ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Volume 5

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Is it real? Heaven



Is it real? This is a common question asked by skeptics, even if they' re hopeful, the answer is yes. And when it comes to heaven, there are few questions in life that carry the weight of this question.

In this week's chapters from our companion book, The First Phone Call From Heaven, "Is it real?" is heavily debated, with most taking

What do you think happens

Late Show host Stephen Colbert occasionally asks this question to guests on his show in an episode called "The Colbert Questionert." The celebrities interviewed by Colbert provide a varie-

ty of responses, offering a

when we die?

one side or the other. I'm betting that even the naysayers are hoping they're wrong. Who doesn't want heaven to be real? Page 2





glimpse into their beliefs. Most of us believe that there is something after death, but

what happens is a mystery. Belief in an afterlife is common globally across nearly all religions.

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Last week's chapters ended with Amy Penn doing a short news report for Nine Action News of Alpena. Amy was hoping for a big break in her career. Working as a news reporter for a TV Station in Alpena, big stories didn't happen very often. Amy was skeptical when her boss told her to go to Coldwater to cover a story about a woman claiming to have received a phone call from her dead sister. Amy wasn't thinking that this story could be her big break.

After returning from Coldwater, Amy's news story was posted on the Nine Action News website, as was the usual practice of the station. Ordinarily, a story might receive a dozen to a few hundred comments from viewers. But Amy's story had thousands of comments. Her boss sent Amy back to Coldwater for more coverage.

Back in Coldwater, Amy does another on-camera interview with Katherine. "What do you talk about? Amy asks. "She tells me about heaven, Katherine replies. "What does she say?" Katherine answers, "She says everyone you lose here, you find again there."

Crowds gathered in front of Katherine's home, hoping that these miracles were real and perhaps wishing that they too would hear from someone in heaven. Is this really Amy's big break, or is Katherine's miracle call just a scam? Is it genuine?

The Annenberg Public Policy
Center at the University of Pennsylvania operates a website,
FactCheck.org. The staff that maintains the content for this website must be busier than ever, given the preponderance of conspiracy theories based on lies circulating. To make matters worse, our current president is fond of promoting theories that serve his position regardless of whether there is any factual content to support his assertions.

Definitions of "conspiracy theories" vary in their emphasis on whether they necessarily involve harmful or tragic events and influential organizations. But they all agree that they generally offer explanations that require improbable conspiracies in place of likely causation.

The European Commission identifies six key characteristics of conspiracy theories and provides guidance on evaluating the reliability of such claims. Conspiracy theories typically include: 1) An alleged, secret plot. 2) A group of conspirators. 3) "Evidence" that seems to support the conspiracy theory. 4) They falsely suggest that nothing

is as it appears, and everything is connected. 5) They divide the world into good or bad. 6) They scapegoat people and groups.

They suggest that the story is unlikely to be a conspiracy theory if it comes from someone with recognized qualifications and credentials on the subject, and provides verifiable facts and evidence from scientific or academic research.

On the other hand, conspiracy theories often originate from self-proclaimed experts and are not affiliated with a reputable organization or institution.

Katherine was not the only one receiving calls from heaven, but not everyone wanted others to know about their calls. Amy befriended Katherine, offering her exclusive access to any new developments. As news about the miracles in Coldwater grew, so did Katherine's popularity.

Another breakthrough. Amy is at Katherine's house on a Friday when the phone rings. She quickly grabs her camera but runs into a chair as it slips from her grasp. Amy managed to capture only part of the call, and what she did record was shaky, which seemed to lend authenticity to it. Her unedited video went viral. Suddenly, searches for Coldwater, Michigan, topped the list of the most searched words.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Virginia Bigger Sylvia Pittman Mirium Watson Fred Hans Jonathon Misner Terrance Williams



FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

Dean Lamoreaux

Norma Buzzard

Nancy Elston

COMING UP THIS WEEK JUNE 16—22

June 16 Leadership Team Meeting Mon 6:00pm 9am-until gone Produce will be available each June 17 Tue week, along with canned goods, until further notice Wed June 18 Thu June 19 11:00qm-2:00pm Health & Wellness Check (see pg 19) June 20 Fri June 21 Sat June 22 Sun 10:30am New Beginnings Contemporary Worship

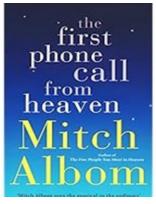
(We are live on <u>Facebook</u> and our newly launched <u>YouTube channel</u>. You can find these links along with more information about us on our website at (<u>FlintAsbury.org</u>.)



Upcoming Worship Series "Heaven"



Book Club News



We're
using another
novel written
by Mitch
Albom for our
next series,
Heaven,
beginning the
second
Sunday of
June. The First

Phone Call from Heaven is captivating as Albom takes us on a rollercoaster ride of hope-filled mystery.

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor Kevin Croom Executive Director/CDC Connie Portillo Office Secretary Kim Sims Finance Director Terry Kinze Ops Manger/CDC Sylvia Pittman Empowerment Arts Jim Craig Board & Leadership Chair Israel Unger (Izzy) Business Service Mgr Terrance Williams Arts Center Mgr Venus McBeth South Flint Soup Kitchen

In our worship series, *Lifeboat*, we learn about a group of people desperately clinging to life after the yacht they were on sank. Three days after the accident, after drifting a considerable distance from where the boat went down, they pull a stranger into the lifeboat. The stranger claimed to be the Lord.

In this series, *Heaven*, we turn to another of Mitch Albom's best-selling novels, *The First Phone Call From Heaven*. In this mystery, Albom takes readers on a roller-coaster ride of mystery and hope.

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The story begins one morning in the town of Coldwater, Michigan, when several phones start ringing. What makes the calls unusual is that the voices on the other end claim to be calling from heaven.

Is this the greatest miracle ever or a cruel hoax? Soon after, a reporter from Alpena arrives, thinking her boss has sent her on an insignificant news story, visitors suddenly overrun the small town.

Meanwhile, a disgraced pilot named Sully Harding

Leadership in Worship & Service

Tony & Mirium
Cyndi
Anthony & Jim
Jonathon & Terrance
Yasheah & Mirium
Christine
Welcome Team
Worship Leader
Voship Leader
Voship Leader
Voship Ushers
Production Team
Nursery
Cafe

returns to Coldwater from prison only to discover his hometown gripped by "miracle fever." When his young son starts carrying a toy phone, hoping to hear from his mother in heaven, Sully has had enough.

As proof of an afterlife spreads, the town and the world start to transform. Church attendance increases as believers turn to the local pastors for confirmation. But Sully is convinced there is nothing beyond this sad life. So he digs deeper, determined to disprove these miracles for the sake of his child and his own broken heart.

Moving seamlessly between the invention of the telephone in 1876 and a world obsessed with the next level of communication, Mitch Albom takes readers on a breathtaking ride of frenzied hope.

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Upcoming Worship Series — "Heaven"

"Miracles happen quietly every day," writes Albom, but "They are rarely tallied. No one keeps score. Now and then, a miracle is declared to the world. And when that happens, things change."

And the miracle Albom writes about is a phone call. Calls happen every day with little notice. But a call placed to a member of Harvest of Hope Baptist Church was different. And so were the other seven. In the case of Katherine Yellin, the call was from her dead sister, Diane. She said she was calling from heaven.

Were these miracles or the result of a cruel prank? Stay tuned, and we will uncover the truth together. Albom's book offers a creative and thought-provoking illustration of the reality of heaven. However, we will turn to scripture as our primary source of truth, supplemented by tradition, logic, and our own experiences.

The Lord builds his home in the heavens.

Amos 9:6

Our series follows Mitch Albom's book but adds our own concerns and relevant stories from scripture. His book is inspirational and should cause us to reflect on our beliefs about heaven and the afterlife.

The Book Club article in our weekly newsletter, the Circuit Rider, includes a reading schedule. All relevant articles and past issues of our newsletter are on our *website*.

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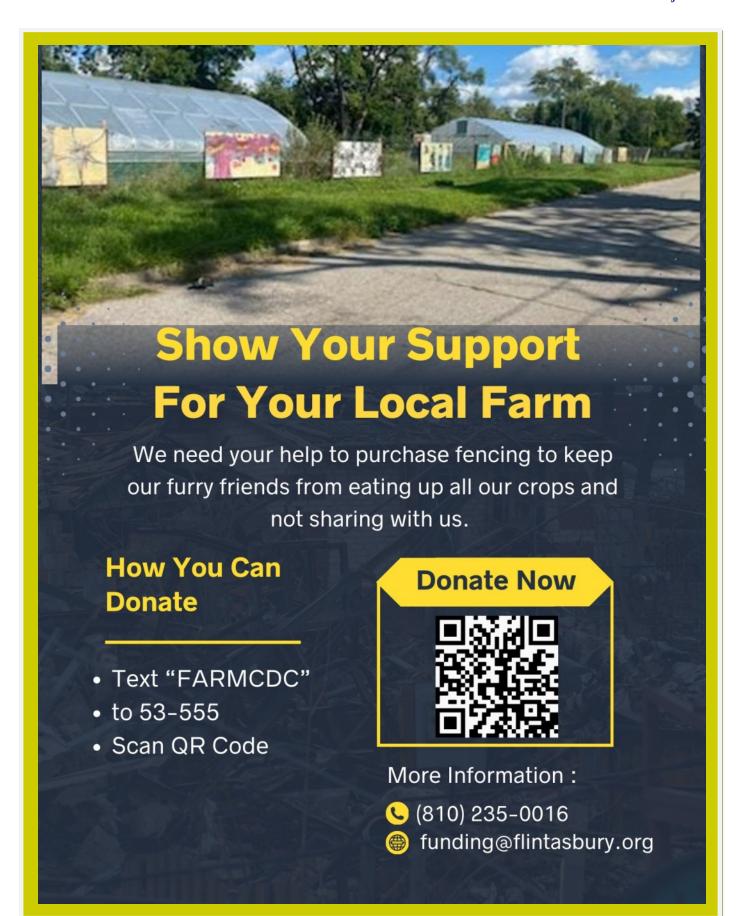




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LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS & MORE:	
What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?	25.01
NOTES FROM WORSHIP	Matthew 14:22-33
QUESTIONS FOR LIFE GROUPS	S:

- 1. Read Matthew 14:22-33. What do you think? Is it real? Why or why not?
- 2. Read the article in this week's Circuit Rider titled Is it real? Do you believe miracles happen? Either way, what evidence do you have to support your belief? How do you deal with conspiracy theories? Are there some that you want to believe despite evidence to the contrary? Why?
- 3. How can your group members help you be more receptive to hearing and understanding the Word of God this week? Pray for one another to be blessed by the Holy Spirit with greater courage.



Album reminds us that while no one is certain who invented the telephone, the U.S. patent belongs to the Scottish-born Alexander Graham Bell.

Many believe he stole it away from an American inventor named Elisha Gray. Others maintain that an Italian named Manzetti or a Frenchman named Bourseul or a German named Reis or another Italian named Meucci deserves credit. What few dispute is that all these men, working in the mid-nineteenth century, explored the idea of transmitting vocal vibrations from one place to another. But the very first telephonic conversation, between Bell and Thomas Watson, standing in separate rooms, contained these words: Come here. I want to see you.

"Come here, I want to see you." These words describe the familiar feelings of telephone conversations between two people who long to be together. Their sentiment also reflects the promise of an afterlife where we're once again reunited with lost loved ones.

Mitch Albom is the founder of SAY Detroit, a nonprofit that provides pathways to success for Detroiters in need through major health, housing, and education initiatives. The nonprofit is funded in part by profits coming from a dessert shop and a gourmet popcorn line. He and his wife Janine also operate Have Faith Haiti, a home and school for impoverished children and orphans in Port-au-Prince.

As an author, Mitch Album has written eight #1 New York Times bestsellers, Emmy Award-winning TV films, stage plays, screenplays, a nationally syndicated newspaper column, and a musical. As a result of his work at the Detroit Free Press, Album was inducted into both the National Sports Media Association and Michigan Sports Halls of Fame and received the Red Smith Award for lifetime achievement.

If you choose to follow along, I suggest using the following schedule:

Sunday's	<u>Pages</u>	Chapters (Weeks)
June 8	1 - 59	Weeks 1 to 6
June 15	60 - 101	Weeks 7 to 9
June 22	102 - 143	Weeks 10 & 11
June 29	144 - 186	Weeks 12 to 14
July 6	187 - 238	Weeks 15 & 16
July 13	239 - 308	Broadcast Day to 2 Months Later

We'll have a few books available for purchase. New copies of the paperback edition are available through Amazon for \$10.10, and used copies in good condition are usually under \$7, including shipping. This book is likely to be available at the local library. Our Book Club does not meet as a group. However, our weekly messages reference that week's chapters. You can anticipate spoiler alerts unless you keep up with the pace. You can purchase your own copy or visit your local library.

You can contact our office with questions by phone or simply type your question or enter a prayer request on our website's homepage — FlintAsburyChurch.org.

Pastor Tommy

Mitch Albom. The First Phone Call from Heaven. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.

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Online at www.mightycause.com/feedflint

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Is it real? Heaven ... cont from pg 2

Meanwhile, Father Carroll, Priest of the Catholic Church in Coldwater, discovers that Tess Rafferty also received a phone call from heaven. Her testimony was important, both because it corroborated the miracle, and her call came before Katherine's first call. After all, reasoned Father Carroll, if God chose to allow such a miracle, then it seemed only right that God would start with a Catholic.

Ironically, Tess stopped attending services once she graduated from high school. She cited the judgment of the other attendees toward her mother, Ruth, a single mom.

Of course, other networks competed for exclusive content, and there would be ample opportunity for new developments to be seen by the rest of the world, waiting anxiously for news from Coldwater.

But for everyone who believed, there were one or more skeptics. One expert, Daniel Fromman, a scientist with Responsible Scientists International in Washington DC, said in an interview, "The contact these people are suggesting is not only impossible, it's laughable. This just isn't something people should take seriously." The scientist emphasized that just because a call from heaven would comfort a person grieving the loss of a loved one, it doesn't make it real.

But, is it real? After all, there are miracles reported in scripture that are just as profound.

Matthew tells us about a time when the disciples of Jesus were crossing the lake in a boat without Him. We're told that the wind picked up and the boat was tossed about by the waves. It was dark out, between three and six o'clock in the morning.

Suddenly, they saw someone who appeared to be walking on the water. "It's a ghost!" they screamed with terror and fear. The ghost they saw was Jesus, who shouted to them, "Courage! It is I. Don't be afraid!"

Peter, still uncertain if he was willing to believe what he heard, replied, "Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you."

"Is it real?" the disciples wondered. "Is it real?" Peter asked out loud.

"Come!" answered Jesus. So Peter climbs out of the boat and starts walking towards Jesus. Peter was actually walking on the water, we're told. But this doesn't seem impossible. What little faith you have? Why did you doubt?

Matthew 14: 22-33

Then, all of a sudden, reality sets in for Peter. It's dark and the wind is strong. And, by the way, people don't walk on water; they sink. Matthew tells us that fear took over, and Peter began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he cried. At once, Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of Peter, saying, "What little faith you have! Why did you doubt?"

Matthew finished his story by telling us that after Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind died down. "Truly, you are the Son of God!" the disciples said to Jesus.

Now it's our turn. "Was it real?" After all, I can barely get on top of the water on skis. I've never managed to walk on water. I sink like a rock.

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According to a recent Pew Research article, 85% of adults in Indonesia, where Islam is the predominant religion, say there is definitely or probably life after death. In Kenya, where most are Christians, 80% of adults agree. The percentage drops to 70% overall for adults living in the U.S.,

According to an analysis published by Ryan Burge, 90% of older adults born in the same decades as me believe there is some form of life after death. Interestingly, Burge discovered that even the majority of people claiming no religious affiliation believe in an afterlife.

Sixty-seven percent of adults living in our country believe in heaven, where most of us hope to reside after we leave this place. So, where and what is heaven? What is heaven like?

These are just a couple of the questions we plan to explore over the next six weeks, aided by a fictional novel, *The First Phone Call From Heaven*, written by Mitch Albom. We begin our new series, *Heaven*, with several phones ringing or vibrating around the town of Coldwater. Each phone call was a miracle. Calls happen every day with little notice. But a call placed to a member of Harvest of Hope Baptist Church was different. And so were the others.

In the case of Katherine
Yellin, the call was from her
dead sister, Diane. She said she
was calling from heaven. Mitch
Albom writes, "Had Katherine
Yellin never stood up that
Sunday morning, what
happened in Coldwater might
have passed like so many other
miracles, held quiet, wrapped
in whispers. But once exposed
to the public, miracles change
things."

Katherine can't wait to tell the world about it. The others who also received calls from deceased friends, relatives, and a former employee preferred to stay quiet.

"Faith, it is said, is better than belief, because belief is when someone else does the thinking," writes Albom when sharing that Pastor Warren's faith was intact. Belief, however, had become more difficult for the Baptist pastor. Sure, church attendance was up dramatically, but Katherine's claim was definitely coloring outside the lines of the pastor's understanding of heaven.

Was it a miracle, a hoax, or the overly enthusiastic imagination of a well-meaning member of his church? Yet, Elias Rowe supported Katherine's claim by informing the congregation that he also received a call. Moreover, Elisa never speaks in front of a crowd.

"Miracles happen quietly every day," writes Albom, but "They are rarely tallied. No one keeps score. Now and then, a miracle is declared to the world. And when that happens, things change."

John tells us, in His Gospel, that Jesus spoke to His followers about the afterlife on the night of His arrest. "There are many rooms in my Father's house." Jesus said, "And I am going to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

A lot of pastors, including me, repeat these words from Jesus at funerals. Many of us prefer to call funerals celebrations of life or sometimes a "Going home celebration," reinforcing the promise Jesus made.

There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you with me, so that you will be where I am.

John 14:1-7

Jesus also said, "And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to Myself, so that you will be where I am" (John 14:3).

Scripture tells us that the place Jesus is referring to is heaven, which, according to Genesis chapter one, was created by God on the second day. The Prophet Amos said that, the Lord builds his home in the heavens (Amos 9:6).

Heaven is real. But what is it really like? A phone call from someone already there would help clear up this question. Lots of phone calls from different people offering similar descriptions would be even better!

Meanwhile, we rely on our faith.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our website's homepage. Click here to watch. This button takes you to our YouTube channel. You can find more information about us on our website

at FlintAsburyChurch.org.

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com, or let us know when you send a message through our website. We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose Newsletters.

Pastor Tommy

Our series was inspired by Mitch Albom. The First Phone Call from Heaven. New York: HarperCollins, 2014. Jonathan Evans, Kirsten Lesage, William Miner, Kelsey Jo Starr, and Manolo Corichi. "Believing in Spirits and Life After Death Is

Common Around the World." © Pew Research Center, May 6, 2025. Retrieved from: link

Ryan Burge. "Belief in an Afterlife is Increasing in the United States." © Ryan Burge, April 17, 2025. Retrieved

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Here is the outline of our series:

<u>Sundays</u>	<u>Episode</u>
June 8	Heaven calling
June 15	Is this real?
June 22	Go tell
June 29	Validation
July 6	Manna
July 13	Busted?

The Prophet Amos tells us that the Lord builds his home in the heavens. And Jesus promised that He would prepare a place for each of us. Whether or not anyone has ever received a phone call from there, heaven is real.

Please join us each Sunday at 10:30 a.m. We share our weekly episodes on <u>Facebook</u> and our <u>YouTube channel</u>, and go live at 10:30 a.m. You can find these links and more information about us, or join our live broadcast on our <u>website</u>, <u>FlintAsburyChurch.org</u>.

Pastor Tommy

Mitch Albom. The First Phone Call from Heaven. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.







An act of vandalism at Annual Conference -

June 11, 2025

Dear Friends in the Michigan Conference,

Greetings in the grace of Jesus Christ. I am writing today to share with you a horrific and profoundly hurtful incident that occurred toward the end of our annual conference gathering at the Grand Traverse Resort (GTR).

In preparation for our 2025 annual conference, the Rev. Dr. Tara Gay created a prayer room at the GTR. The Rev. Nadine Johnson worked closely with Dr. Gay to create this Holy space for meditation and prayer. On Sunday morning, June 1, when Rev. Johnson went to the prayer room to prepare it for the day, she found torn paper, a racial epithet written on a picture, and a few symbols apparently meant to denigrate women. Dr. Gay reported this to me and other annual conference leaders, including the leadership of the Commission on the Annual Conference. Dr. Gay and Rev. Johnson have remained in my prayers since I heard about this deeply troubling incident.

The Annual Conference staff and the leadership of the Commission on the Annual Conference engaged with staff from the Grand Traverse Resort. The resort staff were apologetic and supportive of our efforts to gather more information about this incident. The GTR staff has expressed its commitment to offering safe and respectful spaces for conference guests. Preliminary indications suggest that those responsible for the vandalism in the prayer room were neither resort staff nor conference attendees. The investigation, however, continues.

The annual conference has filed a report with the appropriate law enforcement agencies. Our goal in seeking to identify those responsible is to achieve restorative justice. We would like those who have engaged in such harmful behavior to understand the damage they have caused, the hurt and harm they have created, and to acknowledge their full responsibility for perpetuating such harm.

The Commission on the Annual Conference is committed to collaborating with the GTR staff to ensure an environment that is hospitable and safe for our annual conference, one that reflects our theological affirmation that each person is created in the image of God and loved by God in Jesus Christ. Such work will be ongoing.

This horrific incident again highlights the need to continue our anti-bias, anti-racism work. The tentacles of racism and radicalized thinking reach deep, and we must continue to work to root them out of our hearts, souls, minds, and society. Regardless of who perpetrated this action, it does not lessen the importance of our work. In the name of Jesus, we will help lead our world toward a more beloved community.

I will update the conference as information becomes available. Please continue to pray for all those harmed in this incident.

Grace and Peace.

David A Boul

David Alan Bard Michigan Area Bishop Is it real? Heaven cont from pg 12

Just like Peter, even the most faithful among us have doubts about one or more of the stories we're told or read. Sometimes it's healthy skepticism. Other times, unhelpful conspiracy theories crowd our minds.

Fortunately, Jesus is always with us, close enough to reach out and save us from sinking.

You can join us each Sunday in person or online by clicking the button on our *website's* homepage. *Click here to watch*. This button takes you to our *YouTube channel*. You can find more information about us on our website at *FlintAsburyChurch.org*.

This is a reminder that we publish a weekly newsletter called the Circuit Rider. You can request this publication by email by sending a request to *FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com*, or let us know when you send a message through our *website*. We post an archive of past editions on our website under Connect - choose *Newsletters*.

Pastor Tommy

Our series was inspired by Mitch Albom. *The First Phone Call* from Heaven. New York: HarperCollins, 2014. Kate Yandell. "RFK Jr. Denies Cuts to Scientific Research While Slashing Staff, Funding." © Annenberg Public Policy Center, May 29, 2025. Retrieved from: Iink

"Identifying conspiracy theories." © European Commission, 2025. Retrieved from: *link*