

# HEAVEN IS NOW

awakening your five spiritual senses  
to the wonders of grace

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**BakerBooks**

*a division of Baker Publishing Group*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Baker Books  
a division of Baker Publishing Group  
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287  
www.bakerbooks.com

ISBN 978-0-8010-1482-6 (ITPE)

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Farley, Andrew, 1972–

Heaven is now : awakening your five spiritual senses to the wonders  
of grace / Andrew Farley.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-8010-1438-3 (cloth)

1. Senses and sensation—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Spirituality. 3. Heaven—Christianity. 4. Grace (Theology) I. Title.

BT741.3.F37 2012

248.4—dc23

2011042756

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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, alivecommunications.com.

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12 13 14 15 16 17 18      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## AWAKEN!

**I**n 1998, my father was in a bad car accident. As he lay there in a coma in Fairfax County Hospital, a pastor arrived and tried to heal him. The pastor anointed him with oil, prayed for him, and tried to raise him from the dead. But my dad wouldn't have it. His limp body just lay there, lifeless.

Sometimes we want to change our circumstances. We want to manipulate the externals so that we can somehow feel better on the inside. We want to ask, even in Jesus's name, that things be different.

We want control.

But if you've lived more than a day, you've already figured out that it's not happening. We are *not* in control. Things happen, and we have no say in the matter. Clearly, we're not going to

experience something different by controlling our circumstances. Hope must come from somewhere else. Hope must come from heaven *in the midst of* what earth presents us.

Any other hope is delusion.

## INVITED TO HEAVEN

An early church writer spoke of this hope from heaven: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf” (Heb. 6:19–20). But Jesus never entered any inner sanctuary in the Jewish temple. He wasn’t permitted behind the curtain. Here, the writer means *heaven itself*, where Jesus entered after his resurrection.

But there’s more. Speaking of this heavenly sanctuary, the writer then claims that “*we* have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way” (Heb. 10:19–20). This too means heaven, but this time *we* are invited.

This invitation is not merely about a future in heaven. It’s about awakening to a very present hope. Our God has set it up for today, and he invites us to enter in. Why does he bother with such a spectacular invitation?

Because heaven is *now*.

## THE KINGDOM WITHIN

Heaven is *now*?

We're told that God "seated us with him in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 2:6), that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and that we are "aliens and strangers" in this world (1 Pet. 2:11 NASB). We explain these away the best we can. We can't have our faith involving such ridiculous notions. After all, how can any of it really be true here and now in the midst of so much ugliness all around us?

The early church knew this ugliness. They saw it up close and personal as many of them were taken from their families, imprisoned, tortured, even killed. They were no strangers to trouble. Still, they insisted—heaven is *now*.

No, we can't know *all* of heaven here and now. It will take a lifetime and more to gather it in. But even if we only partially realize heaven's splendor on this side, it is still the sweetest form of life to embrace in the midst of all that earth throws our way.

I'm not making any promises that your circumstances will get better. Our circumstances are externals. This book is about what goes on *inside* of us in the midst of our circumstances, not outside or all around us. As Jesus put it, "The kingdom of God is *within* you" (Luke 17:21 NKJV).

## TOWARD THE SKY

We hear that heaven is now, and we wish to *feel* it. But our feelings come and go, as we travel from the heights of happiness to the depths of despair in seconds. We ride the roller coaster of the soul every day. So what if the real hope we have is not found in our feelings? Would that kind of hope be worth pursuing?

The way called faith brings this hope from heaven. We have the faith. We need only point it toward the sky. Let me tell you about someone who did.

Horatio Spafford was a wealthy lawyer in Chicago. You could look down a Chicago street and it was nearly all his. Horatio had millions. He also had a lovely wife and four beautiful daughters.

One day, a fire swept through Chicago, destroying nearly all Horatio owned. Two years later he sent his family on vacation across the ocean to England. But their ship went down, and only Horatio's wife survived. He received a telegram from her that read "Saved alone."

Horatio then sailed to England to meet up with his wife, so they could grieve together. On his way, he sat in the hull of that ship and wrote the song, "It Is Well with My Soul."

Horatio lost almost everything. He lost his four daughters and his fortune. His life had turned into

tragedy. How could he write that it was well with him? Was he delusional?

As the lyrics of his song reveal, the condition of his soul didn't reflect the circumstances around him. His wellness came as he angled his soul toward heaven. He was awakened to heaven's love. He was reflecting heaven's life. He perceived these with spiritual senses, despite what his physical senses were telling him.

## OUR FIVE SPIRITUAL SENSES

So how exactly do we experience heaven here and now? We already possess the senses we need to take in heaven's goodness (Heb. 5:14 NASB). We need only have these senses awakened:

- We can *feel* the freedom of God's grace.
- We can *hear* the Spirit bearing witness.
- We can *see* the finished work of Jesus.
- We can *smell* the fragrant aroma of Christ.
- We can *taste* the goodness of the Lord.

Through these five spiritual senses, we experience heaven on this side. We don't see heaven with the natural eye. But by faith we enter into all that it means to be raised and seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6), and we are awakened to heaven's grace.

In preparation for writing this book, I spent many months reading through God's Word, over and over, to take in the big picture. All the while, I was asking: What is heaven trying to tell us?

Here is our first message from heaven.

## HEAVEN SPEAKS

My heart's desire is that you rest in me. The heavenly promises I have made to you are designed to give you peace, even in the most violent of storms.

Sometimes you plead with me for a circumstance to change. You ask again and again that it be taken away. My heart longs for you to see more fully how my grace is sufficient for you, even in this. For my power is made perfect in the midst of your weakness.

Through my finished work, I have made you clean and close to me, and you are invited to live in a spiritual seventh day, relaxing in me. But to rest in me takes work. It's not the kind of work you're used to but a very different kind of work. I'm asking you to dig deeper into all that I've done for you so that you can more fully celebrate it, even when outwardly there seems only cause for pain.

I long for you to awaken to the goodness of my grace. As you discover the heights and depths of

Awaken!

my love for you, you will experience relationship with me like you never imagined possible.

I love you, and I long for you to know me as I truly am.

Jesus

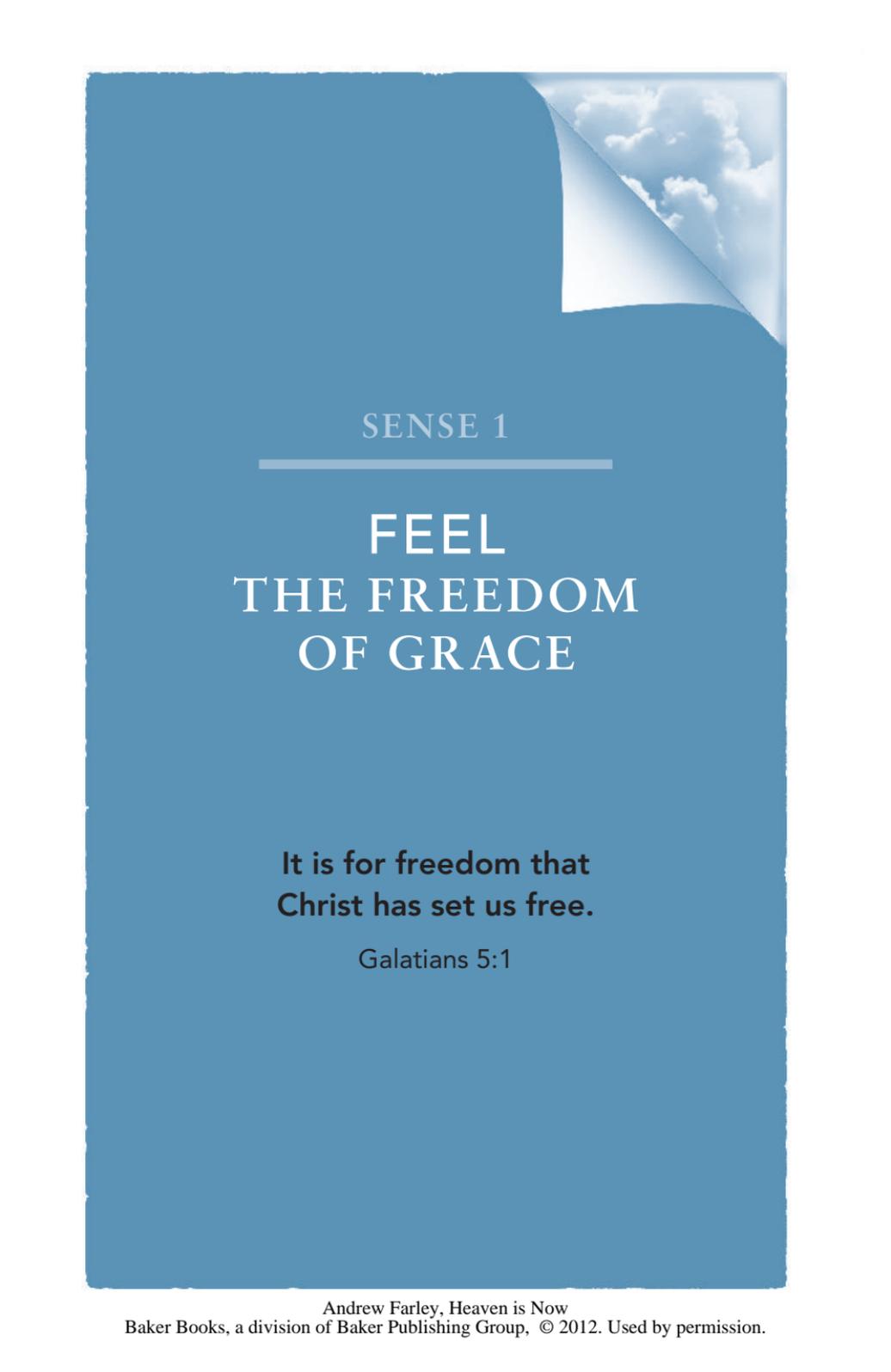
## *Awakening* TO HEAVEN

*Thank you, Jesus, for inviting me to rest. I welcome the adventure of awakening to your grace. I acknowledge that I have no real strength within myself. Instead, I am here, transparent before you, glorying in my weaknesses so that your power may rest on me. I love you, Jesus. And I want to learn more of your goodness toward me so that you can be my anchor, my stability in any storm.*

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Heaven Speaks inspired by Hebrews 3:15; 4:9–11; 6:19; John 14:27; 16:33; 2 Corinthians 12:8–10; Ephesians 3:18.





SENSE 1

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**FEEL  
THE FREEDOM  
OF GRACE**

**It is for freedom that  
Christ has set us free.**

Galatians 5:1



# 1

Skydivers carry an extra parachute. You know, just in case. After all, anything can happen up there. Who's to say the first parachute is going to work? So in the event of a wardrobe malfunction, they're ready to deploy plan B.

Now imagine that I invite you to go skydiving with me, but only under one condition: you can't carry a backup chute. Would you take me up on that offer?

For some of us, skydiving is scary enough on its own, much less without a backup plan! It takes a gutsy person to put all their stock in the one chute, trusting they won't fall to their doom.

It's the same way with heaven's grace, our trusty parachute. God invites us on the skydiving adventure of a lifetime. He invites us to trust his way of grace that will never fail. But when we discover that his invitation means we're supposed to forego the "backup chute" of self-effort, our knees start knocking: "Are you *sure* it's safe?"

## THE BUZZWORD

*Grace* is a word we've heard thousands of times in our lives, especially in church. We think grace means we aren't punished when we should be. We think grace is there to pick us up when we've fallen.

While these are true, I've found that grace has no depth to it apart from a solid understanding of what heaven calls "the new covenant." Without an awakening to this covenant, our understanding of grace will be limited to what we know or feel is true about the character of God. We will walk in grace only to the degree that we *feel* God is gracious toward us. The result is that our view of God's grace may be way off base without us even realizing it.

But through the new covenant, heaven defines grace in *precise* terms for us. When we have our senses awakened to the new covenant, we perceive exactly how God demonstrated his grace toward us. And it's grace we can sink our teeth into.

## HEAVEN'S PERFECT STANDARD

For years, I only knew "new covenant" as the name of the church down the street—New Covenant Bible Church or New Covenant Chapel of God. So what exactly is the new covenant? And how does it help

us feel the freedom of heaven's grace? To answer these, we'd better start with the *old* covenant.

The old covenant was the Jewish law that God gave to Israel. It consisted of about 613 dos and don'ts. Scripture tells us that the law never saved anyone (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:21). The law was intended only as a shadow, a picture of the Christ to come (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). It's true that many looked to the law for hope of salvation, but in the end they found that the law only brought condemnation and death (2 Cor. 3:7).

Today, the law serves as a tool for *un*believers (1 Tim. 1:8–11). It makes us humans aware of our sin problem (Rom. 3:19–20). Within ourselves, we have no adequate response to heaven's perfect standard. The law's strict demands make it quite clear that we fall short:

For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. *But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin*, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. (Gal. 3:21–22)

The law doesn't encourage or praise us. Being under law is like being married to an abusive perfectionist. Even if you please your spouse and only

stumble in one way here or there, they treat you as if you're a good-for-nothing, sorry excuse for a human being. They act like you're guilty of disregarding *everything* they've ever asked of you: "whoever keeps the whole law and stumbles in one point is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Being under law is like being under a curse, because "cursed is everyone who does not continue to do *everything* written in the Book of the Law" (Gal. 3:10). The law is an all-or-nothing proposition. If anyone invests in the old way of the law, they are "obligated to obey the *whole* law" (5:3).

## THE COVENANT CONVENTION

At the first religious convention in history, Moses trotted down the mountain with stone tablets in hand. He read everything aloud to the people of Israel. The Israelites signed on the dotted line, saying, "We will do everything" (Exod. 24:7). But the convention was a bust. The old covenant story is one of broken promise after broken promise to God.

Heaven wasn't taken by surprise. God never intended Israel (or anyone!) to be able to keep the law. The law wasn't designed to bring success. No, the law came into the picture so that sin would *increase* (Rom. 5:20), not decrease.

## HEAVEN'S NEW WAY

Heaven wanted earth to see that, apart from divine intervention, there was no real hope. Then, at the appointed time, the powers of heaven ushered in a new covenant that put *God's faithfulness to himself* on display: "since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb. 6:13 NASB).

God swore to himself that Jesus would be our priest forever (7:21–22). He promised that he would never leave us nor forsake us (13:5). He promised to be faithful to himself. He became our guarantor of a better covenant (7:22).

Here's what God himself says about this new covenant: "It will *not be like the covenant* I made with their ancestors . . . because they did not remain faithful to my covenant. . . . I will put my laws in their *minds* and write them on their *hearts*. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb. 8:9–10).

Did you notice what the new covenant is all about? It's about heaven's solution to our faithlessness. It's about God rigging everything by placing Christ's desires in our hearts and minds. It's about God's commitment to be our God forever. Here, God is the initiator. All we *can* do is respond with belief and a "thank you."

## **CELEBRATE SECURITY!**

Most Christians who worry about their eternal security have imagined some scenario in which they commit a particularly heinous sin or get caught in a series of sins. Then their lack of faithfulness takes center stage in God's decision to axe them. But through the new covenant, heaven is announcing that the work of Jesus is now on display at center stage.

When we place our faithfulness to God in the limelight and believe it to be a potential cause for loss of salvation, we are confusing the new covenant with the old. The whole point of the new way is to eliminate the faithfulness problem under the old way, "because they did not remain faithful" (Heb. 8:9). Heaven declares that "if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). To disown us would be to disown himself, because he resides in us forever!

Heaven wants us to celebrate our security. And when we allow the work of Jesus to take center stage in our lives, we adopt a heavenly perspective in the midst of our earthly circumstances.

Here's heaven's next message to us.

HEAVEN SPEAKS

I brought the law into the picture so that Israel would sense their sinfulness apart from me. To this day, my law holds everyone accountable to a standard they cannot possibly meet. My law silences all who truly confront it. There is simply no response after encountering its perfect standard, because it curses you for not keeping all of it.

But I have called you to feel the glorious freedom of my grace. If you are in me and I am in you, I have freed you from the all-or-nothing curse of the law. The law is not your ticket to life in me. You've been transferred out of the reign of law and into my kingdom of grace.

By faith you have received the promised inheritance of my Spirit. This promise was given long before the law came on the scene. I wanted to show you that, entirely apart from law, you are made whole in me.

Since the day I came to live in you, I've been leading you toward freedom. I've called you away from rules and regulations to enjoy an exhilarating new motivation—my Spirit in you.

My new covenant is not about how much commitment or dedication you are able to muster. I have already witnessed the best efforts any humans can make. No, this new covenant is about my best efforts on the cross and through the resurrection.

You are called to enjoy the fruit of my labor. This is what makes the glory of my new way more brilliant than the old. You are as safe as I am, and our Father will never disown us.

I will always love you.

Jesus

## *Awakening* TO HEAVEN

*Thank you, Jesus, for calling me out to the freedom of your grace. I can see the purpose of the old way, and I am so grateful for the new! Thank you for rescuing me from an impossible standard and making me perfect through your sacrifice. You have delivered me from the curse of the law and shared your very self with me by your Spirit. Any false hopes I had under an achieving system can now be replaced with a genuine hope in you. Thank you for walking with me in this journey and holding me tightly along the way.*

*I love you too.*

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Heaven Speaks inspired by Romans 3:19; 5:20; 6:14; 7:7; Galatians 3:10, 17, 21; 5:1, 18; James 2:10; Hebrews 4:10; 6:13; 1 John 4:17.