But she realized she might be able to forgive a person.

She went to visit Oshea in prison. She recalled her conversation with him: "I just told you [Oshea] that I didn't know you; you didn't know me. . . . But we needed to get to know each other."

Oshea said later that this encounter was painful because Mary Johnson's son became human to him. As their initial meeting came to a close, Mary found herself surprised by what she did. She gave Oshea a hug. Now, years later, she still has not let go.

When he was released from prison, Mary asked Oshea to move in next door to her. He accepted. She says since her natural son is dead, Oshea will be her spiritual son.¹

Only God can do something like that.

CHRISTMAS IN CONNECTICUT

Around the time of the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut, I (Josh) sat in my office early on a Sunday morning, preparing to preach the first of three sermons in a series called Adventure. The message was a simple one: Immanuel, God with us.

Like most Sunday mornings, I got to the church office before 6 a.m. For some reason, as I prayed and looked over my notes, I was in a funk.

It wasn't the feeling of being under the weather. It was deeper than that—something was disturbing my heart. But I couldn't put my finger on it.

At 7:45 I texted Kayci. We usually chat on Sunday mornings right about that time. I asked her to pray for me because something didn't feel right. She said she would, but she also dug deeper. I'm grateful to have a wife who is sensitive to the Lord. If she believes she has a word from God, she doesn't hesitate to speak it.

She prodded with this question: "Do you think there's something you're about to say in your message that God may not want you to say? Pray through your notes again."

I studied my notes and it hit me. I didn't hear the audible voice of God, but there was clarity in my heart. It wasn't that I was about to speak a word that wasn't pleasing to God's heart. It was something else. The word was this: *You are about to preach a message about Immanuel—with us is God. I need you to believe this message more in your heart.*

I need the message of the abiding presence of God to carry me through life in deeper ways. Though I sometimes run from or ignore the abiding presence of God, He continues to hunt me down, to find me, and to work His will in my life.

The "God with us" promise needs to be rekindled in my heart, and in yours.

PACKING TAMBOURINES

God's people in the book of Exodus had been stripped of dignity, hope, and humanity. They were slaves nearly twice as long as the United States has been a nation. The "God with us" promise was hanging by a thread. As the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt, Scripture tells us they plundered the Egyptians. But seriously, how many possessions could you carry when

you were setting off on foot, first to cross a sea and then to cross a wilderness?

After they crossed the Red Sea, we are told about their first possession. It wasn't something practical like a frying pan, a shovel, or a bow and arrow. It was a tambourine.

Of all the items they could have packed for the long trip, many of the Israelites made sure to bring musical instruments. We can assume they were preparing for a big party. They didn't know how the story would unfold, but they believed God was going to do something worth celebrating.

The "God with us" promise was rekindled in their hearts, and they began to dance and sing. How could anyone remain still after God had delivered His people in such dramatic, miraculous fashion?

The early Jesus-followers got this. Sure, they got distracted with keeping laws and abusing spiritual gifts, as well as the daily struggle of pledging allegiance to Jesus and not to Rome. But when they were at their best, they lived from the conviction that God had done something worth celebrating, and that the celebrations would continue.

The Temple stood in Jerusalem, a place where people went to worship and to get a picture of God's dream for the world. The early followers of Jesus were taught that they were mini-Temples of the living God. They didn't go to the Temple to meet with God, but they lived as people who were inhabited by God. They didn't take lessons *about* God into the world; they *took God* into the world. Or better said, God went with them. Immanuel, God with us.

Fifty years after D-Day—the Allied invasion to push the German army out of France—two survivors told their stories of what it was like that day. Troops crossed the English Channel and landed on the beaches of Normandy. The Germans had the high ground and were firing down on the Allied forces. One of the men said that as he approached the beach

landing, he thought to himself, *There is absolutely no way we are going to win this war.*

The other man was a pilot who was in the air that day. He said when he looked down and saw what was about to take place, he thought to himself, *There is absolutely no way we are going to lose this fight.*

Sometimes what we need is perspective. We need God to give us a glimpse of what is to come so we can begin to live in His restored future now.

In Jesus, we learn that God comes with all His gifts, power, and presence. The Immanuel story tells us that senseless shootings in elementary schools, movie theaters, and shopping malls won't have the last word. Neither will ALS, cancer, heart disease, leukemia, or famine.

This is the story that compels us to pray for the people in our world who plot violence, that God will raise up His church to seek out the angry and confused and to lavish them with unconditional grace. We need to extend compassion in acts of service and care before great tragedies happen, as well as afterward.

God is on the move on earth. For two thousand years, God's people have come together on Sundays to worship. But when the followers of Jesus are at our best, we know that God's people don't stay in church. Saints know when it's time to leave home. God is on the move, and we are with Him. Let's join in the restoration of the world.

Let's march.



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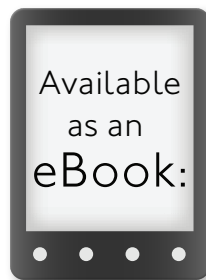
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