

Joe David Bellamy

“Light Years”

The new galaxies are billions of light years away, so we only see the way they were billions of years ago. The farther away we look into the universe, the farther we see into the past of the universe. If galaxies are ten billion light years from Earth, we see them as they were ten billion years ago. They could be utterly dead, an absence in space, and we wouldn't know about it for ten billion years! But then in ten billion years we might not be here to see it.

If we could get far enough away from Earth and still see it, we would be able to see into our own pasts. In order to see fifty years into the past, we would have to be located today at a distance of fifty light years from Earth. But getting to that distance would take us fifty years, even if we could travel at the speed of light, and by the time we got there (even if we could travel at the speed of light) we would only be seeing our own departure, not into the past.

A billion years from now, the light of this day will be received and seen by creatures who live at a distance of one billion light years from Earth—a form of immortality. The light of every moment we have lived is traveling now out across the universe. Light, once emitted, goes on forever. A moment, once lived, is indelibly written in light and projected irretrievably across the face of the universe.