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00:00:02 **Nancy Guthrie:** I don't know anybody who suffers a significant loss that doesn't have to wrangle with the sovereignty of God at some point. I really did. And the truth is I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you today if I hadn't been forced to go on a search to understand the deeper things of God and what he's doing in the world and to find an answer to that question, why? That's one of the things that led me to really embrace Biblical Theology, because my search for why took me to Genesis 3:15.

00:00:35 **Narrator:** Five centuries ago in taverns and public houses across Europe, the masses would gather for discussion and debate over the latest ideas sweeping the land. From one such meeting place, a small Cambridge inn called the White Horse, the Reformation came to the English speaking world. Carrying on the tradition, welcome to the *White Horse Inn*.

00:01:01 **Michael Horton:** Hello and welcome to another edition of the *White Horse Inn*, as we're wrapping up our series on Heaven. And joining me for this broadcast is our good friend, Nancy Guthrie. She's the author of a series of books that we heartily recommend, titled *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament*. For this program though, we're going to be talking with her about a brand new book she's written entitled *What Grieving People Wish You Knew about What Really Helps and What Really Hurts*. Nancy, as always, thanks so much for being with us.

00:01:30 **Nancy Guthrie:** Thank you, Mike. My privilege.

00:01:32 **Michael Horton:** So, Nancy, you're not a dispassionate observer to this issue but you're intimately connected to this topic of grief as much as you are an expert on *Finding Christ in the Old Testament*. You're certainly an expert on the topic of suffering. So, when it comes to being on the receiving end of those who desire to offer you comfort in your time of loss, at some point you discovered that a lot of things people say and may be well intended, many of those things don't really help.

00:02:06 **Nancy Guthrie:** I have to say that when people say I'm an expert on suffering, I feel a little uncomfortable with that.

00:02:12 **Michael Horton:** Another thing that people shouldn't say...

00:02:13 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, only because, you know, I interact with so many suffering people because I have written about it and I think people look at me and – my husband David and I have lost two our children and I think a lot of people think about losing a child is the worst thing you can imagine. It's a thing that lots of us fear. But because I interact with so many people, people come and tell me their stories and as I consider the depths of their loses, the ongoing nature, the complicated nature of the deep hurts of people, I don't see myself as an expert at all but I –

00:02:52 **Michael Horton:** And nobody wants to be a part of this club, right?

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00:02:54 **Nancy Guthrie:** No, that's for sure. So I would say I've tasted it. And I would also say in regard to suffering and loss, I've gone to the scriptures to try to make sense of it for myself and other people. So if that gives me a little bit of expertise and then that's good...

00:03:10 **Michael Horton:** You think that it's hard not only because even if people have suffered, when they're looking at your situation, they're on the outside looking in. Even if they've suffered in different ways, they haven't suffered in this way. So everyone is an outsider to each other's suffering.

00:03:26 **Nancy Guthrie:** So people are really trying to do the best they can. Here's what David and I have come up with in terms of what happens with people. So, they hear about whatever your situation is, maybe it's your divorce, maybe it's a terminal diagnosis, maybe it's a death of someone, right? They start – their brains work like a computer. It's on a search for a match. Because what they want to do is they want to express, I get this, I know something about this, and I care about this, right? Then something comes up, ding, ding, ding, there's a match, if I know someone who had this happen. And so, what they often tend to do is start telling you the story about somebody else they know, you know, whose child died or somebody else who –

00:04:08 **Michael Horton:** Which is really what you need. You need to sympathize right at the moment. You're supposed to kind of get sympathy.

00:04:15 **Nancy Guthrie:** The thing is when you are filled with so much anxiety, you don't have room for anybody else's story. So, it's just natural that your brain is going to that surge and, ding, a match comes up.

00:04:27 **Michael Horton:** I know I've done it.

00:04:27 **Nancy Guthrie:** I have too, but what I tell people is when the match comes up, don't say it. I mean, it's really hard not to, but to ask meaningful questions. So, a question we tend to ask people in the midst of something like this – and once again, I've done this too. If I did it recently, I'd be embarrassed because I recently did this. And once again, it's coming from a good motive. You go up to someone who's working through something and say, "How are you?" Well, that seems kind but what people need to understand is when you're going through grief and someone says, "How are you?" it feels like a burden, like you have to give a report and that what they really want to hear is, "I'm better than I was last time you talked to me." And the thing is maybe you're not. And it can be really uncomfortable to say, "I'm crying all the time, I don't know how to stop," or "I think it's getting worse and not better," or "I'm filled with fear about the future." So, nobody wants to say that because they know you don't really want to hear that and the conversation is going to get really weird. So, rather than asking a question like, "How are you?" I suggest to people, for example, when you come upon someone you know who has had a loss, and it doesn't just have to be a recent loss. We kind of generally around people think after a month or so, maybe we shouldn't ask about it, but the thing is everybody stops asking about it. And grieving people, you know, six months later, a year later, two years later, they're thinking everybody's forgotten, nobody ever brings it up anymore. So to go up to

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that person and rather than saying, "How are you?" maybe you say, elongate that a bit and say, "What's your grief like these days?" Or maybe it's a question like, "Are there particular times of the day or the week that you really miss Joseph?" and you see what I did there, I used the person's name. That's another really important thing to do when you're talking to someone who's grieving.

00:06:32 **Michael Horton:** I do remember his name.

00:06:34 **Nancy Guthrie:** And keep saying that person's name, the one who died. I mean, think about it, if you've got someone in your house and you're saying, "Hey, Joe, it's time for breakfast!" that you're hearing this person's name all the time. And then not only is the person gone, everybody feels awkward saying his name.

00:06:51 **Michael Horton:** Almost as if he didn't live, didn't exist.

00:06:52 **Nancy Guthrie:** Yeah. And this is a person you love. And so, for someone to come up to you and say, "You know what, we went out for barbeque last week and I just remember when we used to go to that barbeque place and Sam loved to go there with us. Remember how we'd always get the –" So, do you know how much better that is than "How are you?" It says you're not the only person who's missing him and you're not the only person who's thinking about him. I'm thinking about him. Now here's a thing, Mike. I think one reason we don't tend to do that with people we know who had a loss, is we think to ourselves, we look over, we see that person, and maybe they're smiling that day and so we think to ourselves, you know what, I think he or she is having a good day and I don't want to bring them down. If I bring this up, maybe that's just going to ruin their day. And so, since they seem happy today, I'm not going to bring it up. That is a very wrong assumption.

I mean, when someone has the courage, and it takes courage and compassion, it takes getting out of ourselves, to approach you, maybe it does seem like a good day and just say, "You know, I've been thinking about Pam so much this last couple of weeks and I drive by your house and I wonder what it's like for you to be there alone. I'm just wondering what that's like for you these days." And then maybe that person begins to weep a little bit and you think, "I have blown it. I shouldn't have brought it up. They were having a good day." Wrong. What you've done, all of that sorrow is inside and what you've done is you've been a safe person to be able to release some of that deep sorrow that's inside, begging to be released and need to come out. You've actually given them a great gift by being willing to enter into their sorrow and just ask about it.

00:08:48 **Michael Horton:** What do you do with some though on the other extreme who is not very expressive? And it could just be that they have a kind of non-expressive personality. They don't wear their heart on their sleeve or they may actually feel like they are getting over it, whatever it is. Do you think sometimes we make people feel guilty for not grieving?

00:09:14 **Nancy Guthrie:** For getting better?

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00:09:14 **Michael Horton:** Yeah.

00:09:15 **Nancy Guthrie:** For experiencing healing?

00:09:16 **Michael Horton:** Yeah.

00:09:17 **Nancy Guthrie:** I think we can. Sometimes we can impose on other people that they grieve in the way we think they ought to or in the timing we think they are too, whether that's really short or really long.

00:09:28 **Michael Horton:** Because it seems like it used to be. That was spiritual, to get over it quickly. That was pious and now it seems to be the reverse, at least in my experience. It seems to be the reverse, where if you are stoic, that's unspiritual. You've got to constantly be emoting.

00:09:46 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, certainly all people are different and there is no right way. I know at our retreats for grieving couples that we call respite retreats, one thing we talk about at one point is in the deep brokenness of losing a child, you sometimes begin to think, "I'm going to be broken forever," and one of the really hard things about grief – and I can speak to this from being a mom of a child. But I think it's broader than just losing a child, is to begin to feel better and not have grief dominate your life can feel like a betrayal to that person. And so, here you are as a parent or a spouse and you're feeling like I don't want the world to forget that this person was here, otherwise their memory is going to be erased. And so, if I'm the one who's not bringing it up and I'm not talking about it, that can feel like an incredible betrayal. And so what I often say to grieving people is your love for the person who has died is not defined by your ongoing misery. Your love for the person whose died is not defined by your ongoing misery. And when I say that to someone who is caught in that sense of feeling like they're betraying the person whose died, it's just like some shackles fall off.

00:11:24 **Michael Horton:** Let me ask a couple of questions about the sayings that people offer that you tackle in the book. "How Are You?" is the first one. We've covered that. "I guess God just needed another angel in Heaven." I know, I've heard it for – how do you answer that one?

00:11:43 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, that one, sometimes I've actually said, you know what? He just has all the angels he needs and my child didn't become an angel. People don't become angels.

00:11:56 **Michael Horton:** So a *genus species* conversation.

00:11:59 **Nancy Guthrie:** They are their own created order, right. Yeah, you know, that's when you hardly know where to start with and if somebody says, "You know what? I'd probably just let that one go. They're just trying to come up with something to say to fill

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the awkwardness." I'd take a deep breath and let that one go. But to all those who are listening, don't say it. It's not helpful. It's not comforting.

00:12:23 **Michael Horton:** Here's one that we do hear a lot more than that one. "It must have been God's will."

00:12:30 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, you and I know, Mike, that term God's will, it's complicated. It's weighted. And who in that moment wants to have a big, heavy theological discussion. And I think that's why we don't say that to grieving people. For one thing, we always have to think about – and this is true in all communication, in all issues, we have to think about not only what we're saying, but how the other person hears it. So let say you're talking to someone whose loved one's committed suicide? Do you say it must have been God's will? That's not comforting, you know? That creates all kinds of questions. And so the ways some people hear those things was, you know, "God wanted my mom to die in a car accident?"

00:13:14 **Michael Horton:** It sounds like God's direct intervention, equivalent to God intervening to heal someone. God intervened in history to directly cause someone to die or to divorce a spouse or directly caused one of these horrible events.

00:13:35 **Nancy Guthrie:** But there's a big difference, Mike, between you're in a conversation and you drop a line like it must be God's will. There's a big difference between that and being a friend who comes alongside a grieving person and is willing and equipped to dive into the scripture, maybe read some good books together, to try to search out to understand God's sovereignty over suffering in life, to understand the causes and the secondary causes – there, we thrown in a theological term in some ways, to try to begin to understand what he is doing in the world. That's very different, come alongside be willing to dig in, have a deeper conversation. You may not be the person that person's comfortable doing that with.

00:14:32 **Michael Horton:** It might not be the time.

00:14:33 **Nancy Guthrie:** Or it might not be time, they might not be ready yet. Hopefully they will. I don't know anybody who suffers a significant loss that doesn't have to wrangle with the sovereignty of God at some point. I really did. And the truth is that was one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life. I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you today if I hadn't been forced to go on a search to understand the deeper things of God and what he's doing in the world and find an answer to that question, why? Because it was there. And not just why, but why again. And, you know, that's one of the things that led me to really embrace biblical theology because my search for why took me to Genesis 3:15, which I had never understood as being all that significant in the Bible before. But to understand the brokenness that came into the world in Genesis 3 and not just that, but the hope that was offered, the plan being enacted to one day eradicate the kind of brokenness in the world that causes natural disasters and accidents and defective gene traits. And ultimately if people ask me and David, "Why have you had two children who have been born with a genetic disorder?" we would say, "Well, the curse that infected the world of sin

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has infected even our genetic code.” So we've had two children because of the curse of sin and how it has impacted our bodies. And yet, this hasn't happened outside of, unknown to – this didn't catch God by surprise. He is sovereignly ordaining a world in which this would happen and that I would marry this man who has the same genetic trait. And I suppose at first I think the sovereignty of God is hard. You just think, “Why did you ordain that for me, Lord?” But, you know what, Mike, I think while it seems so hard at first ultimately it is such a soft place to land. Because if I am just at the mercy of random chance in this world, if it's really all about genetic odds, that's hopeless. How could I ever think that this story that began in Genesis and this promise, if he's not overseeing and ordaining all things, how can I ever think he's going to bring things to their appointed end?

00:17:18 **Michael Horton:** Right, and the God who included that tragedy in all things, not that all things are good, but that he works all things together for good. The God who included that in his plan is the one who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, has chance ever done something that intentional and that loving? There is absolutely no answer to this problem of evil that is philosophically satisfying. But to know that the one who allowed these tragedies and has even figured out how these tragedies are going to figure into his plan. The one who has overseen all of this is the same one who has directly and immediately sent his son into the world to intervene and rescue us. It says to me, I don't have to have it all figured out.

00:18:12 **Nancy Guthrie:** You know, when I think about the losses in our life, I think about them being like a windstorm blowing through our lives. And you know how it is when you see those weathermen on TV in the midst of hurricane and they're holding on to that stop sign for dear life so they don't get blown away into the surf. In some ways these experiences in our life were like that kind of storm. And when I think about what I grabbed hold of, put my arms around so that I wouldn't be swept away in the storm? Two things, one was the sovereignty of God, that this wasn't a surprise to him that he is in charge of my life. But I don't just grab on to the sovereignty of God, what I also need to grab hold of was the love of God, to believe that he loves me, that he is causing all things, even the worse things I can imagine to work together for my good and for my glory, that I would be conformed to the image of Christ and that is the ultimate good. And so, the thing is if I just believed that he loves me, but that he doesn't have the power to cause anything to happen in this world, that's not good enough. And if he's got the power to make everything happen but he doesn't love me, how do I know he's going to use that power for my good? I can't be at all confident of that. So, we grab on to both of those things.

00:18:12 **Michael Horton:** So basically, the answer, it must have been God's will, direct people to not the hidden things but to the revealed things in his word.

00:19:32 **Nancy Guthrie:** Yeah. Don't use it as a trite line, but be willing to enter into that mystery with him, to have a deeper conversation about it.

00:19:40 **Michael Horton:** Something really closely related to that one that I've heard and I know is often said, “What is God trying to teach you? Have you figured out yet what God is trying to teach you through this?”

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00:19:53 **Nancy Guthrie:** You know what that does to somebody? It makes the person they loved an object lesson. It diminishes them. Now I got to tell you, you can't imagine how much I've learned through the death of my children. I am so grateful for the way the Lord has taught me so many things through their lives and through their deaths and through the experience.

00:20:18 **Michael Horton:** But you don't have to be grateful for their deaths.

00:20:20 **Nancy Guthrie:** No, I don't. But also, I'm thinking about a couple who came to one of our retreats and the way that was put to them was, you know, they go kind of a health and wealth, word of faith kind of church and immediately it was, oh, the Lord is going to use you, you're going to have such a great ministry because of this. I mean, his son took his own life and just immediately everybody is pressing him into how the Lord is going to use them and their hurt was so deep and it diminished him. It diminished their loss. It made it a tool just to another end. And the thing is God is going to continue to use that couple in significant ways. I just love them. But once again – I guess here's the general rule in terms of what we say. There are a lot of things we can say that are true that we still don't need to say. The question is, "Is it helpful?" And the thing is God is probably going to teach them something through it.

00:21:23 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. But they don't need to add to their grief right now, the search for the lesson hidden inside the cookie.

00:21:31 **Nancy Guthrie:** And I think, Mike, there's also a difference in what we say when we walk to the visitation line or a month later and what we say two years later, five years later. I mean, five years later, rather than never talking about it to actually honor them by asking the question at some point. "Wow, five years later, when you look back over this, what's the Lord taught you through this? How are you a different person now?" I mean, that's just very different than in the heart of it.

00:22:07 **Michael Horton:** Some people, Nancy, get so stunned by all of these concerns about saying the wrong thing. You point out sometimes they don't say anything at all, which can be the worst thing.

00:22:19 **Nancy Guthrie:** Haven't we all done that? So we just like hide or go the other direction?

00:22:23 **Michael Horton:** We have five sentences in our head and each one of them is wrong.

00:22:25 **Nancy Guthrie:** Now that's not going to work. Yeah. I so well remember, it was field day, my son's field day and Hope was five months old and I came upon a mom who had lost her child and I remember her saying to me before Hope died, she said, "You know, the worst thing for me when my son died wasn't so much what people said. It was the people who didn't say anything all." And a short time later I found out what that was like

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and I just remember feeling like, how could you not say anything because by that you say that my daughter's life doesn't even merit a mention. And so it's so diminishing to her. Once again, you're the mom, you're trying to make sure everybody remembers and you want people to value that person's life. So, it's devastating when people don't bring it up. And what we need to understand, for the person who's grieving, it's like a hurdle has been put up. Think of like a hurdle on a race track. It's like a hurdle has been set in front of you and every person in your world, and until the loss is acknowledged, the hurdle doesn't come down. It's just there. I remember about six months after Hope died, a good friend had had a daughter, Annie, who was born about six months before Hope and I'm in the car pull line waiting to pick up Matt and she's there with her daughter, Annie. I see her look at me a couple of times. She walks over to the car and she said, "Nancy, I just didn't know what to say to you because every time I look at you, I think I still have Annie and your arms are empty and I just haven't known what to say." And I said, "You just said it." You know, the hurdle came down and it's a joy to me to watch Annie grow. Sometimes it brings tears because she's a physical representation to me of about where Hope would be and what she might be doing.

00:24:33 **Michael Horton:** But that was recognized.

00:24:34 **Nancy Guthrie:** It was acknowledged. So, acknowledge loss no matter how minimal it is, you know? And sometimes it's not even words. Some people can do that with a look or a touch on the shoulder or a squeeze of the hand, but it must be acknowledged.

00:24:51 **Michael Horton:** So what are some of the things that you can say?

00:24:55 **Nancy Guthrie:** I think one of the best things to say, you can always say, "I'm so sad with you." The essence of grief is a deep, pervading loneliness and we don't – it feels so lonely and you just wonder, is anybody else sad with me? And so, to just say, "I'm so sad with you."

00:25:15 **Michael Horton:** Which is helpful for people who can't figure out everything that I think of to say right now is wrong, so I'm not going to say anything at all. Is that a good time then just to say, okay, default, I just sit down, hold her hand and sit with them?

00:25:32 **Nancy Guthrie:** You know, people are different once again, but the gift of your presence, not having to fill up the silence with words, not having to theologize, spiritualize, fix – we are such fixers and we don't like to just sit in the – and I used this word in the book and I did it hesitantly but it's the only word I know. And if you've been in grief, you understand and that is to say this sucks. And we want to move people past that so quickly. So to be willing to sit with someone in this sucks kind of moment and not try to fix it is a great gift. So, to express, I am sad with you. To write this book, I did an online survey and I asked people what are things people said, what are things people did and then the third question is what do you wish people understood about your grief that they don't seem to understand. And one of the things that I heard over and over from people was that people tend to say very general things to them about their mother, their father, the person who died, like he was a really great guy, was always there. What they craved was hearing very

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specific stories, so and so was in my Sunday school class. And I always knew when we had a difficult question she will go, "In fact, I remember this one time when –"

00:26:58 **Michael Horton:** It's like finding a photograph that you never saw before.

00:27:01 **Nancy Guthrie:** Yes, exactly. And so, over and over again, people told me – like especially about their parents died. They said people – and when people would write them down, see then it becomes something you get to enjoy over and over again in those hard moments. You pull that out and they write out a specific story, very specific things about that person that you appreciated experience you had with that person that maybe their closest family members don't know about. So, it's a great gift to say their name, to not try to fix, but to listen, listen, listen what's this like and to tell them very specific stories, experiences.

00:27:43 **Michael Horton:** Nancy, in your chapter let's talk about "Talking About Heaven and Hell," you observed it only makes sense that many of the conversations we have with those grieving the death of someone they love turned to the topic of Heaven. In fact, I've come to think that one of the gifts given to us in the death of someone we love is that we think more about eternal things, we're awakened to the reality that this life isn't all there is. At a funeral line, you could hear people say things like, well, at least she's in a better place. But you say that Heaven should never be an assumption. What do you mean by that?

00:28:16 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, you and I know Heaven can't be assumed for all who die, that those who are not in Christ, those who have not taken hold of Christ by faith can't anticipate leaving this life to be with Christ in his presence. So, how do we broach that topic? I think very carefully. Once again, there are things that are true that don't have to be said. We don't have to be out to correct people. Let's say we've been around a person who died, we've never seen any evidence, any fruit of genuine faith but we recognize that none of us know the interior spiritual life or spiritual death of another person, right? So we can't speak authoritatively to that. So we don't rush into examine... crush. But I think also as believers, we don't want to gut the gospel in an effort to comfort. We don't add to the assumption when we haven't seen fruit and understand we're not talking about the question in regard to are you with Christ. Is there a lot of fruit? The question is there is zero fruit.

I mean, think about the thief on the cross. Somebody thought about his life? They would go, oh, I never saw him. Are you kidding? But in those last moments of his life, he took hold of Christ by faith. There was not zero fruit. And that's the biggest, most important rule, I have taken hold of Christ. And so, we don't assume it, we don't – I think as believers we don't add to the discussion in a way that adds to the general assumption, but neither do we rush it. I mean, we need to not ask the question, "Well, was he a Christian?" I've done that. Because it's the first thought, because it indicates to us how crushing this death is. But let's put ourselves in their shoes. My brother's just taken his own life or my mother died in a car crash. Let's say we walk in the door, well was she a believer? If you're that person, you have to say, "I don't think so." My last conversation with that person was still questioning whether or not there even is a God. You haven't been helpful. Now, maybe you're the kind

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of friend that little ways down the road, they would come to you and you would be a safe person that they could pour out their fears and their agonies about that. I mean, because –

00:31:05 **Michael Horton:** Again, timing.

00:31:07 **Nancy Guthrie:** Timing and who are you in their life. There are some people we come around, we want to make ourselves available and they don't grab hold because we're not the person or we're not the person yet. But we make ourselves available, we show compassion and we maybe wait for them to reach out or maybe we drop a little note a couple of weeks, six months, still want you to know I'm thinking about you, would love to go for a walk in the park some time, if you ever want someone you just want to talk about, say his name too, and talk about the hard things about this.

00:31:40 **Michael Horton:** What do you think that we should say about the eternal destiny of someone who has recently died, especially in cases where it's unclear whether was a believer or not? What positively can we say?

00:31:53 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, I think we have three things that we know are true that can mean a measure of comfort. The first thing is that we don't really know the spiritual reality of another person's life. We might think we know but we don't. Secondly, we think about who God is and how he has revealed himself. Think about the way God revealed himself. The first time he revealed himself personally to Moses, I am a God who is abundant in mercy. God's mercy is so much bigger. He doesn't have all the hoops for people to jump through that we sometimes do. He is a God of mercy. If we've read the Bible at all, we know he is a God who loves to save. So rather than putting our trust or lack thereof in something we have seen in that person, we're going to find our solace, our comfort, our rest in who God is.

00:32:52 **Michael Horton:** And more importantly, direct that person to God's mercy and Jesus Christ so that even if their loved one is lost, this person who may have a very weak grasp of anything biblical could be directed to look to Christ even though their loved one didn't.

00:33:15 **Nancy Guthrie:** Absolutely. I mean, isn't that how the deaths of people are used over and over again in the scripture as a warning? I mean, when you think about when they came to Jesus about the tower of Siloam that fell, he didn't give them some kind of theological or philosophical answer about why that happened. He basically said repent and believe. This should serve to you to cause you to believe. The third thing that goes along with that, Mike, is that – and I think it comes best from Genesis 18:25, where the rhetorical questions is asked, will not the judge of the Earth do what is right? And so, ultimately, as we're searching for comfort, we don't know where that loved one is. We're not going to put our trust and faith in what we saw in that person or didn't see. We're going to put our trust and faith. We're going to find our comfort in a God who is merciful, who has abundant mercy and a God who does right. Maybe it's not what we wanted him to do –

00:34:23 **Michael Horton:** Or what we thought was right.

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00:34:25 **Nancy Guthrie:** Or what we thought was right. But isn't it wonderful to be able to put our faith in a God who will always do what is right. I think that just causes us to say, "Do I want a God who does right?" or am I saying, no, I'm going to be the arbiter of what is right. It must be my way. And ultimately that's not going to work out very well for us. And so, here is this God. He will do right. He will do right by you. He will do right by your child. He will do what is right by your loved one who has died. Rest in that.

00:35:00 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. We've been talking throughout this series about some common misunderstandings of Heaven itself. What are some of the common misunderstandings?

00:35:10 **Nancy Guthrie:** Well, I grew up hearing about Heaven as being the place you go when you die. And it's not that that's untrue but I think it's not the whole story. Honestly, I think sometimes the scriptures don't tell us enough about life after this life for many of us. We want the scriptures to tell us more than they tell us. And I think they tell us four basic things.

00:35:36 **Michael Horton:** One, the streets will be gold. Two, we'll have mansions.

00:35:39 **Nancy Guthrie:** I wasn't really going there. I wasn't really going there. Paul describes – he says he desires to actually go to be with Christ. So, this is the essence of what it means to be in Heaven, to be with Christ. Think about what Jesus said to that thief in the cross, "Today you will be with me," – not just you're going to go paradise, "You're going to be with me." So, we tend to think about Heaven very much as joining other people who have died. Once again, it's not wrong that those who are in Christ who have come before us, we will see them. It's not the focus. Another thing the scriptures tell us is it say it will be – and it uses a couple of different words and different translations, far better or better by far. I like that one. But it is true that Heaven is not a minor improvement on life in this world. It's not a better golf course that that person who loved golf is now golfing on, to understand that it is better by far. But I think this is really one that people tend to not grasp, that we are away from the body; to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord.

And I think what the misunderstanding is and where it comes up – I'll tell you once place that came up for me. During my son, Gabe's life, a reporter and photographer from our local paper, *The Tennessean*, followed his life so that they could write a story after he died. They walked with us through all of it and I kind of felt like this was an opportunity to allow people in to see the hardest thing that they could imagine and I wanted them to see that Jesus makes a difference right here. So, a couple of weeks later, she sends us the draft of the article. Now, I had noticed, Mike, throughout the time that she was with us, she didn't take many notes and I discovered when she sent us the draft of the article that she was actually content to make up things that I had said. And a lot of them I let slip but there was one I didn't let slip. She had me saying there in that room after he died, after we handed over his body, that I said, "Well, at least now his feet are straight." You see, Hope and Gabe were born with clubfeet. I said, "I know I didn't say that because it isn't true." I mean, we

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tend to focus – we're so body-oriented that we focus so much on the people we love, now they are healed. Now they could run. That person was on a wheelchair, now they can run. We think of embodied people in Heaven. The body is in the ground. The body has been turned to dust. In one way or another, it is our souls, our spirits who are with the lord. And I think what that misunderstanding does is it diminishes the essence of biblical hope that the scriptures set before us.

Modern Christianity has made the essence of Christian hope going to Heaven when you die. The essence of biblical hope in the face of death is resurrection. Resurrection of the body. But I think growing up in church, Mike, I just never really thought it through because I knew about the resurrection. Certainly those are the passages that are often read funerals, I never thought through. Well, how is my life in a resurrected body going to be different than being a disembodied spirit in the presence of Christ until he returns? And there is the resurrection. And where am I going to live in this resurrected body? So, in terms of misunderstanding of Heaven, we have a very limited view, going to Heaven when I die and I think for most of my life I just thought, that's where we kind of are forever. That's the forever place.

00:39:40 **Michael Horton:** Yeah. Bouncing on clouds, playing harps.

00:39:42 **Nancy Guthrie:** But the scriptures reveal no, especially there in 1 Thessalonians 4 where it begins – Paul says, “We do not grieve as those who have no hope.” Now I think for a long time, I read that in maybe a psychological sense or how you're feeling about this sense. No, he's about to tell us what the essence of that hope is. When he says that Christ is going to come with a shout and the dead in Christ shall rise. That's what means to have hope in the face of death, that dead bodies will be given new life, will be resurrected. And the incredible thing about the story of scripture is that it's not just our bodies that are going to be resurrected. But when Christ comes, he's going to bring restoration, a resurrection to all creation. So, we get to Romans 8 and he talks about how we were subjected to futility and he's talking about what happened there in the garden in Genesis 3:15. But we were subjected to futility in hope. In hope for what? In hope for the appearing of the sons of God. He's talking about in hope of that day when bodies are raised from the dead. And it says, “All creation waits with groaning for that day.” That's something I think most evangelical Christianity has not grasped. That's what we're longing for, is that day when Christ returns. He raises the bodies of believers and he restores us to live forever on this restored Earth. That is the hope that the scriptures offer to us, when Heaven actually comes to Earth and Earth becomes Heaven.

00:41:33 **Michael Horton:** Yeah, no distinction between Heaven and Earth. And that's the vision of the prophets, isn't it? Isaiah 25, in this very mountain, I will remove the death shroud that covers humanity and I will set a table filled with the best meats and wines well refined. Oh, by the way, did I mention the best wines? I mean, mentions it twice in the same passage. The picture here is of a feast and not of a disembodied existence. Don't you think – in my own experience, especially 2 Corinthians 5, people would refer to these passages where Paul says it's better to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord than it is to still be around here. Yeah, but he was underscoring the fact that it's better

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to be with Christ even though it's not the best thing to be separated from your body. The best thing is to be with the Lord but you're not with the Lord wholly yet, because he goes on to say, we long, the soul longs not to be naked, but to be even further clothed, be even more embodied. That is something that I didn't hear. I just heard it's really good now – it was totally contradictory, really good for the soul now to be separated from that body that was wrecked with pain and so forth. And of course, it's better. Of course, it's good. But the rationale is it's good for the soul to be separated from the body and then it was also people are going to play better golf or their legs are going to be straight and you're thinking, how are soul's legs going to be straight? You're making such a great point here. We have to affirm the intermediate state as really intermediate and really not the resurrection.

00:43:35 **Nancy Guthrie:** And there's something better than feet being straight and it this. It's talked about in Hebrews 12, where the writer of Hebrews talks about spirits made holy. These people who are in Heaven in this Heavenly celebration. And what's happened is all of those who have gone into the presence of Christ, there is no more sin. They have been perfectly purified. I think that's something we don't talk about Heaven. We think so much about the suffering of this life being over but we don't think about the joy of being in the presence of Christ and for sin to be gone for good. What's that hymn we sing? Sometimes when we sing it in church, I just weep. "We'll be saved to sin no more." And maybe it's because we don't take sin really all that seriously. That doesn't stir in us a great sense of joy. But if we understand how much sin has robbed of us and how sin is the source of our misery as we refuse to repent of it. The joy of Heaven is going to be that we are now spirits who have been holy, that we have been purified from sin.

And let me just say this, too. A number of years ago, so after Hope died. I lived in Nashville, you know? So, the group *Mercy Me*, their song "I Can Only Imagine" had just become a big hit. And so, some friends of ours who were with the record company, they were making a music video for the song, "I Can Only Imagine." And so, what they did, they have this old house and they invited a number of people who have had loved ones die come to the house, bring their picture or portrait of that person who died and then made a music video to go with "I Can Only Imagine." So, they asked me and David. So, me and David and Matt, we took our big portraits of Hope and Gabe and we put on our somber faces and we're in the music video, you can still it on YouTube. But I remember just thinking when that came out. I think the music video with the song and I love the song. But I think the video represents our evangelical confusion about death. Because here is the song. Do you remember that song? It's 'When I enter into his presence, what will I do? Will I bow before you, Jesus? Will I in awe of you be still?' So the song is all about being in the presence of Christ and how we're going to respond when we're in God's presence and what are all the visuals about on this? It's all people focused on seeing their loved ones again when they get to Heaven.

You know, it is a wonderful thing to me, Mike. I mean, sometimes it just seems like spiritual talk and there are other times when I can almost feel it, that the day is going to come, that I'm going to see Hope and Gabe again. And I'm so glad for it when it becomes real, tangible, that I'll see them and I'll know them in a way that I never could hear because they were so damaged. But you know what? That's not going to be the best thing about Heaven. It's not going to be the source of my greatest joy. The source of my greatest joy is not going to see

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loved ones again. The source of my greatest joy that with my loved ones, we will look together on the face of Christ and enjoy his presence with us for all eternity. What makes Heaven, Heaven is the presence of the King of Heaven.

00:47:24 **Michael Horton:** That Gabe and Hope will be fellow beneficiaries with you of the Heavenly estate.

00:47:30 **Nancy Guthrie:** That's what I'm looking forward to.

00:47:32 **Michael Horton:** They're not the inheritance. They're fellow beneficiaries with you. The book is titled *What Grieving People Wish You Knew About What Really Helps and What Really Hurts* by Nancy Guthrie. Nancy, you always illumine these very important life matters, with scripture and rich godly wisdom and insight. Thanks a lot for helping us think through this issue of Heaven.

00:47:57 **Nancy Guthrie:** It's a great privilege. Thank you.

00:48:02 **Narrator:** The *White Horse Inn* is a listener supported broadcast. For more information about this program, visit us online at whitehorseinn.org. If you sign up as an innkeeper, architect or reformer, not only will you get a complimentary subscription to our magazine *Modern Reformation*, but you'll also get longer editions of every *White Horse Inn* broadcast. To find out how to join one of these support programs, click on the support tab of our website, whitehorseinn.org. You can also give us a call at 1-800-890-7556. That's 1-800-890-7556. We'll see you next time at the *White Horse Inn*.