



Chasing Heaven: What Dying Taught Me about Living

By Crystal McVea, Alex Tresniowski



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From the author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *Waking Up in Heaven*, comes an extraordinary story about Crystal McVea's personal transformation after visiting heaven and how readers can experience heaven themselves—and live a more meaningful life.

On December 10, 2009, Crystal McVea was being treated in a hospital for pancreatitis. Her heart stopped pumping for nine minutes before doctors managed to revive her. In those nine minutes, she went to heaven, stood with God, and was forever changed.

Ever since Crystal's incredible experience, her life has been profoundly different. She has become a brand new person in every conceivable way—heart, mind, soul, and spirit. By dying, Crystal learned how to live. Crystal realized that heaven is real and our true home, but we are still meant to have meaningful lives full of passion and purpose right here on earth. She believes we have to chase heaven while we are still alive and allow God to turn our lukewarm love into a firestorm of faith. *Chasing Heaven* is the story of how God called to Crystal, what He told her, and how she found a way to get closer to Him again here on earth.

Crystal assures us that we don't have to die and go to heaven in order to ignite our faith. We also don't have to abandon the lives we have in order to experience God and heaven. *Chasing Heaven* is about following the path to the Lord, and discovering your spiritual destiny.

The journey that followed Crystal's time in heaven has been difficult, complicated, and surprising—full of twists and turns, setbacks and triumphs, drama and comedy, and everything that makes life so messy and beautiful.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Chasing Heaven* is a true testament to how Crystal McVea took God's words 'Tell them what you can remember' and put them into action. Crystal's time in heaven gave her a clearer purpose for her life on earth. *Chasing Heaven* is a beautiful story of how our faith is ignited through God and how we all have the ability to change the lives of others here on earth." (Laura Schroff, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *An Invisible Thread* and *An Invisible Thread Christmas Story*)

"*Chasing Heaven* is a beautiful story of how our faith is ignited through God and how we all have the ability to change the lives of others here on earth." (—Laura Schroff, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *An Invisible Thread* and *An Invisible Thread Christmas Story*)

"This intriguing book shares story after story of where this event has sent Crystal and whom she has met along the way. It reminds us that 'God finds us worthy' and that if we will listen, He will put our faith in action." (CBA Retailers and Resources, May Issue)

About the Author

Crystal McVea

Crystal McVea is the author of *Waking Up in Heaven*. With a deep rooted passion for the needy and lost, Crystal speaks around the country bringing a message of hope and redemption. She is a schoolteacher and lives in Oklahoma with her husband Virgil, a US Army veteran, and their four children. To learn more, go to CrystalMcVea.com.

Alex Tresniowski

Alex Tresniowski is a former human-interest writer at *People* and the bestselling author of several books, most notably *The Vendetta*, which was purchased by Universal Studios and used as a basis for the movie *Public Enemies*. His other titles include *An Invisible Thread*, *Waking Up In Heaven*, and *The Light Between Us*.

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Chasing Heaven

Introduction



FIVE YEARS AFTER I DIED, I found myself standing on the filthy sidewalk of a desolate street in the worst part of town in the dead of night—on my way into a strip club.

"Hey, church ladies," an absolute giant of a man dressed in all black said to me and another woman as we

stepped out of a van in front of the club. “What you got for me tonight?”

While he spoke to us, he ran a metal detector up and down the legs of the men waiting to get into the club, checking them for guns and knives.

I looked down at the small paper bag in my shaking hands. It was filled with cookies. With a plastered-on smile and my heart pounding in my chest, I offered the bag to him.

“Ohhh, chocolate chip,” he said. “My favorite!”

Then he waved us inside.

As I walked through the front door, everything hit me all at once. The strong smell of smoke. The thumping, jarring music. The dollar bills and bottles of liquor on the tables. The men, young and old and in between, eager to spend their money. I swallowed hard.

This was no place I should ever have been.

I was a wife and a mother and a schoolteacher, and I lived in a small suburban town smack-dab in the middle of the country. Waiting for me back at home were my precious twins, Micah and Willow, not yet six years old. I also had two teenage children, who knew me as the woman who pestered them to clean up their rooms, not a woman who had to be searched for weapons by a bouncer.

So how in the world did I end up there?

I was there because, through tears of desperation one dark night, I called out to God.

“Break my heart for what breaks Yours,” I cried.

And God did.



My name is Crystal McVea and on December 10, 2009, I died.

While I was being treated in a hospital for pancreatitis, I went into respiratory arrest. My heart stopped pumping and I stopped breathing for nine minutes while a team of doctors performed CPR and managed to revive me.

And in those nine minutes, I went to the gates of heaven and I stood with God and I was forever changed. The story of those glorious nine minutes, and of the difficult, sinful, mixed-up life that led to them, is a story I told in my first book, *Waking Up in Heaven*. And since that book came out I’ve read thousands and thousands of letters from people who tell me all the ways they relate so deeply to my story. Not just the heaven stuff, but everything that came before it—the fears and the doubts and the bad decisions that defined who I was for my first thirty-three years on earth.

I’ve heard from teenagers who are lost, like I was, and single mothers who are struggling, like I did.

I’ve heard from women wrestling with the terrible consequences of abortion, same as I did and still do.

I've heard from women bound and broken by child abuse, same as I was for the longest time.

And I've heard from people who want to believe God is real but need more proof—just as I did before I went to heaven.

And what I want to tell these people—what I need to tell them—is that what happened to me after I came back from heaven was every bit as life-changing and miraculous as my trip to heaven was.

And best of all, it is something that can happen to them. To you.

Because ever since December 10, 2009, my life has been profoundly changed. I have been utterly and fundamentally transformed, straight down to the core of who I am. In every conceivable way—heart, mind, soul, and spirit—I am a brand-new person.

By dying, I learned how to live.

And now I know that while heaven is real and our true home and the place we all want to go to someday, we are meant to have meaningful lives full of passion and purpose in Christ right here, right now, this very moment.

We are meant to chase heaven while we're still here on earth.

So how, exactly, do we do that? What does chasing heaven mean?



For me, it meant going to a dark and dangerous strip club. Actually, not just one strip club. Sixteen strip clubs.

In one night.

Why?

The short answer is that, after I returned from heaven, I felt a great longing to go back—to find a way to be close to God again. I could never just return to the life I had, as beautiful as it was and as much as I loved it. I was different, and my life had to become different, too. Somehow, I had to find heaven again.

And so I started chasing heaven here on earth.

At first, though, I didn't really know what that meant. I didn't know how to change my life. I didn't know how to chase heaven. And so I did what we all do in moments of need—I prayed. I asked God to bring me closer to Him and to heaven.

“Use me, Lord,” I prayed. “Fill me with Your spirit. Mold my heart for Your will. Father, break my heart for what breaks Yours.”

And that's just what God did.

The story of Chasing Heaven is the story of how God called to me, what He told me, and how I found a way

to get closer to Him again.

Even if it meant looking for heaven in places that seemed more like hell.

The experience of dying and going to heaven taught me so many incredible lessons about earthly joy and faith and love. It taught me that the secret to achieving true grace on earth—to finding true peace and happiness—is rejecting a passive, lukewarm love for God and replacing it with a powerful, practical, and purposeful faith in His Word and His way. It is turning our faith from a few smoldering embers into a raging fire.

It is allowing our faith to be ignited.

Because the truth is all of us can have our faith ignited through God. This is a book for anyone who wants to feel the incredible strength and power of God's love in a very practical, purposeful way in their lives right now.

The message of this book is also that we don't have to die and go to heaven in order to change our lives and ignite our faith. We don't have to abandon the lives we have or empty our bank accounts or move to another country in order to get closer to God and to heaven. It is about each one of us finding a way, given our own lives and circumstances, to go where God calls us to go.



Now, it wasn't easy for me to step out of my safe suburban life and into some dark and desperate corners of the world. Some people might even say it was dumb or naive.

But after I got back from heaven I heard and heeded a call to go into the darkest places there are, so that God could use me to help spread the light of His love there. "And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed," God says in Isaiah 58:10, "then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday."

And when I went into these dark places, I wasn't alone. There was an army of others out there who were already spreading the light of God's love in the places where it is needed most.

It wasn't always a huge army—sometimes it was just a handful of other moms and wives and women just like me.

But it was an army nonetheless, because these people were fierce and fearless warriors for God. These people didn't all die and go to heaven and come back, like me—in fact, none of them did. And they don't all spread the light of God's love in the same way—some literally go into dark places; others comfort people who live within their own darkness.

But what they all have in common is a firestorm of faith.

They are all leading purposeful, ignited lives.

They are all finding a way to get closer to God here on earth.

And it is through them I discovered what it means to truly chase heaven.



Users Review

From reader reviews:

Belinda Timmer:

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