

When your clock is reset forever

Dreams and visions at the end of life

Peter Reis, MD

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About the title:

For the greater part it concerns an inheritance of short experiences which I will not forbear to pass on to my patients.

It is not a large work, just stories which otherwise you also tell during a meal. Such as stories from the past.

I dedicate this book to the pastoral workers of the hospitals in The Hague.

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Unbelievable meetings

I had a long conversation with Him, seated in front of the open fire, where a log-fire was burning which spread a nice warmth. He was, seeing his grey hairs, an elderly man. But the powerful jaw and the clear eyes gave the impression of a strong personality. It was an extraordinary evening. And also a special privilege just to speak a whole evening with this Man.

The atmosphere which developed in our conversation was exceptional. It was not only perceptible, but even visible. Never before had I felt such a calm and the almost silver white colour which I perceived intuitively, as if I was looking at a snow landscape, was really magnificent. It appeared as if His words came from infinitely far away, but at the same time they touched my heart. As if I was spoken to from within. With each word this created so much warmth and emotion, that it was all I could do to keep from just getting up and embracing my guest. He was definitely the most beautiful and most special Person who was sitting there in my room and who by His presence changed the whole atmosphere dramatically.

The first time I met Him was at an early age. At that time I was twenty-one years old. He visited me in my room at night. An unexpected visit at a time very difficult for me personally. It had put my life upside down, or rather: put on the rails, and had brought recovery, so that I could finish my medical study. The second time was at the end of my years of study. Because of all kinds of circumstances my study stagnated. At once He was there again. He entered my room and without words brought so much freedom and power, that I could at last finish my long way to become a doctor.

The times afterwards that I met Him, was during the long journeys at which we made an all-out effort to do simple doctor's work in remote villages. Actually it was too ridiculous for words that we did so. Inconspicuous, quietly for the modern world here. But with much influence for the people over there. And He was there. That unknown Man, and yet ever leading the way. When once I flew into the isle of Timor, He was there too. I saw Him in a dream, while He walked in front of us. Or that time in Papua, when we were halted by the police because of the tribal disturbance. In the evening He came into that suffocatingly hot hotel room, where a fan made a lot of noise, and eased my mind by His presence.

Forty journeys and as many places in the world. All because of that one Man who challenged us time after time. Very often I had been about to stop. But then I knew again: when I felt the passionateness of His presence, a new task awaited us.

I had never thought that a small decision, taken at an early age, to follow God and believe in Jesus, would have so many consequences. Forty years later and a great number of adventures further, I sometimes wondered what unexpected thing I could still encounter, because we had already experienced so much. There was also an ever increasing realization of becoming older ourselves and after a while entering a phase in which what we did would become less and less visible.

And that was exactly the reason why this meeting at the open fire was so important for me. I realized that a certain time was coming to an end. That I had no longer many years in order to share with others what I experienced with God. I knew that I needed time to ask burning questions and hear straight answers. About life and death. About what we experience when our life is coming to an end. What the events are which allow us to enter heaven. And what prevents us from entering. Whether there was a second coming of Jesus in my generation.

I was worried. About the patients who had no notion of an eternity after death. The daily threat to leave this life untimely owing to a disease or accident without knowing about God. Monthly it would happen that somebody passed away, owing to a disease or otherwise. With many of them I had sometimes spoken about the door of heaven, which stood wide open. But as many of them passed the consulting-room without me knowing of a destiny in eternity.

A staircase to heaven

As if He read my thoughts, He started speaking. A memory came back to my mind of what I experienced two years ago, shortly after the death of my mother. 'Wasn't I there too, and didn't I help you to cope with it? Don't you know any more of the glance I granted you to look into heaven?'

It was in the autumn of 2011. I had just been in Borneo with a team. Still on my way I had telephoned with my mother, who that week had to undergo an operation. After our journey through Borneo we flew from Balikpapan to Malang in the east of Java. While I was waiting for my team in the lobby of the hotel, I suddenly experienced the presence of some angels in the room where I was. So tangible that I looked left and right to see if I saw anybody. That was so strange that in a flash I realized that it could have to do with the situation of my mother, who had just been operated upon. How was she and was something wrong? At that moment my wife walked into the lobby with a mobile phone in her hand. Indeed, there was something terribly wrong: our mother had come into a serious complication.

That night she passed away and that very week I was at home, and spoke at her funeral. I then realized that the angels which I had seen was the group which came to fetch mother, because she would be taken to God. The realization that, if you know Jesus, you are not alone in your dying, but that angels come to fetch you straight away and take you to heaven, has always comforted me.

At the evening after her funeral I went to bed at night, and I had the experience which Jesus aimed at in our conversation. At the moment I laid my head on my pillow, I looked literally upwards and saw a wondrous spectacle which I will not forget any more: an enormous spiral staircase of hundreds of metres wide, stretching out upwards as far as I could see, with on it a very large group of people who were all walking upstairs, dressed in white clothes. While I followed the spiral staircase and the large group with my eyes, I saw at the very top, far far away, in the centre of the staircase, a Person. Jesus amidst thousands who were climbing up to Him. Walking on a staircase which seemed to be made of glass and which radiated light. Also the people whom I saw walking - I did not see them specifically because I saw a panorama view - were dressed in white clothing, which radiated the same light.

Involuntarily I had to think of two things about which I had read in the Bible: the patriarch Jacob, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, who one night in a small town of Bethel in North-Israel put his head on a stone (for a pillow) and saw heaven opened and a staircase along which angels went down and up. He was so deeply impressed by that experience, that he informed his descendants about it, owing to which the story is in the Bible. I also had to think of Jesus' words: 'You will see God's angels go down and up onto the Son of Man.' (He aimed at Himself and at the fact that heaven would touch earth during His life on earth). That I was allowed to see this, was really something special. It gave me great comfort to know that my dear mother was among those many who were going to meet Jesus.

Since that experience I have had many a conversation with patients who knew that they were going to die, and were afraid of it. Sometimes it is easier to tell a story about yourself. What I tell them, is that they must put their faith on Jesus. That I have often met Him, and that I am sure that He is a reliable Person. Somebody who went through death in His life on earth when he died on the cross (He did that for you and me), and afterwards conquered death and came back to life again and has been seen by many. He promised that whoever believes in Him, shall live (in heaven), even if you have died.

As a child that is sometimes easier to imagine than as an adult. We often think that we know everything, but it is about these very things, what happens after death, that we do not know anything. And we think: if we cannot know it now, for sure it will not exist. Strange that we put so much trust in such an uncertain starting-point. Therefore it is good to tell in a simple way about the fact that heaven is real.

A patient from my practice, suffering from cancer, knowing that she had a short time to live, found it rather difficult to talk about Jesus. But a little talk about heaven, and how beautiful it was there, went all right. In the weeks which followed, she slowly came to realize that heaven was real, that she was longing for it, and that she needed Jesus for that. I did not know that she had made that choice to put her trust in Him, until she once gave it away to a friend of hers, also a patient of mine. That way I found out.

Another patient from my practice, also dying, prayed a prayer that was very important. It was about as follows: 'Jesus, today I will come to you. Forgive me for all my faults and shortcomings. Thank You that also for me You bore the punishment for this on the cross. I open my heart for You. Thank You that, although my life is at an end, I may live with You for ever.'

Or that young Muslim woman , who was seriously ill psychically, with whom I was allowed to pray together and ask for help to Isa (Jesus' name in the Koran). What a wonderful moment was that when He gave her too the atmosphere of peace of heaven.

Heaven opened

An important point should be made here. It sounds in an old song that I used to sing as a child: 'Ik zie een poort wijd open staan' (I see a gate standing wide open) (Johan de Heer song 140).

*Ik zie een poort wijd open staan,
waardoor het licht komt stromen
van 't kruis, waar 'k vrijlijk heen mag gaan
om vrede te bekomen.*

Refrain:

*Genade Gods, zo rijk en vrij!
Die poort staat open ook voor mij!
Voor mij! Voor mij! Staat open, ook voor mij.*

*Die open poort laat d'ingang vrij,
aan wie komt binnen vlieden;
aan rijk en arm, aan u en mij
komt Jezus vrede bieden.*

*(I see a gate standing wide open,
through which the light comes streaming in
from the cross, to which I may freely go
to get peace.*

*God's mercy, so rich and free!
That gate is standing open also for me!
For me! For me! Is standing open, also for me.*

*That open gate leaves the entrance free,
to those who come fleeing in;
to rich and poor, to you and me
Jesus comes to offer peace.*

Somebody once told me how she had had an experience in the hereafter without God, and how dark and fearful it was. Although I have not had that experience myself, I do remember how pitch dark it was in my soul at the lowest point of a spiritual crisis that I had as an adolescent. I was twenty-one years old and led a riotous life, with the use of drugs and upsetting standards and values. Chaos, darkness, fear and an immense feeling of being

abandoned and forlorn. The feeling of ever falling into a bottomless pit, with evil spirits around me which tortured me. In that horrible misery I arrived at a point that I called upwards if God was there. What I still remembered right now, was that in my experience a light began to shine far above me. As if somewhere a door was opened. What I also realized, was that prayers of people who had loved me, such as my grandmother, who had a strong belief in God, helped me to focus at that light. Some weeks later I woke up in a dark night and saw a great light in my bedroom. Again a light, which shone in the dark misery of my life. In that light I saw Jesus, who died on the cross, and looked at me with eyes so full of love, that I cannot forget it any more. At that moment that light also shone into my soul, filled me within, and took away my fear and confusion.

From hell into heaven. An unimaginable experience, exactly like that song describes. Everyone should know that that door of heaven is standing open. And that there is free admission for everybody. And that door is not far away. It is standing open, right in front of you. And Jesus too is not far away. He hears when you speak to Him.

The Three Best Things in Heaven

When you are reading and studying about what heaven looks like, it seems anyhow a wonderful place to be. I wondered what are the most striking and important things you meet in heaven. One of the special things for a family doctor is, that you have plenty of time to speak with patients about such things, for who is in a hurry when one is ill, while bedridden for weeks or sometimes months? And I discovered that such a conversation brings an atmosphere of joyfulness and expectation. When life has nothing to offer any more here, there is room to look upwards.

The river of living water

In the middle of heaven is a city: the new Jerusalem. In the middle of that city is a special place where God dwells. And in the middle of that place is God's throne, and from that throne (actually you should say: 'from God Himself') a river is streaming. The water of that river is crystal clear and from God's throne hall it is first of all streaming through all the dwellings of the people who are saved, and next through the parks and the city. In the middle of that park is a highway where that river is streaming in the middle, up to the place where it leaves the city, and is streaming through the valleys all around: the heavenly paradise. On either side of that river are trees, which bear fruit several times a year. Everyone is allowed to eat from these fruits and they are strengthening and refreshing you. The leaves of these trees are healing.

Everyone who believes in Jesus and has shown in his life that he takes it really seriously with God, is allowed to enter this city freely. One of the most beautiful books that has always encouraged me, is the book by John Bunyan, an English clergyman, who spent years in prison for his faith and who wrote a book about a Christian on his way to heaven. In the last few pages of his book he describes how Christian arrives in Jerusalem and is welcomed there by a large group of friends. What a magnificent picture of heaven and how you come home. Everyone who comes in for the first time, descends into the river of heaven and is washed clean of all memories and pain from life on earth.

The water that is streaming there, can be perceived not only when we come into heaven, but streams through to our life on earth when we believe in Jesus. Streams of living water will flow from your inner self. When I became a Christian, there was also such a moment when I got completely filled with the realization of a river which streamed through me. And that has never left me. Every time when I speak with God or when I go through something which I may do for God, such as doing medical work among the poor, I experience that that river is continuously streaming through me. And every time when I pray for a patient, that experience is there. Saint Paul says that God's love is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. These are not fine words, but is a reality.

You meet God as Father

How is it that God can be your Father if you already have a father on earth? Yet it is. Sometimes God is also called: the Father of lights (those are we people). Jesus was constantly speaking about the fact that God is a father. Imagine a house with beautiful rooms. You come in and you meet your brothers and sisters. Fine. And then you are sitting together and you

are talking and waiting. Something is missing. A family is not complete until papa or mama is there. Therefore so many families fall apart when the parents are no longer there. And it is also like that in heaven. We become part of God's family. But that very beautiful heaven with all its magnificent places and even all your friends and loved ones who you see again, is empty without the presence of He who has made everything.

Jesus tries to explain to us who the Father is, by showing us how much a good father loves us. He tells a story about a young man who left his home and squandered his father's inheritance. Hungry and full of shame and a feeling of guilt he returned home. Would his father receive him again? But then at once he sees his father, who had been on the look-out all the time, come outside, run towards him and embrace him. He said: 'Give the boy new clothes and a ring on his finger. There is a feast, because my prodigal son is found again!'

Once I spoke with a dying person about God. I invited him to pray to God, so that he would receive life after death. But how then: no fine words, no long prayer. He simply put his hands up and said: 'Father, here I am.' How extraordinary to see how a lost person is received by a Father in heaven who loves him.

Yesterday there was somebody else, also seriously ill. I asked him if he minded that I prayed with him. He did not mind. A man who had never done much with faith, but yet wanted me to recommend him in prayer. 'Father, do you want to receive this man? Jesus paved the way for him too.' That way there come innumerable people who are embraced by their Father.

By reading this booklet you too have a meeting with Jesus. He tells you how you can come to the Father. This very moment Jesus still goes all over the world and meets people. They dream about Him. They hear His invitation.

Jesse DuPlantis, a well-known pastor from America, described his experience in heaven as follows. When he was near God's throne, there was a mighty power source, like a large waterfall. Suddenly a Person stepped from that enormous power source, like you can step from a water curtain. That was Jesus. He was full of the same Source. So we meet the Father because Jesus and the Father enlighten different aspects of who God is.

My own experiences with God as my heavenly Father have been very impressive. At a young age - I had been a Christian for just a few years - I went through a period in which I was alone much of the time, having trouble with studying, the feeling that all my friends were away. Actually that was the case because I had lost all of them, because I had come to faith. I did not sleep well in that period of time and felt tense. One night I was lying on bed and said to Jesus something like: 'I just give everything to you. I cannot keep up this fighting.' In the moments which followed, I was distinctly aware that there was a presence in my bedroom that picked me up and rocked me as a little child. As a little child that is resting on a father's breast, who protects and embraces him with his strong arms. What an incredibly great moment was that. This was my meeting with God as Father. And it changed my whole life and brought a calm and trust in me which never left me.

You meet Jesus

Children dream, and people who know Jesus dream too. From my childhood on I have learnt that believing in God is not only a dull trust in a book full of promises, but a real personal bond and relationship with a God who is very much a living presence. And He shows that among other things by means of dreams and visions. The Bible also says (Joel 2) that God visits people by means of dreams and visions. In my dreams I often met Jesus. (You can read it in one of my other books: 'Er is hoop' - There is hope). They are wonderful dreams, which

make much clear to you about how extraordinary God is. And what the task is which He has for you.

One of those dreams comes to my mind while I am writing this. It was during a journey to one of the poorest countries in the world, Mozambique. A country torn by a civil war. Many fathers lost their lives in the war. Many children are living on the streets. In a dream I was sitting in the back of a truck in the tailboard. (This is not very exceptional, for that was how we always drove around). The car pulled up in a village and a fair-haired woman (this is exceptional, though, for I had only met dark people) walked up to me and addressed me: 'Peter, (how did she know what I was called?) do you know how many orphans there are in this country?' The scene after that I met Jesus. He said: 'Thank you that you called on me' (although we had only called on children). In the last scene I met the Father. He was so glad, that I awoke from that dream laughing aloud! How extraordinary to dream and meet God in His various qualities. He is the One who cares for children. He is a Father of all children.

This reminds me of another dream. I was doing medical work among the people who had been affected by the tsunami, on the east coast of Sri Lanka. What a devastation; all the houses on the coast had been destroyed. A big tragedy, owing to the hundreds of thousands of victims. In our team too were two nurses who had both lost family members and lived in sink emergency houses. It happened that we drove in an ambulance from place to place and gave consultations. I visited a pastor of a church on the edge of the ocean. His church building had remained intact, but fifty people from his church had been drowned. He was dispirited and wanted to give up his position as a priest. Until he got a dream. In that dream he walked into a garden with beautiful flowers. The owner of that garden came round and picked fifty flowers to bring home with him. He asked in the dream: 'Do you mind if I take these flowers in order to give them a special place in my house?'

When children die, they get a special place in heaven. They live there under the good care of angels. A place where is no pain or sorrow. When their parents come into heaven after their death, they meet their children again. Even if they are children who died before their birth (because of a miscarriage). Many people doubt if God is full of love. For so many children die owing to famine and wars. That last mentioned fact is correct and is terrible. But it is a comfort that all those children have a direct place in heaven. And God hates all things that people do to each other.

The Three Nastiest Things in Hell

You are standing outside

You are standing in front of a shop window with beautiful things, but you are standing outside; you will never have a share in it. It is difficult to write about something which you cannot visualize. Most people who don't want anything to do with God, and simply cannot believe that He exists, don't believe in heaven or hell either. What then should we say about this? There are simply two roads: a narrow road which leads to heaven, and a wide road which leads to hell. He says in short that He has come to save people who will otherwise get lost. Going to hell is synonymous with getting lost.

You are so precious

A while ago I had lost something valuable. A gold ring which had been given to me by my sweet wife when we got to know each other. A ring with a stone in it, which was especially of emotional value to me. I had lost it, because I had switched it from my ring-finger to my little finger, because it was too tight. What was to be done? Just bad luck? However, I have learned to ask God to help me when I have lost something. (You should also give it a try; it really works!) For God is an expert in finding back something which has been lost. That evening I went for a walk in the neighbourhood of our house. Under a car which was parked by the side of the road, I saw glittering something gold. And YES, it was my lost gold ring! How glad I was that I had found it again. Quickly I went to the jeweller to have it widened, so that it fitted on my ring-finger again.

This is a fine example of how much God finds it deplorable of you to refuse to enter the door to heaven, which He keeps open for you. The Bible says that you are lost then. That He has lost you. You fall into the hands of powers and forces which do evil to people. So it is terrible to go to hell. Nobody who is in his right mind wants to go there. It seems terrible to me to be for ever in an environment where the most horrible characters and malicious types are also present.

Actually you had rather be silent about it

I have had patients who during the Second World War were in a concentration camp in Germany. In those days nobody had a notion how dreadful that was. It had been so horrible, that they did not want to speak about it. The memories should preferably remain buried.

But suppose it should cross your path? What then? My patients could and would not speak about that any more. It was too horrible what they had gone through. For the same reason it is also difficult to say something about hell. Nobody wants to listen to it. But even though it is far away, tomorrow something may happen in your life which turns your life upside down and takes your securities away. I am thinking of illness or poverty. What do we do when our quiet life suddenly gets characteristics of a nightmare? What is our emergency exit then? What our

mainstay?

I used to refuse to say something about hell. I preferred to speak about heaven. Until after many years I began to feel a hypocrite. Why not warn when you know that people are running the risk to miss the boat?

Everyone chooses himself/herself

I had a dream when I was young. In that dream I was standing on the quay by which a ship was anchored. A gangplank had been laid down, so that everybody could walk onto the boat. From the boat I heard the sound of singing and music. It was really an inviting sound and it seemed there was a party going on on the boat. Then I heard the words which were sung. It was in English: 'Come on board, Hebrew children, come on board'. In the dream I looked around me and saw one of my family members. 'Let us go on board', I said. But that person did not want to do that. Therefore I went on board alone, but I realized that I had to leave my family behind. A dream which I have never forgotten. For never again do you forget dreams which come from God. They have been imprinted on your memory and are the sign-posts which you get in your life.

How deceived you feel

Jesus also said something like that about people who are rich, and make all kinds of plans and cling to the material security of existence. And then, overnight they fall ill and life is over. And they go the place which fits in with the hidden thoughts of the heart. In this world rich people are rewarded with all goods and delights, but are not prepared for life after death. Instead of a beautiful house, they get a little corner in hell. How terrible.

In the year 1996 I was on my way to a church in the extreme north of Russia. In Murmansk a revival had broken out among the youth in a church. I came along at the invitation of a minister of the church. In one of those meetings Jesus spoke very clearly to me: 'Sell what you have, follow Me.'

Our wealth - as a doctor you are fairly rich, certainly when you compare your life with many people in the world - was in our way. From that moment on my wife and I have devoted ourselves to spend our wealth on the projects and things which God asked from us. With that we set out upon a long journey which took us to fifteen countries, in the very poorest towns and regions of the world. We could also have hoarded our wealth. And then we would have had an inheritance for our children. Now we have another inheritance. Owing to our efforts we have been allowed to touch the lives of many people who did not know God and were ill and poor. That is an inheritance too and we would like to pass it on. The most important and most beautiful part from that inheritance is the knowledge of God. The same goes for the people whom we meet in the medical care in the Netherlands. Their wealth also is not so important any more when a serious disease threatens life. Maybe it is exactly that which you are supposed to do: that you learn to look upwards instead of to the security of your possessions. Take care that you have a treasure in heaven. Look for the things which are above. That is wise and sensible.

Do take the time to think about heaven and hell. Just imagine: contrary to what you thought, there is still conscious existence after the physical death. You wake up in a place with only your own thoughts as company. How bad this is! All kinds of pictures pass your eye, and you realize that you have held on to illusions, ideas of security because of possessions. And now

they are no longer of any value at all. The only things which still count, are the values and thoughts. We often say: 'You can move house, but you take yourself with you.' Do you think yourself good company to spend an eternity with?

Desires never fulfilled again

Jesus tells a story about a rich man who always passed a poor man in front of the gate of his estate, who lay begging there. One day the poor man dies and he awakes in heaven.

The rich man also dies and awakes in hell. From the hell the rich man sees the poor man, who is in heaven, and asks if he cannot come to give him some water. Jesus gives this as an example to show us that who we are, is also what determines our life after death. Have we lived only to fulfil our desires, or have we lived for someone else and sought for truth and justice in life?

I have often thought about this. And I have concluded the following. Our passions (craving for possession, sexual fulfilment, selfishness, jealousy, judgment, negative thinking etc.) are often like a little fire which is burning inside us. Just think of an outburst of anger, when you are ablaze about a certain thing. Those burning emotions, though they are hidden, are still deep inside you. Maybe you think to yourself: 'I am not like that'. I am not so sure of that. Now and then I see everybody fly into a rage and everybody has passions. If hell is a place where people are parked who were not prepared to take it higher up, direction heaven and God, then it seems to me that they will be extremely unpleasant company for each other. In heaven Jesus guarantees that we, including all our traumas, memories and emotions, become clean. We may start anew as children. That seems wonderful to me.

In all my quests for answers about life after death, a number of stories and witnesses have made an extraordinary impression. And if there is energy and you feel like it, these witnesses can be recommended. The first story comes from a book which was written at the beginning of the 20st century.

Sadhu Sundar Singh was a well-known evangelist in India. In a vision he saw the gate of heaven. In front of the gate of heaven were all kinds of people whose earthly lives were over and who were not prepared and so could not (or did not want to) enter just like that. One of them was a man who had studied philosophy for years and had been seeking after truth. He was imprisoned in his own thoughts and just could not understand that there was a spiritual reality after death. The vision showed that for a long time he stayed like that in the neighbourhood of the gate of heaven, till after a long time he came to realize that after all the truth lay in entering heaven. Thus he went higher up, into heaven.

Another person, who could not enter, nevertheless got permission to go inside. But o dear, once in heaven, in the radiating light which shines there, it at once became clear how many wrong and evil things there were in his heart. For it is the case that in heaven your good deeds clothe you, like clothing here in the world. But if you have lived badly, your clothing looks slovenly and dirty there.

This was so unbearable for this person, that he took a big jump and fled back into the shade of the area in front of the gate of heaven. To him heaven was more unbearable than the shadows of the powers which dragged him to hell. In this vision of this Indian Christian, who was world-famous in his time and also spoke at conferences in the Netherlands, it becomes evident that our own choices determine whether we go to eternal life (the area of light in heaven) or to eternal death (the area of darkness in hell). Everyone gets what in his innermost soul he wants himself. Are these visions true? In any case it shows us a God who is love, who

likes to have everyone with Him, but who leaves people a free choice. It also shows that the moral choices which we make today, influence and determine our lives after death. That is really frightening, but also feels as rightful.

What Should I do to be Saved?

Once upon a time there was a man who was prison warden of the apostle Paul, he who at the beginning of our era brought the gospel (Jesus' tidings) to Europe. Paul had been imprisoned. While he was lying in irons he sang a song about Jesus. All other prisoners listened in. Suddenly there was an earthquake which opened the doors of the prison. Shocked and deeply impressed this man came to Paul and said: 'What should I do to be saved?' He wanted to know who was Paul's God who had done this. He wanted to belong to them. Paul answered that he had to turn round and serve God. And thus it happened that this man and his whole family became believers.

Many people whom I meet, ask me the same question: 'What can I do, so that I come in heaven?' Young people ask me; elderly people, who do not have time much longer, but also people from various cultural backgrounds.

In an answer I always stick to that one text which at a young age I had written on the wall of my student room: 'Whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.' - John 3:21

Everyone who sincerely says to God: 'Here I am and I want to know you' comes near God (for God is truth and light). He listens, and He is the One who has opened the road to heaven for everyone by what He did on earth in His human capacity (the cross).

And then, when you are near God, you also realize that it was He who brought you to Him. Not this booklet, not the stories, but God Himself is interested in you. He loves you and wishes nothing better than to receive you in heaven.

How do you know for sure?

When I go on a journey to a country, I consult internet and figure out what visa I need in order to be admitted there. Next I go through the process step by step, so that I finally have my much-coveted visa stamp in my passport.

Entering heaven goes by a similar admission process. We know that people make jokes about it frequently, as if St. Peter should stand at the gate. But all that joking apart, the Bible is rather clear about it. The determining factor is, whether your name is written down in the so-called 'Book of life'. In heaven too there is a clear registration of our doings on earth. In order to be admitted into heaven, during your life on earth you must have taken a decision to believe in Jesus. What does that mean?

I well remember that at the age of five, during a holiday in a children's meeting at the camping site, after a story about Jesus had been told, I said to that person that I wanted to believe in Jesus. That is my oldest memory about making a choice for God, but I still remember. At the age of nine, during an illness at which I had a high fever, I was in heaven and saw in that splendid environment the enormous host of happy children, looking out on the splendid universe with its stars. John 3:16 was the first Bible text which I learned by heart:

‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’

Therefore I know that the moment I chose for Jesus, is written down in the annals of heaven. That is my certainty that I will be admitted. And when I look back on those forty years of being an active Christian, I am glad that I have travelled a path of life which bears witness to that. But however it be: though you choose for Jesus shortly before your death, the all-important thing is that on high your name is known. Therefore take care that your visa for heaven is in order.

A Portal to Heaven?

In many a science fiction film we see portals, doors, to other, distant parts of the universe, using worm-holes, special shortcuts to the reality of the higher dimensions of space and time.

In children's films we see portals as unexpected doors which connect two worlds with each other: the children's world, such as with Alice in Wonderland, or the old wardrobe, such as with the juvenile books of C.S. Lewis about Narnia.

The Bible teaches us that there is indeed a dimension which transcends the visible and measurable. This is called the Kingdom of heaven. In the Bible you also read a lot about God who at certain times visits people, either personally or through a messenger. The Bible does not name it in technical terms, but speaks about the fact that it is the world of the spirit.

When we listen to the eye witnesses of Jesus' life on earth, before and after his death, when he had been resuscitated and appeared alive again, we hear stories how He suddenly appeared in the middle of the room, or suddenly walked on the water in the middle of a storm. And everywhere where Jesus went, there was a visible presence of heaven. Jesus named it like this: 'I am always in direct contact with God', whom he called Father. Jesus says about Himself that He is the Door to the Father. There is only one way to come to Him, and that is through Jesus. He is the portal to the world of heaven. Jesus calls on us to live in that way, that people will find a portal in us, a door, to come into contact with Him.

That too is not so difficult for the modern Christian to imagine either. Lately I was in Malaysia and spoke in a crammed hall with people about the extraordinary nature of prayer. Doing this I made use of my mobile phone. By entering the right number, you get contact with somebody you do not see, although he sits on the other side of the world. And you have also got smartphones which show you a photo or little film from far away. Nowadays everybody sits with such telephones on his lap, young and old twitters and communicates via Facebook and Instagram. We live in a world with technical portals, and the technique is getting near the ways of communication which have always existed in the spiritual world. As a doctor I have always exerted myself so that, apart from being a reliable doctor and person, I would also give room to being a portal for people to meet God. Well, in a large practice that is not so simple. Actually, it is again and again surprising when it happens. But it does happen. Exactly because a doctor spends part of his life going about with seriously ill people, he has a notion of life and death, unlike other people.

Personally it is my greatest wish that in my life after this life I may see my former patients again as friends. Jokingly I say sometimes: 'I think I already have a practice in heaven too', referring to the large number of people that have passed away in the 33 years that I have had a practice as family doctor. For fun I add that in that country, where mourning, tears and pain no longer exist, I am as a doctor probably the only unemployed person. But just imagine that our faith makes it possible for many others to enter heaven through the Door, Jesus Christ.

Me and My House

It seems that family ties can also have a portal function to heaven. In the Bible the story is described of the prison warder from Ephesus. When he comes to faith, he firmly declares: 'Me and my house, we shall serve God.' He spoke on behalf of his whole family. And you wonder how it is possible. Then as a father can you determine what moral way your children go? In a way yes! For a father who leads a moral life in which he is a living example walking on the right way and trusting in God, will unconsciously bring his children in the same relation with heaven. And therefore it is mentioned in the Bible as a promise which many people hold on to. For Jesus cannot let His promise fall to the ground in front of His children. In other words: there is a special way towards God, purely by means of the prayer and faith of someone who loves you dearly and who himself believes in Jesus. Your faith helps your loved-ones, but also your best friends, to believe too.

What a beautiful thought! But then this can also apply to the people you see as a doctor and have treated for years. I have ever so often said that long relationships lead to a sense of friendship. And that is anyhow the case in an ordinary practice of a family doctor. Therefore patients do not want to leave their doctor, even if they move house. This applies to all doctors, but perhaps for other professions too. Long-lasting relationships forge a bond. But above all: deep inside all people are family after all and have a common forefather from whom all people have originated.

There have been several times that I have wanted to finish with the practice in the Netherlands owing to my travels in areas without doctors. It was only at those moments that I discovered how much I was attached to my own patients. To be honest I cannot imagine how it will be to pass the baton on to my daughter, who will also be a doctor.

At one of those moments when I was about to finish, and had already written my announcement for departure, I got a short view of how God was thinking of the medical work we did. On that day I walked to the house in which our practice was situated. To my surprise I saw how the house and the bricks of the walls were shining with a light. It seemed as if the whole building was imbued with an enchanting soft light. When I went inside, walked to the consulting room and sat down in my desk chair, my attention was drawn to something which was situated above my head opposite me. A cloud of the same light seemed to come down in the room from above. In that cloud I saw the faces of my patients: many hundreds of them who were standing in a long queue next to each other. While I was looking, that cloud descended into my heart and I was filled with a wonderful awareness of peace and happiness. That week, in each conversation in the consulting room, I felt that atmosphere of peace around me. It was perceptible with each conversation, even with each medical act.

In the Bible we read about believers in Jesus who have a cloud of witnesses around them. The apostle St. Paul speaks then about the Jewish prophets and kings who have always served God faithfully. Their faith is an example for us, and thus they are a cloud, or maybe a people, of men and women who are walking in front of us and show us the way by means of their lives.

But it is also more than that. Actually it is a fact that people who are already in heaven, are witness to what God's children experience on earth. Lately somebody said to me: 'It is like spectators on the stand. We are playing in the soccer team, and are cheered to make a success of our lives. Maybe that is the most wonderful thing: to know that your profession too can become a portal for others to heaven.'

It does give me comfort when I think of the many people I have seen pass away, of whom I did not know where they were with their hearts and their faith. Hindus who have an awareness of God's omnipresence, but cannot believe that a righteous man can die for an unrighteous person. Muslims who know the God of Abraham, but do not want to acknowledge Jesus as the only way to the Father, and reject the cross. Would my belief, my adherence to the promise that I and my whole house, family, practice, should be saved, in the end give them access to Jesus, also later on in life after death? I may and would hope so.

Some years ago I treated a young woman, who was bedridden because of her serious lung disease. From her bed she took control of all sorts of things and her older father took care of her. I had visited them for years already, on average every month, sometimes every week. By pulling out all the stops, by medication, oxygen and good nursing through the homecare, we did everything to make her life bearable. During one of those visits we had - as is obvious - a conversation about life after death. And how good it was to do that. For she lived continuously in the shadow of dying. Each week there could be a complication and it could be her last week. In a long conversation together with her father we talked about this, and he told how disappointed he was in the church.

That year my patient was admitted to hospital, and she would not come home any more. An abrupt end to a long relationship with many precarious moments. Her father did not live long afterwards either. A man with humour and a cheerfulness which was contagious, had actually lost his desire to live. In the years which followed, I forgot him. There were so many others and you constantly take leave of people whom you got to know.

Three years later I had to give a sermon in the 450 year old English church in Scheveningen. In that message I very much wanted to tell something about how God longs for us as a Father. When I prepared myself for it, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the awareness of God's presence. And as so often, I could suddenly see into the world of heaven above us. There I saw two people standing close to each other, a man and a young woman. They were standing in an environment which was full with a golden light. Then at once I remembered who they were: the father and his daughter. What a surprise to be allowed to see that. What a wonderful realization that they were doing well. And that they were with Jesus in heaven, while down there on earth I did not yet know about that. Me and my house. Me and my family. Me and my sweet patients.

Some of my best doctor-patient relations are with people who have been marked by life, disappointed in people, harmed by drugs and drink, or have made a suicide attempt with medicines. People who never go to church, who have often lost friends. People who have ended up alone after a life with personal failures, dismissal, divorce etc.

Hope for Everyone

Hopelessness enters my consulting room, day after day. However, in our house and in each patient contact there streams a gratifying counter-flow. Hope in spite of everything. A new beginning in spite of misfortune, an unexpected provision, in spite of poverty. A wonder of healing, in spite of bad news. And hope which, if it finds a place with another person, also makes room again to believe.

That it may be better, that tomorrow will be better. That a future, a plan, a meaningful life with new chances is lying in front of you. And a Father in heaven who loves you and who is waiting for you, someday to give you a house with Him in heaven. I have personally prayed with so many of them, that I do not even remember with whom. Sometimes people do remind me that that happened ten or twenty years ago.

The first prayer said in a life which has lost prospect, is like a light which you switch on in a dark room. It changes the whole perspective. At once you get an insight into what you should do to change your life, and you get energy again to get going.

Inner anchorage

When you are healthy and of clear mind, you can find an anchorage for your faith by reading a message, or studying a text from the Bible. This is difficult when you are ill or weak, or when the lamp of life is slowly extinguishing. Or when you live more or less on an island because of old age and deterioration of your eyes and hearing. As a Christian doctor I have discovered that it is easier then when another person stands up for you.

It was in the year 2012 that I had a personal meeting with Jesus again. I knelt down before Him and saw in front of me a current of water which flowed on golden stones. Jesus gave me the task to lead a life of prayer and intercession for others. Not in the foreground, but out of sight. And thus a new task began, which often took place in the early morning or the evening.

One of the things I learned at that time, was to make a memorial at places where I was abroad, often in a remote area, a village, a stretch of desert. A sign which would remind me and would help me when I would pray at home for the people I knew over there. In the Bible we read a lot about this kind of memorials, among other things in the life of Abraham, who at each special event with God erected something like that and sometimes even gave a name to it.

Jesus Himself also gave such a memorial to us before He died on the cross. Worldwide Christians break bread and drink a sip of wine in a common moment of commemoration of what Jesus did. Christians throughout all churches and ages have discovered what a therapeutic and healing effect it has, to do this together with others. A friend of mine was a priest and one day came to me. I asked him to do this ceremony, this drinking of wine and eating of bread together. Thus we did together and I felt strengthened within. On our journeys with teams, often in circumstances which are not very easy, we often do that too. And we are strengthened by it and we receive courage again to believe.

If you are ill and read this booklet, I would like to ask you: would not you like to do this together with a believer? You can always ask a pastor of the hospital, or somebody of the pastoral team of the church. What a surprise would it be if you would at once be able to draw

from a power of healing which emanates from a commemoration which Jesus Himself initiated.

Apart from this God-initiated way to receive a touch of God in a special manner (we call that a sacrament), there are also other ways to receive God's presence. For instance, I have often discovered that each page which I read in the Bible, contains a surprising touch with God's power. God will know a way to come close to you. A book, a song, a poem, and now and then also something which reminds you of a special moment when God was close to you. For instance, on the wall of one of the rooms in our house I hung a photo of a moment that I embrace a South African black woman and pray for her during a church service in that country. And sometimes you are surprised by a letter from somebody who received something good owing to what you did, whereas at that very moment you feel so bad. An intense moment. I also have a lot of photos of consultations and meetings with individual patients in all kinds of places in the world, taken in slums, simple huts and small churches where we had consulting hours.

Healing at the last moment

In the Bible are numerous examples how seriously ill people were healed by Jesus.

Jesus bestowed a large part of His public ministry on healing sick people. Inside and outside the church I myself have for dozens of years been involved in healing services for sick people, often with ministers and pastors of churches. Moreover, for ten years already I have given lectures for students at various universities about this theme. And I have given lessons about this subject at all kinds of conferences with students and pastors in various countries of the world.

What is the simplest guideline which you can follow if, besides the medicines and the treatments by the doctor, you want to ask God for help for your healing too?

The first thing which is of importance, is that you realize that God is a God who Himself wants healing. God made everything and is always busy bringing recovery. That so much goes wrong, that there is so much pain, violence, death, does not come from Him. It is a destruction which originated from what happened with this world spiritually (we call that 'sin').

Secondly it is important to know that there is a way to receive God, and that is Jesus. He is the Source of healing which comes from God.

Thirdly it is important to know that Jesus is God and human. He knows what you go through and what you feel.

Fourthly it is important to know that God has not changed. Jesus Christ is The Same, yesterday, today and forever. Just as Jesus healed the hundreds around him from all kinds of diseases, so can and will He do that to you too.

What is the best thing to do, is to ask Jesus to come into your life and entrust all you have to Him. Then it is also possible to ask Him for healing. For healing you need faith. That is the trust that God knows your situation, hears your question in prayer, and has the best of intentions towards you.

Prayer:

'Lord God, at this moment I come to You in prayer. I want to say that I believe in You, and entrust my life to Your hand. I know that my life was full of wrong things. But I believe that Jesus died for me on the cross, so that I may live. Please will you forgive all my faults and sins? I too forgive everyone who owes me something. From this moment on I call You my Lord and Saviour. Thank You that You have prepared a place in heaven for me too. Amen!'

Prayer for healing:

'Lord God, I entrust my life and my situation to You. I ask You to come into my life. I open my heart for You. Thank You that You forgive all my sins. I also ask you to come into my situation (mention your disease or whatever problematic situation you may have). Please will You come into my life as Healer too? Thank You that You say in the Bible that You are a God who listens to prayer. Amen!'

You may also ask somebody to come, celebrate the Eucharist with you, and pray for your healing.

The importance of the church

Although the most important thing is, that you meet Jesus personally - and you can pray each moment of the day, which means that He is with you - it is important to seek the support of other believers.

Faith is like a burning piece of coal. As long as it remains in the middle of the fire, it remains hot and burning, but if you take it away and put it separate from the other coals, it extinguishes slowly. If after that you put it against the fire again, the flame starts burning again. Try to see which church in your surroundings matches best with you. Here and there you might walk in and taste the atmosphere. There are also many circles in which people come together at home. In care homes there is often an evening dedicated to a moment of meeting under the leadership of a pastoral worker. Also on radio and television it is possible to follow meetings. All this is for the strengthening of your faith and edifies you in it. But also broadcasts of Christian television or radio can be a great blessing.

Epilogue

Several patients of mine told me about their - what is generally called - near-death-experiences. Dramatic events and experiences which they would never forget. I rather like the word 'Near-Home-Experience'. When I had just written this booklet, something happened to me which appeared so appropriate, that I added it in an epilogue. Especially at the insistence of patients who sympathized very much.

Whether you are old or young (for that matter, what is 'old') it might just happen that all at once you make the transition to the life hereafter. For this moment let us assume that there is indeed a 'hereafter'. On Christmas eve 2014 I was comfortably sitting by the fireplace and thought to go quickly up and down to the midnight service by bike, in a church about ten minutes from our house. On my way there, while I was cycling in rough weather with almost nobody on the street, I got a heart attack. I was more or less brought to a halt by a fierce chest pain, just while I passed the entrance of the churchyard. I remember that I found that very strange, but since I had no telephone with me and nobody was on the street, I kept on walking to the first aid post of the nearest hospital. On arrival there it soon appeared that I had a heart attack, and I could call my wife, who supposed that I was sitting in a beautiful midnight service. Dottering on Christmas Day, and after that a complication during which you lose conscience and you wonder, just having regained consciousness, what indeed is the value of faith when something like this happens to you.

The nursing was fantastic, that should be said, but you yourself are on your own to get over what has happened to you. One thing is clear though, for a while you will have to place your work and also your medical mission work into another context. Plans become uncertain, actually planning is not relevant. Recovery first. Not really something which calms you down. All of us are more or less able to accept change, but it takes time. And I had not yet had that time.

Now, what makes the difference when something like that happens to you. Is it really true that a negative event will not become really negative until you also see it like that yourself? Or can our thinking make a difference there?

I decided, while I was lying there, to ask myself the question which would change everything: 'what is the value of your faith?' Where is the peace and quiet you always speak about? While these thoughts occurred to me, help came from a side which I had not expected. What is more, I had been totally unaware of God's presence. In the Bible I read: God is a Helper, Great of Power. But I had often neglected that promise. A fact was that I was helped to see something which would calm me completely down and would also give answers to the question 'what next?'

In my day dream - or was it a vision of the spiritual reality - I looked out on an ocean as smooth as glass, a beautiful and restful picture. At the upper left of me an angel was standing guard. Therefore I could see that it was an experience which came from a good quarter. The next thing I remember was that I was sailing in an open boat on this beautiful sea. And now it comes: my companions on this boat were two famous writers. Whose books had played an essential role in my life. What a surprise to be on that water with them of all people. After some time we came ashore near a sand beach. On the beach a long table had been laid for a meal. I had to think of the fact which Jesus tells us, that He prepares a place for us and invites us at His meal.

Opposite me at the table was sitting a colleague doctor from the town where I work.

How familiar it was all. So special and at the same time so very appropriate, nothing of what I saw there was unrelated to what or who I really was. The sea had always had my passion, and that picture of that meal was the simplest thing I could imagine.

The quiet and the relaxation of that experience helped me through those stressful days. 'Almost home' is not so bad at all, and many a time I have thought ... if only my time was due ... but I will not tell my family ... it has made me realize how good it is to write, and also that there is time for everything. When you are physically no longer able to run from pillar to post, you do good to put your thoughts on paper.

Therefore this booklet is a last letter to my patients, for some a last prescription and for others a farewell. I hope that many of the people whom I have known for years, will find the time to read it through. And that they will keep the memory. Behind a normal life and a medical practice there is more than you think!

Peter Reis, November 2015



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