

**Hope Community Church  
Transforming Belief #2  
Heaven in Front of You**

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## **Introduction**

Transformation describes what happens when a caterpillar turns in to a butterfly. Transformation also describes the kind of change that occurs when an individual is changed from the inside out by God's power. This kind of metamorphosis is not the product of determined effort. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2) Transformation is the by-product of "the renewing of your mind." Transformation relies on changing what you believe. With transformation, changes in behavior are the result of changes in belief.

The "Core Beliefs" study focuses on truths found in the Bible that will change how you behave by changing what you believe. You will discover truths that will change what you believe about God, others, and yourself. As you learn and persevere in believing these truths, they will transform you.

These four lessons summarize the essential messages contained in the Bible. You will not be told what to do in these studies. They focus not on how you should behave differently but on what you should believe differently. Changing beliefs is the key to changing behavior. Study this material thoughtfully and carefully. Pay special attention to the Bible passages written in italics. Ask God to give you insight and understanding. If you do, you will discover that these truly are transforming beliefs.

### **Transforming Belief #1-The Bar Behind You**

When you begin to embrace the belief that through faith in Christ God accepts you, transformation begins to occur. Believing that you have come to be accepted in God's sight becomes the soil from which a transforming personal relationship with Jesus Christ grows.

### **Transforming Belief #2-Heaven in front of you**

Believing that you have an eternal home in heaven transforms values. The hope of heaven provides encouragement and promotes perseverance as you face difficulties here on earth.

### **Transforming Belief #3-God's Spirit inside you**

Believing in the transforming influence of God's Spirit inside you empowers change that is marked by freedom and love rather than by condemnation and fear.

### **Transforming Belief #4-A lost world around you**

Believing that lost people matter to God will transform the way you look at others and yourself. Beginning to believe that you can be used by God to make a spiritual difference in the life of another person will produce joy and fulfillment.

## **Heaven in Front of You Eternal Life**

### **Eternal life is an everlasting, personal relationship with God.**

*"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3)*

Eternal life is an everlasting personal relationship with God.

Jesus compared our relationship with Him to that of a flock of sheep with a shepherd.

*"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are One." (John 10:27-29)*

### **What are the benefits of being one of Jesus' sheep?**

Jesus' sheep *"never perish."* He gives them *"eternal life."* He promises, *"no one can snatch them out of my hand."* If you are one of Jesus' sheep, you are safe in His hand. He will not let anyone or anything separate you from Him. He will lead you through this life and take you to be with Him in heaven.

Jesus compared our relationship with Him to that of a bridegroom and his bride-to-be.

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:1-3)*

### **What comfort does Jesus offer His followers in these verses?**

In the culture of Jesus' day, after a man proposed to a woman, he went to build a home for them to live in. After the home was built, he returned to marry his bride and then brought her to the place he had prepared for her.

Jesus compares Himself with a bridegroom and children of God as His bride-to-be. When we receive His offer of eternal life, it is like accepting His marriage proposal. He is presently preparing a place for us to live in. He will return to personally escort us to that place and we will live with Him in that place forever. If you have received the gift of eternal life, Jesus is preparing a place for you in heaven. He promises to return and bring you there to be with Him.

### **It is possible to know if you have eternal life.**

God wants you to know that you have eternal life. He wants you to be assured that heaven is in front of you. This is why He makes the conditions for going to heaven clear enough to enable you to know if you will spend eternity with Him there.

*"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:11-13)*

### **Where is eternal life found?**

Eternal life is found *"in his Son."* Eternal life is not found in a particular religion or even in keeping the Ten Commandments. Eternal life is found in a person, the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; *"this life is in his Son."*

Because the gift of eternal life is in Jesus Christ, *"He who has the Son has life"* and *"He who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* The individual who *"has"* Jesus has eternal life because eternal life is in Jesus Christ.

How can a person know that he or she *"has"* Jesus and therefore *"has"* eternal life?

*Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)*

### **What does Jesus say He will do? What does Jesus say we must do?**

***If you open the door of your life to Jesus, what will He do? How do you know?***

***Do you know that you have eternal life? Why? Why not?***

Jesus assures us that if we open the door of our life to Him that He will "come in" to us. He knocks at our door. Before we ever make a step in Jesus' direction, He takes the first step toward us. He wants to come into our life. Since eternal life is in Him, when He comes in to our lives we then possess the eternal life that is in Him.

When we open the door of our life to Jesus, He does not promise an emotional spiritual experience. He does not promise to make us "feel" like He has come in to us. He promises the one who opens the door of their life to Him that He will come in and that He brings the gift of eternal life with Him. We can be confident that He will do what He promises to do. Jesus always keeps His promises.

If you have believed in Jesus and have opened the door of your life to Him, God says that you can know that heaven is in front of you. It is not arrogant, therefore, to believe that you are going to heaven. Since eternal life is an undeserved gift given to the person who believes in Jesus, it is possible to "*know that you have eternal life.*"

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You No Condemnation**

**As children of God, we will not be condemned when we die.**

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)*

***What promise does Jesus make?***

***If you have eternal life, will God punish you when you stand before Him? Why? Why not?***

Having eternal life is associated with not facing God's condemnation in the future. If you have heard the gospel and believed that God sent Jesus to pay for your sins, Jesus promises that you "will not be condemned" when God judges the earth.

**As children of God, we are not condemned when we sin.**

How does God respond to us when we fail to do what He commands us to do? Our obedience matters to God, therefore, what happens when we disobey Him? Does sin disconnect us from God and the hope of heaven?

*"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (Romans 4:7-8)*

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)*

***How does God respond when His children sin?***

God promises that He will not hold the sins of His children against them. When we sin, He does not become disgusted with us. He does not angrily turn away from us.

To "confess" our sins literally means, "to say the same thing" that God says about our sin. God says two things to His children concerning their sin. He says that it violates His standard. He also says that it is forgiven. When we confess our sins to God, we say the same thing that

God says about them. We regretfully acknowledge that what we did was wrong. We also thankfully acknowledge what we did is forgiven.

Some believe that misfortune is the result of sinning against God. They feel that when they are involved in a car accident or are fired from a job, God is "getting back" at them for a sin they committed. This kind of thinking is wrong. It forgets that the penalty for sin is death, not difficulty. Jesus Christ suffered the penalty for sin so that those who believe in Him would not have to!

Where does the motivation to live a godly life come from if the possibility of being condemned by God is removed? If our being accepted by God is assured, then what prevents us from ignoring God's commands and living any way we please?

When a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery was brought before Jesus by some outraged religious leaders, he dismissed them by saying,

*"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)*  
After they departed, Jesus said *"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'"* (John 8:10-12)

***How did the religious leaders treat this woman? Why?***

***How did Jesus treat this woman? Why?***

Jesus did command the woman to leave her life of sin. He cared about correcting her behavior. However, before Jesus commanded the woman to leave her life of sin, he told her that He did not condemn her. First Jesus told her that He did not condemn her. Then he told her to leave her life of sin. Jesus offered her connection, then correction.

Because God is a God of grace, He offers connection, then correction. God does not wait until His children correct their behavior before He decides whether or not to connect with them! God is aware of sinful behaviors in our lives that require correction. However, He first wants us to believe that He does not condemn us! Although we require correction, God first assures us of His connection to us. He connects with us in order to make corrections in us.

Connection, then correction!

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You Life in Our Fallen World**

### **All who live in this world experience pain and suffering.**

There is pain and suffering in this world because the will of God is in conflict with the will of someone who is evil. Jesus instructed His disciples to pray, *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."* (Matthew 6:13) The will of God is challenged by the will of Satan, whom Jesus called, *"the evil one."* There is pain and suffering in this world because there are kingdoms in conflict and wills at war!

*"We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."* (1 John 5:19)

Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."* (John 10:10)

*"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."* (1 John 3:8)

### **How does Satan want? What does Jesus want?**

The pain and suffering in this world is due to the *"control of the evil one."* Jesus came to put an end to the evil influence Satan exerts in this world.

### **God is the source of comfort, not the source of suffering.**

The Bible describes God as, *"the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."* (2 Corinthians 1:3,4)

### **What do you learn about God here?**

### **When does God comfort us? What is the relationship between receiving comfort from God and giving comfort to others?**

God is not the source of suffering. God is the source of comfort in the midst of troubles and suffering. Whatever comfort and compassion we experience in this world is a reflection of the comfort and compassion of God.

A father took his child to his doctor's office to get his daughter immunized. On the way to the car, he noticed a bird with an injured wing. He attempted to pick up the bird in order to care for it, but the bird struggled in his hand and he was forced to release it so as not to cause further harm. He continued on to the doctor's office with his daughter and once he and his daughter arrived, she prepared to receive the painful immunization. While the doctor gave her the shot, she wrapped her arms tightly around her father's neck.

Later, this man contrasted the experience of the bird with the experience of his daughter. He reflected on how when experiencing suffering, people act more like a wounded bird than a frightened daughter. Rather than draw closer to God in times of suffering, like the bird, we struggle to break free of the one who wants to bring comfort to us.

### **Jesus Christ sympathizes with us in our pain and suffering.**

While it is difficult to understand why God allows the presence of evil, it is comforting to remember that He came to the earth to experience it personally. In order to rescue us, Jesus had to enter this world and "walk a mile in our shoes." Jesus is able to understand the suffering we experience because He experienced it personally.

*"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18)*

*"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)*

### **What qualifies Jesus to help us deal with sin in our life?**

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You Hope in Suffering**

### **God does not shield His children from suffering**

While it is true that “now ” we can know that we are going to heaven, it is equally true that while we are on this earth we are “not yet” going to experience it. For the believer in Jesus then, heaven is in front of us, but this isn’t it yet! Jesus stated the matter simply;

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)*

### **Why might we be both alarmed and relieved by what Jesus says here?**

When God does not insulate us from “trouble,” we can mistakenly reason that we must have done something wrong; that God must be angry with us. Assuming that God will protect His children from all difficulties is a sure route to resentment, frustration, and spiritual depression.

*“Now if we are children, then we are heirs- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (Romans 8:17)*

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of our faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:3,4)*

### **What purposes does God accomplish in times of trouble?**

***What do these verses say to a person who believes that God blesses his children with health and wealth if they have sufficient faith?***

God's children can expect to experience troubles in this life. Enduring "trials" is an unavoidable part of being developed into a more authentic follower of Jesus Christ

### **Children of God have hope in the midst of suffering**

When we encounter difficult circumstances it is easy to believe that God is either not aware of what we are facing or that He does not care enough to do anything about it. We begin to question whether He really cares about us or not.

The prophet Isaiah indicated that the nation of Israel felt this way.

*"Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God'? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:27-31)*

### **What was the Israelites' complaint?**

### **What is God's response?**

The Israelites assumed that God was either unaware of their plight or unwilling to do anything about it. They felt that God had abandoned them.

Isaiah assured the troubled Israelites that they had reason to hope even in the midst of troubles. He assured them that God was not negligent or ignorant of their plight. He told them that their hope in God would lead them to *"soar on wings like eagles."*

At the end of the forty-year journey through the wilderness, Moses compared God's guidance to that of a mother eagle.

*"He shielded him and cared for him as the apple of his eye; like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him." (Deuteronomy 32:10-12)*

When an eaglet comes of age, the mother eagle *"stirs up its nest"* by making the nest uncomfortable and forcing the eaglet to leave its comfortable confines. Since eagles nest on

cliffs and high places, leaving the nest means becoming airborne. As the eagle plummets to the earth, the mother "hovers over" it, "spreads its wings" to catch it before it hits the earth, and "carries" it back to safety. Why does the mother eagle subject her offspring to this apparent mistreatment? This is how she teaches her young to fly.

In the midst of turbulent circumstances, we can have hope. God watches over us. Troubles are not the result of His neglect, but of His parenting and training. He teaches us to trust in His care in the midst of trouble. We cannot "fathom" why He does what He does, but that does not mean that He is inactive and uncaring.

The Bible assures us that, "*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32)

***Why is it reasonable to assume that God cares about His children and will not withhold good things from them?***

If God did not withhold His Son, He can trust that He will not withhold anything good from us.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You God's Good Purposes**

**In all of life's experiences, God works for the "good" of His children.**

God promises to cause all things to work together for "good" in our lives.

*"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

***What promise does God make?***

There are times when we find this promise difficult to believe. We can point to circumstances in our lives that we would call not "good!"

When we are able to get something we want or keep something we have we generally call that "good." When God promises that he "works for the good of those who love him" is He promising that He will cause us to get what we want and keep what we have? What does "good" mean when God uses the word?

**To God, "good" means sharing in Christ's holiness.**

To God, "good" means, "to share in His holiness."

*"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:7-11)*

***What does hardship demonstrate about a person's relationship to God?***

***How does Christ's discipline differ from human discipline? What benefits does God's discipline bring?***

God "*disciplines*" us so that he might become more like Him in character. The circumstances that lead us to experience this "*good*" purpose are "*painful*." However, God promises to use these experiences to create godly character in us that will benefit others and ourselves.

Children of God experience God's discipline but not His punishment. There is a big difference between the two. The focus of punishment is on past disobedience and the motive is wrath and justice. The focus of discipline is on future obedience and the motive is love and growth.

When a child of God experiences troubles, it is not the result of God angrily punishing him or her for doing something wrong. God is a loving Father who uses difficult circumstances to make His children more like Jesus. This is not punishment, though. It is motivated by His love, not His anger! God's punishment for sin is death, not difficulty! Jesus Christ endured God's punishment so that those who believe in Him would not have to.

God will use "*trials*" in our lives to develop maturity.

*"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."*  
(James 1:2-5)

### ***What benefits do trials bring?***

The road to maturity passes through "*trials*." As we trust in God and His goodness, He enables us to endure these difficult circumstances and uses them to make us "mature and complete."

God promises to walk with us and to cause all things to work together for "*good*." He does not promise that we will get what we want or keep what we have. He does promise that in all things, even painful things, He will bring about a good end; that we will share in His holiness.

### **To God, "*good*" means saving many lives.**

To God, "*good*" also means, "*the saving of many lives*."

Consider the story of Joseph. When his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, he would not have called that "*good*." Joseph experienced times of deep pain and grief due to the cruelty of his brothers. However, Joseph did come to the place where he was able to view his

circumstances from God's perspective. He came to see that God brought about a "good" purpose that included food for many people and a home for his family.

Late in his life he would say to his brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20)

***How did God's good purposes override the bad purposes of Joseph's brothers?***

God's "good" purpose enabled many lives to be saved. When the temporary suffering of one results in the eternal welfare of others, God calls that "good." When Jesus died, the temporary suffering of one resulted in the eternal welfare of many. That is why we call that Friday, "Good Friday."

In all things, even unfair, painful things, God orchestrates circumstances so that through the suffering His children experience, they share in Christ's holiness and other lives are saved.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You Death**

**For a child of God, death is moving out of a temporary dwelling and moving into a permanent one.**

Paul compared living in a body to wearing clothes.

*"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)*

***What happens when we die?***

***Why do we groan when we think of dying?***

We are "*clothed*" by earthly bodies. Death is like changing clothes. When we die, we change out of our earthly bodies and change into our heavenly ones.

Paul acknowledges that death is a frightening prospect, even for a child of God. He wrote, "*we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.*" We "*groan*" in joyful anticipation of being clothed with our heavenly bodies and yet at the same time, we "*groan*" in fearful anticipation of being unclothed by death. It is not unspiritual to be afraid of dying, even for a child of God who is looking forward to being with God in heaven.

God assists us in this struggle. He gives us, "*the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*" The Holy Spirit assures us that heaven is in front of us. Although this assurance does not remove the fear of dying, it does reduce it. Knowing that when we leave these temporary bodies we "*move into*" eternal ones changes the way we view death. We begin to view dying as being "*swallowed up by life.*"

**For a child of God, death is falling asleep in Jesus and waking up in heaven.**

The Bible compares the death of a child of God to a person who has "*fallen asleep.*"

*"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (1 Thessalonians 4:14)*

***For a child of God, how is dying like "falling asleep"?***

When a child of God dies, he or she will experience the same fate Jesus did. Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Therefore, believers in Jesus will experience life after death just like Jesus Himself did.

If you are a believer in Christ, then, death will be a beginning, not an ending. Death will be like drifting off to sleep and waking up in to the kind of life you have always dreamed of. Death will be like falling asleep in Jesus, and waking up in heaven.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***

## **Heaven in Front of You Life in Heaven**

**Children of God experience fellowship with God in heaven immediately after they die.**

The Bible teaches that at the point of death, children of God experience immediate fellowship with God.

*"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far," (Philippians 1:21-23)*

### ***What does Paul say would happen when he died?***

Paul assures us that dying leads to conscious awareness of being with Jesus Christ. If you are a child of God, within seconds of dying you will be conscious of being in the presence of God!

### **When Jesus Christ returns to earth, children of God will receive immortal bodies to house their eternal spirits**

When Jesus returned to heaven, He was different than when He came to earth. He came to earth as a spirit without a body. He returned to earth as a spirit within a body. Jesus Christ rose bodily from the dead. Jesus now exists as an eternal spirit within an immortal body.

Presently, we exist as eternal spirits within mortal bodies. At the point of death, the spirits of children of God experience immediate fellowship with God. The mortal bodies remain behind. That will change when Jesus Christ returns to the earth at His Second Coming!

*"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)*

When Jesus Christ returns to the earth, children of God will receive immortal bodies to house their eternal spirits. We will not be like angels who are spirits without bodies. We will be eternal spirits within immortal bodies. We will eternally exist in the same form Jesus presently exists in!

## **Life in heaven will be completely and eternally satisfying.**

The Bible indicates that, *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

While it is not possible to fully grasp what heaven will be like, the Bible gives us enough information to fuel a healthy desire to go there.

*"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* (Revelation 21:3,4)

*"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve Him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."* (Revelation 22:3-5)

### ***What do you learn about heaven?***

### ***What might it be like to live without fear, pain or death?***

While we live on earth, we are like fish out of water. We are out of our element. When we get to heaven we will feel like a fish does which is returned to the water after flopping around on the shore. When that fish hits the water it is back in its element; it feels alive. When we get to heaven, we will feel like that. We will feel like we are in our element. We will feel alive. More alive than we have ever felt before. Moreover, that feeling of being alive will never fade away and never diminish. It will last forever.

***Review the verses in this lesson once more and summarize what you learned.***