

HOME

HOW *Heaven* AND THE *New Earth*
Satisfy OUR *Deepest* LONGINGS



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BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Home*
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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2016938456

ISBN 978-0-7642-1802-6

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Cover design by Rob Williams, InsideOutCreativeArts

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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To Phil,
dearest, kindest, most loving friend
and husband.

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Foreword

Have you ever been camping? I don't know how much you appreciate the outdoor activity, but I've always thought that one of the fundamental purposes of camping is to make you long for home.

If you've been camping, you know what it's like. It all starts with giving in to the romantic notion of wilderness living with your friends and family in the great outdoors. You have visions of sleeping under the stars and cooking over an open fire. You pack up, filled with the positive vibes of adventure, and travel to what you think will be the ideal site to experience your camping dream. You set up your tent and collect firewood, and with feelings of pioneer accomplishment, you prepare that first meal over the campfire. Food tastes different when it's been cooked over an open flame. (Is that ash?)

By the third day, your back hurts from sleeping on an air mattress that slowly deflates, your tent has taken on smells that seem subhuman, and all the available dry wood within a half-mile radius has been used. At this point, something begins to happen inside of you: *You begin to think about home*. But you still have hope for the rest of the trip. That is, until you go to

the cooler and find your special roast—the one you knew would just “wow” your family—is now a sickly gray color, floating in stomach-turning bloody water.

It’s happened: You’re hit with a deep longing for home—the comfort of a soft mattress, the ease of a stove where you turn a knob and get an instant flame, and the convenience of a refrigerator that does such an amazing job of keeping food cool and fresh. You long for the sights, sounds, smells, and luxuries that only home can provide, and you begin to listen for comments from friends and family about being homesick so you can say, “Hey, let’s just pack up and go home.”

But, if you decide to go “camping” in a sixty-foot Winnebago with a fifty-inch flat-screen TV, high-speed Internet, the kitchen of Gordon Ramsay, and beds from the Ritz-Carlton, you probably won’t be homesick, and you won’t be as grateful for your home. Why? Because you’ve done everything in your power to make camping just as good as, or better than, your actual home.

Perhaps one of the reasons why God chooses to leave us in this terribly broken world with its various disappointments is to create in our souls a certain dissatisfaction, an insatiable hunger for home. In his sovereign plan, this world is not meant to be our final destination; we’re not meant to live with a right-here, right-now mentality, where we expend our physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and relational energies trying to turn this temporal home into the eternal home it will never be.

We try to numb our homesickness with an endless cycle of remodeling, hoping that each renovation we make will get us closer to satisfying our longing for home. We jump from house to house, from job to job, from church to church, from accomplishment to accomplishment, from marriage to marriage, hoping the next move will give us what we long for. But we only become more distracted, more cynical, more discouraged, and more fearful because nowhere we’ve been and nothing we’ve

done can turn this brokenness into the home we long for. The trying will simply make you crazy.

But there's another dynamic operating here. Allow me to refer back to my camping illustration. Imagine getting to the point where you recognize that camping is not as wonderful as it's cracked up to be, but you have no clear idea of what home is like. Now you're stuck between what you've found to be disappointing and what you don't really understand. What I have described is not a pleasant place to be, but I'm convinced it's where many Christians find themselves.

It's nearly impossible to be homesick for a place that you have little or no real understanding about. When you're away from home, you long for home because you know what's there. You recall the welcoming smells, the warmth of the family room, where you can kick back and not be disturbed, the dinner table that always seems to deliver familiar and comforting meals, your bedroom that is yours alone or that you lovingly share, the backyard that carries the memories of many childhood adventures. But more than anything else, you long for home because of the people that are there—people who love you and accept you as you are. I am aware that some of you sadly do not have this experience of home.

You see, we're all homesick, but many of us don't know we're homesick because we're too busy giving ourselves to the impossible task of turning where we are into home, and many more of us don't know we're homesick because we simply don't know what home is like. Whether we know it or not, we long for home:

Every sad moment in marriage is a longing for home.

Every moment of hurt and concern as a parent is a longing for home.

Every cry in the midst of loneliness is a longing for home.

Every complaint in a moment of physical pain is a longing for home.

Every loss of physical or mental vitality is a longing for home.

Every frustration with corrupt government is a longing for home.

Every urban fear in the dark of night is a longing for home.

Every “if only” that interrupts our sleep is a longing for home.

Every loss of a friend or family member is a longing for home.

Every discouragement at the loss of a job is a longing for home.

Every sadness at the failure of a pastor is a longing for home.

Every disappointment with ourselves is a longing for home.

Every frustration with a lost opportunity is a longing for home.

Every day we hit our heads against the reality that this is not our home—that it is, in fact, a far cry from what we long for home to be. This is why I love the book that you’re about to read. It brilliantly accomplishes two very important things—things that I confess I need, and things I’m sure you need, too. These two things only accomplish their purpose when they work together.

First, Elyse does a wonderful job of helping us recognize and own our homesickness. She also lifts the burden of feeling guilty that we’re homesick. Like a tender friend, she stands with us and says, “Of course you’re homesick; so am I, and here’s why.” It’s hard to understand in a few words the spiritual importance of recognizing your homesickness and being comfortable with it, but if you carefully read Elyse’s words, you will understand the balance.

There’s another thing this book does better than any book I have ever read: It does an excellent job of describing the stunning

glories of what home will be like. As I read Elyse's descriptions of home, it brought tears of longing to my eyes. One of the most important things this book did for me is stimulate a healthy homesickness. Embedded in the DNA of homesickness is surrendering to the reality that this is not home. And once you surrender to that reality, you quit asking people, places, possessions, and experiences to be what they will never be. You become liberated from unrealistic expectations and the resultant disappointments. You are freed from being overly critical and unrealistically judgmental. You are progressively freed from a life of grumbling and complaining. You are freed from asking your spouse or children to be the messiahs they will never be.

Homesickness is a tool the Savior uses to free us right here, right now. He frees us by confronting us with the universal brokenness of the here and now and by comforting us with the assurance that we are on the road to a home that is wonderful in every way, glorious beyond the scope of our wildest dreams. And he assures us that no matter how completely messed up we have been and continue to be, the glories of home are ours by grace and grace alone. We don't have to mortgage our lives away for this home, because it's already been paid for in full by our Savior King, and there's a special place waiting for each one of his children.

Allow yourself to luxuriate in the portrait this book puts before you. Its words have been painted by a seasoned and skilled gospel artist. Take time to respond to the questions that follow each chapter; they are worth your effort. Then, go out and live in the painful joy of homesickness, while you enjoy the freedom of being comfortable with a longing that nothing or no one in all creation right now can satisfy.

Paul David Tripp
March 11, 2016

Acknowledgments

Nothing of any value is ever constructed in isolation, this book included. I am deeply thankful for all the friends on social media who responded with prayers when I sent out the distress call. Thanks again!

I am also thankful for my friends at church who continually told me they were praying for me, and especially for my pastors and elders, David Wojnicki, Tony Sutor, Jon Walters, Paul Behneman, and Jason Smith, and their dear wives, who never failed to encourage me.

I'm grateful for Andy McGuire and the folks at Bethany House who allowed me to write this book out of order . . . and for their kind suggestions, and for Ellen Chalifoux's careful editing.

I could not (I really mean that) have done this if it were not for the help of my dear friend Scott Lindsey and Logos Bible Software. Seriously. Logos has been such an immense help, allowing me to finish this project on time. Thank you to all the folks in Bellingham, Washington, who spend their days making this sort of thing possible. Amazing.

Acknowledgments

And, of course, I remain sincerely grateful for my family. For my mother, Rosemary, and my brother, Richard, who prayed for me and patiently waited for me to be available to them. My children and their spouses and children are foretastes of heaven to me. Thank you, my dearests.

And especially, I am thankful to Phil, who has been the primary conduit of love to me throughout our lives. He has loved me, and I am grateful.

Introduction

Bright overhead lights in the cabin rouse drowsy passengers. Children rudely awakened from restless sleep cry, while harried moms and dads try to soothe them with words about “almost there” and home. Like automatons, wearied business travelers stow their laptops and grab their jackets. Tray tables are locked in place. The seat that has been both my private space and instrument of torture is again in its full upright position. I lean forward to look out the window. . . . *There’s Balboa Park and the bridge. . . . There goes Interstate 5. . . . Any moment now. . . .* “Thank you, Lord,” I whisper. With a jolt the jet’s tires make contact with concrete and the flight attendant tiredly welcomes us to San Diego.

I text one word to Phil, “Home.”

He texts back, “I’m here and waiting for you.”

“Thank you, Lord,” I whisper again.

“Please remain in your seat with your seat belt fastened until the captain has turned off the seat belt sign and we’re safely parked at the terminal. Only then will it be safe for you to move about the cabin. Remember to be careful when opening overhead bins, because items may have shifted during the flight and could

fall out and . . . blah . . . blah . . . blah. . . .” I don’t have any more room in my brain for words other than home. So I wait. It seems like another hour before the cabin door is opened.

Home. Finally freed from this marvel of modern technology, and torment, I grab my carry-on, check again in that seat pocket, and deplane as fast as the struggling families ahead of me will allow. I make my way out of the terminal and onto the street. Our car approaches, and Phil automatically opens the trunk. I throw my suitcase in the back and jump in the front seat. He’s got water and snacks waiting for me.

“Hello, dear.”

“Hello.” We kiss like old friends who have been married for over four decades, and he gets us back on the road.

“Just relax, honey,” he says. “I’ll get us home soon.”

“Thank you, dear,” I reply. *Thank you, Lord,* I pray.

For the first time in days I can relax. I know what awaits me at home. My bed. My shower. Quiet and warmth. No trying to listen to people who want desperately to talk with me. No shoes that pinch. No struggling to remember the right word or the name of the pastor I’ve just met. And best of all, no pretending . . . no hoping that I’m being a faithful witness . . . no censuring every thought and word so that I don’t offend. None of that now. I’m finally home.

“Home.” As Dorothy famously quipped, “There’s no place like home.” That’s so true, isn’t it? Not only is there no place like it, there is no other place that wields more power in our lives. Home can be the source of immense joys and crushing disappointments. It can engender thoughts of deep relationship, love, and family, but it can also tie you up in knots with memories of anger, conflict, regret, abuse, or shame. There’s not a place in our lives that has more power to shape us, to build us up, or to destroy us than home. How we answer questions like “Where were you born?” and “Where did you grow up?”

not only reveals facts about our history but also communicates considerable unspoken information. If I said to you, “I have lived my entire life in Southern California,” you would immediately draw some conclusions about me. If, on the other hand, someone said, “I don’t know where I was born,” or “I lived in twenty different foster homes growing up,” what would you have learned about them? In many ways, how we define home defines nearly everything about us.

Home can be a source of great pain. To have a home, to be in relationships, to love, and to trust, is to know loss, brokenness, and hopelessness. That’s what it means to live here, this side of heaven. Strong relationships grow weak; people we’ve trusted desert us. The eggs we’ve carefully placed in *that* basket get scrambled on the floor. At the bottom of our hearts, when we are being brutally honest, even the happiest among us wouldn’t say that our homes here are completely satisfying. And even in those deeply satisfying homes, everyone still has to say good-bye.

Loss: My Lifelong Companion

Loss of relationship, family, and home started for me before my fourth birthday. Although I was too young when it happened to retain a clear memory of it now, it was about that time when my mother and father divorced. I do remember the sadness I felt every summer when my brother and I had to leave my dad and head back home. And though my mother tried valiantly to provide for us and to build a home where we were loved and cared for, I distinctly remember the feeling of desertion, emptiness, and loss. I was longing for life as I thought it should be. I longed for unchanging, secure, satisfying relationships. In some way, even then as a child, I knew things weren’t as they ought to be. Something wasn’t right. I pined for the home that I thought I would have if only my father were present.

Don't misunderstand. In some ways, especially considering my tumultuous childhood, my adult life has been surprisingly stable. After a short and disastrous marriage and divorce, the Lord saved me, and then, in 1974, Phil and I were married. We've been together ever since then—which, I jokingly say, “proves that there is a God.” We've got a lovely family here in San Diego, with three married adult children and six delightful grandchildren. We've made our home and put roots down deep in the sandy Southern California soil. This is home. And I'm thankful.

Even so, I find within myself a longing that no family gathering, party, or reunion can alleviate. No matter how I fuss with my home, trying to fashion it into my ideal, it never quite satisfies. And no matter how much time I spend with my kids and grandkids . . . no matter how many lunches we have together or waves we ride down in unison, it's never quite what I'm craving. Christmas can be beautiful, the Fourth of July a blast . . . and still, I always walk away knowing that although it was indeed wonderful, I still want something more. Isn't there anything here that will ultimately satisfy my deepest longings?

After one Christmas celebration, I asked my daughter Jessica, “How was it for you? Did you feel like something was missing?” “It was really nice, Mom,” she said. “But you know you will never be satisfied here, right? You are not supposed to be.”

I Am Homesick

What is this emptiness I feel? What is it that I'm hoping to find when I finally return home after a trip? Even deeper, what is this longing that makes me reminisce over forgotten yesterdays, why this current of nostalgia running through my every desire? It feels as though I've lost something, but I'm not quite sure what.

Does this feeling have a name? I think so. I think it is called homesickness. These moods of nostalgia and this longing for some just-out-of-reach settledness are actually just symptoms of homesickness. I sense that something important is missing, and though I anxiously search for it, it remains elusive, like a word I'm trying to recall that hides until my desire for it passes out of my memory.

I'm homesick for a place . . . for *the* place I was created to live, for my true home with my Father. How many times have I heard people say, "He went home to be with the Lord," and I know exactly what they mean. Yes, home is here, but it is also there, with the Lord. I am homesick; I'm pining for Jesus. I am an exile here. I feel it every day. I am a wanderer, never quite settling in, never quite satisfied, never really rooted in this world. I am homesick for heaven.

Is *Heaven* Really What I'm Pining For?

I've finally come to realize that this place of peace I'm longing for is called heaven; but I also know that word carries unfortunate negative baggage with it. It really is woefully inadequate and profoundly misunderstood by most everyone, both believers and unbelievers. Sure, unbelievers can scoff at cartoon angels playing harps on clouds, and actors like Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life* can opine about angels getting their wings, but they're not the only ones who are mistaken.

Believers are confused, too. We're confused about what heaven will be like, and our misconceptions don't help us identify what's actually missing. I don't believe my homesickness will be satisfied by life without a body, strumming a harp with see-through fingers while perched on a puffy cloud. I'm not longing for less of life. I'm longing for more, for deeper, stronger, sharper life and a glorified body that will actually function the way it was

created to. I am not hoping for eternity on a cruise ship where I'll lie around by the pool while the angels wait on me. No, that isn't what I'm wanting. Nor am I longing for a never-ending church service while I float around as a disembodied soul. No, that's not home either, though perhaps it is a bit closer to what I long for.

And so, because most of us have failed to understand heaven and the New Earth, where we are headed, and the satisfaction we will ultimately experience there, we try to scratch this itchy homesickness by refashioning this wasteland into a true home. Of course, once the renovation project is complete, we discover that it isn't quite right, but that doesn't stop us from trying again . . . and again . . . and again.

The answer to much of our worldliness—our love and commitment to make the here and now into heaven—is to obtain as clear a picture as possible of what our coming life will be like. What will heaven be like? When we read the Bible closely, we discover that it will be a life more concrete than anything we've ever known. We will live in a physical body, a body as it was meant to be, and we will live here on the earth as the Lord created it. We want to be delivered from suffering here, of course, but we wouldn't want our eternity to be completely disconnected from life as we know it now.

Where We Are Headed

Over the next twelve chapters, I will do my best to sketch a portrait for you of the home we are journeying toward. It is my goal to make you thirst for it like you never have before and to prepare you, by the work of the Holy Spirit, to live your life *here* keeping your life *there* in view, understanding that much of the discontent you experience now flows out of homesickness and will only be answered when you are truly Home.

Your Eschatology (or What You Believe About Last Things)

I recognize that there is a wide divergence of opinion among true Christians about the events of the last days or what theologians generally call *eschatology*. This is not a book about the different strains of Christian thought regarding who goes up when or comes down or witnesses or rules for a thousand years. I have my own views on the topic, but they are not the subject of this book. Rather, this book will focus on life *after* the last day, wherever you want to place that day on your personal time line. I've known folks who, seeking to be humorous, have said that they are pan-millennialists, meaning that they believe everything will pan out in the end. For the sake of this book, I will join them. We all want very much to be able to figure out all the particulars of every event of the last day (or days). I won't help you do that in this book. Instead, we're going to be looking at life afterward, which actually is far more satisfying to our souls and really will help with our homesickness.

My Hermeneutics (or How I Interpret Scripture)

I also admit that I am making an assumption in the way that I use and interpret verses about the future. I assume that all the glories of any future time, say of the millennium, for instance, will certainly be more than dwarfed by the glories of the New Heaven and New Earth. So, I will use Scripture, especially prophetic and apocalyptic Scripture, as though it were plainly written in reference to the days after the last day, even though these might be verses that you have usually heard applied to another epoch. So if, for instance, you've always believed that the lion will curl up with the lamb (and not for dinner) during the millennium, then I think it is surely acceptable to press that reality out into the New Heaven and New Earth, too. Certainly what is a blessing in a temporary time like the millennium will remain a blessing in eternity.

Our Shared Faith

I am also making one more assumption: I am assuming that you have already come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. (If you haven't, or aren't sure what "saving faith" means, please turn to the appendix at the back of the book.) Because of that assumption, I won't encumber you with if-you-have-come-to-faith language whenever I speak of the blessings that will be given solely to believers. The Bible is clear that the blessings of heaven and the New Earth are only for those who believe that God is good enough and loving enough to bestow them on sinners by faith.

The Antidote for Homesickness

When you send your sixth grader off to camp, you usually pack her suitcase with reminders of home—tangible items that she can actually hang on to while she's trying not to be a crybaby in front of her classmates. Perhaps you send along a little stuffed animal or write a note expressing your love for her. I trust this book will be like that for you: a reminder of your true home that you can hold on to when the days get dark and you feel like you are going to die from longing. Come back here often. Revisit these pages, and then someday, and probably sooner than we know, we'll all sit around and have a great laugh about what we thought home would be like and how we didn't even begin to scratch the surface of how wonderful it actually is. "Well," we will say, "at least we tried." And then, perhaps, as we're having that lovely chat, the King of Glory, Jesus himself, might come walking up and join in the revelry. "Lord, I tried," I will say. And he'll say, "Yes, I know, daughter," maybe with a twinkle in his eye, and we'll all burst out laughing again.

1

On Loss and Homesickness and Baking Bread

It was not my plan to write this book . . . at least not yet. I apologize if that seems like an inauspicious start to your read, but I need to be up front with you. I want you to trust me and your trust demands my honesty. You rely on me to give you something worth your while. But what exactly are you investing in? Only this: Words. Black lines on a white page arranged in a way that enriches you. Black squiggles . . . letters and words in sentences that assure you that, as the movie *Shadowlands* claimed, you are not alone.

C. S. Lewis knew that one of the reasons we read is to recognize our shared human experience. We are not alone, and what you and I are walking through now we walk through together, as fellow sojourners in a world where there is nothing unshared, nothing uncommon, and nothing new. We have each other and our communal experience of life where “what has been is what will be . . . and there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). The path we are walking on is well trod.

We are walking with women and men of faith who have gone before us, believers who felt a gnawing sense of isolation and exile and needed to know that this isolation and exile weren't as absolute as they feared they might be. We read to hear our own voice of faith whispered in the storm of doubt, to hear another's voice calling back to us from somewhere on the road up ahead. We read to find our way to rest, to family, to home.

But knowing that we are not alone is not all we need. We also need these black lines, these words, to impart a strength that will enable us to keep on, to keep walking by faith through the dark. Have others gone before us? Did they make it home? Was God faithful? Can we actually hear their voices? We need assurance that there is a God who is sovereignly ruling over our journeys and will one day put everything right. In essence, you are trusting me to arrange words in such a way that they miraculously spring to life, that inanimate black ink turns into living golden light, infusing your soul with strength. I trust that they will, but as I said, arranging them like this at this time really wasn't my idea.

I also realize that what I want to do is far beyond my ability to accomplish. In part, that's because although I have written a lot, I am not really what I would call a writer . . . not like those artists who construct sentences that are so beautiful they make you want to cry. But I am also going to struggle because I will be writing about a place I have never seen or experienced. Yes, I will use the words of the faithful witnesses from Scripture and I will pray for the Spirit's enabling, but I am quite sure that there are no earthly words for what we will ultimately see there.

Even the apostle Paul himself, after he had visited the "third heaven" (or Paradise, where God actually dwells), said that he had "heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4). So, some of the pictures I will sketch will undoubtedly stretch your imagination; they certainly did mine. When I am speculating (and know it), I will tell you. But the

truth is that much of what we're going to investigate together will necessitate the use of "devout imagination"; while seeking to be true to the Bible, we will push our imagination out past its normal moorings. So, please join me in praying, as I have throughout this entire writing process, "*Lord, grant us all grace to see the unseen and to be satisfied to live by faith, not sight, in what we cannot see right now.*"

My Journey Here to You

The book you're holding right now is the result of the Lord's work in and through me at a very dark time in my life. On some days during this season I was aware of the fact that he was leading me here to write these words. On other days, I admit to being oblivious, apathetic, or angry. I struggled to ignore his gentle direction. During these days I discovered deeply troubling truths about myself (and this world in which we live)—truths that I would have said I was aware of but really hadn't a clue about.

It was also during this time that he taught me how to define what was at the center of my longing. I ultimately realized it was centered on one word, *Home*.¹ Isn't there something about that word that evokes desire and emotion in you? I have longed for Home. I longed for something more than this devil-filled, sin-cursed world. I wanted a place where love overruled every event, where joy infused every word. I wanted holiness to infiltrate, to make right all I saw. I longed for rest from the battering. I wanted Home . . . to go there, yes . . . but not just for a visit. No heavenly two-hour church service would ever satiate me now. I wanted heaven, to live there, to never be alone again, to be with Jesus forever.

A friend once told me that her longing for heaven was like walking by a bakery and being drawn in by the fragrance of the bread baking inside. I was beginning to smell heaven . . . but I

was stuck outside. Smelling it. Longing for it. I yearned for it and this yearning created homesickness in me. I was starving for the most delicious-smelling bread but just couldn't get to it. I needed a better map, enhanced trail markers, a more accurate vision of the door.

I had to write this book because it helped me read the map and see the door. It gave me sight and it temporarily allayed my homesickness. I wrote it because I was pining away and needed to find the remedy that would both quiet and strengthen my desire for something that remained beyond my reach. I needed to get as close as I could to that bakery so that I really believed that what was coming was as good as I needed it to be, so my soul would be quieted. So I could wait. But I also needed my imagination to be set ablaze so that I wouldn't lose sight of my Home in the midst of the darkness I was stumbling through. I had to run toward a vision, a lovely smell (if you will), a homing beacon. Little squiggles needed to be infused with the smell of bread baking and the sight of a place where all would ultimately be as it should be. Home: a place for everything where everything had its place . . . including me.

This book we've titled *Home* . . . this is the Lord's idea. I am trusting him to speak through it to you and to use it however he wishes. But I am mostly glad for it because I needed it. It has kept me from sliding off a perilous road into the quicksand at the bottom of the valley of the shadow of death. Home is in the distance. The lighthouse is burning brightly in the night. Words help me see what my eyes are too weak to perceive . . . and yet I'm continuing this walk in the dark.

I Got This!

Like most independent, self-directed, and self-deceived mortals, I recently thought I knew what my immediate future held.

Everything was planned out, tidy, even exciting. I could smile and quip, “I got this!” without a second thought. I thought I knew what to expect from my family, my church, my ministry, my day-to-day life. But then I began to sense that something was amiss; life wasn’t proceeding along the tracks I had so carefully laid out.

A ministry that I had recently aligned myself with was falling apart and events that had been completely unthinkable a few months prior were headlines in Christian magazines. Friends were wounded terribly. Many simply vanished from the landscape of faith. I hugged a dear friend who sobbed and sobbed over the losses in her life as she questioned everything she had ever believed, and feared that all her work was for naught.

“Lord,” I wondered. “We prayed about this . . . You opened this door . . . I don’t understand.” Plans that had been carefully arranged and prayed over evaporated overnight. Relationships shattered. Bridges burned. I began to feel like I was caught up in a raging torrent headed unavoidably toward destruction. The harder I paddled to get out of that treacherous current, the more ground I lost. I was headed for the falls and was completely powerless to change my course. But that was just the beginning.

Just when it seemed that we had weathered that storm and could see those shiny train tracks laid out in front of us again, another distressing event occurred. My church went through difficult changes. My head was spinning. My heart was broken. “O Lord, God . . . What are you doing?” The waterfall’s roar was deafening.

While I was struggling to cope with this loss, I became aware of the fact that I was being misrepresented and maligned by people I had assumed were friends. I offered an olive branch to them and suggested that rather than attacking and counterattacking one another on the Internet, it would be a good idea for us to try to come to some understandings by phone. The

day was set for our conversation and it quickly went downhill. It was one of the most hurtful conversations I had ever been party to.

And then . . . less than thirty minutes after that conversation ended, I received the news that a dear friend was leaving his pastorate. The ministry he had built was being shut down. From that sadness there was born grief after grief as people struck out in pain, responded in misunderstanding, and assumed the worst about one another. Friends savaged friends. Accusations flew back and forth. Efforts to help blew up in my face. This went on for months and consumed every waking hour and many hours during sleepless nights. The ramifications continue to this day.

A few months later, my sweet daughter's pastor resigned. The church plant she had labored in for six years was on the brink of extinction.

And finally, my dear uncle died. This was a man who had, for all intents and purposes, functioned as a father to me. As a child I had spent sweet weeks during the summer playing with my cousins at his house. I had such fond memories of splashing in the pool with them. As I became an adult, he was always there for me: someone I could call on, someone I could count on. During the last decade of his life we became even closer; his wife became a dear friend, and we loved attending their birthday parties. His death felt like another devastating blow to me. Of course, he had been ailing for some time, but his death seemed so sudden. It wasn't supposed to happen yet, was it? On one hand, I was thankful because I had visited with him the week prior and was as convinced as I could be that he had come to faith; on the other hand, it seemed too soon. I experienced a year bookended by the loss of a beloved pastor on the front end and the loss of a beloved father on the other. Over the falls I went.

All Right, Already! Isn't This Enough?

I don't mean to sound blasphemous, but sometimes I wonder if God doesn't have a tendency to be heavy-handed. You don't need to tell me about how wise he is. I know and believe that. But I also know that the writers of the Psalms felt this same impulse: "How long, O Lord?" was their ancient refrain. Yeah. How long? Isn't this a little much? Of course, it's nice to know that my experience was also theirs, but, seriously, *Can't a gal get a break?*

It was about this time that I leaned over to my husband during church one Sunday morning and said, "I have no idea what I'm doing here." I knew then that I was a step away from leaving everything I had once held dear and that, if I didn't head in another direction, I was in danger of denying the faith . . . or at least leaving the church.

It was then I also knew I had to write this book. I began reading. A book I had been slated to write was set aside for a later time. I kept reading. I began talking about heaven and the New Earth to friends. I talked about it with everyone who would listen. I listened for it everywhere. These conversations were a God thing. He was directing my thoughts. He was forcing me to think more deeply. I hiked with friends at Torrey Pines State Park and asked them if we would be hiking like this on the New Earth. We watched the waves and wondered if we would ride them in eternity. I read and read and took pages and pages and pages of notes. I prayed.

What will heaven be like? What about the New Earth? What do I have wrong? Exactly what happens when I die? Where will I go? How is that different from where I will spend eternity? What are my loved ones who have already died doing now? Will we work? Will we learn? How will the answers to these questions help me now? These were the questions I asked over and over again while God was untethering me from the here and now. I kept reading and praying and asking.

What Is This Longing I Feel?

I began to try to define the pain I felt. Yes, it was sorrow, but it was something more, something infinitely deeper. I felt it all the time, even when I was happy. It wasn't just sorrow. It was a longing: a pining for a better place and time . . . no, not just a better place and time, a *perfect* place and time; a different reality. It felt like longing for home, but not for a home I had ever been to. I began to see that it was something like homesickness, so I began to study that, too.

The word *homesickness* was coined in the 1700s. Homesickness is defined as “distress . . . caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home.”² The word *nostalgia*, which we commonly use when we talk about a longing for the way things used to be, was also coined around 1700. Since there was no word in medicine for this sense of sadness, Johannes Hofer, a Swiss scholar, combined two Greek words, “*nostos*, meaning ‘return home,’ and *algia*, the word for ‘pain.’”³ This pain I was feeling felt like nostalgia. I was suffering because I wanted to return home. But I didn't want to return to any place I had already been. I was living in San Diego, where I had lived practically my entire life. I wasn't longing for San Diego or a log cabin on a prairie—Lord, no! I was still living with my dear family. I wasn't longing for them, but they were involved in this longing, too. Yes, I wanted to be with them, but with them in a different way. And yet this longing was something deeper . . . something, I began to see, I had felt for years but had been too busy, too “in control” to notice. I had been trying to silence this cry in my heart my entire life in all sorts of foolish ways. I realized that I had actually been homeless, but kept trying to build a home out of pretty matchsticks I found on the street.

There is a passage from an unpublished novel by Walker Percy that captures the homelessness of humanity. Percy imagines this dialogue between two men in a tuberculosis sanitarium:

“What’s the matter, Willy?”

“I don’t know, Scanlon. I’m homesick.”

“How long have you been homesick?”

“All my life.”

Percy’s dialogue captures the restlessness of the soul that wanders through this world until it finds a home with God.⁴

I related to those words: I realized I had been homesick *all my life*. But even though I had indeed found a home with God, the answer to my restlessness hadn’t been completely quieted. I’m not saying that coming to faith wasn’t a homecoming. It was. But it was also true that my faith didn’t instantaneously translate me out of here to there; it didn’t change me from being an exile to living life by the hearth at home. In fact, perhaps in some ways it made my nostalgia worse because it had enabled me to see that there was something more than this life, something infinitely better. Perhaps Christians are the most consistently homesick people in the world because they know this world (as it is) isn’t their true home. Yes, I was home, but I was still homesick.

An Inn on the Side of the Road

I longed for home but not just any home anywhere. I was looking for a capital *H* home, a real, tangible, flesh-and-blood, Home-on-Earth-With-Him Home. I wanted a Home where my Father lived, and if he was going to be there, then it had to be a home filled with righteousness; a capital *H* home that was crammed to bursting with capital *H* holiness. I wanted, no, actually *needed* a Holy Place where I would finally say, “Oh, yeah! This is it! This is the place I’ve been looking for my whole life! This is what solid holiness feels like! It’s this face I’ve needed to see! This is Home!”

This Home was what I was looking for all those times I rearranged the furniture, went on vacation, watched palm fronds dance in the breeze out my window and wished I understood what they were saying. This is the look I saw in my dog's eyes when I knew she knew that I wanted something more for her than this ending we had finally come to. This is the place I wanted to live when I struggled to communicate my heart to Phil and it came out all wrong and I cried into my pillow like a child. This is the peace between brothers, the quiet of soul when, for just a few seconds, you can search your mind and find nothing amiss.

That! That! But more than that! This is the momentary joy when families hug and laugh and wine flows and the food is shockingly delicious. This is the excitement of discovery, the experiencing of fulfilled anticipation; this is what I feel when a great movie tells the story of redemption all over again and I'm stunned by the gifts God has given unbelievers.

It's all that and yet, none of these shadows, no matter how hard they struggle for substance, were solid enough to cure my homesickness. I remained homeless. I am an exile. They were merely reminders . . . inns on the road to the real place, to the Home I'm pining for. But just inns, not Home.

Cheer Up! After All, You're a Christian!

When you talk about longing for Home a lot, people start thinking you're being morose. They think they ought to pat you gently or kindly offer to pray that you will be happier. They think that you ought to buck up and smile and work hard at bettering your lot. They think you should take a pill. They think that in time you will feel better, once you get free from this briar patch of despondency you have fallen into.

They might suggest a list of things you should do so you could smile like the ubiquitous televangelist. "Read your Bible!"

they advise. “Pray more! Go to church!” they counsel. And yes, they’re right, sort of, but I also respond, “No. Sorry. Those things don’t quite scratch where I am itching right now.” They are only inns on the side of the road. And, yes, a good church is the best inn of all. But everything I can do here, even those things I do by faith, are merely the Motel 6s where I’m checking in for the evening and hoping for a halfway decent rest. Maybe a biblical church is like a really gorgeous Hilton with a bed that promises deep sleep. I don’t know. But all these things remain just inns on the road, after all. They let me rest a bit on this weary road; they give me a bit of refreshment, but they don’t get me off this road. They are not Home.

Those of us who are Americans tend to think we can solve any problem. We can build a better mousetrap or mobile device, perform laparoscopic surgery, develop GMO corn, or create a selfie stick for our GoPro. Got a problem with drought? Hang on, and we’ll think of a fix for that. Just give us time and money. We are an overconfident nation of fixers. Of course, that doesn’t mean we are the happiest people on earth, just that we think there is a solution to every ill and we can find it if we just buck up and press on. It’s un-American to say, “I can’t . . . and neither can you!” We believe in capital *P* progress. I used to. I used to think that there was some secret key to living life without homesickness. I don’t believe that anymore.

Please don’t misunderstand. I do believe that we should read and pray and work hard here and that joy is possible now. I even believe something more radical: I believe that our faith and good works will somehow make a difference in our Home to come (see chapter 11), but as best I can now, I’m shipping that basket of eggs—trust in real deliverance from longing—Home. I’ll bet we could invent some way of shipping boxes from one dimension into another. It’s just a matter of logistics, right? No, probably not. Eventually everything will be better. I will finally be Home.

That's what I'm trusting for while I pine away here. I'm no longer expecting to find Home in the here and now.

Strangers and Exiles All

Freedom from this longing for Home is impossible for us in the same way it was for the people of faith who have gone before us. On one of his best days, a day when he was rejoicing in all the good things God had given him and done for him, King David acknowledged, "For we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding" (1 Chronicles 29:15).

King David, with all his faith, at the height of his power, knew that he was merely a foreigner here. He confessed that he was a sojourner, a "temporary, landless wage earner."⁵ We would call these kinds of people alien day laborers. Got a lawn that needs mowing? They're here for you. They are without land; they live from job to job. Many of them take what they earn and send it back home. They're not building a home here. They're not abiding. They know that. I admit that until recently I rarely saw myself as a sojourner, a temporary, landless wage earner. Not because it was a wrong way of thinking, but because I was so invested in my home in the here and now. In Psalm 39, King David again refers to himself as a sojourner. He calls himself a "guest, like all [his] fathers" (v. 12). We are landless wage earners, guests in a land that is not our Home.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

Hebrews 11:13–14

No amount of faith in God will change the fact that we are homesick exiles, pining for another place, a place where he is. *Jesus is our Homeland.*

The Jewish exiles experienced this longing, too: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres” (Psalm 137:1–2). Their homesickness silenced their song. “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (v. 4). How indeed?

Home Is Where He Is

We can’t put our hope in our own progress, either. Inns along the road won’t answer this longing. Not even great faith will satisfy our seeking. Even when the Jewish exiles were finally able to return to Jerusalem, they still longed for something more. This alone is our hope: That at the very moment of our death we are finally at Home with the Lord. When the church’s first martyr, Stephen, was being stoned to death, his eyes were finally opened and he was able to see his Homeland: “But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

When Stephen saw the doors of the heavenly dimension open, what did he see? The glory of God and Jesus standing there, awaiting his arrival. He saw Home. Death would usher him instantly into the presence of the Lord.

The apostle Paul puts it this way: “We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. . . . We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6–8).

Did you notice how he talks about our home here, “in the body,” and our Home there, “with the Lord”? Did you hear him say he’d rather be with the Lord? Sounds like homesickness to me. Paul recognized that we are traversing a road between two

homes, leaving one behind, heading toward another. Home in the place to come will truly be *Home* for us because it is where the Lord is. We miss him. We feel so homesick because we are “away from the Lord” right now. But a time is coming when we will be with him and his presence will make it Home for us. Yes, that place will be heaven; it will be Paradise. Because we were made for him, any place where he isn’t will never satisfy us.

In another letter Paul writes,

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Philippians 1:21–23

What was his desire? To die. To depart this life and be with Christ. He felt hard pressed because he didn’t want to leave his fruitful work *here* in this home, but he also really wanted to be *there* in that Home. His mind was pulling him in two directions; his heart was speaking two different words to him:⁶ Work for others here or rest with Christ there? He admitted that he wanted to be there because it was “far better.”

Do you think about Home in that way? Is it just better or is it *far* better? How much better do you think it will be? A hundred thousand times better? A million times better? Little black squiggles could never describe better? Yes, that much better and then some. Paul defined his homesickness as an overwhelming ache to be at Home with the Lord. It will be *that much better*. And though he counsels us to continually rejoice in the Lord, he was also filled with an unending longing for a different life. Together with him, we both pine and rejoice.

The trials of Paul’s life in ministry made him long to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 11:23–29). The dangers and hardships

he faced are inconceivable. Most of us have never faced much persecution at all—perhaps aside from a snide remark or being passed over for a promotion. But the dangers he faced actually worked to sweeten his longing for heaven. They gave him the ability to smell the bread baking. In addition, aside from perils from persecution, he wrote, “And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches” (v. 28). Daily pressure and anxiety coupled with his longing for the Lord were tearing him apart. It’s easy to understand why the thought of dying and being with the Lord was much better. Though the difficulties I’ve faced are nothing in comparison to what he went through, they have accomplished the same work in me. Home, with Jesus, does seem *very much better*.

Here’s one more passage from Paul in which he admitted to “groaning.” Have you ever been in such deep distress that words won’t come and all you can do is sigh or moan? That was Paul’s experience, too. He was longing, pining, even moaning for his true dwelling. “For in this tent [our earthly home] we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. . . . For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened” (2 Corinthians 5:2–4). In chapters to come we’ll talk more specifically about our physical resurrection, what Paul refers to as our “heavenly dwelling,” but for now I would simply like you to see that Paul himself felt this homesickness, too. He was burdened. He groaned. Me too. How about you?

Our Journey Home

Like Paul, like you, I’m longing to go Home. Sure, the last few years have been hard, and they have pressed me into a place where I’m groaning for my Savior. I’d like to see his face, to rest in that garden Paradise, to let him heal my homesickness. I don’t know what the future years will hold. If I am to live on,

I am sure there will be days of both sunshine and deep pain. And then, one day, I'll take one step over into the heavenly dimension, and all will be at rest. I'm longing for it . . . and yet, I know that while I still have work to do, God will sustain me here. I am hard pressed. I am groaning. I long for Home. Can you smell the bread baking? Are the tiny black lines starting to glow a little?

————— FIXING OUR EYES ON HOME —————

1. Have you ever gone through a difficult time when your desire for Home grew stronger? Describe it.
2. Have you gone through an extended time away from home where you experienced homesickness? What was that like? How did you quell your longings?
3. Have you ever thought about your desire for the life to come as homesickness? Philip Yancey wrote, "Faith is, in the end, a kind of homesickness—for a home we have never visited but have never stopped longing for."⁷ Respond.
4. Are you beginning to smell the bread baking? If so, describe it. If not, that's fine.
5. Summarize what you've learned in this chapter in four or five sentences.