

Waking Up in Heaven: A True Story of Brokenness, Heaven, and Life Again

By Crystal McVea, Alex Tresniowski

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An inspirational memoir of near-death experience, rebirth, divine mercy, and faith from first-time author Crystal Leigh McVea.

On December 10, 2009, McVea, a thirty-two-year-old mother of four, went to the hospital for a routine procedure. While undergoing treatment, her face suddenly turned a dark shade of blue, then black. Her mother screamed for help, and a nurse tried to revive her…to no avail.

Today, Crystal does not remember what happened in that hospital room during the nine minutes she was unconscious and unable to breathe on her own. She has no memory of the panic and the rushing nurses and the loud cries of “Code Blue.”

She only remembers drifting off…and waking up in heaven.

This unexpected meeting of a self-described sinner and skeptic with her God changed everything. Raised Christian, she had left her faith behind after childhood abuse and the subsequent struggles and suffering of her troubled teens and early adulthood. She longed to believe but felt abandoned, broken, and undeserving.

A moving autobiographical testament to the power of divine love and forgiveness, *Waking Up in Heaven* shares the message of hope, healing, and compassion McVea brought back from her brush with God.

This brave, honest account of years lost to shame and guilt will inspire those who’ve stumbled along their own spiritual journey, with the uplifting reminder that no one is beyond the reach of grace and redemption, and that, in the words of the author, “God is real. Heaven is real. And God’s love for us is the realest thing of all.”

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Editorial Review

About the Author
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 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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Waking Up in Heaven

SOMEDAY SOON, ONE OF MY PRECIOUS THREE-YEAR-OLD twins is going to ask me the question "Mommy, what happened to you when you died?"

Someday they will overhear me telling my story to someone and want to know more about it. They will look at me with their big, innocent eyes and try to make sense of what they're hearing. It isn't always easy explaining what happened even to adults, so how am I going to explain it to my kids?

There is so much I want to share with them, so much I want them to know. You see, my story is one of hope and forgiveness and salvation, and of the glorious healing power of God's presence. It's the story of what I saw and what I learned when, during a hospital stay, I left my body for nine minutes and went to heaven and stood before God. And it's the story of how, when I came back to Earth, my life was profoundly and permanently changed—changed down to the very core of my being.

But it is also a story that, for the longest time, I didn't want to tell.

I live in a wonderful town in southern Oklahoma, in a community of friendly and God-fearing people, a place where passion for Jesus runs deep. Still, I know how much damage a juicy piece of gossip can cause. I was a teacher—someone parents trust to teach and care for their children—and I was afraid that if people heard my story, I'd be shunned and ridiculed and maybe even fired.

I was afraid people would think I was flat-out crazy.

And even though God's instructions to me could not have been any clearer—"Tell them what you can remember"—I struggled to understand why I had been chosen and what exactly He wanted me to do.

I struggled, because I'm the least likely person to be telling anyone about God.

Put simply, I'm not ever going to be on any short list for sainthood. Early in my life I was a sinner, and I'm pretty sure I broke every one of the Ten Commandments. That's right, not just some—all ten.

Even the big one—Thou shalt not kill. When I was younger, I committed a sin I believed to be so grievous and so unforgivable, I was sure God could never love me, if He even existed at all.

And that was the other thing about me—when it came to God's existence, I was a skeptic. I had grown up in the heart of the Bible Belt, been baptized not once but four times, gone to church regularly, and heard a million sermons about God. And yet, deep in my heart, I wasn't convinced. Over and over I challenged God to prove He existed, and every time He did. I'd set up a new roadblock, a new challenge for Him to overcome.

I saw the hardships in my life as evidence that God had no interest in protecting me from harm. I questioned Him, and I cursed Him. And at times I vowed to cut Him out my life.

And still—and still!—God chased me and wooed me and loved me and chose me, and then He sent me back to this world to share a message.

And so, eventually, I began to tell my story. I told strangers in restaurants, customers at Walmart, and patrons eating ice cream at Braum's—anywhere and everywhere I felt God's familiar nudge.

"Excuse me," I'd say. "My name is Crystal McVea, and in 2009 I died and went to heaven."

How's that for an icebreaker?

And what happened after I started telling the full story of my journey to heaven is a remarkable, miraculous tale all its own.

Now I am sharing that story with you, in this book. Believe me, writing a book is not anything I ever thought I'd do. It's not like it was on my bucket list (like taking my kids to see a Broadway show and going to the Grand Canyon), and every single day I worked on this book was a day I had to pinch myself to make sure it was really happening.

But as soon as I got over my fears and started testifying, I knew that God's plan for me was to share what happened with as many people as I could. And frankly I can only spend so many hours a day at Walmart accosting strangers in the checkout line. Writing a book will leave me lots more time to get dinner ready for the kids.

Now, are there people out there who will think I'm a fraud, or a religious nut, or crazy? I'm sure there are. Maybe some people who pick up this book will toss it across the room midway through and write it off as fiction. Who is this mom from Oklahoma who says she stood with God? Why should we believe anything she says? One response I sometimes get is, "Oh, Crystal, I believe that you believe you saw God. I just don't know if I believe it." That's just a polite way of saying I'm either lying or crazy without actually having to say it.

The truth is, I know my story is hard for some people to believe. I know what I went through is beyond the realm of what we can experience on Earth. Listen, if someone had come up to me before this happened and told me they had died and stood with God, I'm pretty sure I would have been skeptical, too.

But I also know this book deals with the biggest and most important questions of them all: Does God exist? Is there a heaven? What is God's plan for us? Why are we even here?

I certainly don't pretend to have all the answers. In fact, I still have plenty of questions. Nor am I claiming to be anyone special. I'm a run-of-the-mill American mom living in the heartland. I spend my days begging my twins to take their naps, driving my older kids around to practices, and trying hard to eat better and lose a little weight (and not always succeeding). Before this happened I loved my life as a mother and a wife and a teacher, and that life fulfilled me deeply.

But what happened to me did happen, and now I know—after a lifetime of not knowing—that God does exist. He gloriously, beautifully, wonderfully exists.

And since God told me to share my whole story, that is what I'm doing—even though much of my story is painful and not always pretty. You will learn as you get deeper into this book that for most of my life I lived with terrible shame and horrible secrets. For the longest time I hated myself and believed I was worthless, and as a result I made so many bad choices.

But it's important to realize who I was in order to understand who I have become.

Some of what I describe about my time in heaven may be familiar to you from other accounts of people dying and coming back—the quality of the light, the shimmering entranceway, the presence of angels—but some of it probably isn't. Everything I describe is absolutely, 100 percent how I remember it—that has always been my one and only rule for sharing my testimony. Nothing is embellished or exaggerated even the tiniest bit. I always tell people, "If I was going to make this up, I'd have made it a lot more dramatic." What I describe is what I experienced, nothing more or less.

What I can say is that the things God showed me were simply astonishing in their power and impact, and now the reality of God's presence bursts forth from my heart every day. The truth is, I was more alive in those nine minutes than I have ever been in all my years on this Earth.

And now I can only hope that through my descriptions, however inadequate they may be, you will feel even a fraction of the power and the impact and the absolute glory of what I experienced.



NOT LONG AGO I read about a national Pew survey that showed the number of young Americans who have doubts about the existence of God is growing. In 2007, only 17 percent of people aged thirty or younger said they had some doubt that God was real. In 2012, that number went up to 32 percent. That's roughly a third of young Americans surveyed who aren't sure if they believe God is real.

Then there is a recent comment from Professor Stephen Hawking, the famous Cambridge scientist. "There is no heaven or afterlife," he said in a 2012 interview. "That is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."

Maybe the Pew poll and Hawking's comment should upset me, but they don't. And the reason they don't is because I used to be one of those doubters. I understand the skepticism, because a skeptical streak still runs through me. As a kid I questioned everything, and as an adult I'm still nosing around, searching for answers.

And while I no longer have any doubts about God and His power, I also realize that I am lucky, because I got to stand with Him. For many others, faith is about believing in a God they can't see. And for some, faith means believing in a God they have questions about. Just because you have questions doesn't mean you can't have faith.

My point is, I can’t prove that what happened to me actually happened. Reading this book requires some measure of faith. Ultimately, what you take from my story depends on what you believe.

In the hallway of our home, just outside the bedroom where my youngest daughter plays with her purple stuffed donkey and my youngest son cooks up adventures for his little wooden robot, not far from where my oldest boy lifts weights and my teenage daughter texts her friends nonstop, a verse from the Bible is stenciled across the wall in black script. It reads

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,

And the evidence of things unseen.”

Hebrews 11:1–3

Because of what happened to me, I know that God is real. But you don’t have to die and stand with God to know what I know.

What makes God real for anyone is faith.

And so, when my twins come up to me and ask me about my story, what will I tell them? I guess I will sit them down and start by saying, “Children, there is a heaven, and heaven is beautiful.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Donna Macdonald:

In this 21st millennium, people become competitive in most way. By being competitive today, people have do something to make all of them survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. Sure, by reading a book your ability to survive boost then having chance to stay than other is high. In your case who want to start reading a book, we give you this kind of Waking Up in Heaven: A True Story of Brokenness, Heaven, and Life Again book as starter and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

Stephanie Gilley:

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Blair Chappell:

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