

# Living Right Between Here and Beyond

by

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(adapted from the “Introduction” to *Poems Between Here and Beyond*)

Ancient Chinese wisdom aptly pictures humans with feet on earth and heads in heaven. We inhabit two worlds, one tangible, measurable, concrete; the other intangible, difficult to measure, often elusive. Men and women are *body-spirit* beings, participating simultaneously in two modes of existence: material and mental. We’re not spirits wrapped in flesh or bodies with souls, but a marriage of them, a wedding of the animal and the angelic, an amalgamation of the chemical and the transcendent, a unique union embodying God’s image.

We can’t escape being replicas of our Creator. If we try denying our God-*likeness*, human art betrays us in paintings, plays, novels, songs, poems and other creative works. We image a Supreme Artist. Or if we try denying God as the Decider of “good and evil,” we empty our own personal moralities of meaning. We can’t remove an Ultimate Authority from the human equation without forfeiting the divine certainty that we are “very good” parts of creation (Gen 1:31).

Confidence in a Self-revealing God gives us a much more solid and *human-friendly* perspective. His existence (God reveals *Himself* in Scripture as “Father”) makes *creativity* and *morality* not just gifts but callings. As image-bearers of the Designer and Judge of all things, we were meant to mimic Him. He calls us to create new designs and to live holy lives.

Communicating truth is also part of that divine image. God is love, and love communicates. So, the God of truth and love is also a Communicator, sharing truth with us and infusing into us a persistent attraction to it. This explains why human creativity is often an attempt to communicate, using story, song, poetry, music, dance, drawing, sculpture.

Perhaps our greatest purpose in imaging God is to be His ruling representatives. He made us mediators, belonging to both the cosmic and celestial worlds. Ultimately, His revealed plan is to bring both realms under a single, divine government administered by human servant-leaders.

This coming reign has a human King, in fact, “*the King of kings and the Lord of lords*” (Rev 19:16). The Old Testament foretold His First Advent—the transcendent God’s incarnation into creation as a human being “*to reconcile all things to Himself*” (Col 1:20). The New Testament culminates in His Second Advent: the God-Man’s return in His resurrected body to reign over “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (Rev 21:1). Although this renewed universe awaits future fulfillment, it has already begun in the hearts of those following this Savior, Jesus Christ. In a real sense, the future is already here while still on its way.

This *kingdom* context is where I live, think, preach, and write poetry. Along with others in Christ’s Body—His Bride, the Church—I serve as one of the King’s royal ambassadors in a familiar but foreign land. It’s familiar, because He created it, sustains it, and plans to fully renew it. But it’s foreign, because human sin and selfishness have

misshapen it. His kingdom has come, but it's still coming. Jesus initiated God's salvation plan, but we still pray for His reign's full consummation, using the familiar words He taught us: "*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matt 6:10). Christians live in a world of *already* but *not yet*. So does everyone else, even if unconsciously.

As I've aged, I've become more aware of the *body-spirit* nature of humanity. The *here-and-now* of the material world is quite blatant. We spend time and energy maintaining the body and its health, engaging in labor and leisure, accumulating and managing possessions. But the *beyond* of the spiritual world impinges on these material dimensions of life with a long list of immaterial values and virtues, some of which are listed as fruits of the Holy Spirit: "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*" (Gal 5:22-23).

While our spiritual lives anticipate a destiny hereafter, our future afterlife begins here and now. Christ's First Advent firmly planted the future's presence in historical time. His earthly work established an ongoing beachhead of God's Kingdom in our fallen, sin-scarred world. Tradition calls this holy battalion the *Church Militant*—Christ's loyal followers still engaged in earthly spiritual warfare. The *Church Triumphant* comprises that group of faithful souls who now rest from life's labors, awaiting a reunion with their physical bodies promised by Christ's resurrection.

Yet, by that mystery described in the Creed as "the communion of saints," these departed believers are still surrounding us as "*a great cloud of witnesses*" (Heb 12:1), watching our progress in faith and cheering us on to victory. Christians live between a present *here* and future *beyond*. At this stage of my life, I feel even more keenly my location in this "between" mode of living. Yet, although less active now, since my retirement from hospital nursing, I also feel in the midst of dynamic momentum.

We never move through time; time moves through us. Our *present* is without dimension, sandwiched between an irrevocable *past* and an unfurling *future*. The *now* dividing them cannot be subdivided, but it can be wasted. We can ignore our calling as God's image-bearers, squandering the remaining days of our sojourn *between here and beyond* in trivial pursuits. I myself have tried to be faithful through writing poetry: to paint pictures, sing songs, preach sermons, tell tales and crystallize thoughts that will hopefully stimulate awareness of time's limits and encourage personal decisions of involvement in the present and future reign of the King. What are you doing with your time *between here and beyond*?

(If you're not sure of your relationship with God, you can be. It starts with your **repentance**, which means "*a change of mind*" from your way of thinking to adopt God's view of reality. Next, **trust Jesus** for the salvation He came to offer, which means believing that He died for your sins and rose again as Lord of all. Then, **surrender** to Him as Lord, which means letting Him take charge of your life. Simply pray, telling Jesus of your choice to do this repenting, trusting and surrendering, and leave the rest to Him. Afterwards, feed your mind with His truth in the New Testament, letting His Word continue to renew your thinking. You'll be amazed at how God helps you live for Christ and grow in spiritual understanding, if you're willing to give up your old life for the new one He wants for you. If you have questions or need help in this process, contact me through my website: [www.pastordavidrn.com](http://www.pastordavidrn.com).)