

TEARS IN HEAVEN (Inspired by the Eric Clapton song)

Week #4 of a 6-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, May 3, 2026

LYRICS to "Tears in Heaven"

Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?

Would it be the same if I saw you in heaven?

I must be strong and carry on

'Cause I know I don't belong

Here in heaven

Would you hold my hand if I saw you in heaven?

Would you help me stand if I saw you in heaven?

I'll find my way through night and day

'Cause I know I just can't stay

Here in heaven

Time can bring you down, time can bend your knees

Time can break your heart, have you begging please

Begging please

Beyond the door, there's peace, I'm sure

And I know there'll be no more

Tears in heaven

Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?

Would you feel the same if I saw you in heaven?

I must be strong and carry on

Because I know I don't belong

Here in heaven

MESSAGE:

Father Murphy walked into a pub. And the first man he saw, he said, *"Do you want to go to heaven?"*

And the man said, *"Of course! Absolutely!"*

And then Father Murphy said, *"Then go stand against that wall."*

He goes to that second guy and says, *"Do you want to go to heaven?"*

And he said, *"Certainly! Of course I do.!"*

And he said, *"Well, go stand against that wall."*

And then he goes up to O'Toole and he says, *"Do you want to go to heaven?"*

And O'Toole says, *"No; I don't."*

And then Father Murphy is offended. He says, *"What? I can't believe this! You don't want to go to heaven when you die?"*

He said, *"Oh! When I die."* He said, *"Oh, I thought you were trying to get a group to go now."*

[Congregants laugh]

So how many people have ever wondered what happens when you die? Anybody ever? And how many people ever think about what heaven might be like? I mean, is it a place? Is it paradise, you know? Flowing with milk and honey and paved gold roads? And hanging and meeting and reuniting with our families? Or is it a state of consciousness? Or maybe it doesn't exist at all?

The answer to these questions really depend on what faith you grew up in. So, is there a heaven or is it a state of being? Christianity and Islam believe that there is a place and we are united with our families. Sikhism and Buddhism and New Thought churches don't believe in a place of heaven; they believe in a state of consciousness and a state of awareness, and it's uncertain about whether we will unite with our loved ones.

And so how do we -- if this exists -- how do we get to heaven? In Christianity and Islam, it is by faith and grace. And by Hinduism and Buddhism, it is by karma and growth. Well, my question is for you: What do you believe about heaven and how to get into heaven?

It kind of reminds me of this teacher that was testing her Sunday school class to see if they understood the concept of getting to heaven. And she asked them, *"I sold my house and my car and had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would I get into heaven?"*

And all the kids said, *"No."*

She said, *"If I cleaned the church every day and mowed the yard and kept everything neat and tidy, would I get into heaven?"*

Again, the kids said, *"No."*

Now she's just smiling, feeling so proud of herself as a teacher. She thought, *"Well, if I was kind to all animals and gave candy to children and loved my husband, then would I get into heaven?"*

And all the kids said, *"No."*

And so she's bursting with pride and joy. And then she finally said, *"So what do I have to do to get into heaven?"*

And a five-year-old kid says, *"You've got to be dead."* [Congregants laugh] Okay.

Unity believes that death is not the end of life, but it is a transition of the eternal soul. That our body is just a garment that we wear, and dying is releasing that garment so that the spirit could be free to move on with God to the next purpose and mission. Unity rejects the notion that there is a burning hell or a literal heaven, viewing these as states created in our own minds and actions in the here and now.

Today we are in Week #4 of our six-week "Songs of Life" series, taking famous songs -- popular songs, songs we love -- that already uplift us and glean a spiritual message from them.

Week #1, we did "Help" by the Beatles. Week #2, "Redemption Song" by Bob Marley. Last week was Bob Seger's "Against the Wind." And today we're doing Eric Clapton's "Tears in Heaven."

This song was in 1991; was written about six months after the death of his son, who fell out of a window from the 53rd floor and died. And he was obviously devastated and was not able to do anything for a while. He and his writing partner, Will Jennings, were writing something for a movie called "Rush."

But Eric decided about six months after his son Connor's passing that he wanted to write a song about him. And he wrote the first line:

Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?

And then, together, he and Will wrote the rest. He knew that doing it would be hard, but he also knew that doing it would help him process and feel and heal the pain -- obvious pain and devastation -- that he felt.

At the 1993 Academy Awards, this song won “Best Song,” “Best Record,” “Best Male Performance.” I mean, clearly it is a song -- whether you know the history on it or not – that is touching and moving ... and even more profound when you know the back story. It is sad. It is heartbreaking. And yet in it, I think there is some hope and some comfort and the possibility of gaining strength through it.

So, this morning, I want to look at three life lessons that we glean from this heartfelt but heartbreaking song, “Tears in Heaven.” And they are to allow grief; to stay connected; and to find meaning.

And so, to **ALLOW GRIEF**. Let me just reread the opening lines:

Would you know my name if I saw you in heaven?

Would it be the same if I saw you in heaven? ...

Would you hold my hand if I saw you in heaven?

Would you help me stand if I saw you in heaven?

And it's amazing. He just comes right out, and understandably, with the grief, with the hurt that he's feeling. How devastated he feels. And I think it shows how important it is for us to feel our pain; to feel our loss; to feel the grief; to feel the devastation. Clearly, he's feeling this strong desire of missing his son and wishing he could see him; wishing he could touch him again.

And I don't think we disagree in any way in saying the most devastating and painful thing in life is to lose a child. But in the way this is, I think the message is about all the loss and all the grief that we can go through, because we all go through a lot of loss. We all go through levels of grief and pain in our lives.

There was a study done with people over 100 years old. And they asked them: Besides genetics, what do you think are the top reasons that have allowed you to live this long and live so well for this long? And the four things were: Number one was they had a good social network. They knew a lot of people and they made those social connections. Number two is they had a positive attitude. Number three is they had goals. They had things that they were looking forward to. And the fourth one is that they were good and they constantly worked on getting over their losses in life.

And you can imagine in a hundred years, you'd probably have a few losses. And there'd probably be a lot of losses. And they recognize that in their living: that sometimes that we can hold on to pain. We can have it weigh us down. And that how important it is for us to process; how important it is for us to feel and deal and face and move through the pain that we inevitably feel in our lives.

And we would all agree, death of a loved one is the number one thing. But also a loss of job can be devastating. Having to sell your family home that you've owned for many years can be devastating. Retirement, a miscarriage, the empty nest experience, or a health challenge. Or a health challenge so significant it removes your ability to do things you used to love to do. I've had some friends who can't play racquetball anymore, and they're kind of sad that they're not able to do that. I know people who are no longer able to drive. It can be a painful experience.

Life has a lot of changes, and we don't like changes. Life has a lot of endings, and we don't like endings. But one of the most important things is for us to allow ourselves to acknowledge this hurt; to acknowledge the pain.

Because sometimes in our culture, we kind of dismiss things. “*Ah, just get over it.*” You know, we have this way of minimizing and dismissing these things. But the truth is: these things need to be processed. We need to move through these things in our lives.

In the 23rd Psalm, it says, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*” [Repeats] Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Notice it doesn't say, “*Yea, though I run through the valley of the shadow of death.*” [Congregants laugh] “*Yea, though I loiter through the valley of the shadow of death.*” [Congregants laugh] “*Yea, though I don't pitch a tent and camp out in the valley of the shadow of death.*”

And it's making it very, very clear that we all have to walk through that valley of the shadow of death. We all have to walk through various types of losses in our lives; various types of things that we need to grieve, need to feel, and need to allow it to move through us. We can't go around it. We really need to go through it, to feel it, and to process it.

And it's so important that in John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible appears. Anybody know what it says, the shortest verse in the Bible says? It said what? *"Jesus wept."* Correct. And you think, *"Its own verse? Two words?"* But here's why. Because Jesus knew -- was fully aware -- of eternal life. He was fully aware that Lazarus was going to be fine. He was fully aware that all was going to be fine. And yet, through that experience of life, his heart was breaking and he cried for his friend. He cried for his friend's family.

And he's trying to emphasize very, very clearly: even when you know that things will all work out in the end, we need to honor the emotion and feelings that we're feeling. We need to acknowledge that sadness. We need to acknowledge the hurt that we are going through.

The thing about it is: we need to understand that grieving is a part of healing. And it helps us adjust. And it helps us with a sense of well-being: being able to release the weight of the hurts so we can move forward and enjoy our lives more fully and freely.

You know, sometimes things happen in our lives and we skip the grieving part. I've known someone who lost a parent and didn't cry at the funeral, didn't ... You know, just said she's fine, she's fine, she's fine. And it has manifested itself in some not-so-good ways. And it has taken years to realize that is something for them to grieve and to acknowledge and move through.

Everybody remember Sugar Ray Leonard, the boxer? He said it wasn't until he was 50 years old that he acknowledged to himself that he was sexually abused. That he was not able to grieve and process that stuff, because he felt ashamed of it. He felt these things that prevented him and allowed himself to be prevented of fully expressing it and moving through that process.

And I think it's an important thing here with loss and grieving. The number one thing for it, to me, is: Are you willing to feel? Are you willing to face it? Are you willing to go through that experience? Are you willing to go talk to a therapist? Are you willing to do some journaling? Because it does take some work. It'd be easier to sweep it under the rug, but it's way healthier and better for us to face it and to have that experience.

You know, it is a normal thing to grieve when there's loss in all kinds. And in fact, the more significant the loss, usually the more intense the grief will be. But the thing to remember is that everybody's different. There's no right or wrong way to grieve. You'll know if it's working. You'll know if you're feeling more peace or feeling more clarity through the process. But it's something that we need to do.

So, the first thing is to allow grief and be willing to feel the grief.

The second one is to **STAY CONNECTED**. You know, when we're feeling lost or hurt, it's usually -- a big part of it is -- Feeling disconnected from God. feeling disconnected from our loved ones. feeling disconnected from ourselves. And so, the important thing is through these processes to feel connected: and feel connected to God and feel connected to that loved one, if by chance it is about grief and the death of a loved one.

And so, the first thing is about staying connected to God. It's about spending time in the silence and the quietness and reconnecting with our divine nature; reconnecting with our spiritual foundation; reconnecting with our spiritual power.

You know, Paul Tillich says that, *"God is the ground of our being."* And that, if you're going through stuff, the most important place to start is to connect with the ground of your very being: the essence and strength and the source from which we come.

I mean, I love that line:

**I must be strong and carry on ...
I will find my way through the night and day.**

And so, in the song, it's really clear there's a desire to move through this. There's a desire to find strength -- find a way to carry on and keep living and have things get better. And the way to do that is to make sure we ground ourselves in God.

Psalm 1: Verse 2-3 says something so beautiful. It says that we need to *"delight in the law of the Lord, and on His way to meditate day and night. [People who do] are like trees planted by the stream of water which yield their fruit in season and their leaves do not wither. In all they do, they prosper."*

And what it is saying: that the most important thing -- no matter what's going on in your life -- is to ground yourself and to deepen your connection with the spiritual roots that are within us. To immerse our minds in the mind of God. To spend the time in the silence. Because that is what gives us the power and the strength to be able to move through the grief that we're facing.

You know, about 15 or 17 years ago, I met somebody, who was very interesting and was sharing me that her father had died and how she talked to her father every day. And I thought it was kind of interesting. And literally for everything ... like get up in the morning, getting ready, talking to her dad and loved her dad. He died. She was devastated and she decided and realized that he's still alive, so she's going to chat. And they chatted all the time. And I thought that was so interesting, and that was cool.

And it made sense. Because if we are saying that our souls are eternal, then it kind of made sense. But when my mom passed away, I remembered what she'd said. So every time I'd come home, I'd look at my mom's picture, and I'd say, *"Hello, Mama!"* And I didn't get into this elaborate conversations as she did with her dad. But I have to say: what was surprising was how connected and how joyful and how happy I was just saying, *"Hello, Mama."* And it wasn't a big deal -- three or four words. But it made me smile, and I felt a sense of connection.

Sometimes we feel like, when we've lost the physical presence, we've lost everything. And that is absolutely not the truth. Look at how we love and feel connected to God. We don't see that physical presence, so why would we think it would be any less with the loved one that we have? And so it's an important thing.

And so, one of the things she had said to me in the instructions -- she said, talk to them. Write to them and ask them questions. And consciously feel their presence in our lives. There is no reason, she said, why we should lose our connection.

How many people have heard of Helping Parents Heal? And I think that some of the similar ideas are experienced. It's a group that supports anybody that has lost a child. And it just seems that that's one of their tenets -- is to continue to just acknowledge different ways that that spirit of their child has shown up -- and does show up -- in their lives.

You know, healing doesn't mean that you stop missing them. It means that you learn how to carry the love you have without being crushed by the feelings of loss and grief. Because that thing will take longer and more time than we would imagine. But we can still find peace. We can still find love. We can still find happiness in and through that experience itself.

So, number one is allow the grief. Second one is: stay connected. Stay connected with God spiritually and stay connected with your loved one. And in whatever form works for you, to talk to them or relate to them is an important thing.

And then the third one is to **FIND MEANING**. You know, I saw a TED Talk by this woman. Her name was Emily Smith. And she said that people think they're looking for happiness. People think they're looking

for all these kind of things. And she said the number one thing in life that people are looking for, although they're not aware of it, is meaning.

Remember Viktor Frankl's book, "Man's Search for Meaning?" And basically, he was saying you could go through anything, but when you know the meaning of it -- when you know the purpose that you are going through it -- that it absolutely makes a difference. He wrote a book called "The Power of Meaning."

And one of the things that Viktor Frankl actually said is, "*We think we're looking for the meaning of life. But the truth is: life is saying, 'What meaning do you give it?' We are the ones who give life meaning.*"

And so, for someone who has passed away, we can ask ourselves the question: What did this person awaken in me? What did this person help me see or become? Or enjoy? Or develop, and to continue to reawaken that in their honor, in their spirit?

You know, sometimes even when there's loss, you know what? Life is always unlimited. Even if you're going through pain, life is always unlimited. Always unlimited. And so, it's important for us to find meaning, to find the blessing, to find the benefit and the value.

A woman, after losing her husband, began volunteering at a hospice center. And she said, "*I realized that I could take the love that I was sharing and giving to my husband and give it to someone else and others who were hurting.*"

And so, we're never going to run out of love. And we can find meaning. We can find purpose. We can find direction in our lives. Her loss became her ministry. Her loss actually helped her develop meaning in her life; focus and direction.

How many people ever heard of the book, "The Five Regrets of the Dying?" Anybody ever heard of that book? Bronnie Wade -- she was a caregiver to people who were dying. And what she noticed was that the caregiver didn't like talking about death to the family, and the family didn't like talking to death about their loved one. And so, they were just always polite, but they were too scared to talk about dying, too scared to talk about death.

But they talked about death with her. And they'd tell her every single thing they felt. And she compiled five regrets that were common for all the people that she had served. And here they are.

Five was: "*I wish I had let myself be happier.*"

Four: "*I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.*"

Three: "*I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.*"

Number two: "*I wish I hadn't worked so hard.*"

And number one: "*I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.*"

And so, one of the things I think sometimes when someone in our lives passes, or even from time to time, asking ourselves: What am I here to do? What is it that I want to do? What in my life do I not want to regret when I die? And to literally start living more in alignment with the life that we want to live; the life that we've called to live; the life that we're inspired to live maybe by the death of a loved one or anyone in our lives.

In Psalm 118, I love: "*This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*" That even with loss and grief, that I think it's so important for us to be intentional in how we want to live our lives. Be intentional of how we want to move through experiences -- even grief -- and making sure we extract from it the best and the greatest blessings that we can to continue enjoying life. But also in honoring that beautiful soul that has helped us in great ways.

One day at the entrance of heaven, St. Peter saw a group of tough, leather-wearing thugs coming up to the pearly gates. Being his first time, he was a little scared, so he ran to God and said, *“God, there's something bad brewing at the pearly gates with a gang of thugs. What should I do?”*

And God replied, *“Just do what you do normally. Redirect them down to hell.”* [Congregants laugh]

Peter ran back to carry out God's order, and all of a sudden, he comes running back yelling, *“God! God! They're gone! They're gone!”*

And God says, *“Who? The punks?”*

He said, *“No! The pearly gates.”* [Congregants laugh]

You know, this song is powerful. And, to me, it is about being aware of loss and the need to grieve and the incredible power that love can play in that experience. Love is not confined by a body. Love is an energy. It is a vibration that is available to all of us. And even when we have our heart broken, there is still plenty more love for us if we are willing to allow ourselves to grieve the losses and rise up.

So just remember these three things: Allow the grief. Don't run from the grief; it's a powerful, healing thing that will help open us to a greater life. Stay connected. You know, in life sometimes it's when we're disconnected that we struggle the most. Feel connected to God and feel connected to your loved ones. And finally, find meaning. Find meaning and purpose in the loss that you've gone through.

And those are the lessons from *“Tears in Heaven.”* God bless you all.

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