



BEYOND THE STARS

One of the last sermons I heard my father preach was from Psalm 8.

*“When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
What is man that You visit him?
And the son of man that you visit him?”
(Psa 8:3, 4 NKJV)*

Dad went on to say, “We can picture David standing under the clear summer night skies beholding in awe and wonder the risen moon and the sparkling stars, so many and so widespread. ‘How many of them are there?’ he might have wondered, each one a separate, creative work of God. How far from earth are they? It is estimated that not only are they in the millions of miles distant, but perhaps as many miles distant from each other. Yet from earth it looks as if they were like jewels set in a picture frame, only inches apart” (*One Life of Many*, 2005). Max Lucado suggests, “Hold a dime in your fingers and extend it at arm’s length toward the sky, allowing it to eclipse your vision, and you will block out fifteen million stars from your view” (*The Great House of God*, Word Publishing, 1997).

Shakespeare called the stars “the blessed candles of the night.” Lord Byron described them as “the poetry of heaven.” I have always been fascinated with the stars. I was a teenage boy when President Kennedy urged our generation to “explore the stars.” We should take more time to gaze at the stars. Emerson said, “If the stars should appear but one night every thousand years how man would believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which has been shown!” Our Creator flung them into space for our contemplation and consideration. They are up there “shining in order like a living hymn” (N. P. Willis). The stars declare the glory of God (Psa 19:1). Do you see them – do you hear them? “There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:3, 4 NKJV).

My father used to take us five children outside on a summer night like

David described. He would direct our attention to the stars and point out to us the Milky Way, the Big Dipper, the North Star, Jupiter, Orion and other heavenly constellations. One cold winter night we saw the Auroa Borealis, the Northern Lights. What a light show God put on that night! I sometimes wondered, “What’s out there beyond the stars?” Indeed, what is out there beyond the stars, beyond the planets, beyond the moon? I remember a song we used to sing in church, “Beyond the Sunset.” It spoke of a beautiful place, the very presence of God.

*Beyond the sunset a hand will guide me
To God, the Father, whom I adore;
His glorious presence, His words of welcome,
Will be my portion on that fair shore.*

That was fascinating to me. But it was the last stanza that really tugged at my heart, even as a boy, because it mentioned being with our loved ones in a beautiful “homeland.”

*Beyond the sunset, O glad reunion,
With our dear loved ones who’ve gone before;
In that fair homeland we’ll know no parting,
Beyond the sunset forevermore!*

Virgil P. Brock

On April 25, 2009, I stood by the bedside of my beloved 93-year-old father, Dale V. Knowles, in Iowa City, Iowa. Just before he breathed his last breath at 8:28 A.M., a little tear pooled in his eye and trickled down his cheek. Was he trying to tell my sisters and me that he was sad to leave us behind? I cried, “Oh, Daddy, Daddy!” and then he was gone. His gentle spirit was ushered into the presence of God whom he loved and served so faithfully. From Iowa to Heaven in “the twinkling of an eye.”

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One of my favorite passages about the future is Philippians 1:21-23. The great apostle Paul declared, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” In death, the believer gains the ultimate beyond – Heaven. Yet Paul wrote, “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” Notice those won-

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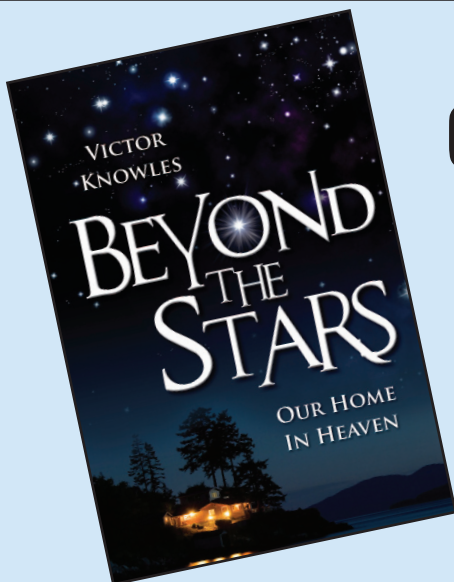
derful words: to depart and be with Christ. The Greek word for “depart,” according to Kenny Boles, was used for a ship “to untie from its moorings, weigh anchor, and sail away” (*What the Bible Says About the Afterlife*, College Press, 2010). That is precisely what happened when my father weighed anchor and set sail for new horizons.

In her book *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination With the Afterlife* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), Lisa Miller argues that while 80 percent of Americans say they believe in Heaven, few of us have the slightest clue about what we mean. What, exactly, is Heaven? Where is Heaven? How far is it to Heaven? What will Heaven be like?

I believe that “beyond the sunset,” beyond the skies, beyond the stars, is a place so beautiful that it defies description. Paul told the Corinthian believers, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). Yet, still we try. We must. For Heaven is our homeland. The stars are the street lights of eternity.

David must have spent many nights under stars while he tended the sheep. In his most famous psalm he declares with certainty, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psa 23:6). Notice: I will, not I might or I hope to. This was his lifelong ambition, the one thing he desired more than any other: “that I might dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life” (Psa 27:1). By faith he saw that “house in the heavens.” Paul saw it too, for he wrote, “. . . we have a building from God, a house not made with hands; eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). He then goes on to pen one of the most treasured verses in the Bible: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

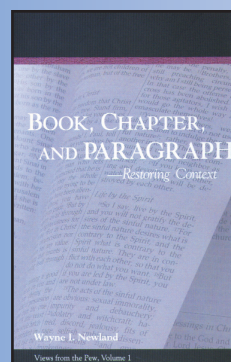
Condensed from Chapter 1 of Victor’s forthcoming book, Beyond the Stars: Our Home in Heaven. Available in July.



Coming in July!

“I believe that ‘beyond the sunset,’ beyond the skies, beyond the stars, is a place so beautiful that it defies description. Yet, still we try. We must. For Heaven is our homeland.” —Victor Knowles

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