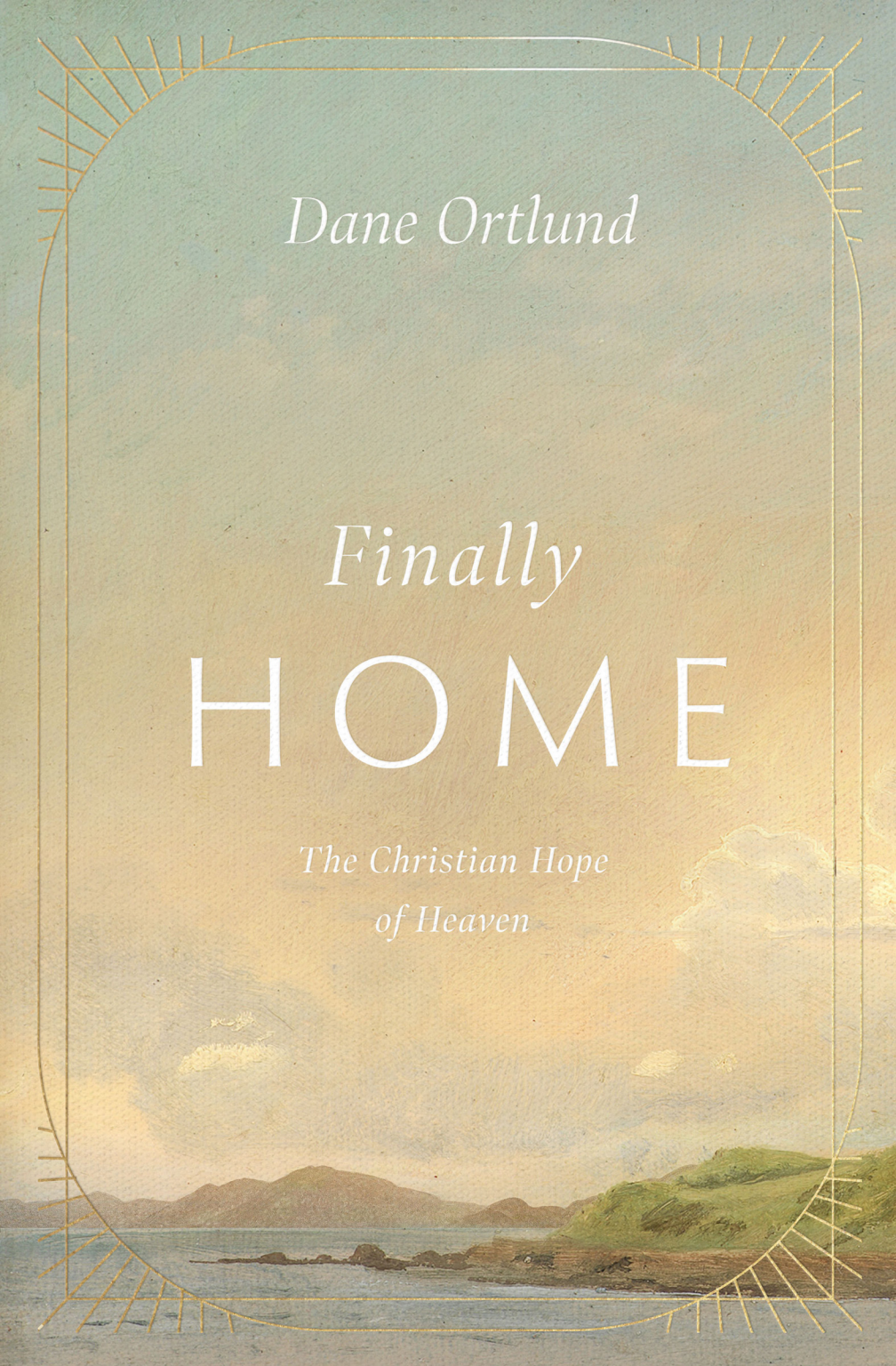


Dane Ortlund

Finally
H O M E

*The Christian Hope
of Heaven*



“The careful, thoughtful, and faithful life of the individual who has rooted his or her identity in Christ can be difficult. We live in the world but are not of it, and yet this world matters. Dane Ortlund carefully navigates the beauty of a life that desires eternity in the next while living a worthwhile life in the here and now. C. S. Lewis once wrote that if we find in ourselves a desire that no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world. Ortlund seems to have taken that sentiment and drawn a roadmap for valuing the world we find ourselves in while properly calibrating for the world to come.”

Wesley Huff, historian; Vice President, Apologetics Canada

“Dane Ortlund’s book has swept my heart up and away to the vestibule of heaven. He is saying things I’ve never heard before and has given me so much to ask God about. Plus, his writing is so gentle and poetic, and each page urges me to turn to the next.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Founder and CEO, Joni and Friends

“When Dane Ortlund writes, our sight grows sharper for the beauty of Christ. The excellencies of his worth are displayed concretely, viewed more clearly, felt more exquisitely. In *Finally Home*, Dane helps us see the next life as more than relief from suffering, the end of sin, or even our reunion with those we have lost. Life after death is about a person—Christ himself—overflowing with irrepressible joy to welcome us to an eternity of exploring grace. Let this book stir your longings for the happiness of that world. I needed that hope kindled again. Maybe you do too.”

Dave Harvey, President, Great Commission Collective; author, *The Plurality Principle*; *The Clay Pot Conspiracy*; and *When Sinners Say I Do*

“In *Finally Home*, Dane Ortlund has given me a deeply personal gift, one that has stirred my longing for heaven with fresh clarity and hope. At seventy-eight, I feel the nearness of stepping from death to life, and this book has made that transition even more eagerly anticipated. Rather than filling a book with his own imagination of heaven, Dane handles Scripture with precision, like a treasure hunter uncovering gems that illuminate eternity with Jesus. Now when I experience joy, my laughter will be even deeper because of how heaven will exponentially expand joy in eternity. I will return to this book again and again with journal, Bible, and pen in hand, especially in those times when this broken world and my aging body remind me that I don’t belong here; I am on my way home. This is a book that turns our homesickness in the right direction, reminding us that our tears here will give way to joy there and that in Christ, all our pain is preparing us for glory. It will be worth it all.”

Sharon Betters, Director of Resource Development, MARKINC Ministries; coauthor, *Aging with Grace*

“Some books about heaven explain; others intrigue. Rare is the book that induces a hunger for heaven—a real readiness to go home. Dane has given us such a book. In *Finally Home*, we have been gifted a book about heaven with writing worthy of its subject matter: beautiful poetry in prose, captivating and soul-stirring imagery, and pastoral warmth in application. It is truly my pleasure to commend this book to you.”

Sean DeMars, Pastor, Glory Community Church; host, *Room for Nuance* podcast

“Writing about heaven is different from writing about other Christian doctrines. Some books on the new heavens and the new earth are so imaginative and speculative that they become untethered from biblical reality. Others are not imaginative enough; they make lots of accurate statements but lack the fusion of poetry, consolation, metaphor, wonder, and joy that characterize the apostles and prophets. *Finally Home*, more than any other modern book I have read on the topic, gets the balance just right. It is clear, solid, robust, and orthodox, but it is also soaring, evocative, comforting, and beautiful. It will be my go-to book on heaven to recommend from now on.”

Andrew Wilson, *Christianity Today*

Finally Home

Finally Home

The Christian Hope of Heaven

Dane Ortlund

 **CROSSWAY®**
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Finally Home: The Christian Hope of Heaven

© 2026 by Dane C. Ortlund

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

Cover image: Rawpixel

First printing 2026

Printed in China

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-9125-9

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-9127-3

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-9126-6

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ortlund, Dane Calvin author

Title: Finally home : the Christian hope of heaven / Dane C. Ortlund.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2026 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2026001505 (print) | LCCN 2026001506 (ebook) | ISBNc9781433591259

(hardcover) | ISBN 9781433591266 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433591273 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Heaven—Christianity | Future life—Christianity

Classification: LCC BT846.3 .O78 2026 (print) | LCC BT846.3 (ebook)

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026001505>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2026001506>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

RRD	35	34	33	32	31	30	29	28	27	26				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

*Affectionately dedicated to my father-in-law,
Don Steele,
a godly saint who made this world a brighter place,
and was released to heaven during the writing of this book*

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed, and then cried: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this."

C. S. LEWIS
The Last Battle

Contents

Introduction	<i>1</i>
1 Fleeting	<i>3</i>
2 Better by Far	<i>11</i>
3 Him	<i>21</i>
4 The House of the Lord	<i>31</i>
5 Clean	<i>43</i>
6 Eternal Kindness	<i>53</i>
7 Sorrow and Sighing Shall Flee Away	<i>63</i>
8 Eden Restored	<i>77</i>
9 Physically Immortalized	<i>93</i>
10 Reversal	<i>107</i>
11 I Go to Prepare a Place for You	<i>121</i>
12 Transposition	<i>129</i>
13 Clothed in Glory	<i>137</i>
14 Judging the Angels	<i>151</i>
15 All Wrongs Righted	<i>161</i>
16 A World of Love	<i>171</i>
17 Loved Ones?	<i>183</i>

18 Calmed 193

19 Face to Face 203

20 Forever 217

Epilogue: Seated in Heaven—Now 227

Afterword 233

Acknowledgments 237

General Index 239

Scripture Index 245

Introduction

FOR ANYONE NOT UNITED to Jesus Christ, this life is the best it will ever get. For anyone united to Jesus Christ, this life is the worst it will ever get.

One day soon—sooner than we realize—we will wake from the bad dream of this life clean and radiant and bright with energy. Our hearts will collapse into calm, and we will realize with a frightful shock that all our life long the Lord of heaven has been eagerly preparing to walk us through the wardrobe door into Narnia.

That flood of tears, tears of relief, will reflect only the shimmering surface of all our latent longings gathered up and quenched in immediate and endless calm.

Built on the surprising claims of Scripture, and with help from the great thinkers of the past, this book reflects on the future inexorably awaiting believers in Jesus Christ.

In recent years as I have lived and fathered and pastored and cut my grass and paid my taxes and cried my tears, I have increasingly realized how hollow the future life is to me. I have drawn strength from it only weakly. In the darkness of this brief life, heaven has been a distant star, not a blazing sun. Speaking with other

believers, I've heard the same from them—sometimes with misapprehensions of what our final future, according to Scripture, is.

How many of us view the couple of decades of retirement as our primary opportunity to enjoy ourselves, surrounded by boring work beforehand and boring heaven after? Like a child finishing his morning chores and finally able to play in his sandbox, disappointed when his mother calls him as the family leaves for the beach, a place he's never been and one he can't imagine being more enjoyable than the backyard sandbox?

So I returned to the great theologians and poets of the past who wrote with their feet on earth and their minds in heaven—Augustine and Aquinas and Dante and Goodwin and Milton and Baxter and Edwards and Chesterton and Lewis and others. And wonder at what awaits imminently, and a corresponding sense of our strange neglect of it, rose higher than ever. The surprise as I studied was not the church's lack of theological clarity on and personal fortification from the biblical teaching on heaven. The surprise was my own lack of theological clarity on and personal fortification from the biblical teaching on heaven.

So I opened my laptop and my Bible and found myself wondering my way into a soul-tranquility I had never found, through reflecting unhurriedly on that eternal celestial nectar just around the next bend in the road. The following pages are my attempt, futile though it has felt, to put words to reality. Perhaps they would be an encouragement to you.

Even in the midst of your own heartache and loss. Especially in the midst of your own heartache and loss.

You don't lament the loss of a sandbox on your way to the beach.

Fleeting

Let me know how fleeting I am!

PSALM 39:4

A FRIEND IS INHERITING a vast fortune of billions at the end of the week. You call to congratulate him. He begins complaining of this week's tight budget.

What are you thinking?

Don't you realize what's just around the next bend in the road?

This is a book on heaven. The first thing to get clear, however, is not what heaven will be like, but how soon we'll be there. As we ponder the afterlife, we are not considering a distant reality. We're reflecting together on what is just around the next bend in the road. A reflection that makes every earthly trouble endurable.

I listened recently to an interview of a wise old pastor dying of cancer. One comment caught me off guard. He mentioned that until receiving a diagnosis of a very aggressive and terminal form of cancer, he didn't believe he was going to die.

He knew it at one level, as we all do. But it was not real to him. Isn't that all of us? Given a quiz with the question "Will you die one day?" we check the right box. But asked the question "Are you stronger and brighter right now, in light of your impending release to heaven?" we would be hard-pressed to provide a substantive answer.

A strange mechanism within resists our mortality. Without doing so self-consciously, we turn a deaf ear to it. Beneath our theoretical belief about our certain death lies a deep resistance that makes it hard for even the wisest Christians to fully believe. Perhaps it is the very fact that we were originally made to live forever that makes our coming demise seem so unreal. This is why Psalm 39:4 is a prayer request, not a declaration of something attained.

O LORD, make me know my end
 and what is the measure of my days;
 let me know how fleeting I am!
 Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
 and my lifetime is as nothing before you. (Ps. 39:4–5)

Without divine help, we live unwittingly in a death-denying stupor that the world all around us is reinforcing. Meditating on heaven is swimming upstream against all the currents around us. The advertising industry in which we're all immersed is spending billions each year to draw our hearts downward to the things of earth. After years and then decades of living thus hypnotized, we hardly feel the hypnosis. All we know is that this life feels long and real, and heaven like a distant consolation.

And so Scripture coaches us into sanity: “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14). That word “mist” occurs just one other time in the New Testament, there speaking of a “vapor” of smoke (Acts 2:19). A mist, a vapor. Here for a moment, then quickly melting away. Nonsubstantial. Ungrabbable. Elusive.

It is this life that is small. Heaven is not an endnote to the novel of this life. Heaven is the novel of which this life is page 1.

The notion of our life as a mist or vapor is given an entire book of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *hebel* occurs thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes, an average of about three times per page in my copy of the Bible. Some translations render it “vanity,” others “meaninglessness” or “futility.” The word literally means “vapor” or “smoke,” something you can’t grab onto, here momentarily, then slipping through our fingers. “*Hebel* of *hebel*. . . All is *hebel*!” (Eccl. 1:2).

The point of Ecclesiastes is that if you try to plant your hopes in the good things of this life, your heart will be broken. But this is the perverse tendency each of us finds our wandering heart pursuing. Ecclesiastes is in the Bible to expose the way our heart tries to turn this life into the next one. But this life is given to prepare us for the next one, not to substitute for the next one. How absurd to expect packing for the vacation to deliver the joys of sitting on the beach. We’re just getting ready. The real thing is coming, but not here yet. But you can’t enjoy your vacation if you haven’t thoughtfully packed.

And so the Sage of Ecclesiastes exposes the fraudulence of what we are doing when we expect the gifts to be the Giver. Picture the absurdity of running around outside on a windy day, hungry, trying to satisfy one's hunger by gulping down the wind. That's what Ecclesiastes says we're doing when we treat this brief life as providing the joy only the next eternal life can: Planting our hopes on anything in this life is "a striving after wind"—or, as the phrase might be translated, a "feeding upon the wind" (Eccl. 1:14).

This life is a hotel, not a home. Why would any of us, staying one night in a hotel, get up early in the morning to plant flowers in the garden? Yet that is what we who plant our hopes in this life are doing.

Life in this fallen world has its pleasures. They are to be enjoyed wholeheartedly. But they are signs pointing forward, not destinations.

The pleasures of life point forward to eternity, but the pains of life do so even more. The pleasures of life make it harder to long for heaven, but the pains of life make it easier. In both cases we say to the Lord, "Let me know how fleeting I am!" (Ps. 39:4).

How do the pains of life make it easier to relish heaven? The same way the prodigal's misery made him long for home (Luke 15:14–19). The principle is shot through all of life. The teenager who feels the pain of parental rejection will long to leave the house. The employee's harsh work culture creates longing for a new job. Sickness longs for health, loneliness for a friend. Augustine makes the point with his usual elegance, speaking of the "blissful

vision reserved for us” in heaven: “It is for this that our hearts are being trained in all the hardships and trials of this life. Do not feel surprise at being schooled amid toil: you are being schooled for a wondrous destiny.”¹

With every earthly satisfaction, the tentacles of our hearts latch more firmly onto this life for joy. We are tricked into earthly-mindedness, and our hearts are broken. With every earthly pain, the tentacles recoil, detaching, looking for a new object. We are anguished into heavenly-mindedness, and our hearts are fulfilled. The pleasures tempt us to think life is longer than it is, but the pains wake us up to how short life is and, happily, how long heaven is.

And so we go through life fighting to remember that the troubles of this vaporous existence are like the money troubles of a man inheriting a vast fortune at the end of the week.

We have a birthday. We have a deathday. We know our birthday. We do not know our deathday. But it is just as fixed.

In your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them. (Ps. 139:16)

And it is not morbid but healthy to live mindful of the day of our death. Indeed, past generations of faithful Christians have

1 Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 30–37*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Walter J. Burghardt, trans. Scholastica Hebgin and Felicitas Corrigan, *Ancient Christian Writers* 30 (Longmans, Green, 1961), 275.

viewed our deathday as a new birthday, a natal dawning into the presence of Christ.² And so a healthy Christian regularly ponders death's inexorable approach. The old poet George Herbert wisely pictures our earthly life as a quickly draining hourglass:

Flesh is but the glass which holds the dust
That measures all our time.³

A Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and so we do well to care for it (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Our bodies matter—they are inherently good—and one day God will raise them invincible. But from about age thirty on, in this sin-ravaged life, they are powering down. We might buy a new car every ten years or so, but we can't do that with our lungs or liver. We get only one body, and it is dying. We call it "aging," but that's a nice word for dying. A wine "ages" with time; humans shut down with time. We may, by staying active and eating right, fend off the sickle a bit. But only two humans, Enoch and Elijah, sidestepped death (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11; see also Heb. 11:5), and you or I are not likely to be the third. "No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death" (Eccl. 8:8).

And our deathday may be far nearer than we expect. Yes, we live in the age of modern medicine. Most of us would have died by now if we had been born into a pre-antibiotic age. But our modern time has also invented new ways for us to be given a

2 E.g., Thomas Brooks, *Apples of Gold*, in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. A. B. Grosart (Banner of Truth, 1980), 1:196.

3 George Herbert, "Church Monuments," in *The Best Poems of the English Language: From Chaucer Through Robert Frost*, ed. Harold Bloom (Harper Perennial, 2007), 187.

premature funeral—cars that crash, planes that go down, junk food that rots us from the inside out, military weaponry that incinerates on the spot.

Whether we live in a predigital time or not, life is precarious. One minute we're eating lunch alone, two minutes later we're standing before God, a green grape neatly lodged in the windpipe of the body we just left behind. This life is fleeting, and it is fleeting with a terrifying unpredictability so long as we are not regularly bathing our hearts in the imminence of heaven. "What a short moment it is between us and our rest," wrote Baxter. "What a small step it is from here to eternity."⁴

And so we live accordingly.

What if we knew we were in our last six months of life? That would be wonderfully clarifying. Our true priorities would click into place. When the windshield of your vehicle is dirty, it's easy to become distracted by the bugs and smudges, dangerously losing perspective on the road ahead. To shift out of earthly-minded fixations and to lift our minds to heaven is to shift our gaze from the windshield of life to see the road ahead—which was what the windshield was there to help us do all along.

If we were forced to face our mortality through a medical diagnosis of some kind, our heart's concerns would quickly sort themselves out. We would love others well. We would be more generous with our resources than ever; we're about to leave this life, after all.

4 Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, ed. Tim Cooper (Crossway, 2022), 113.

And we would enjoy the sweetest communion with the triune God that we had ever known. His own divine face is just on the other side of the door, a door that is finally about to swing open. He to whom we have prayed and sung, he of whom we have spoken and read, is about to appear unavoidably before us. The smell is about to morph into taste, hearing into sight. The vapor is about to be replaced with solidity.

But whether we have six months or six decades of life left—a century or a second—there is no difference between the two compared to eternity. We may feel that we are suddenly being summoned to the king's throne room when we realize we're about to die. But our whole little life has been the summoning.

This life is fleeting. We are wise to know it, and to feel it. The rest of this book reflects on what awaits us just ahead, for the sake of our comfort and strengthening through this brief hotel of a life.

Home is coming.