All the Way Back Home:
where is home and what is shalom?
Stephen T. Hague

“Homemaking, like world-building, is a world-ordering enterprise. To turn space into place is to establish normative boundaries that bring a certain kind of order to the life lived within those boundaries.”

For Julian and Marcus upon their return home March 10[really the 7th], 2018 in hopes that home will always be with, behind, and before them. And for Lucas who made traveling to Mexico and back home a joy I will never forget.

In memory of the Contes’ family house (which burned down the day I finished this essay), and which did not destroy their home nor their memories of it.

1 Prediger and Walsh, Beyond Homelessness, p. 53.
What if I was to ask you what is the word that most warms your heart, touches on your deepest longings, evokes your riches memories? For me, that word would be HOME. Home to me is the essence of our earthly life, the center, the focus, the foundation of life in this world. And, this is coming from one who loves to travel, and often “get away” from home! “Home” may not be the word that comes to your mind, especially if you had a painful or tragic home-life as a child, or do at present. There is also the feeling, or reality, of homelessness and displacement prevalent in our times. Yet, if you have painful associations with the concept of home, let me suggest for the moment that you put aside those pains and fears and allow yourself to consider the beauty of this word “home.” That is, I suggest, the pain of those who have suffered through childhood is in fact particularly acute because we have an intrinsic understanding of, and longing for, what home should be, for as we are made in God’s image he has made us for home. Therefore, I believe all humans that have ever lived can understand and relate to the pictures I am going to present here on this theme.

To begin, here are several questions to stimulate consideration of this topic:

- Why do we love [familiar] places and faces? Why when we travel do we often imagine we see familiar faces and friends in the crowd?
- Why do we love peace and safety and security?
- Why do we love (or at least long for) a place to call home?
- What is the deepest longing of the human heart?

Beginning with the Bible and the story of creation, it can be proposed that we are hard-wired for Eden, a home together in God’s presence. This home was a place of perfect shalom;^2^ extraordinary superabundance of every good and beautiful provision in a place of perfect love and peace. Therefore, if the original creation was a place of such shalom, it is reasonable to say that the goal of redemption is also shalom. That shalom is the restoration of our true home with God on this earth restored. If this is true, then every human being longs for this in some way, and whether twisted by distorted and misaligned loves and longings, the heart desires above all things a

return to the joys of Eden’s perfect delights.^3^ This is evidenced in countless ways across this globe in nearly every human story shared in literature, poems, songs, recorded histories, and in all of the world religions. There is in this sense no such thing as a “non-religious” person, because every fiber of our being and our hopes is for something of this happiness of shalom, a peace that we pursue with a relentless zeal that passes all present comprehension. This passion that drives the human-person is unstoppable and all-consuming, even where it is not recognized, and this is what makes us all “religious” creatures, since we are searching for something we cannot create, provide for ourselves, or find through our own efforts. Even those who style themselves as atheists, or fashionably “spiritual but not religious,” or as agnostics, we have countless examples of such people demonstrating that they are longing for this unreachable hope for something. In this sense, we cannot not hope. Even for those who are said to have “lost hope,” we all understand that this is a condition none of us would want to experience. We strive with all our hearts not to lose hope. So desperate we are, we often end by hoping in that which is no hope, in what cannot provide any means to find hope. And though we may then feel hopeless, there are often the embers covered in ash that burn inside, waiting to be rekindled. Hoping for hope to come alive again, we make choices, we search, we clamber, we climb, we run, we dive, we divert, we leap, hoping against all hope we keep as busy as possible in the hope that . . . .

The poems and songs people have written that convey these themes could probably fill volumes stackable to the moon. To share a few of these, will illustrate their prevalence. For my title, I borrowed the phrase from the Irish musician Ronan Hardiman, whose song “All the Way Back Home” captures this in a refrain repeated many times with haunting vocals and rhythms:

I want to be
I want be
I want to be home . . .
I want to go all the way back home.

The famous lines, “Home is a man’s castle” is a concept embedded within our Bill of Rights, specifically the Fourth Amendment: “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation . . .”

---

^2^ Shalom (שלום) in Hebrew conveys quite a range of related concepts: completeness, soundness, welfare, peace, safety, soundness, secure. welfare, health, prosperity, be well, quiet, tranquil, content, friendship, peace from war. See more on Shalom, p. 22.

^3^ See Joni Mitchell’s song below, “Woodstock.”
Most human law is designed to protect *boundaries*, whether personal, communal, or national. These boundaries ultimately protect our place, our person, our home. Whether we are speaking of our property or our person, our laws are created to preserve and protect out of the zeal we all share to find *shalom*. Whenever this effort is subverted, as by dictators and totalitarians, we all intrinsically sense that this is an evil, or at least a wrong that threatens humanity itself. Why should this be?

Perhaps the most famous lines on home are found in Lena Guilbert Ford who wrote, “*Keep the home fires burning*”:

Keep the home fires burning,
While your hearts are yearning,
Though your lads are far away
They dream of home.

Perhaps equally famous are the words of J.H. Payne from his poem “Home Sweet home”:

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home;
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is ne’er met with Elsewhere.
Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There’s no place like home! There’s no place like home!

We all know the nostalgic feeling that is expressed in the song “I’ll be home for Christmas”:

I’ll be home for Christmas
You can plan on me
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I’ll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams
If only in my dreams

This sense of deep longings and nostalgia for home is also captured in Stephen Foster’s famous song, “The Old Folks at Home”:

Way down upon the Swanee River,
Far, far away,
There’s where my heart is turning ever;
There’s where the old folks stay.
All up and down the whole creation,
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for the old plantation,
And for the old folks at home.

Even though the vast majority of quotes I searched up online (and there are millions) were either very serious or mostly serious, there are also many examples of humorous references to home such as Robert Frost’s in “Death of the hired Man”:

Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.

“Home is where you can say anything you want because nobody listens anyway.”
Anon

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.
Warsan Shire, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*

And also, playfully serious:
A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.
George A. Moore, *The Brook Kerith*

Home is where somebody notices when you are no longer there.
Aleksandar Hemon, *The Lazarus Project*

You haven’t really been anywhere until you’ve got back home.
Terry Pratchett, *The Light Fantastic*

No other success can compensate for failure in the home.
J. E. McCulloch
Home is where your WiFi connects automatically.
Anon

Marriage lets you annoy one special person for the rest of your life.
Anon

Home wasn’t built in a day.
Anon

If you want to change the world, you start small, right at home.
Lizzie Velásquez, *Dare to Be Kind: How Extraordinary Compassion Can Transform Our World*

Do not interfere with an army that is returning home. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

I love the echoes of a home filled to the rim with poetry, books and art.
Melody Lee, *Moon Gypsy*

I used to dream about escaping my ordinary life, but my life was never ordinary. I had simply failed to notice how extraordinary it was. Likewise, I never imagined that home might be something I would miss.
Ransom Riggs, *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*

I years had been from home,  
And now, before the door,  
I dared not open, lest a face  
I never saw before  
Stare vacant into mine  
And ask my business there.  
My business,—just a life I left,  
Was such still dwelling there?  
Emily Dickinson, *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*

The zealous Christian Hannah Moore wrote in “Sensibility”:  
The sober comfort, all the peace which springs  
From the larger aggregate of little things;  
On these small cares of daughter, wife, or friend,  
The almost sacred joys of home depend.

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher, wrote in “John Ploughman”:  
“East and West, Home is best.”

Music of home likewise would be fill endless volumes, but some well-loved examples include the following:

**Home Again**  
by Carol King

Sometimes I wonder if I’m ever gonna make it home again  
It’s so far out of sight  
I really need someone to talk to, and nobody  
Else knows how to comfort me tonight  
Snow is cold, rain is wet  
Chills my soul right to the marrow  
I won’t be happy till I see you again  
Till I’m home again a feeling right.

Carole King’s song *Way over Yonder*, pushes the longings for home even further:

Way over yonder is a place that I know  
Where I can find shelter from hunger and cold  
And the sweet tasting good life is easily found  
Way over yonder — that’s where I’m bound I know when I get there,  
the first thing I’ll see Is the sun shining golden—shining right down on me  
Then trouble’s gonna lose me — worry leave me behind  
And I’ll stand up proudly in true peace of mind  
Way over yonder is a place I have seen  
In a garden of wisdom from some long ago dream  
Maybe tomorrow I’ll find my way  
To the land where the honey runs in rivers each day  
And the sweet tasting good life is so easily found  
Way over yonder — that’s where I’m bound Way over yonder — that’s where I’m bound.

In the hippie movement of the 1960’s, Joni Mitchell’s song “Woodstock” became one of its most popular anthems, and which remarkably calls us the voice of a “child of God” to get back to the garden (presumably Eden):

**Woodstock**  
by Joni Mitchell

I came upon a child of God  
He was walking along the road
And I asked him where are you going
And this he told me
I'm going on down to Yasgur's farm
I'm going to join in a rock 'n' roll band
I'm going to camp out on the land
I'm going to try an' get my soul free

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

Then can I walk beside you
I have come here to lose the smog
And I feel to be a cog in something turning
Well maybe it is just the time of year
Or maybe it's the time of man
I don't know who I am
But you know life is for learning

We are stardust
We are golden
And we've got to get ourselves
Back to the garden

By the time we got to Woodstock
We were half a million strong
And everywhere there was song and celebration
And I dreamed I saw the bombers
Riding shotgun in the sky
And they were turning into butterflies
Above our nation

We are stardust
Billion year old carbon
We are golden
Caught in the devil's bargain
And we've got to get ourselves
back to the garden

Similarly, much Christian music tends to combine themes of earthly home with hopes of heaven:

Home
by Strahan, (from Posters)

I see revelation standing at the door
I have held your hand for so long I don't remember anymore
I have searched 10 miles wide and far more than that deep
And I'm so glad a decade on your fire still burns in me

Let them speak of man who lives to die
And in my bones beat the pleasure of your fire
My heart still breaks but the rivers running wilder every day
That's how I know
I am home

I used to think my energy would carry me on through
But poetry kissed reality the moment I met you
All my years and all my friends never told me what you do
But now I know it's so obvious that through that I grew

Let them speak of man who lives to die
And in my bones beat the pleasure of your fire
My heart still breaks but the rivers running wilder every day
That's how I know
I am home

Home At Last
by Josh Garrels (from Home)

Who is that at the end of lonesome roads
All of us hope there's a home
Place to rest where wounds get dressed
The table's full the sound of laughter in the halls

Light the fire gather round
Join together sing it loud
Raise the glass and joyful be
Home at last one family

We're all orphans looking for an open door
Hard times come no more
Come on up to the house of the Lord
Father adopts us all
Light the fire gather round
Join together sing it loud
Raise the glass and joyful be
Home at last one family

A Long Way
by Josh Garrels (from Home)

There’s a time in our lives
To return, sacrifice
Wild grass has grown high
On the path between our lives
There’s a light in the trees
It’s closer now, I’m on my knees
Oh Father, forgive me, please

I came a long, long way back home
To see you one more time
‘Cause I came a long, long way back home
To see you and say Goodbye

Father’s hands work the ground
Turns the soil, lays it down
Everything done and said
Lives beyond the quick and the dead
Heritage passed along
To the sons like a blessed song
So raise your voices on high tonight

At the Table
by Josh Garrels (from Home)
I went the ways of wayward winds
In a world of trouble and sin
Walked along a crooked mile
Behind a million rank and file

Forgot where I came from
Somewhere back when I was young
I was a good man’s child

‘Cause I lost some nameless things
My innocence flew away from me
She had to hide her face from my desire
to embrace forbidden fire

But at night I dreamed
she’s singing over me
Oh oh my child

Come on home
Home to me
And I will hold you in my arms
And joyful be

There will always
Always be
A place for you at my table
Return to me

Wondering where I might begin
I hear a voice upon the wind
She’s singing faint but singing true
"Son, there ain’t nothing you can do
But listen close and follow me
I’ll take you where you’re meant to be
Just don’t lose faith."

So I put my hand upon the plow
Wipe the sweat up from my brow
Plant the good seed along the way
As I look forward to the day
When at last I’ll see
My father run to me
singing, “Oh, my child.”

Come on home
Home to me
And I will hold you in my arms
And joyful be
There will always, always be
A place for you
At my table
Return to me
Come on home
Home to me
And I will hold you in my arms
And joyful be

There will always, always be
A place for you at my table
A place for you at my table
A place for you at my table
Return to me

Bach’s “Wedding Cantata” (Wauchet Auf, 140) expresses the most profoundly beautiful dialogue between a bride and her groom, representing the wedding of the Church and Christ. It pictures the love and warmth of home and our final homecoming in the utmost sense. The great cantata was used powerfully in my own personal life in coming to faith in Christ.

Wauchet Auf (“Sleepers Awake”), 140
1. Chorus
Wake up, the voice is calling us
Of the watchmen in the high, high tower;
Wake up, you city of Jerusalem!
The hour is midnight;
They call to us with ringing voices;
Where are you wise virgins now?
Come on, the bridegroom comes;
Rise up and take your lamps!
Alleluia!
Make yourself ready
For the wedding,
You must go to meet him!

2. Recitative
He comes, he comes,
The bridegroom comes!
Come forth, you daughters of Zion,
His exit from the heavens brings him rushing
To your mother’s house.

The bridegroom comes, he who is like a buck
and a young stag,
Leaping on the hills
And brings you the wedding feast.
Wake up, bestir yourselves!
To receive [be receptive to] the bridegroom!
There, look, he comes to meet you.

3. Aria (Duet)
When are you coming, my salvation?
(I am coming, your share.)
I am waiting with burning oil.

Open
the hall
(1 open)

(For the heavenly feast.)
Come, Jesus!
(Come, lovely soul!)
At my left hand you shall rest,
And my right hand shall kiss you.

6. Aria (Duet)
My beloved is mine,
And I am his.
The love shall not separate anything.
I wish to, with you,
(You shall,) me,
Revel [or graze] in Heaven’s roses,
There we shall find satiety and bliss.

7. Chorale
Gloria be sung to you now
With human and angel voices,
Surely with harps and cymbals.
The gates are made of twelve pearls;
In your city we are consorts
Of the angels high around your throne.
No eye has ever perceived,
No ear has ever heard
Such joy.
Thus we are glad,
Io, Io!
Eternally "in dulci jubilo."

Many American spirituals reflect this deep longing for a renewed world
where there is safety, deliverance from suffering in the heavenly reality of
presence with Christ. Many Christian songs and hymns were born of such
intense suffering that they naturally express what I would consider an
unbiblical hope of escape from the world itself. Indeed, very few Christian
songs do not have such themes.

Wayfaring Stranger

I am a poor, wayfaring stranger,
While journ’ying through this world of woe,
Yet, there’s no sickness, toil nor danger,
In that bright world to which I go.
I’m going there to see my Father,
I’m going there no more to roam;

Chorus:
I’m only going over Jordan,
I’m only going over home.
I know dark clouds will gather o’er me,
I know my way is rough and steep;
Yet beaut’ous fields lie just before me,
Where God’s redeemed their vigils keep.
I’m going there to see my Mother,
She said she’d meet me when I come.
I want to wear a crown of glory,
When I get home to that good land;
I want to shout Salvation’s story,
In concert with the blood-washed band.
I’m going there to meet my Savior,
To sing His praise forevermore;

I Am A Stranger Here

I Am A Stranger Here, within a foreign land;
My home is far away upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be of realms beyond
the sea,
I’m here on business of my King . . .
I’m here on business of my King . . .

I’ll Fly Away

Some bright morning when this life is over
I’ll fly away
To that home on God’s celestial shore
I’ll fly away
I’ll fly away, oh glory
I’ll fly away in the morning
When I die, Hallelujah by and by
I’ll fly away
I’m gonna fly someday
Bruce Cockburn
Home & Shalom by Stephen Hague

I'm gonna fly someday
If I keep ready and watch and pray
I'm gonna fly someday

*Just Beyond the Jordan*
Edward W. Clayborn

Just beyond the Jordan River
There beside the crystal sea
There's a city built of mansions
Will there be one for me?

When my work on Earth is ended
And I sleep beneath the sod
Will my soul sing with the angels

'Oround the blessed throne of God

Blessed, gentle Jesus, guide me
O'er life's ocean, dark and wide
Blessed gentle Jesus, guide me
Safely to the other side

And when my work on Earth is ended
And I sleep beneath the sod
Will my soul sing with the angels

'Oround the blessed throne of God

Oft times I see the tempest raging
Then with strength I'll pull the oar
Jesus is the lighthouse keeper
He will guide me to the shore

Soon I'll anchor in the harbor
Nevermore to drift away
There to meet with all my loved ones
There to spend eternity

Blessed gentle Jesus, guide me
Over life's oceans dark and
Blessed, gentle Jesus, guide me
Safely to the other side

When my work on Earth is ended
And I sleep beneath the sod
Will my soul sing with the angels

'Oround the blessed throne of God

The biblical Promised Land and the gospel

What I would like to further consider is how these themes of home found in
all world religions, literatures, music, and stories relate to God's *plan of
redemption*, and not just what home means to us in earthly or emotive
terms. There are various reasons I would like to address this theme, several
of which are personal, but primarily the reason is to encourage us all in our
"returning home" as prodigals to our Father. That we might be reminded
through the biblical picture of our hopes, just how great a redemption God
has in store for his adopted children.

Perhaps you have heard the story from World War II, when housing was in
short supply, when a lady with good intentions expressed sympathy to a
little girl whose family did not live in a house. She said, "It's too bad your
family doesn't have a home." The five-year-old replied, "We have a home.
We just don't have a house to put it in" (in World War II there was a housing
shortage; today we have a home shortage.)

Karen Burton Maines proposes that home is the place for showing
hospitality:

She writes: "I am firmly convinced that if Christians would open their
homes and practice hospitality as defined in Scripture, we would
significantly alter the fabric of society. We could play a major role in its
spiritual, moral, and emotional redemption. For the Christian, hospitality is
not an option. It is an injunction."

---

4 From the *Christian Reader*, Nov/Dec, 1994, p. 47.
5 Maines, *Open Heart, Open Home*, p. 22.
Hospitality, like charity, must begin at home. How sad it is that so many of us don’t feel comfortable in our own homes. Men are not warmly welcomed at the end of a long day’s hard work. Roommates live in a tense atmosphere. Children are greeted with scoldings and reprimands. Wives and husbands wait to dump frustrations on each other. How we all long to hear, “It’s so good to have you home,” or those other words, “It’s so good to come home to you.” If those dwellings we inhabit are not filled with the gentle considerations, the cherishing, the openness which earmark hospitality, it will be most difficult to extend the gift beyond our front doors. After an attitude of openness has been developed toward our immediate families, we can then more readily impart it to those brothers and sisters in Christ, the household of faith. This marvelous refuge of acceptance and mutual support is graphically described in Ephesians 2:19-22:

Eph 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Edith Schaeffer’s book What is a Family? is full of practical wisdom and insights about what it means to be family. In defining what a family is, she is essentially describing what a home should be. Some examples of her chapter titles reflect these ideals:

- “The birthplace of creativity”
- “The formation center for human relationships”
- “A shelter in a time of storm”
- “A perpetual relay of truth”
- “An economic unit”
- “An educational center”
- “A museum of memories”
- “A door with hinges and a lock”

In summary, to varying degrees home ideally can be said to consist of the following characteristics (or, that is, should consist of):

- Home is where you can be yourself most freely.
- Home is where there is trust, love, intimate communication.
- Home is the place you are safe and can retreat from the world.
- Home is thus a haven, a shelter from the storm.
- Home is where we share our hospitality.
- Home is the center of the education and training of our children.
- Home is where we rest.
- Home is where we retreat to pray and meet with God.
- Home is where we start from each day, from where we go out into the world.
- Home is thus where we replenish and re-arm for the spiritual battles of life in this world.
- Home is where we picture heaven by how we live our lives in our homes. It is where we know grace and mercy and forgiveness.
- Home is thus a foreshadowing of heaven, since it pictures the gospel of Christ.

Eight main attributes of [ideals of] home from Prediger and Walsh, in Beyond Homelessness:

- Home is a place of permanence: a place of familiarity, tenure, a degree of spatial permanence, enduring presence, enduring emplacement.
- Home is a dwelling place: a home is not just a house, since it is made of memories, stories, relationships, a place of (in)dwelling with psychological resonance and social significance.
- Home is a storied place: a place of identity, connectedness, order, and care directed by historical meanings that are narratively formed. Rituals and traditions generate meaningful stories and memories.
- Home is resting place: a refuge of safety, security, rest, regeneration, satisfaction, peace, shalom, trust, vulnerability, respect, and a sense of identity.
- Home is a place of hospitality: a hospice of low and thin boundaries where there are no strangers, inclusion of others and embracing of others, not insulating and isolating those within its boundaries.
- Home is a place of embodied inhabitation: permanence of habitation, intimate knowledge and care and cultivation, a mutually

---

6 Prediger and Walsh, in Beyond Homelessness, pp. 56-64.
nurturing relationship with the place of home, where things are homemade, homegrown, and homespun.

- Home is a place of orientation: home is the point of orientation around which our world is rendered meaningful, providing order and direction to our lives, the axis, the ordering memory of the past. On the other hand, homesickness is a kind of disorientation.
- Home is a place of affiliation and belonging: home is a locus of recognition; hometown, home team, and homeland. It is where we are affiliated and belong, and where we are forgiven.

Even though home as defined in these ways is portrayed as a beautiful haven of flourishing (in a world more prone to destructive and divided relations), it is even so but a weak foreshadowing of the great things to come. All-the-same, as a foreshadowing, or foretaste, it can still be a great testimony to the world, wherever it reflects our biblical ideals and demonstrates what we believe about our future hope. Home is thus the antithesis of homelessness, for homelessness is being lost. Being lost is the plight of Adam’s posterity, as demonstrated in the many perversions of what is home for many today.

Confusions at home of gender identity, divorce, abuse, and abortion

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27):

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

(Gen 2:24)

In recent years, we have witnessed the rise of what is termed “Gender Feminism” that sees the home primarily as the breeding ground of domestic violence, child abuse, and other brutality.

Home is the girl’s prison and the woman’s workhouse.⁷ George Bernard Shaw

In this view, men and women are antagonistic and divided classes in which the family then becomes the breeding ground for gender conflicts. It is evident in many Hollywood productions that men are presented as the problem, as bumbling and irresponsible idiots and weaklings who are surpassed in all things by women who by smarter and stronger. So, it is even now encouraged that we raise boys as though they are girls, and allow feelings to become what identify us, so that if you identify as a male or female, you can be either, or even identify as the father or mother, and even mix incestuous relations within the home. Not only can you now select the gender for your child, the child can decide what gender they want to be, rather confusing their roles in the home as members of family. This has come to the place where terms for brother, daughter, mother, father boy, girl, husband, etc., are rejected altogether. Along with so-called “gender-neutral” toys, there are now children’s camps for boys where they can pretend to be girls that include gender role-shift-playing and fashion shows, to help them identify with their self-chosen female gender-roles. What does this illusory liberation from being male or female lead children towards? Does it produce real freedom? It certainly has created a new lexicon of sexuality terms that indicate a high level of anarchy and confusion to navigate for this generation and those following them:

Agender (genderless), Androgyne, Bigender, Cisgender, Cisnormativity, Demisexual, FtM/F2M, Gender bender, Gender dysphoria, Gender Fluid, Gender Non-Conforming (GNC), Genderqueer / non-binary, Heteronormativity, Heterosexism, Hijra, Misgender, MtF/M2F, Non-binary, Pangender, Passing, Polyamory/Polyamorous, Transgender, Transitioning, Transphobia, Transsexual person, Transvestite, Transwoman.

News about men “marrying” men and women “marrying” women (the ultimate oxymoron) has been so sad to those of us in the Christian faith, since we believe it radically redefines what it means to be made male and female, and so much diminishes the true freedom and beauty possible when we live according to the reality of God’s design for our lives. It is not because we would deny such people the joy of human love, physical relations, or a home on this earth. Indeed, we would say that such perversions of God’s design are just that – a perversion of the divine order available to them. That is, even such things, by their nature, reflect the original divine order for creation, for home, and for family through their perversion of that divine order. That may be a peculiar way of stating it, but we must see that the image of God in all people desires to go back home, all the way back home to relationships of love and family identity, yet sin blinds, thwarts, sidetracks, pre-empt, scuttles human attempts to find that way home.

Homosexuality, adultery, sexual dysphasia, and all perversions of God’s order for home in this world are in reality homelessness in the truest sense

---

⁷ From Maxims for Revolutionists.
of the word. Such things render the home an unsafe and dangerous place, a breeding-ground for exploitation and denial of who we are as persons made in God’s image, as male and female, created for life-long, monogamous heterosexual commitment. Rejecting God himself, and his design, for the smoke and mirrors of hell itself, where true freedom has been lost altogether through following the delusions of salvation and deliverance from God’s order. Hell must in some sense be the epitome of homelessness, for it would be the experience of utter lostness. In contrast, we believe that the gospel of Christ brings restoration and wholeness and renewal of God’s design. But of course, we must believe that there is such a God in order to reject the absurd notion that we can live in any way contrary to how we were designed. Indeed, we believe that without Christ, who is the only true way back home, we walk in darkness, and grope about blindly. Those of us who know the Way of Christ must have compassion for those lost in this darkness, without light, without hope, and without his life of real freedom. Yes, we must not only condemn sin, we must set the light of our example of biblical marriage upon the hill; we cannot rest content with condemning sin in the world when we ourselves often lack beauty and love and truth and holiness and purity in our own marriages and church families. Further, we also have the freedom of grace and forgiveness that can characterize our relations, since we also have that available to us in Christ when we do fail one another.

Also, divorce represents another perversion of God’s order for creation for the home. Lee Strobel gives us some sad statistics:

Currently, one out of every four children in the United States lives in a single parent home. This represents nearly a three-fold increase over the last twenty years. This phenomenon is not a respecter of race or socioeconomic status. Among Anglo children, 1 out of every 5 live in a single parent home, among Hispanics the ratio is 1 in 3, and the African-American ratio is 1 in 2. The fastest growing segment of increase is among the Anglo population. Additionally, 60 percent of the children born today will live at least part of their first eighteen years in a single-parent environment.8

Related to this, is the terrible abuse of children and spouses, for this is also a perversion of God’s order in creation for family and home. This reality is far more widespread than many of us would like to know. We must address it.

We cannot preach good news for the homes of those suffering in this way when we fail to even acknowledge their suffering.

Needless to say, the greatest assault on families and their homes has been the legalization of abortion of pre-born children in which nearly a third of all members of families are killed before they enter the home (though they are “in the house” prior to their end). Such logic has actually brought some of its advocates now to support neonaticide, or “after-birth-abortion” (otherwise known as infanticide). Not only have they redefined gender in our generation, they have redefined what it means to be a human person, and have acted accordingly to seek freedom to determine who should live and who should not.

Biblical home
In contrast to these departures from a biblical understanding of gender, personhood, family, and home, let us consider the biblical background to the theme of home.

"The Bible begins and ends in Paradise."  

When we consider the beginnings of humankind, we see that God made us for Paradise. Our first home was paradise on planet earth. God created us for Eden, the perfect HOME, and provided perfect guidelines for full and eternal enjoyment of that home. God created us for family. We are designed to be in relationship with others.

Since we all made in God’s image, it would stand to reason that we have not lost the deepest longings of our nature to be in Paradise. Our belief in human depravity, that we have lost all moral grounds upon which to stand in God’s presence, does not mean that the image of God in us was obliterated. The fact that all humans are image-bearers is actually our fundamental contact point with all other humans. Indeed, all world religions, all of the songs and stories and poems found in all human cultures throughout all of our history, mentioned already, are indications of this very truth: all humans long for something we identify as home, and we all know it is far more than any building or residence. We are hard-wired for Eden, or Paradise.

Further to that, all people, made in God’s image, also have a conscience and know true guilt. Therefore, all humans seek some means of canceling or escaping that guilt. That is, alongside our longing for Paradise is our shared sense of guilt, the very reason we believe Adam and Eve were expelled from their first home into exile. Consequently, all humans seek to re-enter Paradise, somehow, someway. . . . Indeed, all of history cries out this theme as all humans in all times have longed for a return to Paradise.

As made in the image of the eternal Creator of love and humanity and family,

- We were made for love. To love and be loved. We know that God is love, for there is eternal love in the Trinity.
- We were made for communication. There has been, and always will be, communication in the Trinity.
- We were made for creativity. God is the one who created all things, and again will create a new heaven and a new earth, a Paradise of eternal joys and delights.
- We were made for family, hospitality, and to share our home with others.

I have been suggesting that God made us for such a home, a place, as reflective of our collective memory of, and longing for, Paradise. But how is this notion of home characterized in the OT? Perhaps it will give us hints about what home is supposed to be? And, what our final destiny, our final habitation, might include. Naturally, one of the key motifs in biblical history related to the theology of home is that of the land. The land comes to represent the covenant-promise that God would create a people for himself in a place where he would place his name. There can be no home without a place to build it. Thus, the theme of the land is found through the entire Bible as one of the central unifying threads to the very gospel itself, in which the land promise is ultimately fulfilled through the Messiah who would reverse the curse on the land and bring about the restoration and renewal of the earth itself by ushering in the new heavens and the new earth at the end of the age. The Paradise long-awaited will be realized.

A poem for sojourners and exiles

| Home is permanence, dwelling, memory, homemaking, remodeling, boundaries, rest, habitation, orientation, belonging, a space, sojourn, community, homeland, homecoming, a place of return, hospitable, an axis. |
| Homeless is deprivation, alienation, estrangement, transience, borderless, displacement, uprooted wandering, unknown dislocation, nomadic migrancy, disorientation, restless, inhospitable, vagabond mobility, no place, exile and impermanence. |

More on the theology of the land illustrated below:
The Land and the Covenant-Promise of Redemption

Creation in Eden-Paradise — a perfect sanctuary-land-home of God’s unmediated and communing-presence

Invasion of a trespasser and deceiver in the home-boundaries of Eden

Curse on the ground/land and Promise of God to crush the deceiver’s head (reverse curse on ground)

EXILE from the land of Eden (homelessness in the wilderness)

Violence and bloodshed in the land bring the Flood over all the earth. Judgment followed by a new creation

Covenant-Law taught/applied by

Priests

Promise of land flowing with milk and honey — a place of sanctuary — a provisional place of home where the tabernacle/Temple sanctuary will be built for God’s Name to be present

Kings

Wilderness wanderings in the desert (homelessness continues)

Prophets

Israel and Judah’s conquest land of promise — provisional presence and home: a typological prefiguration of eternal promise of land/home/place

EXILE: Idolatry and centuries of failure to comply with boundaries of God’s law and loss of home Sojourners dwell in foreign land (expansion of land principle and God’s presence)

Restoration to land that was promised by prophets and fulfilled by God. Temple-presence and synagogues. Boundary walls, homes, and temple rebuilt. Sanctuary and security for remnant.

Covenant-Law fulfilled by

Prophet

Prophet-Priest-King Messiah fulfills all stipulations of covenant-stipulations and begins removal of curse from the land, prepares a home

Priest

NT Church in EXILE: the visible means of presence-sanctuary pictured in people of God. Escalated realization of prefiguration of eternal promise of land/home/place

King

New Creation-Paradise-Sanctuary in home of eternally renewed earth. Curse removed from land completely Christ reigns over all the kingdoms of the earth.

Conditional promise: land of Palestine conditioned on obedience of God’s people

Unconditional promise: new creational land [conditioned] on obedience of Messiah

Boundaries protect all individuals, families/homes, communities, & civilization for human flourishing. All biblical laws represent some form of boundary marker See Appendix, p. 29.
Hebrew words related to home in the Old Testament

הָעֵלָה (ohel) - a common word for tent, or home in the OT. “Tent” was essentially synonymous with the word for house, as the place of one’s home and place of belonging. It held especially important meaning to the Israelites who were delivered from Egypt to dwell for many years in tents. Their national identity was characterized by this nomadic lifestyle of dependence on God for all their basic needs in the wilderness. Thus, the exodus was the defining experience in Israel’s history. It also prepared them for the promise that God would tabernacle among them. The long history of the tabernacle relates directly to this theme of Israel dwelling in tents, for the Lord promised to “Be their God, and they would be his people.” What that meant was, his covenantal, abiding-presence would go with them in their journey all the way home to the promised land, the place they would call home. This home was one of the three main blessings God would give them: with his abiding-presence he would also give to them progeny, and prosperity in the land. This idea of a home in the land is expressed in Numbers 15:

Num 15:2 Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘After you enter the land I am giving you as a home’

This is echoed in the NT in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Heb 11:9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Further, one’s tent defined what you were, whether you are from the “tents of the righteous” or the “tents of the wicked.” Thus, one’s spiritual state would be characterized by one of these identifications. Figuratively speaking, one’s home, the spiritual and moral place you resided, was the spiritual indicator of your relationship with God himself.

בַּיִת (bayith) - a common word for house in the OT. Although the word is typically translated as “house” in English, such a translation does not do justice to all the dynamic of meaning it conveyed to an OT Israelite. “House” spoke of one’s home, one’s immediate and extended family, one’s place of rest and place of ownership, one’s divinely protected abode, the place one is from, thus the place to which one belongs – Such expressions as “of the house of David” could refer to one’s lineage, or origins, thus that which identified you to others. It could also denote your spiritual status: whether you were in, or from, the house of the righteous or the house of the wicked.

Home was to be the place of real spiritual nurture, education, and guidance for children:

Deut 6:7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Consequently, the person who strays from this spiritual nurture and training:

Prov 27:8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.

And, the consequences of such abandonment of a biblical “home”:

Prov 3:33 The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.

Home was also to be a place of marital joys, protected by many laws. One such particularly interesting law:

Deut 24:5 If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.

Marital, familial bliss (in stark contrast to modern notions) is further illustrated by the psalmist:

Ps 113:9 He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD.

“Abiding” or “dwelling” is also importantly expressed in the term “the house of the Lord.” This has tremendous biblical significance; for it represents the redemption promise that God would restore us to his holy presence, as pictured in the temporary sanctuary in Israel. Such a conception prepares us for what Jesus teaches concerning the temple, the Holy Spirit, the abiding of God with us and in us (we are his temple or abode), and this is especially important regarding the promise that he is going to prepare “a place” for us. The world in its present state is not the final home we await.
We have also the idea in the OT that home in this world is not presently our final home; we are sojourners who will experience a temporary home [with God] at death. As Solomon wrote,

Eccl 12:5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home (תִּקְוָה הָעָלִים) and mourners go about the streets.

מָקוֹם (maqom) - the word for “place” or “a place” is a frequent word for “home,” or “dwelling place,” in the OT. This word is often synonymous with “house,” wherever it conveys that sense of belonging to one’s place, or one’s place belonging to us. The place of one’s home is one’s origin, source of identity, and reference point. The place one goes back to, and sets out from. The place from which the Lord will guide and protect. This idea of a “place” in the OT is associated closely with God’s promises of the land of Canaan, and conversely God’s judgment (Jer 19:3):

2 Sam 7:10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning.

It is also linked with the manifestations of God in theophanies, for these “places” of God’s revelation become special places to be memorialized with various kinds of markers. As in the other OT words for dwelling-place, this word can refer to the very “place” of YHWH’s dwelling in the sanctuary (also 1 Ki 8:30):

1 Ki 8:6-7 The priests then brought the ark of the LORD’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. 7 The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the ark and overshadowed the ark and its carrying poles.

מִקְלָת (miqlat)- haunt, refuge, dwelling is a word that has connotations of remoteness (often in reference to animals). A place of refuge from enemies, shelter, synonymous with “fortress” and “rock” as places God protects his people from enemies. There are several other Hebrew words that describe this important concept of taking refuge in a place of safety (5236, 6395, 7117, 8572). This word also sometimes describes the dwelling of God, either in the sanctuary or in heaven.

Lastly, a very important word that is broader than conceptions of home or dwelling-places, is the most common word for returning: שָׁבָּה - to return or turn back home is a very important use of the word for turn or return in Hebrew. This is seen in Naomi, who had been forced to go Moab to escape famine:

Ruth 1:6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

Another aspect of returning, refers to the sin of Israel which would become the cause of Israel losing their home in the land, their refusal to repent and turn back to the Lord. Speaking of Jerusalem, Isaiah wrote:

 Isa 34:13 Thorns will overrun her citadels, nettles and brambles her strongholds. She will become a haunt for jackals, a home for owls.

Thus, to return home is a motif that pervades the scripture, in both temporal and spiritual senses. To return home, as in repentance, symbolized a return to the Lord their God. God would be their point of return, he was ever calling them to return to him, their true home.

For example, Hosea pleads with Israel “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God (14:1[2]). Likewise, God is often described as “turning” to those who repent and seek him. This is clearly portrayed in the exilic hope of a return to the land, which would be the result of the Lord’s turning back to undeserving Israel. For example, Ezekiel wrote:

Ezek 36:8 “But you, O mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home.

As mentioned, the land represented the covenant-promises to provide a place of dwelling, a home for God’s people. Restoration to the land was a return home. It was a return from captivity. It was a return to safety.

Yet we see that Israel was rebuked for placing their own homes, upon returning from Babylon, at a higher priority than rebuilding the house of God:

Haggai 1:9 “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.
Their return from exile prefigures, as did the Exodus, the fulfillment of God’s promise to redeem his people. It was not just about their material needs being met. It rather points us to the final redemption of God’s people who will dwell in his presence forever.

In the New Testament, some Greek words for home include the following:

7.2 οἶκος, οὐ m (oikos): a building consisting of one or more rooms and normally serving as a dwelling place (οἶκος also includes certain public buildings, for example, a temple) - ‘house, temple, sanctuary.’ (The extension of οἶκος to include temples may be the result of speaking of a temple as the dwelling place of the deity.) ἧκοινθὴ δὲ ἐν οἴκῳ ἐκτιν ‘it was reported that he was at home’ Mk 2.1; τοῦ ἀπολομένου μεταξὺ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ τοῦ οἴκου η δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὀσμῆς τοῦ μύρου ‘the sweet smell of perfume filled the whole house’ Jn 12.3. The size of an οἰκία or of an οἶκος (7.2) may differ greatly. For example, the house referred to in Lk 7.10 was no doubt have been relatively elaborate, and in Mt 11.8 οἶκος refers to the palace in which Herod lived. In a number of languages it is important to distinguish clearly between various types of dwellings depending upon their size and presumed importance. Accordingly, in rendering οἰκία or οἶκος it is necessary to use a number of different terms roughly equivalent to the English series ‘cottage,’ ‘house,’ ‘official residence,’ ‘palace,’ ‘temple,’ etc.

7.3 οἰκία, ας f (oikia): a building or place where one dwells - ‘house, home, dwelling, residence.’ ἧ δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὀσμῆς τοῦ μύρου ‘the sweet smell of perfume filled the whole house’ Jn 12.3. The size of an οἰκία or of an οἶκος (7.2) may differ greatly. For example, the house referred to in Lk 7.10 would no doubt have been relatively elaborate, and in Mt 11.8 οἶκος refers to the palace in which Herod lived. In a number of languages it is important to distinguish clearly between various types of dwellings depending upon their size and presumed importance. Accordingly, in rendering οἰκία or οἶκος it is necessary to use a number of different terms roughly equivalent to the English series ‘cottage,’ ‘house,’ ‘official residence,’ ‘palace,’ ‘temple,’ etc.

7.4 ἔπαυλις, εως f (epaulis): property in which a person was expected to reside, either as the result of ownership or legal contract - ‘homestead, house, residence.’ γενηθήτω ἣ ἔπαυλις αὐτοῦ ἔρημος ‘may his place become deserted’ Ac 1.20. In the NT ἔπαυλις occurs only in Ac 1.20 as a quotation of Psalm 69.25. The immediate reference is to a person’s traditional residence, but the entire passage must be interpreted figuratively as a reference to a person’s expected position or place of service. The phrase γενηθήτω ἢ ἔπαυλις αὐτοῦ ἔρημος may be rendered as ‘may his house become empty’ or ‘may his home be deserted.’

7.5 βασιλεῖον, ου n (baseleon): the dwelling of a king or ruler - ‘palace.’ οὶ ἐν Ιασέου ἐνδόξῳ καὶ τρυφῇ ὑπάρχοντες ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις εἶσιν ‘those who dress like that and live in luxury are found in palaces’ Lk 7.25. In Lk 7.25 βασιλεῖον may be rendered as ‘the home of a king’ or ‘the home of a ruler.’

7.6 αὐλή, ἡς f (aule): any dwelling having an interior courtyard (often a relatively elaborate structure) - ‘dwelling, palace, mansion.’ συνήχθησαν ... εἰς τὴν αὐλήν τοῦ ἀρχιερέως ‘they gathered ... in the palace of the high priest’ Mt 26.3; ὅταν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς καθωπλισμένος φυλάσσε τὴν ἕαυτος αὐλήν ‘when a fully armed strong man guards his own dwelling’ Lk 11.21.

7.8 σκήνωμα, τος n (skeneoma): a dwelling, with the implication of temporary duration - ‘dwell ing.’ εὑρεῖν σκήνωμα τῷ θεῷ Ἰακώβ (θεῖ from apparatus) ‘to provide a dwelling for the God of Jacob’ Ac 7.46. In Ac 7.46 there is a complex textual problem in which the critical text has οἶκως ‘house’ (but in the figurative sense of ‘people’), but the Byzantine text reads θεῖ ‘God.’ It is only with this latter form of the text that σκήνωμα would mean an actual construction or dwelling. If one adopts the form of the critical text, then σκήνωμα would point to ‘a place to dwell,’ in other words, an area or region (see 85.77)

7.9 σκηνή, ἡς f (skene): a portable dwelling of cloth and/or skins, held up by poles and fastened by cords to stakes - ‘tent.’ εν σκηναῖς κατοικήσας μετὰ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ ‘they lived in tents with Isaac and Jacob’ He 11.9. In a number of languages ‘tent’ is simply ‘a house made of cloth.’ One should avoid terms which would imply a military tent or a temporary shelter used only on vacations or holidays. In OT times such tents were permanent dwellings of nomadic groups and were moved from place to place as livestock were transferred from one pasture area to another.

7.11 κατάλυμα, τος n (kataluma); πανδοχεῖον, συ n ; ταβέρνη, ης f: a place for the lodging of travellers - ‘inn.’ κατάλυμα: dióti οὐκ ἦν αὐτοῖς τόπος ἐν τῷ καταλύματι ‘since there was no room for them in the inn’ Lk 2.7. πανδοχεῖον: ἤγαγεν αὐτὸν εἰς πανδοχεῖον καὶ ἐπεμελήθη αὐτοῦ ‘he took him to an inn, where he took care of him’ Lk 10.34.
In a number of languages, one must distinguish carefully between a house and a home. A term meaning 'house' would be used in referring to any dwelling as a construction, while a term meaning 'home' would be used in referring to the more or less permanent dwelling of a particular person. In Mk 2.1, for example, it is significant to indicate that Jesus was dwelling in the house through the roof of which the paralyzed man was let down.

The motif of home is prominent in the NT, with many of the same ideas that we find in the OT. When we consider the ministry of Jesus, we see that much of his ministry took place in people’s homes, and the language of his teaching was full of references to home-life and family.

Lu 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Mk 2:1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus describes salvation in terms of home:

Lu 15:5-6 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

Jesus taught about returning to God through the parable of the prodigal son, whose brother was indignant that he was allowed to return home:

Lu 15:30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

Jesus also commanded some to go home and bear witness to his power:

Lu 8:39 “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

More closely approaching the heart of my topic, is where Jesus taught that God will make his home with us, if we love him and obey him:

Jn 14:23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

We cannot fully consider the many NT texts referring to home, but I suggest that they are all background to the things that Jesus taught about home on this earth, and the greater hope of final home that he promises to his disciples. Jesus makes it plain that this world in its present state is not our final home, nor is it to be the final/ultimate end (or purpose) of our earthly existence. Indeed, disciples may be asked to forsake some earthly joys in the present age of this world:

Mk 10:29 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel

We see also the idea in Paul’s letter to Corinth that this present world is not our final home, and that if we should die before the new creation we have a home with Christ:

2 Cor 5:6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

2 Cor 5:8-9 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

This is also seen in 2 Peter 3:13, that we presently await in this fallen world for our perfect home to be realized through Jesus:

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The place Jesus is preparing for us is our final home. In John 14, Jesus spoke direct comfort to all believers, for no believer can rest content with this world as their final home. We all suffer the residual effects of sin and the abnormalities of the world that it produces. Jesus knew that there would be much sorrow on behalf of his disciples when he would be crucified and then return to his Father in heaven. Therefore, I love Jesus’ warmly compassionate words to them in Jn 14:14, that he was going to prepare a place for them. The context of this text is the Lord’s Supper. John gives us much vital information about what was communicated between Jesus and his disciples. In this conversation:

- Jesus had predicted his betrayal (by Judas).
- Judas had just left the upper room.
- Jesus predicted Peter’s denial.

Immediately after this prediction of Peter’s denial, John recorded that Jesus remarkably said,

“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

Home and Shalom by Stephen Hague
Page 18
am going there to prepare a place for you.  

[1] 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.  

[2] You know the way to the place where I am going.”  

[3] Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”  


[5] If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

The Rev. George H. Sherer of Beirut, Syria (Presbyterian of the South), says: A traveler in the desert, longing for a stopping place, may meet a native lad who tells him that there are tents and hospitality farther on. It is a place where he can stop, and the courtesy of the desert demands that the minimum length of the sojourn be at least three days. Then, after the lad has told the traveler of the stopping place, be likely will mount his horse and ride on, saying, ‘I will go and prepare a place for you.’

This word from the East may throw a flood of light on the saying of our Lord as He spoke of the mansions in his Father’s house. Jesus comforts his disciples in light of his betrayal, which meant his death and departure. Jesus comforts his disciples also in light of Peter’s denying him.

The substance of Jesus’ comfort to them was that they could trust in God. That if they could trust in God, then they could also trust in him. If they could trust in him, then he would prepare (where he was going) a place for them. This place he would prepare for them would be a “dwelling place” (μοναὶ) (not just “a room” or a “mansion”).

- Such a dwelling place would be suitable for all whom he brings back with him.
- Such a dwelling place would be a home in fully biblical sense that we have considered. It would not just be a building or place to live; it would be an eternal refuge, an everlasting home.

Jesus affirms strongly that this will be so in his saying emphatically, “If it were not so, I would not have told you.”

- He was essentially saying, “in my home the Father has accommodations that are entirely suitable.”
- He is saying “this is not pie in the sky,” while, he seems to assume they would doubt his words of promise of preparing a place for them, even before he elaborates on that promise.

Thus, I am grateful that Jesus stressed it so affirmatively, especially in times of uncertainty or worldly sorrows, I can remind myself that Jesus spoke such a word of reassurance to his disciples. The beauty of what Jesus then promises them is one of our greatest treasures. It is jewel, a pearl of great price, worth all the kingdoms of the world, and then some: it is the promise that

- If he does the preparing,
- Then he will come back,
- And, he will take us into his dwelling place to be with him.

In sum, this is why all creation longs for the home of God’s dwelling, in Paradise, Eden restored. This is why “the whole creation groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). As we groan in our present condition, hoping to find our lasting home, we experience a sense of homelessness and longing, as described by the editors of Christianity and the Arts magazine:

“Home team. Homelessness. Homecoming. The meanings and feeling of home are deep in our human consciousness. Allegiances to home fuel athletic rivalries and instigate wars. The longing for home sustains soldiers and motivates pilgrims. Making a home is complex—for beavers building a lodge as well as for humans fashioning a culture on our home planet. But what exactly is a home? What does it mean to leave home? How do you make a home?”

We also struggle to preserve our memories of home, often longing to return to something we remember, but we are unable to return to or to forget. Yet, not even ravaging fires can destroy those memories, for they form a large part of what is home to us:

“Without memory we don’t know who we are or where home is or what home looks like.”

---


11 Editor, “Yearning for Paradise and Home” (Christianity and the Arts in 2000).

12 Steven Bouma-Prediger & Brian Walsh in Beyond Homelessness, p. 297-298.
How we perceive our present life in this world, and how we view our future hope in this world, or in relation to it, impacts the whole of how we live in it. And, there are various operative paradigms we employ to varying degrees, and with diverse emphases, that help us frame a perspective on our present life in this world. Taking a cue from Steven Bouma-Prediger & Brian Walsh, we can summarize these paradigms as follows:

**Paradigms for Pilgrims**:  
- The **Plowman-farmer** is a deeply rooted and settled dweller who clings to his place as eternal home.  
- The **Pilgrim-dweller** is a wayfaring dweller who dreams always of a homeland, yet while dwelling in a place they are not yet home.  
- The **Passing (wayfaring) stranger** is a traveler who is an eternal nomad never at home and seeks no place as home, since indifferent to all places.  
- The **Sojourner** is a provisional dweller whose home is incomplete, though rooted in a place, a home that is loved, it is not final since sojourning is toward a final eternal homecoming.

All of these have certain value to them, but above all the motif of a sojourner seems to best capture the tenor of Biblical Theology: to build a home as a sojourner, there must be memory, community, and love. As Christian sojourners,

...we are not immigrants or refugees, exiles or migrants, tourists or postmodern nomads. If we understand ourselves properly, then in contrast to all of them we are, in a real sense, at home. But this being at home is a posture, a way of being in the world. It is a journeying homemaking characterized by all the things revealed by that phenomenology: permanence, dwelling, memory, rest, hospitality, inhabitation, orientation, and belonging.”

I think we could also add the biblical categories of ambassadors and refugees:

**Ambassadors** we are those who are sent into the world by Christ to bring the light of the gospel and to represent Christ, not to escape the world, or just to dwell in it as a stranger or pilgrim. In this motif, we are also combatants, or soldiers, in a battle for the home-turf, and therefore are in that sense “behind enemy lines,” though our battle is spiritual until the King returns to reclaim the whole of the creation.

**Refugees**: we are also refugees from the sinful world, and are those who have taken sanctuary in Christ and in his visible church we have a provisional family-home in a dark and difficult world, where we find solace, strength, and fortitude for the battle to be holy ambassadors who sojourn in enemy-occupied lands.

**The biblical vision of redemption and home can be summarized as follows:**

in their homeless wilderness, on their way to their promised home-land, 

God said to Israel:

Deut 8:11-20 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>fall</th>
<th>redemption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rooted</td>
<td>uprooted</td>
<td>replanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed</td>
<td>displaced</td>
<td>re-placed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden</td>
<td>wilderness</td>
<td>garden city</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is an overarching pattern discernable in biblical history related to the land concept, beginning with creation and Eden, the fall, the homeless condition that followed, and the eventual replanting motif and the promised restoration of the Garden. The home whose architect is God will be renewed in the new covenant of redemption (begins in Gen 3:15), and it is contiguous (in continuity) with the old covenant of creation; the new covenant of redemption is contiguous with the old creation. After many centuries of homelessness and wandering and exile from Eden, the People of God in Israel were called to be sojourners in the land of the promise; they would find a home-land where they could settle down and plant and grown and live. They were no longer going to be wayfaring strangers or pilgrims passing through (as in much previous history), but dwellers in the land, having dominion and exercising creation-care of the land. Though that period in biblical history was limited in time and scope, being restricted to the period of the theocracy now ended, the picture of a place to settle “flowing with milk and honey” recalled the Garden of Eden, while also prefigured the future church-haven home of the New Testament period (until present), as well as prefigured the yet to come new creation in Paradise. In Christ we are at home with God, since he is the Master Builder of the new creation, the restored (redeemed). He is also making us fit for the home he is building for us.

House, home, and numerous building motifs played a central role in the covenant-promises to Israel, as well as were a constant reminder of all that was lost in Adam and Eve’s Edenic home. The subsequent history of redemption centered largely in the picture of the promise of land, a home, for the sanctuary presence of YHWH, as well as a place for the earthly king and the people and their progeny. The theme of man in sin as a wanderer, not at home any longer in this world, is thus prominent (Adam and Eve banished, Cain a fugitive, Abraham a wandering Aramean, Israel in Egypt, Israel in the wilderness, Israel and Judah in exile).

Important is the link between the motif of God’s “house” in the sanctuary and his covenant relation with his people. Where God dwells is where he is faithful to his promise. The restoration of man’s relationship to God is a return home. The OT sanctuary provisionally mediated that divine presence. In the new covenant, the church of Christ is God’s household, in a mediatory fashion:

Jn 14:23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Mk 13:34-35 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.

Eph 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.

1 Pet 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2 Tim 2:20-21 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

1 Tim 3:15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

In the NT book of Hebrews, we find a very home-oriented section about the house that God is building for his people. The text is summarized here:

- Moses was faithful in God’s house, and thus had great honor (Heb 3:2).
- Jesus, as God, is the Master builder of God’s house, and thus has a greater honor than Moses (Heb 3:3-4).
- Moses was faithful (πιστός) in God’s house in his testifying prophetically to the future (Heb 3:5).
- Jesus is faithful (πιστός) in God’s house, as the Son, in building us into (his church) (Heb 3:6).
In relation to the home/house motif, Jesus famously described the life built on him like a house built on rock, in contrast to the house built on sand which will wash away. In his parable of the house built on a rock, Jesus is the foundation for salvation and life and the house-builder (Matt 7:26).

Matt 7:24-27 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.

Most importantly, the motif of a home built on rock points to a complete and lasting home, the goal of our redemption. According to Jesus, this will be our final homecoming, as noted previously from John’s Gospel:

Jn 14:1-14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 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. 3 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. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.” 5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” 6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

This theme is also seen in Hebrews 11:

Heb 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

These texts connect the ancient hopes of the Patriarchs with those of the disciples, both pointing us to the motif of sojourning in the land while always hoping for the new land of the new creation. Related to all that has been said about home is the Hebrew concept of shalom, that is a potent and rich theological image that is found in both the OT and the NT anticipations of redemption.


The Hebrew term שָׁלוֹם (shalom) (noun masculine) can indicate a range of concepts that typically contain an element of “completeness, soundness, welfare, peace” in whatever it is referring to (Genesis 29:6; Ezekiel 13:16; Genesis 37:14; Psalm 41:10; Jeremiah 13:19; Psalm 69:23; Psalm 55:21; Jeremiah 13:19). There is sometimes a completeness in the sense of safety and soundness in body (Psalm 38:4; Isaiah 38:17; Job 5:24), as well as peace, contentment, and restful tranquility often indicated by the term (Isaiah 32:17; Genesis 15:15; Isaiah 57:2).

Shalom is:

“Repose, yes. But not as quiescence, passivity, eternal fixity. It is, instead, peace as wholeness, as fullness of function, as the restful but unending creativity involved in a cosmos-wide, corporative pursuit of a created order that continuously approaches but never reaches the limitless goodness and greatness of the triune personality of God, its source.”

In the Greek, there is the corresponding term of such peace, which similarly can mean to make peace (εἰρήνευω, εἰρήνη), or to live in God’s peace in completeness, harmony and accord, and as in the Hebrew shalom can indicate security, safety, prosperity, felicity (2 Corinthians 13:11; Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

Rest in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Heb 3:11 So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’

Heb 3:18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

Heb 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.


16 The Greek term for rest (κατάπαυσις) here indicates a repose from weary labor, or to rest metaphorically from works and striving.
Heb 4:3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world.
Heb 4:4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.”
Heb 4:5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”
Heb 4:6 It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.
Heb 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.
Heb 4:9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; Heb 4:10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.
Heb 4:11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

Rest relates to the motif of Eden, the promised-land, of home, the new creation. Rest on the Sabbath points backwards to remember/honor God who rested/ceased from his creating the universe (of course, God’s “resting” was not cessation of activity). Rest points forward to redemption, salvation, restoration for those who cease from their works of righteousness and find rest in Christ from sin, guilt, suffering, striving. Rest in Christ is redemption, entering into the liberating freedom of God in Christ. Rest in Christ requires faith in his finished work of redemption. Rest in redemption will be a new labor in a new creation, a work of great joy and worship of God for all eternity. We will rest in perfect works of creating, singing, building, writing . . . The covenant of works will be complete in the consummated covenant of redemption through which we share in Christ eternal pleasures:

Ps 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Ps 36:8 (KJV) They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. 9 For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.
Ps 36:8 (NIV) They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights.
Ps 36:8 (NRSV) They feast on the abundance of your house; you make them drink from your river of delights.

Pleasures? Delights?
So often these words are associated only with sin, but God takes pleasure in many things, beginning with his creation. In Ps 16:11 text, the Messiah will know eternal pleasures, and by association so would those who inherit what he has inherited. The pleasures and delights of the eternal kingdom are all those that are righteous and good and glorifying to God.

Images of eternal delight: The fountain of life, the river of life, the tree of life.

River of life (22:1): Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8 (& 13:1?). Water is such a prominent feature in the OT, beginning with Gen 1, that its various symbolic roles must be considered, noting that it has a diverse roles in both creation, judgment, and redemption (water appears numerous times in the NT, and esp. in John’s Revelation). Jesus is Lord of the Waters, Lord of the River of Life, since he is the source of life.18

17 Compare the extra-biblical rabbinic laws that rigidly governed all activity on the Sabbath, even how many feet one could walk.

In John’s Revelation, the tree of life (22:2, 14, 18) indicates the added wonder of the very tree that was forbidden to Adam and Eve after their sin against God in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In heaven, the new Paradise, the sons of Adam and Eve, now the sons and daughters of Jesus Christ, will eat of the tree of life freely. This tree somehow stands “one each side of the river,” indicating that the life the river represents coming from the throne of God is fully available to water the tree. This tree of life will importantly bring healing.

To imagine heaven:
- How do you imagine heaven?
- What is heaven like?
- Where is this city that God is building?
- Where is Heaven? Are we now seated with Christ in the heavenlies?
- Where/what is the new creation?
- What is the objective of redemption? Salvation of soul? Body?

Despite how wonderful all of the good things of life are, they are but a faint shadow, a foretaste, a hint, ("Rumors of Glory," Bruce Cockburn) of what we will know in the new heaven and new earth. This is what Jesus Christ is about; this is what he has promised! Nothing in scripture teaches that the end-goal of redemption is some upper-story "heaven", but rather it is a new creation. John Lennon wrote his most famous song that ironically points to some real truths he never imagined to see, since he was trying to dispel all religious ideas. I wrote a spoof of his theology, and put a biblical spin on it:

To imagine
To imagine there’s no heaven
but one on earth, it isn’t hard to do . . .

Think of all the good
that you have ever known,
all the joy, peace, happiness, pleasure, delight, and beauty.

Imagine all the good times, friends, grace-filled family reunions,
banquets and feasts, and all the fabulous places, sunsets, paintings,
crescent moons.

Recall the many aqua summer evenings of pure bliss
sitting out under the stars with friends around a fire of embers.

Remember all the moments of shimmering wonder at the sea
and how we marveled at God’s awe-filled universe.

Consider the times of laughter
that made us roll on the ground in fitful abandon.

Bring back to mind the incomparable joy of first knowing
that Jesus is the King of creation,
suddenly to see this world as it is
with eyes and heart open to love its glories.

In other words, picture life as you know it now,
without any consequence of corruption.

Yet, even more, consider heaven as the eternally creative life
we have now begun in this world to its very fullest extent
before his glorious presence.

Then, it isn’t hard to imagine a brotherhood without “religion”
when the world will be as one,
with no greed nor hunger,
the peace of perfect shalom,
no death nor destruction when all the kingdoms of the earth
become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ
Many people today sincerely believe they know the way to heaven.
Many people today believe they are going to heaven, even though they do not believe in the gospel of grace. In fact, whenever we present the gospel to such a person they invariably say they that they have been a pretty good person, haven’t done great harm to others, that they lead a moral life, that they believe in Jesus, etc., the list of works is long . . . long . . . long. But Jesus tells us in Matt 7,

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’
We must ask, *what is the will of the Father* who is heaven? The answer is, to believe on his Son, as Jesus says this himself in the Gospel of John 6:35-40,

35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” 19

Heb 10:35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one 2 will live by faith.

This is expressed in a letter to Dr. Charles E. Fuller, published in *The Sunday School Times*:

“Next Sunday you are to talk about Heaven. I am interested in that land, because I have held a clear title to a bit of property there for over fifty-five years. I did not buy it. It was given to me without money and without price. But the donor purchased it for me at tremendous sacrifice. It is not a vacant lot. For more than half a century I have been sending materials out of which the greatest architect and builder of the universe has been building a home for me, which will never need to be remodeled nor repaired because it will suit me perfectly, individually, and will never grow old. Termites can never undermine its foundations for they rest upon the Rock of ages. Fire cannot destroy it. Floods cannot wash it away. I hope to hear your sermon, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to Heaven has no date marked for the journey—no return coupon—and no permit for baggage. Yes, I am ready to go, and I may not be here while you are talking next Sunday evening, but I shall meet you there some day.”

The death of Jesus paid the penalty for Adam’s sin, for which we all are guilty as children of Adam. This imputed guilt is the reason Jesus died. He atoned for that guilt that his righteousness might be imputed to us. This is the gospel we believe and know to be true.

Further, God raised him from the dead as irrefutable proof that Jesus’ substitution for sin was satisfactory to appease God’s holy wrath. This is the gospel we believe and know to be true. It is my impression that we tend to obscure the proclamation of the resurrection in our times. There may be a number of reasons for this, but I ask today: what do you suppose would happen to our witness to this lost world, if we really grabbed hold of one simple truth:

“HE IS RISEN!”

This proclamation of Jesus’ physical resurrection from the grave is the greatest confirmation of the God’s greatest promise: to REDEEM us and restore us to his presence, our true home. This proclamation of the resurrection is God’s declaration that the consequences of Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden have been cancelled forever.

- If you have not surrendered your life and your will to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- If you are still trying to create your own paradise on earth apart from the one who made it.
- If you are still trying to re-enter the Garden of Eden through human effort. If your works of righteousness have been blocking your way back home.
- If you are still attempting to numb the longings for home and heaven through drugs, money, or other means.
- If you are running from God and hiding behind your position of power or prestige.
- Or, If you have suffered much in your earthly home, and are bitter with God.

Then, let me tell you the greatest news you will ever hear: God has given us in Jesus Christ: the way home, the truth to know it, and the Life everlasting to live in it.

---

After Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them, we read further in Jn 14:5-14 that Thomas questioned Jesus’ assertion that they already knew the way:

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” 6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” 8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” 9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. 12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

We presently live in a world that has lost its way. We live among people, work among people that have no idea how to get home. They are truly lost. Often their homes are places of pain and suffering. Often they look for ways to find their way home, only to be frustrated by not knowing the way. We live in a world that is dying and hell-bound without the answer of this gospel truth. Have we been withholding the words of life and truth, and the way home, to our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers? Have the words HE IS RISEN been engraved upon the marrow of our souls, are they the white flame of our passion? Do we burn inside with the reality of these three words? Do we live and breathe them?

That Jesus promised to go and prepare a place for us is certain. This place will be our home for all eternity. Every beautiful image, good feeling, joyous remembrance that we can attach to this word “home,” will be infinitely surpassed by the reality of our final home he is going to bring to us. This is not to say, such memories of home in this life are not forever meaningful.

Quite the contrary, they too are evidence that we were made for the home that God has promised. There will be real continuity in the new creation with our present life in this world, even though we can barely imagine how marvelous it will be. After all, God is going to give us a new heavens and a NEW EARTH!

The musician, from whom I took my title, has another song of deep longing called “Heaven.” It is another good example of this great longing for heaven, even among non-Christians:

“Heaven …………… Heaven …………… Who’s waiting there for me?”

This question beautifully personalizes the hope of an eternal home, something we often forget even among Christians. The new creation is going to be the homecoming of all homecomings, for it will be the long-awaited reunion of the Bride and the Bridegroom, the living God who so loved his own people that he became one of them in order to redeem them. He gave them “his only begotten Son.” This reunion will be the greatest Wedding Feast imaginable. This Feast will inaugurate our eternal dwelling with our Lord and with one another. This could not get more personal. For those who still think this talk is but pie in the sky, we read in Acts 1, after Jesus was taken up into the heavens, that the disciples were looking skyward:

Were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven . . .” (Acts 1:11).

Further implications of this are that our relations in Christ are eternal, beginning now! In this way, redemption is horizontal and not vertical. Our relationships and our persons are being redeemed and sanctified horizontally throughout our present lives on the earth, not just “for heaven.” If only we could also get this truth in our bones, we might do much better in our loving one another, for what we are building in this family of God, this home for the people of God on earth, is eternal.

We are preparing for that eternal home where we will know and love each other with no sin. No sin to entangle. No sin! May we be encouraged to live

---

a Some early manuscripts If you really have known me, you will know.
our final days here building for this home, this family, this eternal kingdom
of the living God who dwells in light unapproachable, in glory unimaginable.

Our homecoming is going be a profound encounter with the glory of God,
but it is also going to be personal: we will be with our Lord and King, he will
embrace us into our eternal home with the eternal love of God. We will
never shed another tear, experience another heart-break or heartache. We
finally and forever will be restored physically, no longer racked with pains
and sickness. We will receive the completion of all the promises God gave to
Adam and Abraham, to the Patriarchs, the Judges, and the Prophets. All the
hopes of many thousands of years will be fulfilled as we enter that eternal
kingdom with our Lord.

He has promised that he is building a place for us.
My sisters and mother and father are waiting for me.
My Christian brothers and sisters are waiting for me.

He has promised he will come back and bring us all the way back home to
that place. And since he has accomplished on the cross what it takes to
complete that home for me and for you, then we can rest confident that he
will keep his promise. And, it’s been my experience that he is a man of his
word. He is waiting for me . . . and for you . . . Will you come with us on this
path back home? Will you invite your friends and neighbors to come with
us? Will you invite them to our eternal home, telling them we will be
waiting for them? That they can have someone waiting for them? That they
can have our living Lord and King love them home, all the way back home . .

Preparation this essay for the return welcome-home party of my sons from an
extended journey-absence from home, I was greatly encouraged by this
theme in Scripture, and was reminded that it is really central to our gospel
hope. The night of the party, three of my sons’ friends (the Contes) visited
from out of state and while sleeping in our home they lost their family
house to a devastating fire that night. We all awoke to this terribly sad
news, prayed, laughed, and cried along with them, but thankfully all decided
to go to church together. Thankfully, because incredibly (in God’s
provides) the sermon was on the theme of houses and home and the
gospel of our eternal hope. So, we all praised God for his encouragement
that day, and also that no one was in that house that night, but had been at
home together in our house. Their memories of home were not taken from
them that night along with the many family treasures and works of their
craftsmanship, but rather their love grew even more into something new
and everlasting that nothing in the heavens or earth can take and destroy.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled . . .”
Maranatha. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

“Citizens of the new earth will experience and enjoy both wholeness of
body and longevity of life. They will have quality of life unrestricted
by disability or disease. To live in the New Jerusalem is to experience
life in all its fullness and vitality. It is to live as one has never lived
before. It is to be in the prime of life, for the whole of one’s life.”21

Various biblical narratives and motifs of home, homelessness,
homecoming (see p. 14 on the land and home):

- God created a perfect home in Eden for Adam and Eve (Gen 1-3).
- Adam and Eve were banished from their home (Gen 3:23-24).
- Cain was a fugitive from home after killing his brother (Gen 4:14).
- Noah and his family lost their home to the Flood but return to make
  a new home afterwards (Gen 6-9).
- Abraham wandered homeless for most of his life (Deut 26:5).
- Jacob leaves home and then returns home after many years in
  Haran (Gen 28-33).
- Joseph is reunited with his family and they make a new home and
  then return home (Gen 37-47).
- Moses returns home after sixty years in Midian (Exo 2-4).
- Naomi returns home after losing her family and home in Moab
  (Ruth).
- Israel wandered homeless in the wilderness for forty years (Exodus-
  Leviticus).
- Israel settles in a home if the Promised Land.
- Israel and Judah are exiled to Assyria/Babylon.
- The remnant of Israel returns to the land of the promise to rebuild
  their homes and the temple.
- The tabernacle/temple sanctuary of Israel became a refuge of home
  for them to meet God’s presence.

21 Alexander, From Eden to the New Jerusalem, p. 156.
Jesus tabernacles in his incarnation to make a home with us. Jesus was born into a home and human family, yet it was not his permanent abode.

Jesus returned home to his family-home but was rejected (Mt 13:54-58; Mk 6:1-6; Lk 4:16-30).

Jesus comes to redeem his own people Israel, and they largely reject him.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates the most well know earthly picture of the return home of lost sons to the Heavenly Father (Lk 15:11-32).

The NT church is a home for the homeless, provisional and preparatory for their eternal home in the New creation with Christ.

Jesus promises to bring us all finally home into his own abode either at our own deaths or at his glorious return and our resurrection.

Quotes by Steven Bouma-Prediger & Brian Walsh in Beyond Homelessness

“Wanderer, expatriate, exile, diaspora, stranger, migrancy, displacement, stranger, migrancy, displacement – all ways to describe homelessness of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.” p. 8

“The antidote to exile dislocation is memory.” p. 9

“Forgetfulness closes down both the past and the future, thereby paralyzing the present.” 9

“Without memory there can be no vision, and without memory of home, there can be no homecoming. 9

“Amnesia breeds apathy; forgetfulness renders a people numb to their homelessness. But it is not just exile that tempts people to forgetfulness. In the Mosaic tradition, a secure sense of being at home can also be a temptation to an exile-producing forgetfulness. That’s why Torah is a document of remembering. In the wilderness, in that place on the boundary between slavery and homecoming, Israel is admonished to be a people of memory:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, 11 houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, 12 be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deut 6:10-12)” 12-13

“Ancient Israel was a community constituted by memory. When that community suffered amnesia and no longer remembered the Exodus – the liberating homemaking God – the result was invariably homeless and placeless exile all over again.” 13

“The overwhelming testimony and claim of Hebrew scripture is that embracing the memories of idolatry will always result in homelessness. Covenantal amnesia – forgetting the story of a homemaking God – might afford the people a place even a ‘home’ in the midst of another vision of life, another narrative, but such a home is judged to be no home at all.” 14

“In the conflict of memories, the conflict of narratives that characterizes our postmodern context, we are prepared to stake our lives on a biblical memory, a vision of life rooted in the narrative of the Old and New Testaments.” 14

“Humans are ‘placed’ in a garden home that they receive as a gift; they are called to tend and keep this home, to continue to construct this world as a home in such a way that cares for all of its inhabitants. Creation is home, and humans are stewardly caretakers of this creational home. This is the most foundational and (literally) grounding memory of biblical faith (Gen 1-2). Without this memory, there could be no going home, there could be no vision of homemaking, no way beyond our present homelessness.” 1

“As image-bearers of the homemaking God, humans are incurably homemakers.” 16

“Covenantal home is home constituted by covenantal word. Home making stewardship is predicated on covenantal listening. Thus Israel listens and becomes a people of Torah in the wilderness. Torah is God’s charter for a homemaking people, a manual for covenantal home construction. Do this, says God, and you will flourish in the land. “Torah exists so that Israel will not forget whose land it is and how it was given to us?’ Therefore, Torah is breathtakingly comprehensive in its scope: it addresses every dimension of communal life, every dimension of what it means to make this world into a cultural site of homemaking — agricultural practices, building regulations, gender roles, sanitation, ecology and economic justice.” 17

“Exile is a return to wilderness. It is an experience of radical land loss and hence a fundamental experience of homelessness.” 19
“Where there is covenantal word and a listening to that word, human beings can experience life as home in creation. Home construction apart from that word will always result in homelessness; that was the painful lesson of exile. But listening to that word empowers us to build houses, to be at home, and to experience fruitfulness even in the barrenness and oppression of exile. 21

There is, at a minimum, no reason to think that the world of nature will cease to exist or be destroyed. In a Trinitarian universe—a universe grounded in a society of divine persons—that is entirely a matter of the purpose that world serves. As long as it serves a purpose in such a universe—as it most certainly does—it will continue to exist, through whatever transformations may come. The material universe is both an essential display of the greatness and goodness of God and the arena of the eternal life of finite spirits, including the human.

The Human Future in This Universe
This present universe is only one element in the kingdom of God. But it is a very wonderful and important one. And within it the Logos, the now risen Son of man, is currently preparing for us to join him (John 14:2—4). We will see him in the stunning surroundings that he had with the Father before the beginning of the created cosmos (17:24). And we will actively participate in the future governance of the universe.

We will not sit around looking at one another or at God for eternity but will join the eternal Logos, “reign with him,” in the endlessly ongoing creative work of God. It is for this that we were each individually intended, as both kings and priests (Exod. 19:6; Rev. 5:10).

Thus, our faithfulness over a “few things” in the present phase of our life develops the kind of character that can be entrusted with “many things.” We are, accordingly, permitted to “enter into the joy of our Lord” (Matt. 25:21). That “joy” is, of course, the creation and care of what is good, in all its dimensions. A place in it is only one element in the kingdom of God. But it is a very wonderful and important one. And within it the Logos, the now risen Son of man, is currently preparing for us to join him (John 14:2—4). We will see him in the stunning surroundings that he had with the Father before the beginning of the created cosmos (17:24). And we will actively participate in the future governance of the universe.

George MacDonald has given us some lines that help us think about such a future:

And in the perfect time, 0 perfect God,
When we are in our home, our natal home,
When joy shall carry every sacred load,
And from its life and peace no heart shall roam,

What if thou make us able to make like thee—
To light with moons, to doTHE with greenery,
To hang gold sunsets o’er a rose and purple sea.

Stated in other words, the intention of God is that we should each become the kind of person whom he can set free in his universe, empowered to do what we want to do. Just as we desire and intend this, so far as possible, for our children and others we love, so God desires and intends it for his children. But character, the inner directedness of the self must develop to the point where that is possible. This explains the meaning of the words of the prophet Daniel, utilized by Jesus to conclude one of his great parables of the kingdom: “Then shall the good shine brilliantly, like the sun, in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43; compare Dan. 12:3). We sing from this passage, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
bright, shining as the sun...” But we should understand that brightness always represents power, energy, and that in the kingdom of our Father we will be active, unimaginably creative.

The Older Prophecies
The beautiful prophecies of the Old Testament, especially its later books, captivate the heart of all who read them. When we read them, it seems to matter very little what one believes, or what one’s religion or irreligion is. They are a human treasure. They express something far deeper than any particular tradition, even those singled out by God for special covenant responsibilities.

Behold I create the heavens and the earth all over again. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. I create my city; Jerusalem. It is joy, and her people are gladness. No longer will be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer babies dying, or mature people who do not live to the end of a full life. When they build houses they will get to live in them. When they plant vineyards they, not others, will be the ones who eat the fruit. They shall not labor in vain or bear children to be destroyed. Before they call on me I will answer. Animals, even, will stop killing one another, and in my new world every kind of evil will be eliminated. (Isa.65:17—25)

Quotes from Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 934-397
What, Then, Changes?
When we pass through the stage normally called “death,” we will not lose anything but the limitations and powers that specifically correspond to our present mastery over our body, and to our availability and vulnerability to and through it. We will no longer be able to act and be acted upon by means of it. Of course this is a heartrending change to those left behind. But, on the other hand, loss of those abilities begins to occur, in most cases, long before death. It is a normal part of aging and
sickness. The body as intermediary between the person and the physical world is losing its function as the soul prepares for a new arrangement.

But along this passage we do not lose our personal sense of who we are, and all our knowledge of and relationships to other persons will remain intact—except, once again, insofar as they are mediated through the body and its physical environment. Indeed, we will then be in possession of ourselves as never before, and the limited universe that we now see will remain—though that universe will not be as interesting as what we shall then see for the first time. We will not disappear into an eternal fog bank or dead storage, or exist in a state of isolation or suspended animation, as many seem to suppose. God has a much better use for us than that. Stated in other words, our experience will not be fundamentally different in character from what it is now, though it will change in significant details. The life we now have as the persons we now are will continue, and continue in the universe in which we now exist. Our experience will be much dearer, richer, and deeper, of course, because it will be unrestrained by the limitations now imposed upon us by our dependence upon our body. It will, instead, be rooted in the broader and more fundamental reality of God’s kingdom and will accordingly have far greater scope and power.

**His Glorious Body**

The key to understanding all of this for the early followers of Jesus was not just their knowledge of God himself, which we have so heavily emphasized, or their knowledge of the multitudes of non-physical beings or angels that serve him. The absolute bedrock of their confidence concerning their future was, rather, in their experience of the postresurrection Jesus.

He had a body: a focus of his personality in space and time that was publicly observable and interacted with physical realities. But it was radiant, and therefore it was called “the body of his glory” (Phil. 3:21). And it was not restrained by space, time, and physical causality in the manner of physical bodies. Accordingly, Paul says, “there is a physical body and there is also one that is spiritual” (1 Cor. 15:44). Now it is true that the thought world of the first century allowed for this important distinction, but acceptance of the reality of the spiritual body is mainly based upon the specific experience of the earliest Christians with the risen Jesus.

In God’s universe matter is ultimately subject to mind or spirit. That is a given in the tradition of Jesus and his people. Already our natural home, our “citizenship” (politeuma), our “sociopolitical order,” is “in the heavens, out of which we eagerly anticipate the coming of Lord Jesus Christ. He will metamorphose our humiliating body, transforming it into a glory body like his, utilizing the power he has to make all things do what he wants” (Phil. 3:20—21). When we pass through “death” into God’s full world—or “our earthy tent is torn down,” as Paul elsewhere says—we are not thereby deprived of a body, any more than Jesus himself was. Rather, we are then “clothed with a dwelling place of the heavenly sort” and “not left naked” (2 Cot 5:1—8). The mortal part of us is “swallowed up by life.” God has prepared us for this by depositing in us a “down payment” in the form of the Spirit (v. 5). We know even now, and by experience, the reality of a life that is not of the physical body.

**“Running Steadfastly the Race Set Before Us”**

What, then, should we expect to happen as we move onward in the eternity where we live even now? Let us break it down into three stages: the time of growing steadily, the time of passage, and the time of reigning with Jesus.

**THE TIME OF GROWING STEADILY.** We should, first of all, find ourselves constantly growing in our readiness and ability to draw our direction, strength, and overall tone of life from the everlasting kingdom, from: our personal interactions with the Trinitarian personality who is God. This will mean, most importantly, the transformation of our heart and character into the family likeness, increasingly becoming like “children of our Father, the one in the heavens” (Matt. 5:45).

The agape love of 1 Corinthians 13 will increasingly become simply a matter of who we are. But the effects of our prayers, words, and deeds—and sometimes of our mere presence—will also increasingly be of a nature and extent that cannot be explained in human terms. Increasingly what we do and say is “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and every part of our life becomes increasingly eternal, in the sense explained in earlier chapters. We are now co-laborers with God.

Aging, accordingly, will become a process not of losing, but of gaining. As our physical body fades out, our glory body approaches and our spiritual substance grows richer and deeper. As we age we should become obviously more glorious. The lovely words of George MacDonald, once again, help us to imagine this crucial transition:

Our old age is the scorching of the bush
By life’s indwelling, incorruptible blaze.
O life, burn at this feeble shell of me,
Till I the sore singed garment off shall push,
Flap out my Psyche ‘wings, and to thee rush.’

**THE TIME OF PASSAGE.** Common human experience, in all ages and cultures, teaches much more about transition and passage than Western culture for the last century or so has been willing to deal with. Some of it has been reaffirmed, and perhaps overembellished, by the recent interest in “near-death experiences.” But what common human experience thus teaches is in basic accord with indications to be derived from biblical sources.
Most notably, the person in the transition begins to “see the invisible.” Others whom they know come to meet them, often while they are still interacting with those left behind. If death is sudden, those nearby will have no opportunity to realize that this is happening. But we can be sure that even in such cases the person is not hurled into isolation. You would not do that, if you could help it, to anyone you loved. And neither will God.

Here we see the comforting mercy of God toward those who love him or seek him. Poor Lazarus died, we are told by Jesus, “and he was borne away by the angels to where God’s people are gathered” (Luke 16:22). From the “great cloud of witnesses” come those who have been watching for us. They greet us and enfold us. And while those first few moments or hours will surely present us with one astonishing view after another, we will be joyous and peaceful because of the company we are in.

The old spiritual song says, “I looked over Jordan and what did I see, comin’ for to carry me home? A band of angels comin’ after me, comin’ for to carry me home.” And this seemingly simplistic picture, derived from scriptural stories and teachings, presents exactly what we should expect. We should expect it on the basis of our knowledge of God and the human soul, common human experience, and the teachings of scripture.

1805 Cromwood Road snow, 2018
Appendix

Biblical Boundary Stones

Top of the Code of Hammurabi. The Babylonian king Hammurabi (standing, left), who ruled ca. 1792–1750 BC, receives a scepter and ring from the sun god Shamash (seated, right), the god of justice, in a ceremony commissioning Hammurabi to write a code of laws. Below the scene are Hammurabi’s 282 laws and an epilogue inscribed in cuneiform. The stela, 2.3 m (7.5 ft) high, was discovered by archaeologists in Susa, Iran, where it had been taken as booty by Elamites in ca. 1200 BC, possibly from Sippar in northern Babylonia. Many of the injunctions found in Hammurabi’s code are similar to Biblical laws. *Bible and Spade* (2004), Volume 17.

The Code of Hammurabi provides a glimpse into the society of the Old Babylonian period—a world like that of the patriarchs. Details in the code have provided information about the daily life of people during that time, including such details as the price of hiring a boat for a day (§ 275–277) and the cost of an early delivery of a jug of beer during harvest time (§ 111). The code’s sampling of legal situations has elaborated details contained in numerous other documents from this time. The legal material preserved on the code provides a source for comparison with the Bible’s legal material. *Lexham Bible Dictionary* Logos Bible

Biblical boundaries are understood in the context of the covenant-promise of land for Israel in the theocracy. This promise was for a *home* in the land. That home would include homes that would be protected by the law (property rights) against encroachments, theft, usury, etc. The land was protected because the family must be protected in order for the community to be protected and preserved. In essence, Israel’s border controls were not for exclusion but for inclusion of all who would believe on the Lord in faith by creating a safe and sacred context in which the faith of Israel would be preserved and proclaimed.

*boundary stones*, stones erected to delineate boundaries between nations or between private individuals, the latter type frequently also registering special tax exemptions. The many royal stelae found throughout the ancient Near East also served as indications of national boundaries. Although written testimony amply attests to the existence of markings for private property, examples beginning from the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 b.c.) have been excavated almost exclusively in Mesopotamia. In Israel where theoretically all property was deemed inalienable, because God-given, boundary stones were set ‘by the ancestors’ (Deut. 19:14) to guarantee the demarcation of private fields (cf. also Prov. 22:28). Allusions to implicit abuse of such rights are found, however (cf. Deut. 27:17; Hos. 5:10; Prov. 23:10; Job 24:2). J.M.Sasoon, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* in Libronix

19:14. moving boundary stones. Since the land had been given to the people by God and apportioned according to a God-given formula, to move boundary stones and thus appropriate territory unlawfully was a crime of theft against God. The antiquity of laws concerning property rights is affirmed by inscriptions on sixteenth-century B.C. Kassite *kudurrus* boundary stones, admonitions in eleventh-century B.C. Egyptian wisdom literature against relocating a surveyor’s stone (*Teachings of Amenemope*) and in the curse in Hosea 5:10. Each example calls on the gods to protect the owner’s rights against encroachment.

Deut 19:14 Do not move your neighbor’s boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

Deut 27:17 “Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor’s boundary stone.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

Job 24:2 Men move boundary stones; they pasture flocks they have stolen.

Prov 22:28 Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.

Prov 23:10-11 Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you.

Hos 5:10 Judah’s leaders are like those who move boundary stones. I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.

Isa 10:13 For he says: “By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings.”

Property rights in the OT

The protection of homes and homeland was central to the covenant-law and, since it relates to the covenant-promise of a land. Biblical boundaries governed the proper protection of land and property. These boundaries are treated in the OT agrarian laws (Jubilee Year, Sabbath Year, land-redemption, kinsman-redemption), primogeniture (first-born) laws, manumission of slaves, as well as in the laws governing treatment of the poor (gleaning, etc.) and of wealth. Property laws in Israel have correlatives in the A.N.E., but Israel’s monotheistic and theocratic theological context influenced all aspects of their laws and their practice.
Most importantly, all of the land (earth) belongs to YHWH! The land of the Promise was a conditional gift of tenure. Obedience to the covenant and its laws was the pre-requisite for retention of the land. Thus, the circle of protection/sustenance of life and limb (family and society) ultimately rested on their obedience to the Torah. Property was thus to be governed and protected with boundaries at the personal, familial, and communal levels, sometimes depending on its use for the private and common good. This was God's safeguard to protect and preserve the individual, the family, the community, and even civilization itself. This principle was especially true also of the internal, personal boundaries necessary for the preservation of wholesome and holy human relations. Home was the place where all good things are to be given and received, and thus where they are most needing to be protected with proper boundaries (fencing out threats while guarding what is inside that all might flourish in shalom).

Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit. Prov 25:28

[Image: Typical Israelite Home of the Iron Age]

**Ancient Israelite House**

Accessed 3/20/2018

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_yYqa3PqCYW4/TPUgxcUq70I/AAAAAAAAARl/iDwC8-TAU_M/s1600/IsraeliHome.jpg