

Buy Real Estate in Heaven: Cheap Now; Priceless Later

Understanding True Wealth: How to
Convert Your Pain on Earth into Riches
and Glory in Heaven

Most of this article was written in 2004 and seems prophetic in view of what happening to the economy, caused by the housing crisis.

Steve (names have been changed), a few years ago, had a regular job replacing polybutylene tubing in homes. After work he did “swing trading” on the stock market. When his job ended he went full time on the stock market. Within a year or two he had a new truck, a new boat, and finally a new house with a huge garage for his now bigger boat.

He had me in awe and I told another friend, Bill, about it. Bill decided to try his skill with the stock market and in a few days lost more than he had the nerve to tell me.

In the meantime the stock market began its roller-coaster ride and many investors lost huge profits. I called Steve and he admitted it had lost its glitter, but he still plugged away. In the meantime Bill found real estate less volatile, more dependable, and finally experienced “real” and “appreciable” profit.

Real estate is so named because it has an actual and fixed or stationary existence. Investing in real estate may not bring quick profits, but they don’t “evaporate” with marketing whims and bad news because the property is still there when the dust settles. And people always need a place to live.

Real estate where I live in Florida is currently “appreciating” at one of the fastest rates in the nation. My friend Bill buys a home one day, and in a few months sells it at sometimes 20% profit. That’s like getting a 50% to 80% annual return on your dollar. Every time I see him scoop another windfall, I tell myself, *if only I could do that.*

But it’s just not me. Instead I see “real estate” from another angle. And it frightens me.

If only!

Maybe *if only* will be wiped away with tears in heaven, but before it is, it may well be the cry of multitudes of saints one day when the stamp of eternity is imprinted on our value system. *If only we had invested in “true riches” while on earth!* (Lu. 16:11).

Picture yourself in heaven. Those long, frustrating years of life in flesh and blood are now almost a forgotten memory. You are now in the *real* world of permanent, solid, absolute existence. (Jas. 4:14)

You have hardly begun to absorb its magnitude when you notice certain saints with a depth of character beyond anything you’d ever known. For in heaven you *know* just as you also are *known*. (Heb. 11:1; 2 Cor. 4:17, 1 Cor. 13:12).

They appear to be more closely related to the Lamb on the throne than others. They have an *intimacy* with Him which is very

special, as though it’s the goal for which everything else reaches.

What is it, you ask? Have they been here much longer? Yet you notice several new arrivals with the same capacity. On the other hand, some of the saints who accomplished more for God on earth are now among those without this heart-to-heart relationship with the Lamb, and worship Him at a distance, as it were.

Suddenly you know the answer, but it’s too late to do anything about it. In that tiny speck of life called *time*, you’d misunderstood your goal. And now some you thought were “baby Christians” are among those closer to the Lamb. (Mt. 11:25; 18:2)

How could I have missed it? you sigh. Your mind fights to pull out of the realm of time those lost opportunities, like bargain real estate, in which you could have more deeply “inherited the promise.” (Heb. 6:15)

Right in your own “back yard” was a gold mine, beginning with your spouse. Over the years she had changed into an unhappy nag, consumed with her own problems, whining about “wanting out” of the marriage.

Instead of trying to understand her, you withdrew into your own world of work. When you lost your job and couldn’t find another, you lapsed into depression. Living on antidepressants gave your kids the excuse they needed, and they ended up on “pills” too and in trouble with the law, which drained your savings and unemployment benefits.

You knew you trusted God, but constant anxiety had replaced the joy you once had, even though you kept up an outward show of being a “happy camper.” Getting even more involved in church only covered up your problems in place of taking responsibility for them.

Now you see clearly and realize these problems were *opportunities to teach you God’s ways and exercise your faith, not liabilities* meant to bring you down. (Ps. 103:7, 1 Cor. 13:12, Heb. 3:10, Jam. 1:2-4)

But taking more time to know God seemed more difficult than getting more involved in religious activity. Like the members of the church at Ephesus who “labored for [His] name’s sake and [had] not become weary.” Yet Jesus warned them He was about to remove their *lampstand*, signifying His Presence and Light, because they had *left their first love*. (Rev. 2:1-5)

A different set of values.

But it’s over now. Just a dim vapor of history, gone forever. Now you behold the Lamb who “made himself of no reputation,” who *emptied* Himself, “who was made in the likeness of men,” who “humbled himself” even to “the death of the cross” (Php. 2:5-8).

So that was “the mind of Christ” He told us to have, you realize regretfully; my value system was all backwards. His plan was to *empty* me of *my self* so He could fill me with *Himself*. *No wonder I don’t “know” Him as these others do.*

God has not furnished us with many details of the coming age of glory. But he has given us definite clues to help us prepare.

Proverbs 3:15 tells us *wisdom* is worth more than “all the things one can desire,” for by *wisdom* “kings reign, and rulers decree justice” (8:15), the purpose for which we are called, to “rule and reign with Christ” (Lu. 22:28-30, Rev. 1:6; 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:6 etc).

And if Christ is our wisdom, then wisdom comes through *knowing* Him. (1 Cor. 1:30, Php. 3:10)

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a parcel of real estate containing a treasure so valuable it’s worth giving up everything else for. Israel left Egypt, the “Exodus,” for the “Land of Promise.” Today it is the most contested and coveted land in the world; “the end of the age” will climax on its hills and valleys. (Ex. 14)

But spiritually it symbolizes the Kingdom of God, our inheritance in Christ. And, incredibly, the New Testament links the glory of this heir-ship with Christ to a faith tested and refined by *suffering*. (Rom. 9:8, Gal. 4:26, Heb. 12:22, 1 Pet. 1:7, etc)

This corresponds to Deuteronomy 8:2-3, where Moses told Israel how God had prepared them to “possess the land” He had sworn to their fathers to give them. He reminded them, “Your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” (Gen. 12:1-3)

He afflicted them not to build up their endurance like athletes, but to allow the pain to *expose the condition of their hearts*, the weakness of their flesh, and so to create spiritual hunger. (Mt. 5:6, Ps. 63:1-2)

To add to the affliction, He fed them a diet of *manna*, which is like living on nothing more than pancakes or corn-bread without butter and syrup—forty years! (Ex. 16:14-35, Num. 11:4-10, Ps. 78:24-33)

Why such “cruel and unusual punishment”? Only *one* reason: He wanted them to learn that they could *not* “keep His commandments” by their own will-power, but “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.” “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

When the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, after He’d fasted forty days, Satan said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” (Mt. 4:3)

It was a replay of his temptation of Adam in the Eden, when Adam chose to live by his own decisions (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) instead of by complete dependence on God. (Gen. 3:1f)

The “last Adam” (Jesus) understood the full meaning of this choice: He could turn the stones into bread by the power He had as the “Son of God,” or He could “do nothing of Himself, but what He *sees the Father do*.” (1 Cor. 15:45, Jn. 5:19)

If He had acted on the power of His deity as the Son of God, He would have acted *independently* of His Father, which is what the first Adam did.

Instead He answered Satan by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

This decision reset the human race back to the path of obedience. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by *one Man’s obedience* many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” (Rom. 5:19-20).

God afflicted Israel in the wilderness to bring them to the end of themselves, to expose the complaining, sinful condition of their hearts, that “the offense might abound” so they’d learn to live by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

That’s the only purpose for suffering. It’s not to develop our tolerance for pain or keep us weak and beaten down, but quite the opposite: to weaken our dependence on the *flesh* in order that we might live by His strength, by the *Spirit*, by *faith*, by the Word from the mouth of God.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *word* of God.” The same Greek word (*rhema*) is used here that Jesus used against Satan, the “word [*rhema*] from the mouth of God.” (Rom. 10:17, Mt. 4:4)

It’s God’s Spirit-breathed, *revealed* word (revelation) that enables us to “live in the Spirit” and “walk in the Spirit.” “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” (Mt. 11:25, Lu. 10:21, Rom. 8:1-5, Gal. 5:16,25)

The Lord’s Gym

Suffering is like *weight lifting* to strength our spiritual muscles to keep us from living like wimps, after the flesh, the carnal mind. “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Rom. 8:6)

Ten “spies” brought back a “bad report” of the Promise Land because they saw giants there and felt like “grasshoppers” in their sight. It was pain and suffering to them. But Caleb and Joshua saw the same giants as “bread,” a challenge that energized their spirit-man! (Num. 13:27-14:9, Heb. 12:1-2)

It’s actually a *blessing* to be brought to the end of our *selves*, because living by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” sets us “free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2, 15).

Paul taught his converts that “we must through many *tribulations* enter the kingdom of God,” that being a “joint heir” with Christ in His glory depended on *suffering with Him*, and that “if we *endure*, we shall also *reign* with Him” (Acts 14:22, Rom. 8:17, 2 Tim. 2:12).

Amazingly, Paul considered his “gains,” his assets and profits, as *liabilities* and *losses* “compared to the surpassing greatness of *knowing Christ*.” And as if that reversal of values wasn’t enough, he desired to *know Him* through “sharing in His sufferings” (Php. 3:7-10 NIV).

No wonder he “boasted” in his “weakness” rather than in his strengths.

Rather than finding pleasure in material blessing, convenience, and personal advantages, he found it in "infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses." (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

What a bumper! But Paul saw these things as momentary "light affliction" which works "for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." What the natural eye can't see, Paul saw—amazing wonders through the eyes of faith by the Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:17; 12:4, Heb. 11)

According to Hebrews 2:9-18 Jesus was *perfected* through suffering and *so are we* (2:10-11, Acts 14:22, Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:7, Job 23:10, etc).

Through partaking of flesh and blood "in all points tempted as we are," He *identified with us* "in all things . . . that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest." This was the "obedience." He "learned" through "suffering," the "compassion" He gained through being "subject to weakness" (Heb. 4:15; 2:17) Heb. 5:2, 8, Is. 53:3).

It is what qualifies "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" to open the seals of judgment and take possession of—"reign" over—our fallen planet, for He had suffered like a "Lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:1-7).

Jesus offered His disciples positions of rulership because they "have continued with Me in My trials" (Mt. 22:28-31).

I don't think of suffering in terms of physical pain but of the *resistance of the flesh in areas of obedience, responsibility, and commitment to relationships*. This view keeps me from self-pity and corrects my motives when I pray for deliverance.

I hate suffering, obviously more than many people do, because I plan well ahead to minimize or eliminate it by avoiding junk food, careless spending, risky living, wrong relationships, and by feeding on the Word and living in right relationship with others. (Pr. 3:8; 4:20-23, Gal. 6:8, 1 Cor. 11:29-32)

But as careful as I am, I've ended up in many prolonged periods of darkness and confusion, wondering if God knows where I'm at and why He doesn't answer. (Ps. 22, 38, 88, Lam. 3, Job 3, 2 Cor. 4:7-11)

But when I turn wholeheartedly to Him in these pits and experience a breakthrough—a *word from His mouth*—I literally *beg* God *not* to stop His loving chastisement or spare me from the pain. (Job 33:23-26, Ps. 119:76, Heb. 12:10-12, Rev. 3:19)

Because in that "light affliction" *He deals with another attachment of the flesh that keeps me from greater intimacy with Him*. No wonder it results in deeper insights into His glory and the mystery of my *purpose* on earth: to know *Him*, and in knowing Him, to connect to others with more understanding and compassion. (Ps. 40:1-10, Col. 1:24)

The pleasure, inner strength, and joy that result from these breakthroughs is

beyond anything I've ever experienced from any other kind of pleasure. They are my lifetime "highs"! (Ps. 30:5; 40:1f, Jn. 11:40)

That's why I see facing these *difficulties as real estate*. In this way I can invest in and build on a permanent foundation—the Rock—instead of sand (Mt. 7:24-27).

And as current events, economic pressure, and family conflict drive more people to antidepressants, this "real estate" is "appreciating" at a phenomenal rate: it's becoming *more difficult, challenging, and valuable than ever!* (Lu. 21:25-26)

One day as I struggled over the abuse by someone of one of my cherished possessions, it suddenly occurred to me (perhaps a word from His mouth) that there *is* a way to take our earthly treasures to heaven: convert them to heavenly currency the way we exchange our US dollars into foreign currency when traveling abroad. How? By allowing God to "test" us with them.

For example, when I yielded the "thing" I loved, giving it back to God, trusting Him with the whole problem, it yielded a wealth of heavenly "currency" back to me in the form of *patience, understanding, insight* into human nature, and a revelation of my own weakness and humanity, resulting in more *brokenness and compassion* for others. (Rom. 5:1-5)

The hardships of flesh and blood contain priceless gems of eternal significance. All we need is to absorb them in the light of the Cross and to cooperate with Him in childlike *faith* instead of looking for a quick way of escape (Is. 50:10-11, Jer. 48:11-12).

What about faith and prosperity?

Many have over-used the faith scriptures in the Bible, such as Mark 11:23 and 3 Jn. 1:2, for material gain. There is a *time* for this, especially when God *speaks* to us about it (*rhema*), for poverty is often a result of *disobedience* rather than obedience. And God's *blessings abound* to those who *speak* faith and *act* on it, especially when we bless others as God blesses us. (Pro. 18:20-21, Lu. 6:38, 2 Cor. 8:14-15; 9:6-8, Phi. 4:17-19).

But the prosperity God means as *normal* and good must not become the *goal*, for a wrong *emphasis* might actually *hinder* the goal—*knowing Him*. And if I have faith strong enough to move a mountain or gain wealth, but without *love* motivating it, "I am *nothing*." (1 Cor. 13:2)

The *emphasis* in the Bible is not in *material* but in *spiritual* prosperity—to be "more than conquerors" through "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" (Rom. 8:35-37; see Dt. 17:17, 1 Tim. 6:17-19)

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33).

Take the Son is a story on the Web and popularized by e-mail, of a wealthy man who

had a collection of famous art masterpieces. His son had died saving the life of another soldier in the Vietnam war.

This soldier, an artist, had returned and given the father a portrait he had painted of his son in gratitude for saving his life. The art collector prized this painting more than all the others.

After he died, his entire art collection was to be auctioned off. Many gathered for this rare opportunity, but the auctioneer insisted that none of the other paintings would be offered until the portrait of the owner's son was sold.

"The son! The son! Who'll take the Son," he insisted.

Nobody wanted it and people began to shout their impatience and irritation over the hold up. Finally an offer of \$10 was made by a poor man who'd been the gardener of the owner. When nobody offered a higher bid, the painting was sold to him for \$10.

The auctioneer then told the crowd, now eager with anticipation, that the auction was over. The will had provided that whoever bought the portrait of the son would inherit not only the rest of the paintings, but the entire estate.

The story is a beautiful picture of the Kingdom of God—the buried treasure nobody notices. The Jews missed it because it didn't meet their political expectations; I wonder how many Christians are missing it because we choose the *outward* blessings of the Kingdom rather than the *heart* of it—the Son!

"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 Jn. 5:12). (see also Jn. 6:27, 40; 15:1f, 1 Jn. 5:21, 26, 40)

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the *Son of Man* will give you, *because God the Father has set His seal on Him*" (Jn. 6:27)

Why is He called the Son of Man? Because in fully identifying with our humanity, He made God available to us in our weakness. (Mt. 12:20, Lu. 4:18)

That's why knowing Him "in the fellowship of His sufferings" is so crucial to *knowing God*. It is knowing God *intimately*, in our brokenness—vulnerable, transparent, empty, unveiled, real—the way *we often secretly wish others would relate to us . . . or we could relate to them*. (S.S. 1:6-7, Is. 57:15, 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 4:9-16, 2 Cor. 3:18; 11:23-30; 12:1-10)

Buy now at Rock bottom prices (Rev. 3:18)

Think of it: all this cheap real estate is available for almost nothing, like the \$10 portrait of the son. Imagine the anguish, the horror of regret as those treasure seekers realized how easily the whole estate with

its entire art collection could have been theirs. They'd missed it by a hair, all because their heart was in the wrong place.

But the *real* Treasure is *still* available: a little time here, a little patience there, a heart listening for *His voice*, digging a little deeper in the Word, and grace to endure with *joy* instead of complaining. *It's giving God permission to replace our layers of self-reliance with His unconditional love, enabling us to love others the same way.* (Col. 1:11, 1 Thes. 1:6, 1 Pet. 1:8; 4:13)

Do you realize God *wants* to give it to us? "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lu. 12:32; see Rom. 8:32)

The next two verses show us what God thinks of our earthly real estate when our heart is in it and not *Him*: "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail . . . For where your *treasure* is, there your *heart* will be also." (Also Mt. 6:19f)

The "rich young ruler" could have kept his wealth if his *heart* had not been there, if it had not taken the place of God. To the disciples, "astonished at His words," Jesus said, "Children, how *hard* it is for those who *trust in riches* to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mk. 10:24)

How does "the deceitfulness of riches" take the place of God? When they replace the comfort and satisfaction God alone gives. And when they take *time* away from intimacy with Him through a listening, hungry heart. (Mt. 13:22; 5:6)

Ezekiel, when exposing the sin of Sodom, dealt first with the *cause* of her "abominations." "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." (Ez. 16:49)

The *true* purpose of wealth beyond "having food and clothing" is to "have something to give him who has need" and have "an *abundance* for every good work." (1 Tim. 6:8, Eph. 4:28, 2 Cor. 9:8)

Jesus rebuked Martha for being "worried and troubled about many things," telling her "*one thing* is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part which *will not be taken away from her*." Earthy cares, along with "houses and . . . land" will soon "pass away." (Lu. 10:42, Mk. 10:30, Mt. 24:35)

In fact many business analysts predict the "housing bubble" is about to "pop." with a more devastating affect than the "stock market crash in 2000-02." A web-search on "housing bubble" will give you the pros and cons.

Why not invest in heaven's *real estate*—an opportunity of a lifetime. You may wonder why you are "cursed" with your particular disadvantages, trials, weakness, physical looks or deformity, emotional hang-

up, circumstances, addiction, incarceration, husband or wife or children or lack of them.

These temporary problems are your *challenge* to digging deeper into a life of faith as an *overcomer* in Christ, filled with wisdom and glory through "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." (Heb. 12:1, 1 Pet. 1:4, 1 Jn. 5:4-5, Rev. 2:7).

*Scriptures, except where noted, fr. the NKJV
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Epilog: In 2007 Bill pulled out of the Florida housing market, but not without major losses. Steve faced a different crisis which shook his foundation of sand. I'm not sure where he stands now.