

The background of the entire cover is a close-up photograph of flowing, translucent fabric. The fabric has a mix of light blue, teal, and pale yellow colors, creating a soft, ethereal, and textured appearance. The folds and ripples of the fabric are visible throughout the image.

STEVEN R. MUSICK

WITH PAUL J. PASTOR

LIFE
AFTER
HEAVEN

How My Time in Heaven
Can Transform Your
Life on Earth

Praise for
Life After Heaven

“When my wife and I first met Steve Musick, we had a quiet hunch that this man had something in his life that put him in a rare category. We could not figure it out until he shared all of his story with us. He is a man of unusual depth, care, honesty, and relational brilliance—qualities that I know come from what you will read about here. Having been invited to be his whole-life mentor, I trust his story in every detail. He relives his time with Jesus daily and shares it through every encounter he has with others. One caution: prepare for your own life to experience some welcome, needed change and growth as you encounter Jesus in these pages of deep truth and life-giving love.”

—WES ROBERTS, founder/master mentor, Leadership
Design Group

“My dear friend Steve Musick is not an angel, but he is an ambassador sent back to us from ‘Our Father which art in heaven’ to show-and-tell us what we’ve been missing here ‘in earth, as it is in heaven.’ Reading this book will give you a window to look through and a map to follow so you can experience your own moments in life when heaven touches earth.”

—DENNIS TURNER, founder and lead pastor of Christ Church,
Wichita, Kansas

“As I read *Life After Heaven*, I happened to be mourning the loss of my dear father-in-law, Cowboy Ken, who joined his Savior in the coming world, a world described in gorgeous detail by Steven Musick. I found deep comfort in Steven’s eyewitness account as I imagined my loved ones experiencing the rich, saturated sensations and fathomless love and peace in heaven. But this book goes beyond just describing heaven. It encourages, energizes, and brings zest, power, and hope to us in the here and now. I find myself

watching and waiting for ‘bubbles of heaven,’ the ‘beautiful closeness of the kingdom of heaven,’ to break through and change everything. This is a book of radical comfort and outrageous hope.”

—LORILEE CRAKER, *New York Times*, CBA, and ECPA
best-selling author of *My Journey to Heaven* with Marv
Besteman and *Anne of Green Gables, My Daughter, and Me*

“People like Steven Musick telling of visits to heaven always raise my Missouri-bred skepticism. But I remember Paul’s visit recounted in 2 Corinthians 12:1–9 or John’s visit in the Revelation and look to the results of the story. Musick’s is to make God’s presence all the more real here on earth. He tells powerful stories, ‘bubbles of heaven’ times, when God’s love meets earth’s needs. There is much wisdom in the story: ‘Poverty in God’s kingdom . . . is tightly holding on to what you’re supposed to give away.’ The blandness of worldly living is overcome by the personal presence of God who is Emmanuel, promising ‘Lo, I will be with you always.’ Ponder prayerfully with Bible and heart open.”

—GERRY BRESHEARS, professor of systematic theology,
Western Seminary, Portland

“I am fascinated with the stories of those who have experienced heaven, but I’m often left feeling disappointed after reading books of others’ experiences of heaven. *Life After Heaven* certainly did not disappoint! Steven R. Musick’s book left me feeling satisfied and renewed. I can truly say it’s the very best book I’ve read on this topic, and I’ve read quite a few!”

—LINDSAY ANDREWS, Blogging for Books reviewer

“I am personally more interested in life before death than life after, but Steve has done a marvelous job bridging the two. I found this book relevant and helpful.”

—WILLIAM PAUL YOUNG, author of *The Shack*

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WATERBROOK

LIFE AFTER HEAVEN

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This book is dedicated to a lioness of a woman I met in 1975, married in 1978, and who is the only reason I am still alive today. She accepted a brainiac social dwarf when no one else would. Together we built lives of immeasurable depth and richness. Elaine J. Musick is a world-class lady. I believe she is an angel sequestered in a sack of skin, sent specially to rescue and complete me. She is a gift, pure and simple.

This book is my gift to her, as she is present in every page.

The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.

—MARK TWAIN

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NOTE FROM PAUL J. PASTOR

I was on a writing retreat at a local abbey when my phone rang. It was a good friend who'd recently taken a job with the publishing house that released the book you now hold. "I have a project you might be interested in," he said. "But you need to hear me out. It's a heaven-and-back story."

If I hadn't known Andrew, I would have laughed and hung up. After all, he knew my feelings about what I call "heavenly tourism" books. While I think many of them are based on real experiences, the way they are told, in my experience, is overmarketed, wrongly focused only on "after you die," and (sorry) rather kitschy. I was skeptical.

But I knew and trusted Andrew. "Go on," I said.

"Well, I think you need to talk to Steve," he continued. "There's just . . . something about him."

With a little reluctance, I said yes. And after a couple of hour-long phone calls, I agreed. There was something about Steve, something honest and deep. Something kind and quietly magnetic. Not only did I feel his story of a near-death experience was credible enough to print, but it had an emphasis I'd never heard before in Christian stories of trips to heaven. It cared about here—the world we see now. And over the course of a few weeks, I realized I wanted to be the person to help him tell his story.

The point of Steve's story isn't divine escapism or "wait till you die for the pie in the sky." It expresses, through the story of one man's life and death and life again, one of my deepest theological beliefs: God's work in our world is something far greater than merely getting people to heaven; it is bringing heaven to earth in an open mystery, in a secret fullness. "Heaven is much closer than we've been led to believe," you'll hear Steve say often, both in his teaching and in his everyday conversation. And here is a story that illustrates that principle like no other I've ever heard in person.

During our time talking through his great experience, what impressed me most was the overwhelming sense that when Steve was relating his story beyond the white tunnel, he wasn't just telling it. He was remembering it. It was real. And it had changed everything about his life.

While making this book, I came to know and love Steve as a friend. Between spending long hours with black notebooks and tape recorders, we prayed together, ate together, laughed together, hiked to Oregon waterfalls, and drove curving highways together. We swapped stories of our families, work, and hobbies. We munched hamburgers and burritos. We talked fishing. He got to know my wife and kids and ate spaghetti at my table. He's a simple, everyday man. Easy to spend time with. But in each of those situations, my mind went back to Andrew's words: "... something about him."

It's true.

I think that "something" about Steve is heaven—not as a far-

off reality but close. Closer than we've been led to believe. I hope you'll meet him someday and sense it for yourself.

I was skeptical about this story at first. Even as we arranged for my creative involvement, I was considering whether I wanted my name on this book. But that's not the case anymore. I'm proud to be associated with Steve's message.

In working with Steve to tell his story, I have become convinced that his account of That Place is worth wide attention, worth your attention. But further, I have felt and experienced for myself the power that comes with an awareness of the beautiful closeness of the kingdom of heaven. I am encouraged, not just for the hope and the clear presence of God beyond death, but for hope now. For hope in this life. Steve's remarkable story has helped make that more real to me than I had ever experienced before.

Truly, it has.

It's my prayer that it will do the same for you.

INTRODUCTION

My years on earth have been unusually defined by an experience in heaven. My years of life were critically influenced by my death—a death, by God’s grace, that is proving well worth living for.

This great experience described in the following pages is actually very hard for me to talk about even now. In fact, it took me ten years to tell my wife about it and another twenty-five years to talk about it publicly. Part of the reason is that sharing this ignites in me a deep, indescribable desire to go back. Nothing—nothing—on this side of heaven equates to the kind of joy that you have being there. Once you’ve had that kind of experience, you don’t want to be here. You want to go back there. You just do. And the desire to be there is so intense and so inexpressible that you feel guilty for not wanting to be present in your own life or with your own family. But I know that’s not my call yet. One day. One day I will go back.

As a result of my experience, I no longer struggle at all with my faith. I have plenty of other struggles, but wondering if I’m

saved is not one of them. In an unusual way, my faith became sight when I was thrown out of the tunnel of light and into the presence of Jesus, as you will soon read. There's a certainty for me that came with that experience. I know what it will be like when I go back. I have seen heaven. I know firsthand that the presence of Jesus is my home. I don't have to believe; I merely have to remember. It is still fully real to me. Perfectly fresh. And I know I will fully return there one day.

But even as I look forward to returning to That Place, I feel passionate and deeply called to be fully here in the meantime. As much as I long to return, it fuels me to see God's work and presence here, where we live and work and weep and play and receive tastes of his presence and of heaven. I want my life to be a preview of coming attractions. I want people around me to get a flash of heaven, a glimpse of what Jesus is like and what the Father is like.

I recognize the impossibility of recreating that perfect place on this imperfect earth. But I believe we should try. I know it is what we were made for and what all of us want. Everybody. God's kingdom can be seen in part now, even though the totality of that joy has to wait. You and I can see glimpses of it and can welcome the kingdom of heaven that Jesus preached so often about while he walked the earth.

We can feel it now. We can taste it now, even if it's not the full thing. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

I think we're supposed to have that.

What's more, I think we can.

You don't have to have an experience like mine to truly experience some of the kingdom. You and I can feel it and know it now. We can even learn to anticipate such moments. I think my death can be one worth living for. I don't want this to sound arrogant, but I think this is why I'm here. Why I couldn't stay there. And why I'm supposed to tell you about it.

You see, this is not just a story of life after death.

This is a story of life after heaven.

PART 1

FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN

A LIFE BEGUN

I'm sitting in a six-lane intersection close to home, my blue Subaru station wagon idling at the traffic light. Through the windshield I see a watery sun going down over the Colorado mountains, red and hazy in the summer sky.

A white moving van pulls up in the turning lane to my left. A white panel truck pulls up on my right. We wait for the light to change.

My vision is totally obscured by the two trucks, one on each side of me. The light clicks to green. The trucks don't move. *Are they texting or something?* I think. I step on the gas.

My car accelerates into the intersection just in time to meet a careening green-and-white garbage truck running a red light. The massive truck smashes into my driver's side post, tearing through my car, atomizing glass, crushing my body with a sickening crash. I am killed instantly.

I wake up from the dream.

It's the middle of a warm night in June 2011. My bedroom is dark; my heart pounds. The atmosphere in the room feels heavy,

like a spiritual weight is pressing down on us. My wife, Elaine, wakes up instantly, feeling something significant has happened. “What was that?” she asks. Still disturbed, I tell her the dream. We fervently, earnestly pray together.

Lying there in the dark, we both have the overwhelming feeling the dream means something, something from God far too important to ignore. Somehow, we just know it.

For the next several weeks we prayed for him to tell us what to do, how to understand it. We were unnerved. We were inquisitive. But the interpretation didn’t come. I didn’t get it. So as the days went by as usual, we moved on as usual too.

But “usual” didn’t last.

About three weeks later I pull up to a six-lane intersection. A watery sun descends over the Colorado mountains. The light is red, like blood or fire. A white moving van pulls up on my left. A white panel truck comes up on my right. I can’t see past them.

I’ve been here before. My mind begins to tremble. Now I get it.

The light changes from blood red to green. The trucks stay put. I don’t move. I start to count the seconds. One thousand one. Nothing. One thousand two. Nothing. One thousand three. Nothing. One thousand four—. The green-and-white garbage truck comes from my left, runs the red light, rockets through the intersection with the sound of screeching metal. Then he’s gone. Both white trucks move out.

I step on the gas and move through the intersection and then immediately pull over. I am nauseous, shaking. In my soul God

speaks to me: *I could bring you back home anytime. I want you to get serious about telling your story.*

I took long, deep breaths, letting the oxygen calm me. I had wondered for years why I was alive (for reasons you're about to read). Conversations with my wife and friends, those close to me, were beginning to have a common theme: "I think God wants you to tell your story."

There, as the car idled by the road and my adrenaline slowly began to ebb, I knew they were right.

Denver, Colorado. The Mile-High City. A place of crisp mountain air and clear sunshine and ringed by mountains and alpine beauty. I was born here in 1956 at the height of the baby boom, part of an old Denver family.

My father bounced from job to job with long periods of unemployment in between. He always seemed unsettled in his world of work. My mother compensated for that, keeping herself constantly busy and largely unavailable. So even though they were there, they weren't really there for me.

I was the second of two boys, two years apart in age. We grew up essentially as latchkey kids during the times Dad was working. Taking advantage of my parents' physical and emotional vacancy, my older brother abused and tormented me relentlessly. He liked to beat the tar out of me just because he could. Since I had a lot of allergies as a boy, I received frequent injections. My brother would

wait for me to get home, get me alone, and punch the injection sites as hard as he could, bruising them and causing them to swell. (Much later in his life, my brother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a diagnosis that now makes our troubled relationship understandable and forgivable.)

My brother was strong and fast, extraordinarily gifted in athletics. That ease of success, perhaps combined with the manic highs of his undiagnosed condition, made him the kind of person who could walk into a room and immediately become the focus of attention. All eyes naturally went to him, like a star athlete walking through his high school. In he would stride, and *whoomp*. All the air in the place would be sucked out. But because of his serious behavioral issues, he was a handful for my mom and dad. My mother didn't know how to deal with him, and my dad was just passive, always trying to smooth things over and make peace.

Because I wasn't particularly athletic or talented, I couldn't compete for attention in the shadow of my brother. I was a good student, though, so I found my identity in being a brainiac, which, let's face it, doesn't lead to the same kind of recognition or popularity as athletic prowess. So my early life was defined by being invisible.

I was just a kid. Life was what it was, and I learned to get by.

I bear no malice for the way I was raised. I have no issues with my brother today. Nor do I have any with my mother or father. They're in heaven now, and we experienced healing in our relationship later in life. In many ways, even in spite of the vacancy and violence I experienced, our family life was rich. I never

doubted my parents loved and cared about me. They just didn't know how to manage a household with a son who was so needy. Looking back, I can't imagine being in their shoes. It must have been a tremendous challenge.

And what my parents lacked in emotional depth, they made up for in spiritual depth. Clearly, God was working from the very beginning. We were orthodox Episcopalians, deeply involved in our parish community at Christ the King Episcopal Church. I accepted Christ when I was seven, though in hindsight I realize I didn't understand the depth of what that commitment meant. I went through catechism, was an altar boy, and always loved being in church. When Father Kempfel, the rector of our parish, needed an acolyte on Easter, he chose me. That was huge. I felt safe there. I felt seen. I felt recognized.

One of the most important memories of my childhood is when my mom was in the hospital for a major surgery and my dad was out of work. Father Kempfel came over one evening. I listened from the stairs while he sat in the kitchen with my dad. "Chuck," the priest kindly said, "we've missed your tithe for the last three months. That's not like you. I'm concerned. Is everything okay?"

The rector didn't know it, but my father had just made us lunch for the following day, using all the food we had left in the house. My dad explained that we didn't have any income because of Mom's illness and his unemployment.

"Now I understand," Father Kempfel said with compassion. They prayed together, and the rector left. My dad sat at the kitchen table with his head in his hands and wept. The next day my

brother and I left for school with the minimal lunch my father had prepared. There was nothing more in the house.

I came back that afternoon, though, and there was food everywhere. The pantry was full! So was the fridge. Overjoyed, I dunked Oreo cookies in cold milk and ate and ate.

I learned later that the rector's discretionary fund was the source of the abundance. The local parish provided sacks of food for our family at that time of need, along with the promise of more if it was needed. That was a powerful moment, because for the first time I connected what we did in church on Sunday with the rest of the week. I connected faith to life. I understood that's the way the kingdom should be. Sunday was important, but it wasn't all-important. Ensuring we had food to eat on Friday was every bit as important to our church family as worship on Sunday. We were part of a community.

When I was a kid, my faith roots began to go deep. However, at that time of my life, I probably equated knowing God with Bible knowledge. I knew about God, but I didn't really know God. My dad raised us by reading Scripture at bedtime. My father, so kind, gentle, and attentive when my brother wasn't there, created a safe space with just him and me during those evening times. These were the moments I felt most loved and accepted. I loved reading Bible stories with him. Heroes like Joseph, Daniel, David, and Jesus fascinated me. I wanted to be those guys, to see the miracles they saw, to be part of a great story.

I thought I had a good sense about who Jesus was. I read my Bible, so I knew Jesus was full of love. I saw that he was coura-

geous, that he worked and had a calling, and that he loved kids. I knew he was the spitting image of God, his Father. With all that said, my faith wasn't really experiential or relational or intimate. God felt distant, impersonal. I didn't think people could have a relationship with him any more than they could with George Washington or anyone else I had read about. I didn't really sense he cared about me in any personal way or cared about having a relationship with me. He was real and loving but far off. How could I really matter to him personally? Why would he even notice me? I wondered if my story really mattered at all to him. I knew him a little. Did he know me?

Likewise, I thought being a Christian meant going to church, being good. There were rules to follow, and I was always good at following rules. There were behaviors I assumed you adopted to be members of God's family.

I recognized heaven as a reality, but it felt really distant. It didn't affect my here and now or my everyday world. I had my "fire insurance," my "ticket." I knew in my mind exactly where I was headed when I died. I just didn't think much about it. Why would I? I thought of earth and heaven as totally separate places. Heaven? It was that end-of-the-road place you went when you died.

As we grew into our high school years, my brother no longer beat me the way he did when we were younger. But even though the physical abuse let up, I still carried emotional bruises.

Part of the fallout was that I had virtually no identity, no sense of self-worth. Because attention usually had gotten me punched at home, I had become a chameleon who worked to blend into the background. Being quiet was the easy thing. My brother loved the attention, so I let him have it. All of it. Like my father, passivity became my method of coping. I simply tried not to be noticed, and it largely worked. But it came at a cost. I was a social dwarf in many ways because of this, finding it difficult to connect with friends or build relationships with kids my age. I went through adolescence without feeling recognized.

There was one glorious exception. During my growing-up years, my family lived close to Dad's parents, who wonderfully loved me and made me feel seen. In fact, we were close enough for me to ride my bike to their house over on West Seventy-Third Place. I was the youngest of their thirteen grandkids, but they still saw me for who I was and really cared. My grandfather was one of the most important people in my life. His home became a refuge for me, and I spent lots and lots of simple, quiet time with my grandfather George. We would talk about everything and anything. I felt I had a special place in my grandparents' house.

I loved my grandfather's quiet but kind ways—putting out birdseed, journaling, going to a special room he called his “womb room,” set aside for quietness and rejuvenation. In him I saw an example of hard work and craftsmanship, of benevolence and generosity, of making provision for those around him with his powerful God-given talents. He was an architect and also incredibly gifted with finances. He told me, “Money is only good for what it

can do for others.” And he lived that out for a lifetime and beyond through his legacy and values passed down to others.

Until the summer after my junior year, I wasn’t much to look at, especially next to my athletic older brother. But that year I shot up to five feet eleven. I became a man almost overnight—and a strong, healthy one at that. When I returned for my senior year of high school, people I’d known for years didn’t recognize me because my appearance had changed so much. Having already earned enough credits to graduate, I stuck around that school for only two weeks, trying to convince them to let me graduate early so I could work. Finally I did.

Over the next several months, I earned enough money as a gofer errand boy at a downtown firm to pay for a year of college. I didn’t know where I’d get the funds for subsequent years, but I figured I’d deal with that when the time came. I didn’t feel comfortable taking out student loans, and I didn’t know anything about scholarships. I assumed I’d go for a year and see what options presented themselves.

So in the fall of 1974, I left for the University of Colorado. I moved what little bit of stuff I owned into the college dorm by myself because my parents were once again focused on my brother. And, as many college kids do, I entered that new phase of life and pretty much left my faith behind. I wasn’t rebelling against it, but it seemed to have little relevance.

Being a brainiac may not have served me well socially, but it

did academically. I had gotten a thirty-five out of thirty-six on my college board tests, and with that momentum I had tested out of two full years of my university program—all my general courses in science, physics, chemistry, and so on.

Other than my finances, I had it all planned out. I wanted to be a rural pediatrician, practicing medicine for a small town somewhere. I had convinced myself that the bachelor life was for me. I was prepared to be married to my work.

Yeah, I had it all figured out. Until I met Elaine.

She showed up midsemester and moved in down the hall in my dormitory. She was working on the prerequisites for physical therapy school. And chemistry was giving her trouble. She needed a tutor.

After one look at her, I became a chemistry expert.

She was driven and focused. Nothing was going to distract her from achieving her goals. But soon our tutoring sessions included unconventional study methods, like catching a movie or going to a party. We built a romance to fit between our studies like the grout between bathroom tiles—not much to look at initially, but it held our relationship together. Solid. She was the longest relationship I had ever had, but anything longer than a week would have set that record.

We'd walk to the recreation center on campus. She would go swimming, and I would head to the basketball courts. I remember finishing early one Saturday and simply sitting in the viewing center and watching her glide across the pool. She lifted herself out of

the pool, smiled, and waved. I just gawked and weakly waved back.

“What?” she asked.

“Oh . . . nothing,” I answered. That wasn’t entirely true. But what would I have said? “You’re simply spectacular”? “You’re sweeping my heart away”? Or maybe the clincher: “I don’t want to graduate and just be married to my work anymore. I want to be married to you.”

It would be a while before I would speak those thoughts. But in those months Elaine’s presence gently changed the course of my life. If I had executed my original plan, I’d be a very lonely and miserable doctor today. While there was certainly testosterone involved, something much deeper was going on inside. Little did I know just how integral this new relationship would become. But even less did I suspect how much my life was about to change.

My school funds ran out after that first year, right on schedule.

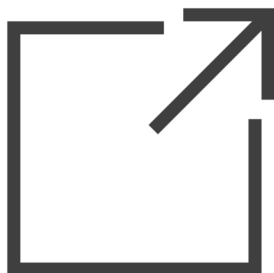
“I can’t afford to stay here at the university, Elaine.”

“You’re dropping out?”

“I have to. There’s no money.”

I had no idea, but I was standing at one of the most significant crossroads of my life.

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Steve and learn how to experience the
kingdom of heaven in the here and now.

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