



Our Spiritual Endpoint

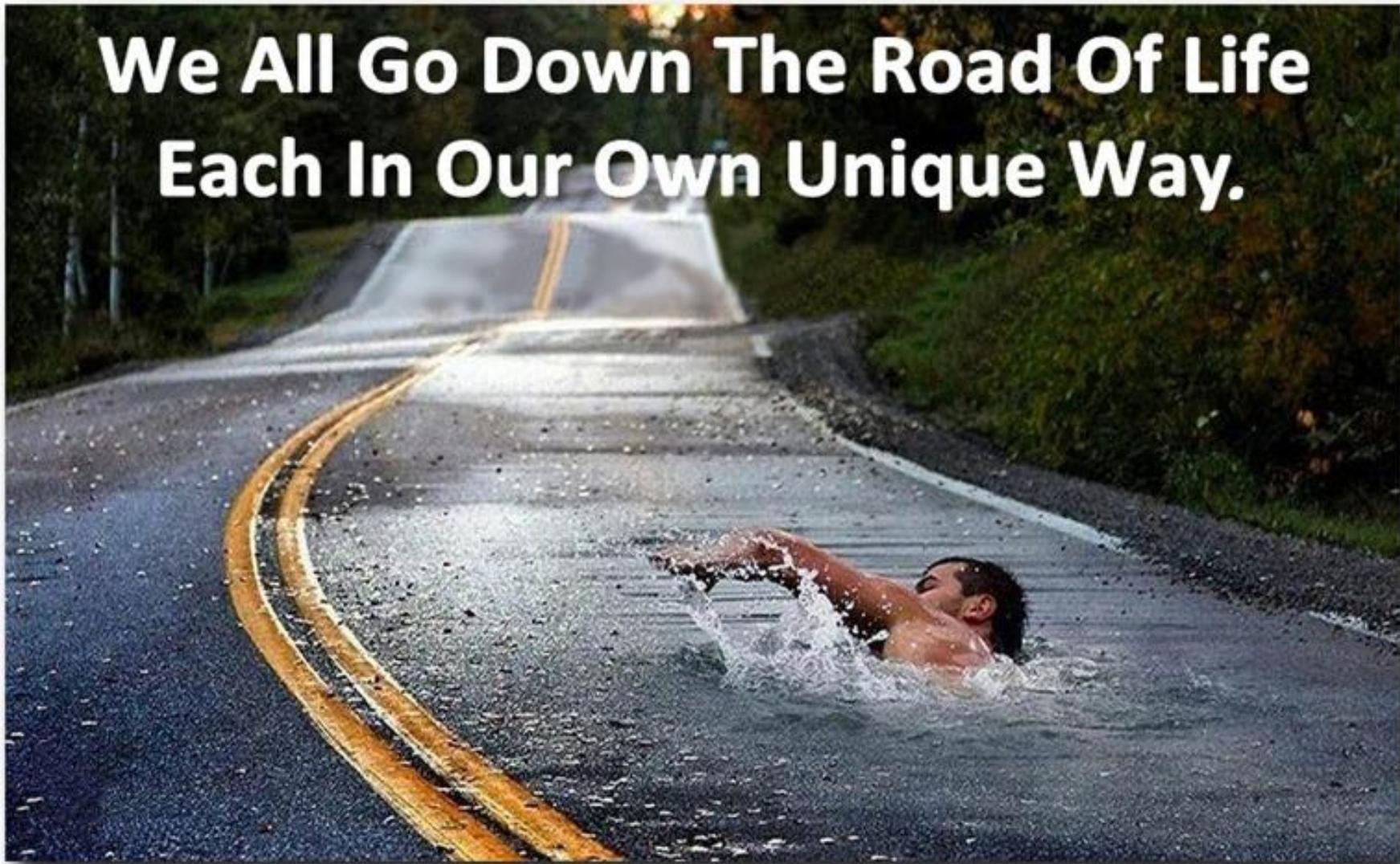
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Scripture Quotes

- Are all from the New Living Translation 2nd Edition unless stated otherwise.

**We All Go Down The Road Of Life
Each In Our Own Unique Way.**



<https://2.bp.blogspot.com/unique-road-of-life-shadow.jpg>

We often talk about life as a journey

- Life is a journey, but don't worry, you'll find a parking spot at the end. --Isaac Asimov
- If you do not know where you are going, every road will get you nowhere. --Henry A. Kissinger
- The whole journey of life is a journey of preparation... to see, to feel, to understand the beauty of what lies ahead, of the homeland towards which we walk. --Pope Francis
- It may be that when we no longer know what to do, we have come to our real work, and that when we no longer know which way to go, we have begun our real journey. --Wendell Berry

Journeys cover some amount of distance

- I will be 60 next year, which has raised thoughts about how far I have come in my spiritual journey
- Visualizing distance <https://www.htwins.net/scale2/>; somewhat random but potentially useful to you teachers
 - Start at $10^{-3.4}$ – smallest human-visible object
 - A few interesting observations
 - the diameter of a neutron star is smaller than the length of Rhode Island (77km)
 - the U.S. (4200km) is wider than the diameter of the moon (3500km)
 - the Asian continent (8000km) is longer than the diameters of Mercury (4900km), Titan (5200km), Jupiter's largest moon Ganymede (5300km), and Mars (6800km)
- Sufficiently long distances are described using time – a light year

Views on time

- Human view
 - Time seems slow and our lives long
 - The younger we are the slower it feels
 - Christians often talk about eternity, but how much can we truly grasp about this concept?
- God's view Ps. 90
 - [4] For you, a thousand years are as a passing day, as brief as a few night hours.
 - [5] You sweep people away like dreams that disappear. They are like grass that springs up in the morning.
 - [12] Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.

Our time will end

- How often do we think of the span of our lives, all our memories, experiences, pains, and joys as “just a vapor that appears for a little while, and then vanishes away” (Ja. 4:14, NASB)?
- When contemplating the entirety of our life’s journey, we must give thought to its destination.

Final destinations: who's going where

Typical expectations of many Christians:

- The Innocents – heaven
 - Infants
 - Children younger than ~7 years old (the age of reason) who haven't reached an understanding of right and wrong
- 'True' Christians – heaven
 - Jesus knows His sheep. (Jn. 10:14)
 - Absent from the body, present with the Lord. (2Cor. 5:8)
 - 'True' as opposed to self-professed, to whom Jesus will say "I never knew you" (Mt. 7:23)
- Everyone else – hell



What is the nature of hell?

And when was the last time you thought about it?

What Jesus said about hell

- Jesus mentioned hell 13 times, more than anyone else in the Bible
- It's hotter than... the Sahara Desert
 - "And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell." (Mt. 5:22)
- For Christians and sinners alike, our postmortem destination should not be a surprise
 - "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way." (Mt. 7:13)
- BUT Jesus (and others in the Bible) did not paint a clear picture of hell

Jesus on Hell

- Mt. 5:22
 - "But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell."
- Mt. 7:13
 - "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way."
- Mt. 10:28
 - "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell."
- Lk. 12:4-5
 - "Dear friends, don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot do any more to you after that. [5]But I'll tell you whom to fear. Fear God, who has the power to kill you and then throw you into hell. Yes, he's the one to fear."

Jesus on Hell

- Mt. 16:18
 - “Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.”
- Mt. 23:15
 - “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!”
- Mt. 23:33
 - “Then you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets.’ [31]But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. [32]Go ahead and finish what your ancestors started. [33]Snakes! Sons of vipers! How will you escape the judgment of hell?”

Jesus on Hell

- Mt. 5:29-30
 - “So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. [30]And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”
- Mt. 18:9
 - “And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better to enter eternal life with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

Jesus on Hell

- Mk. 9:43-48
 - "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. [45]If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. [47]And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, [48]'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.'" (some manuscripts repeat v.48 after v.43 and v.45)
 - v.48 is a reference to Is. 66:22-24. The following occurs after the LORD has gathered believers together
 - "As surely as my new heavens and earth will remain, so will you always be my people, with a name that will never disappear," says the LORD. [23]"All humanity will come to worship me from week to week and from month to month. [24]And as they go out, they will see the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me. For the worms that devour them will never die, and the fire that burns them will never go out. All who pass by will view them with utter horror."

There are options... who knew? (not Baptists, lol*)

- Three main views of hell
 - Eternal Conscious Torment – ‘standard’ view of hell, where sinners are punished forever as retribution for their sin
 - Terminal Punishment – sinners suffer in hell long enough to satisfy God’s justice, then God permanently destroys their souls; synonymous with annihilationism and conditional immortality.
 - Universalism – sinners suffer in hell long enough to appreciate the wrongness of their sins and make amends, then God brings them to heaven.
 - Purgatory – everyone’s initial postmortem destination until they are wholly sanctified.
- Above from [“The Four Views on Hell”](#) (Burk et al., 2016)

*No disrespect intended. I went to Baptist churches for decades and was never presented with the idea that hell was anything but eternal conscious torment. That there were options was a personal revelation.

Eternal Conscious Torment

Punished forever as retribution for sin.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POSTMORTEM STATE OF SINNERS

1. Final separation – after the last judgement, sinners will be separated from believers
 - They won't share in God's "new heavens and new earth" (Is. 66:22)
 - Rather, they will be thrown "into the fiery furnace" (Mt. 13:50)
2. Unending experience – their punishment will be conscious and continue forever (Mt. 25:46)
 - They will rise from the grave to "shame and everlasting disgrace" (Da. 12:2)
 - And "the fire that burns them will never go out" (Is. 66:24)
3. Just retribution – sinners will be punished as recompense for sins committed against God
 - There is no escape or end, hence their punishment cannot be restorative
 - The consequence of sinning is "to be thrown into eternal fire" (Mt. 18:8)

Eternal Conscious Torment

Punished forever as retribution for sin.

- The seriousness of a sin must be measured by
 1. the actual wrong committed and
 2. the worth of the one it was committed against
- Consider that only one of God's attributes is ascribed to him three times, and it isn't love, mercy, or justice.
- God is holy, holy, holy. (Is 6:3) "His transcending moral purity is far above and beyond what we can understand" (The Holiness of God, Sproul, 1985)
- Any sin against such a being is "is an infinitely heinous offense that is worthy of an infinitely heinous punishment" (Four Views of Hell, p. 19)
- Thought experiment: the grasshopper and the baby

Terminal Punishment

Punished commensurate with sin
then soul permanently destroyed by God.

- 'Eternal' has quantitative meanings, as in God is eternal, and qualitative meanings as in "the eternal hills" (Ge. 49:26)
 - So, we can separate the eternal consequence of rejecting God from the amount of suffering required to atone for one's sin.
- Perish, destruction, death mean 'the end', period.
 - "the way of the wicked will perish" (Ps. 1:6, NASB)
 - "ungodly people will be destroyed" (2Pe. 3:6)
 - "the enemies of the cross of Christ... are headed for destruction" (Phl. 3:18-19)
 - "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life" (Ro. 6:20)
- God's new heaven and earth cannot be purely good if any evil remains. He assures this by destroying "both soul and body" (Mt. 10:28) of the wicked.

Statistical Side Trip...

How many souls will suffer forever or be permanently destroyed?

- Or, how many unsaved people have died from creation until now?
- [As a closet philosopher, I don't mind dealing with ambiguity. However, the engineer/statistician in me likes to make things concrete from time to time.]
- A conservative estimate from a fairly 'simple' model puts the total dead at 84 billion (estimates ranged from 40 – 200 billion)
 - [Approximately 28 billion before the flood and 56 billion after](#)
 - [There are more complex models](#)
 - They all make several assumptions and [small changes \(e.g., increase growth rate by 0.001\) have a significant effect \(+ 3 billion people pre-flood\)](#)
- An estimated 28 billion (33%) of these were spiritually innocent – infants and children
- Apply the 80/20 rule to the rest for going to hell/heaven (my best guess)
- ~45 billion souls are in hell now
- With current death rates, ~50 million are added every year

Universalism

Punished for sin and make amends,
then brought to heaven by God.

- Must 'zoom out' on the larger biblical narrative from creation to reconciliation
 - "for through him (Christ) God created everything, in the heavenly realms and on earth... [20]through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross" (Col. 1:16,20).
 - It is God's desire to redeem all people (1Ti. 2:4, 2Pe. 3:9).
- Requires salvation after death for those who die rejecting God
 - Not directly addressed in the Bible, but God cannot have complete victory over sin until no sinners exist.
 - Adam's sin "resulted in condemnation for all people... so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people" (Ro. 5:18)
 - Given the above and that some people will go to hell, salvation after death is reasonable.

Purgatory

The last stop before heaven in our journey of sanctification.

- Not really a view of hell – more of an expansion on how time might be spent in hell under Universalism
- Based almost entirely on Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis; author admits “there is little explicit biblical support” for purgatory (Four Views on Hell, p.152)
- Also requires postmortem salvation from passage in 1 Cor. 3:10 – 15
 - [13] But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. [14] If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. [15] But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.”
- The concept
 - Salvation starts the sanctification process.
 - Sanctification requires our cooperation and its end goal is to conform us to Christ-likeness.
 - We cannot achieve Christ-likeness on earth so must continue this work after death.
 - Just like on earth, the process will be painful after death
 - Christians have a head start on sanctification, so less pain and less time
 - Sinners get more of both
 - In both cases, suffering is proportional to the amount of sanctification needed

Questions

- If hell is a place of retribution or restoration, then:
 - What are “the powers of hell”? (Mt. 16:18)
 - What is a “child of hell”? (Mt. 23:15)
 - What is the “judgement of hell”? (Mt. 23:33)
- Can a God -- who is love, who sacrificed His Son to make peace with everything, and who desires that all should be saved -- forever punish or permanently destroy the souls of 45+ billion people all created in His image?
- Where is God’s justice if the wicked prosper from persecuting believers on earth then end up side-by-side with them in heaven?

Questions

- What purpose(s) might God have for His elect to witness dead, maggot-ridden bodies in a burn pile every week after church... forever?
 - “where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out” (Mk. 9:43-48)
 - Refers back to OT: “All humanity will come to worship me from week to week... And as they go out, they will see the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me. For the worms that devour them will never die, and the fire that burns them will never go out. All who pass by will view them with utter horror.” (Is. 66:22-24)
- How much suffering in hell is fair for non-believers to endure if they eventually end up in heaven – a million years for every year on earth? a billion? Infinity minus 1 billion still equals infinity.
- Is the following justifiable?
 - Non-believers who die will be condemned, cast into hell, and suffer never-ending punishment. This will ultimately become a source of joy and praise for the saints.