

A Little Bit of Heaven on Earth

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Ps. 23:6).

THOUGHTS OF HOME and a loving family have sustained many soldiers in the trenches of war. No matter what war or in what year, their sentiments reflect the same need for support back home while they’re away. We get a sense of the importance of home when we read these lines from the letters of soldiers who fought in the American Civil War, World Wars I and II, Vietnam, and Iraq.

“I live in a world of death. Only thoughts of home transport me away from this evil place.”

“When I think of you in mind and thought we are together.”

“If it weren’t for pleasant thoughts of home and people I love, I couldn’t survive.”

“Every day I am in Vietnam I think about home.”

“Without love from home, and faith, I don’t see how anyone could stand this.”

Most of us live in pleasant enough surroundings, free from the fear of being killed by a bomb or captured by the enemy. Yet we do live in a world that is riddled with sin and all the destruction that sin brings. We face illness, death, personal failures, hardship, and injustice—and none of us escapes the ravages of age. The ungodly saturate our society with perversions of every kind. Believers who depart from evil, doing what

is right, make themselves prey for the cruelties of scoffers. It's no wonder Christians have always called themselves strangers on the earth, people who look for a country called Heaven and an eternal home where these things do not exist. As the songwriter has said, "Heaven's growing sweeter all the time."

It is tempting to ask God to take us home when we are in the thick of battles that we face on earth. Many have done that. The problem is that no wars are won without soldiers willing to fight. What would the world be like if no Allied soldiers had been willing to fight Nazi aspirations for world dominance? What keeps Christian soldiers on the battlefield of life and sustains them until the war is over is the same thing that has sustained soldiers as long as there have been wars—thoughts of home, the love and support of family, believing in the purpose for the war and the goal to be won in the end. What Christian soldiers need are care packages from home that contain a little bit of "Heaven on earth" to keep them encouraged and going forward.

There is a cause much greater than ourselves and a reason to press on and fulfill the work we have been given to do here on earth. Paul grappled with thoughts like these and decided, given the choice, he would stay on earth until his work was done.

1. Read Philippians 1:22–26. What reason did Paul give for his desire to remain on earth instead of going to Heaven?

While Away from Home . . .

Mothers have a powerful impact on children, even when they are grown. I have seen elderly women cry as they remembered the love of a devoted mother. When a mother's words of instruction are backed by genuine self-sacrificial love, they

are powerful enough to penetrate the hardest heart. Hopefully each of us carries the words of a loving parent in our hearts, encouraging, prodding, comforting, instructing, and warning. As a child, I expected to hear words of instruction whenever I was going to be away from home for any length of time. They all seemed to begin with, “Remember to . . .” followed by instruction. I laugh now, but as a teenager I groaned the minute my mother started the “remember to” list. Then when I became a mother, I did what comes naturally to mothers: I recited “remember to” lists every time my own children left home.

We have a Heavenly Father Whose love for His children knows no boundaries. His heart is the tender heart of a parent whose child is far away in a war-ravaged country, longing for the comforts of home. Like any parent whose child is the apple of his eye, our Heavenly Father sends words of instruction, love, and encouragement that are like care packages sent from Heaven to our hearts. Heaven’s delights are the chocolate chip cookies in a Christian soldier’s life! They are a taste of home until we arrive on Heaven’s shores. Our Father in Heaven longs for the day each of His children will come home for good, and He prepares for it with eager anticipation. In fact, no soldier coming home from war has ever been welcomed home as warmly and enthusiastically as God’s children. But until that day, the Lord has His own heavenly “remember to” list that will both instruct and encourage our hearts.

Remember Who You Are

As my children went off to camp or visited friends, my husband and I often said, “Remember whose kid you are!” What we meant was that they are kids of the King first. Whether we like it or not, our actions and attitudes will bring either a reproach or respect to the family we represent. It is no different in the family of God. Some are an embarrassment to God’s

family, bringing shame and deserving criticism from those who watch. And sadly, it's not because they sin, as much as it is that they don't humble themselves to simply acknowledge their sinful failures. Other believers' behavior is so genuinely humble and gracious and so like Christ that observers are drawn to God's family. We might call out the door, "Remember whose kid you are!" but God also calls out to His children with the same exhortation.

2. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:11–13. What do you think it means to "walk worthy"?

3. Read Philippians 2:14–16. As children of the King, we are expected by our Father to conduct ourselves accordingly while we are away from Home. According to Paul, how could the Philippian believers bring honor to their Heavenly Father?

4. Read Matthew 5:9. God's children should be known as what?

In a family built with love, each feels the others' joys and sorrows with his heart. What affects one affects all. A home filled with Christian love is a happy, forgiving, comforting place. It is a tiny bit of Heaven on earth and gives us a taste of what family life in Heaven will be—each for the other and all for the Lord. There will be no sibling rivalry or selfishness up there! When our children were young, we wanted them to know our home was not the same as a home without the love of God, and we wanted them to see and cherish the difference.

God is no different. He tells us we are children of light, not children of darkness. As children of light, we can see what others do not, and it changes our behavior. As God's children, we carry the abiding love of our Heavenly Father with us always, and we can know He goes with us no matter where our journey takes us.

5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:5–11.

(a) God tells us that we have obtained salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ for what purpose?

(b) Are we ever apart from God?

There was never a time in my childhood that I didn't know my parents would love and care for me, through thick or thin, as they say. I never worried that I wouldn't have a roof over my head or food to eat. I could go to my parents for comfort, guidance, and protection. It is a wonderful Christian heritage; however, I am most blessed, not because I had good earthly parents, but because I have a perfect Heavenly Father and am a sheep in His pasture. My Shepherd is good, and because I am His, He provides so well I have no unfilled needs. He provides for me abundantly and never leaves me or forsakes me. He stands guard when I am in the presence of evil, and He heals my broken heart as no one else can. All children of God can find this same comfort by knowing who they are and Who their Father is. He is good, so we can say with David, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Ps. 23:6).

Remember You Are Loved

We are able to endure a lot when we know we are loved, but we tend to melt under pressure if that confidence wavers. Love

strengthens our resolve, it upholds us in difficult times, and it comforts us as nothing else can. We long to be loved. In fact, we will overlook a multitude of faults and sins in our friends and family if we know they genuinely love us. God sends evidence of His love to His children every day, and when we get to Heaven, we will see His love and grace manifested before our eyes. We are not loved because we are lovable. We are loved by God because God is love. We are loved because of Who He is and what He has done for us, not who we are and what we have done.

6. Read Ephesians 2:4–9. How does our salvation demonstrate this love and grace?

7. Read 1 John 4:9. What is the evidence of God’s love for us?

Truly we can say, “His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22–23). The Bible is filled with love letters from home that will bring joy to our souls as no love on earth can. Jerry Bridges made a profound statement in his book *Trusting God*:

God’s unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. It is true whether we believe it or not. Our doubts do not destroy God’s love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.¹

The Lord Jesus wants us to remember that He came to give us not only eternal life, but life more abundant here on earth (John 10:10). The abundant life He spoke of is a little taste of Heaven, and having it is possible through His love and power. We are instructed in Jude to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21). In 2 Thessalonians Paul's prayer for the believers was that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God while they patiently waited for Christ's return (2 Thess. 3:5).

8. There are at least five reasons to keep ourselves in the love of God. Read each verse or passage and complete the sentence.

Passage	Reason
Ephesians 3:17–19	It is the foundation of Christian
Psalms 36:7; 1 John 4:18	It is God's cure for
Colossians 2:2–3	In trying times, it is a source of
Galatians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:8	It gives us strength in this
1 John 4:7–12	It teaches us how to

When we stand before the Lord in Heaven, we will understand fully what it means to be justified, forgiven, accepted, and fully loved by God. Until then, we need to believe what He has said, and simply take Him at His word.

9. Read Romans 8:33–39. Through what means do we win our battles here on earth?

Remember to Write Home and Call Often

Read the letters of homesick soldiers and you will begin to see deep longings for contact with their loved ones. Over and over again they beg for mail. Letters from soldiers who lived over 2,000 years ago are found to contain the same longing for communication with home that our soldiers in the Middle East long for. Two-way communication keeps us strengthened and refreshes us! We read in Psalms that there is joy in the presence of God and there are pleasures in Heaven forevermore. Though we won't know the physical presence of the Lord until we reach Heaven, the Lord is still present with us always. We might not see Him, but we can enjoy His presence just the same. It's another way we can find a little bit of Heaven on earth (Ps. 16:11). When life is hard, He is near and makes Himself available to His children. In Jeremiah the Lord asks, "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?" (Jer. 23:23).

10. Read Psalm 145:18 and Isaiah 58:9. What is our part and what is God's part in our communication with Him?

Remember Your Homeland

When Abraham traveled through Canaan, the land that God had promised to him and his descendants, it was inhabited by Canaanites and the Perizzites. The only land he owned there in his entire lifetime was a family burial plot. When Abraham needed encouragement, the Lord gave him a reminder.

11. Read Genesis 13:14–17; 15:7–8; and 28:13–15.

(a) What did the Lord show Abraham?

(b) How long did God say it would be his?

We have a land that is our inheritance, just as Israel has a land that is the inheritance of Abraham's descendants. While the world fights over who they believe owns the land, it isn't a question in Heaven. The land belongs to God, and God has said He would give it to Abraham—and He will. Likewise, the Bible tells us of our inheritance: that we will rule and reign with Christ on the earth during the millennial period that occurs after the rapture and seven-year tribulation. At the end of the Millennium (one thousand years), the earth as we know it will be destroyed. God will re-create the heavens and earth. The city of Heaven John described in Revelation will descend upon the new earth, and then we will inherit the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ. The land will be divided and we will each be given an inheritance. Our capital city will be the New Jerusalem (and we really will live happily ever after)!

12. Read Psalm 115:16 and Matthew 5:5. Who has God given the whole earth to?

We are not home yet. Like soldiers away in battle, we dream about Heaven and we long to enjoy its pleasures. The more we know about our homeland, the more at home we feel even though we haven't seen it, heard its music, or tasted its food. Like our Christian brothers and sisters who have lived before us, we look for a city whose builder and maker is God. We feel less at home here and more at home in a place we have never been. The Bible's snapshots of home that we keep in our minds encourage us to look forward to the glad reunions with loved ones and the activities of Heaven. We are like the soldier in a trench who pulls out his wallet and gazes on images of home. A fuzzy little picture can never convey the real beauty and glory of our beloved homeland, yet it strengthens and comforts us while we are at war in a strange land.

13. Read 2 Peter 3:13–14. What are the Heavenly Father’s “remember to” things in these verses?

While we cannot comprehend or imagine much of what is in Heaven, remember that God has given much on earth that is a little bit of Heaven. Palm trees and fruit trees are in Heaven and on earth. Food is in Heaven and on earth. We sing in Heaven and on earth. Many familiar things in both places give us a connection with our homeland! What will Heaven and earth be like when we inherit it? It will be a perfect version of what we already know. It will be the Garden of Eden restored better than ever. So when you see a beautiful sunset, think of the city that has no night and needs no sun. That diamond on your finger can remind you of Heaven’s wall, and the gold chain around your neck is like the streets you will walk on. Remember the words of your Father, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Remember Where You Are Going

We tend to get too comfortable here on earth and spend an awful lot of effort and money trying to make our houses and property a little bit of Heaven on earth. When difficult times come and the things we hold dear are taken from us, we can be taken off guard. It is unsettling, yet perhaps it is the best time to reconsider our priorities. The little book of 1 Peter was written to believers who were undergoing intense persecution during the time of Nero. Their property and possessions were being destroyed, and many were being thrown into poverty because of their faith in Christ. It was to these suffering saints that Peter wrote, exhorting them several times in five short chapters to think ahead to Heaven. He wanted them to

remember where they were headed and what they had gained in Christ so they wouldn't be overwhelmed with sorrow at what they had lost in this world.

14. Read 1 Peter 1:4–9. What things did Peter tell believers to look forward to?

Remember Who Is with You to Help

The indwelling Holy Spirit is given to every believer and is a portion of our inheritance to come when we arrive home in Heaven. He is with us to comfort, guide, correct, and give us understanding, not just in Heaven, but here on earth as well! The Holy Spirit is a little bit of Heaven on earth.

15. According to Ephesians 1:14, what is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is our partner in battle, our commander, and guide. No group of soldiers can win a war without cooperating together and working as one unit. It is no different with spiritual battles. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5). There will be no spiritual fruit and no victories in battle except we live in dependence upon Him and the Word of God. The Holy Spirit produces the wonderful fruit of the Spirit, which is a by-product of our walk with Him, obedience to Him, and dependence on Him for both the desire and ability to do whatever God asks us to do. Sadly, many believers never talk to or acknowledge the presence of God's Spirit. Neither do they avail themselves of His ever present help. Our Heavenly Father calls out to us, "Remember Who is with you to help!" But some of God's children don't listen and instead attempt to engage in life's battles without the appropriate weapons to fight and win the war.

16. Read Galatians 5:22–23. If your life and the lives of everyone around you were characterized by all these things, do you believe there would be any interpersonal relationship problems between you?
17. Read Romans 8:26. How does the Holy Spirit help us with our weaknesses?

Remember Your Responsibilities

Remember who you are and Who your Father is, and remember that God's children are to be about their Father's business just as Jesus was. Our purpose on earth isn't to collect earthly treasures and make little museums of our homes. None of it is going with us when we move to Heaven. We are not here to seek pleasures, although God has certainly provided pleasures in living here. We are here to serve and do our part to build the kingdom of God. Our lives are about people, just as our Lord's life was about people. They are eternal souls, and they are the *only* thing we can bring with us to Heaven. It's why we read in Proverbs 11:30 that winning souls is wise and why Daniel 12:3 tells us the wise who turn many to righteousness will shine like stars in Heaven.

18. Read John 12:26.

(a) How is Christ working on earth today?

(b) How can we be where He is?

19. Read Matthew 6:24–33. This passage begins with the statement that we can't serve both God and money. Christians aren't to love money; rather, they are to use money. Our life is to be spent loving and serving our God, putting His work as first priority. Jesus then described how our Heavenly Father takes care of His own and provides for us, and closed the subject by telling us the two conditions that must be met in order for us to claim this promise. What are they?
20. Read 1 John 2:28. Believers who cultivate a relationship with the Lord and serve Him faithfully on earth will have confidence on the day they arrive home in Heaven. How will those who neglect their responsibilities as children of the King behave when they see their Savior for the first time?

Remember Your Family

The child of God has a family of brothers and sisters already in Heaven who have run their races and fought their own battles. Now they cheer us on, and they are an inspiration to us as we live out our lives on earth. They are the family back home who loves and supports us.

21. Read Hebrews 12:1. The races won by our Christian brothers and sisters should motivate us to do what two things?

We have a host of brothers and sisters waiting for us to arrive home, but we also have a host of brothers and sisters who live together with us right now on earth. Brothers and sisters provide wonderful camaraderie and family support. We need

each other! They are a little bit of Heaven right now. No, they are not perfect yet any more than we are—but they are our own and we will spend eternity with them. Furthermore, our Heavenly Father is delighted when we love one another, forgive, and reconcile with one another.

22. Read Ephesians 4:29–32 and 5:1–2. In what way and for what reason are we to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Remember the Songs of Home

During the Civil War, when the two opposing armies were camped on opposite sides of the Rappahannock River in Virginia, each of their bands began to play music as both sides settled down to sleep. The bands on both sides played loud, attempting to drown the other out, a sort of battle of the bands. Then the Federal band began to play the slow, plaintive notes of the song “Home Sweet Home.” The Confederate bands went silent, and then one by one, they all joined in, playing the piece in unison. The listening soldiers all stopped what they were doing on both sides and were silent as the bands played. When the song was finished, the soldiers on both sides of the river began cheering wildly and throwing their hats into the air. Thoughts of home struck a chord in every heart, and some said if they had been permitted to do so, they would have all shaken hands and gone home.

Music is powerful. Read Psalms and you will see the word “sing” repeatedly. The book tells what to sing about, when to sing, and how to sing. Music plays a big part in the worship and praise of our God, especially while we are away from home. Every human emotion is expressed somewhere in Psalms and touches the heart of every participant, bringing comfort and joy. Music will also play a big part in our fellowship and

worship together in Heaven. We will sing with the angels and enjoy the expression of music as never before. It is truly a wonderful gift of God.

Our songs here on earth may not have the same quality that they will have when we are in our glorified bodies, but our songs on earth are music to our Father's ears just the same. Music draws us all together in family unity and draws our attention upward to nobler things than any earthly sorrow. The ability to sing and praise God now is a little bit of Heaven on earth. David, the great musician and songwriter, said he would thank God forever with his song. He didn't say he would wait until he got to Heaven and then start praising and thanking God in song. He started this joyful practice on earth and said it would never end (Ps. 30:12). We can do the same!

Ancient Israel was known for its happy music that praised God. Perhaps the music changed and became nothing more than entertainment as the people turned from their God and forgot Him. Or perhaps the music simply became a routine activity with no real heart expression. We don't know. What we do know is that Israel rebelled against God and became idol worshipers instead of worshipers of Jehovah. They were eventually destroyed by Babylon and taken captive to a faraway land. There they began to reassess their priorities and turn back to God. Their hearts were broken for their sin, and that was when their captors demanded they sing one of the happy songs of Zion they had heard so much about.

23. Read Psalm 137:1-4; 51:14; 71:23; and 108:3. When sin has come between ourselves and our Heavenly Father and we are suffering the consequences of our own foolishness, we aren't in the mood to sing. The people of Israel felt the same way and asked, "How can we sing the LORD's song in a strange Land?" What needs to happen before you (or Israel) can sing from the heart the Lord's song?

Closing Thoughts

Remember your future—it is glorious! Our minds are not capable of imagining what Heaven will be like, but even the little we know is incredible beyond comparison. Knowing our destiny helps us live for eternity by shaping our priorities for this short time on earth. A plaque on my wall says, “Only one life will soon be past—only what’s done for Christ will last.” It is a reminder that this world is not our home and its treasures are not worth living for. Remember that the Lord has told us to set our affection on things that are in Heaven, not on things that are on the earth (Col. 3:1–4). Our hearts will be where our treasures are; therefore, we do well to invest our lives and treasures in things that will last forever (Matt. 6:20–21). And last, remember that the cultivation of godliness is profitable, and has promises, not just now on earth, but in our life in Heaven, which is yet to come (1 Tim. 4:8).

*We're not home yet, children, so keep your eyes
on the Savior,
Just a few more days to labor and we'll sit down
beside the river,
How we've longed to be with Jesus, and our loved ones
gone before us,
There's a better day a-com-in, we're not home yet.*
(Chorus from “We’re Not Home Yet, Children” by Jon Bradford)

Endnote

- 1 Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 150.