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THE LONGING FOR HOME The Necessity of Belief—September 28, 2003

Jeremiah 31:10–17, 31–34 The Scripture is from the book of Jeremiah. 10 “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.’ 11 For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. 12 They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord—the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. 13 Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. 14 I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the Lord. 15 This is what the Lord says: “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.” 16 This is what the Lord says: “Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,” declares the Lord. “They will return from the land of the enemy. 17 So there is hope for your future,” declares the Lord. “Your children will return to their own land.” 31 “The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. 33 “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” This is God’s Word

New Year’s Eve

We’re looking at the book of Jeremiah because Jeremiah, we’ve said each week, lived in a fragmented culture. That’s a culture that didn’t have any consensus about what is right and wrong and what society should be like and who we are and what we’re here for. There was no consensus in his culture. There’s no consensus in our culture. We live in a fragmented culture with various competing visions of reality. We said when you live in a culture like that there are particular challenges. We’ve been looking at one each week. We’ve looked at the challenge of forming beliefs in such a culture and forming identity and relationships and sexuality. This week, though, we look at another challenge which is a little harder to put into a nutshell, a little harder to put into a word. I think as we describe it and we go along, you’ll recognize it. Two very diverse thinkers, very prominent thinkers: Martin Heidegger (the existentialist) and Karl Marx. They’re very different. Martin Heidegger was a fascist sympathizer. Karl Marx was the father of Communism. Yet they both agreed you cannot understand the human condition without the concept of what they called “alienation,” a sense of being estranged, a feeling we have that we’re not at home in the world. We’re not at home in the world! You see, literal homelessness is a horrible tragedy. Refugees. When you have entire homeless nations and groups of people, that’s a terrible tragedy. What they’re talking about is the fact that underneath all that, every human being is characterized by what Heidegger called

“Unheimlichkeit,” a sense that we are living in a place that’s not really home. We’re exiles. We live in a world that does not sustain and support the deepest needs of our hearts. Of course, that immediately raises the questions ... Why wouldn’t we feel at home here? Why would we feel alienated? Jeremiah, of course, in this passage (as we’re going to see in a second) is addressing a literal homelessness, literal refugees, exiles to Babylon. As he addresses it, he is going to actually give us a lot of insight into the bigger questions of why we long for home, how we can get home, and what life there will be like. Why we long for home is in verses 10–14. How we can get home is in verses 15–17. What life there is like is in verses 31–34. Look. 1. Why we long for home This text, of course, is about the fact that Israel had been invaded. Jerusalem had been sacked by the Babylonian Empire. The children of Israel were taken captive. They were made exiles, taken to Babylon. This passage talks about that when it says in verses 10 and 11, “He who scattered Israel will gather them ...” He will bring them back. They will come. This is all about the fact that though they’ve been scattered, though they’ve been displaced, though they’re homeless, he will bring them home. He will bring them back to their land. Now you say, “Fine. I’ve heard about that. That did happen. They did come back from Babylon. They were resettled. What does that have to do with us?” The answer is a lot, because it’s not just here in Jeremiah but all through Ezekiel, all through Jeremiah, and all through Isaiah ... all through the prophets ... there are many, many, many prophecies like this that say, “The Lord will bring them home. He will bring them back out of exile in Babylon. He will bring them home.” The thing I want to point out to you is, if you look at those prophecies (which I had to do all week getting ready for this sermon), they are over the top. They are exorbitant, it seems. They are incredibly extravagant. The claims are enormous. For example, let me just give you a few here. In Ezekiel, this is a prediction that he will bring them back out of exile. God says, “... I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. [...] I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. [...] On the day I cleanse you from all your sins ... the desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden ...’ ” The garden of Eden! Not just come back. The garden of Eden! Here’s Isaiah 35. “... the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. [...] Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.... the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing ... sorrow and sighing will flee away.” Of course there’s another place where Isaiah says the wolf will lie down the lamb. Here in Isaiah 19, it says, “In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria ... The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork ...’ ” Here in Psalm 87 God says, “I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me ... and will say, ‘This one was born in Zion.’ ” Do you know what that’s saying? The prophecies about the return out of exile are so over the top that the actual, literal return that did happen ... Seventy years after they were taken into captivity, they came back, and they resettled. These prophecies are so over the top that they have never been fulfilled in all of history. Nothing in history has ever fulfilled them. They’re talking about Babylon and Assyria being brought out of exile. Babylon! They’re the ones who did it! We’re talking about the garden of Eden and blooms in the desert and streams in the desert and the wolf lying down with the lamb. What is all that talking about? What does it mean? Here’s what it means. Israel

coming back was great, extremely important, but in a way, it was only an image of a deeper lesson. What's that? All human beings were made for a home they've lost. All of us are in a form of exile. Let's talk about this. The Bible is actually saying (and the only way you can understand these prophecies that are so over the top and they were never really fulfilled by the literal return of Israel from Babylon) is when God says, "I'm going to heal you of your exile," he is not just talking to Israel. He is talking to the human race. He says, "There's an ultimate exile, and I'm going to eventually bring you back." What is that? The Bible says God has made us for a home, but we've lost it. Let's break that down. First of all, God has made us for a home. Genesis 2. When he created us, he put us in the garden of Eden. The garden of Eden was our home. Let's get a grip on this idea of home. I think I can do it by giving you a negative illustration. Imagine you're shipwrecked on Mars. Your rocket crashes on Mars. The first thing you do is you open the door, and you take in a great big deep breath of that wonderful Martian atmosphere. Your lungs will start to experience alienation. Why? Because this is not home. Therefore, that means this environment cannot support the function of your lungs. Your lungs were built to breathe an atmosphere that is 20 percent oxygen, whereas the Martian atmosphere is 1.5 percent oxygen. I looked it up. You will experience physical alienation. You'll start to break down because you're not built for this atmosphere. This isn't right. This doesn't fit you, doesn't fit the physical capacities of your lungs. Not only that, you will not only experience physical alienation, you will experience psychological and social alienation because this is Mars, and there is nobody home. There's nobody there. You need somebody else. Do you remember Tom Hanks in *Castaway with Wilson*? See? If you haven't seen that movie, I won't explain it. You will start to experience psychological breakdown because you need other people. See, Mars isn't home. You will experience psychological, physical, social alienation, and you will break down. You will not survive long on Mars. The oxygen eventually (whatever you have) will give out. Because you're in an environment that's not home, what that means is it doesn't support who you are. If you're going to have to live some place even for a month, you have to arrange it the way you like it, that fits you. See? So when you get out of bed at night you don't immediately crash into something. Because you're used to doing this, you change where the chairs are. You make things higher or lower. They have to fit you. You see, Mars isn't home. That's why you start to break down. That's why you experience alienation in all your capacities because it doesn't fit who you are. It doesn't support your capacities of physical and psychological and social. When God created us, he therefore put us into home. He put us in the garden of Eden, the one place where our every capacity was absolutely ... intellectual and aesthetic and social and psychological and spiritual and emotional. Every one of our capacities was absolutely sustained, totally fulfilled, absolutely supported. See? The first thing is we were meant for home. We have to have home.

New Year's Day

The second thing the Bible tells us is we all have lost it. Genesis 3 (not Genesis 2), tells us when we chose to be our own bosses, our own masters, essentially our own lords, we went into exile. We went into exile. We lost the garden. We lost home. Not to put too fine a point on it. Let's imagine somehow you get your spaceship on Mars working again. You're a great mechanic, and you get your spaceship going. You fly home, and you step out, and you're on Earth. You're home, but are you home? See, on Mars, you would have died really pretty quickly. Here on

Earth, you're going to die a little more slowly, but you're going to die. How could that be home? Even in this world you're wearing down. You're breaking down. Nobody understood this better than Camus. He wrote something I read back in college, and it's actually affected me ever since in many, many ways. Albert Camus said this in one of his works. Listen to it carefully, but I'll explain it afterwards because he is still a philosopher, so you need to read it twice. I'll explain it. He says, "... beauty is unbearable, drives us to despair, offering us for a minute the glimpse of an eternity that we should like to stretch out over the whole of time. But we do not even have that consolation ... Why this and that, this woman, that job or appetite for the future? To put it all in a nutshell, why this eagerness to live in limbs that are destined to rot? [...] For most men, the approach of dinner, the arrival of a letter, or a smile from a passing girl are enough to help them get around it. But the man who likes to dig into ideas finds that being face to face with this particular one makes his life impossible. And to live with the feeling that life is pointless gives rise to anguish. From sheer living against the stream, the whole of one's being can be overcome with disgust and revulsion, and this revolt of the body is what is called nausea." Here's what he is saying. It's simple, but it's pretty profound. He says hardly anybody wants to actually face the implications of death. Nobody wants to face the philosophical, emotional ... They don't want to face the implications of death. Most people don't want to think about it, so they have sex. They have food. They do things. They travel. Even The Lion King does everything it possibly can to make death seem natural. There's even a wonderful song about it. There's a song called "The Circle of Life," and it goes like this. Basically (in not so many words), "When you die, you become fertilizer. Out of the fertilizer that used to be you grow little plants and flowers the animals eat. Then they're able to live for a while till they become fertilizer. The same thing happens." Isn't it a lovely thought? We're all part of the circle of life. Camus says no, it's not a lovely thought. Here's why not. A world in which everyone you have ever loved or ever will love is going to become fertilizer. Then you will. Then everyone who ever remembers anything you've ever done is not a world that fits us. It's not a world that supports the most basic desire of our hearts. What's the most basic desire of our hearts? The most basic desire of our hearts is to have love last. It's to have beauty last. It's that when we do something right, it counts. It counts forever! I mean, that's the most fundamental need of the heart, to have our love last. This world cannot sustain that any more than the Martian atmosphere can sustain your lungs. Therefore, this world can't be home. Yeah, we don't die as fast here, but we die. We're wearing down. This world cannot be home. This world isn't home. It cannot sustain and support the most basic needs we have. This is not the world we're for. This is not the home we had. This is not the home we were built for. You know, there was a great movie I love so much. It doesn't get a lot of attention anymore, but Geraldine Page starred in a movie called *The Trip to Bountiful* in the 1980s. In it, she plays an aging widow who is very unhappy with life. Then she gets in her mind the idea that if she could just get back to where she was raised, if she could get back to the little farm outside of the little town of Bountiful (that's on the Gulf Coast, in Texas, a little village), if she could just get home, if she could just go back there, somehow she'd get back her strength and her dignity. She gets there, and she finds everyone she has ever known is dead or gone. She finds the house itself is a crumbling wreck. You see, if you go back to places you have these incredible fond memories of, grand, wonderful memories of, it's not just that you find the place has changed. It's not just you find the house is falling down or somebody built a shopping mall in the field where you used to listen to the birdies. It's not just

that. When you go back, you find even the parts that haven't changed, you realize you remember them as being much grander than they really are. In other words, even the home you remember, you never had. Why? The Bible makes sense of it. The Bible says the home your heart seeks ... in fact, even the home your heart remembers ... it's never had as an individual. It's the collective memory of Eden, of God. What does Psalm 90 say about God? "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations." As Isaac Watts puts it in his hymn based on Psalm 90, "You are our eternal home." God is the home we're missing. God is the home somehow we remember. Eden. The face of God. Walking with him in the cool of the day. It's what we absolutely remember. It's what we're absolutely trying to get to, and we can't get there. That shapes everything we do. See, what Camus says is ... Let me use Camus to just say two things to you before we move on. First, avoid the naïveté Camus is talking about, which is do not mask your profound spiritual homelessness by thinking, "If I just have a great family, or if I just have this great house ... If I can just make enough money so I can get this beautiful house, or just a house that looks at the mountains or a house on the sea ..." He says don't be so naïve. Don't try to mask your profound spiritual homelessness by thinking if you build a great enough family, if you build a great enough home, that will deal with it. It won't. Don't do that. It won't work. They crumble. They rot. Not just the house, the family. So don't try to mask your profound spiritual homelessness or think you're going to fix it that way. Secondly, though, on the other hand ... Don't be naïve, but don't be as despondent as Camus himself. See, Camus says this universe is not our home. It doesn't meet the basic needs of our hearts. C.S. Lewis asks Camus and you, if that resonates. He says, "Well, why wouldn't we?" What are the implications of that? C.S. Lewis wrote a man who said something to him like that and said, "I hate the universe; it's not home." C.S. Lewis said something like, "Though being hungry does not prove I will get food, surely being hungry proves there is such a thing as food. You say the material universe is ugly, unjust. You don't like it. If you were just the product of a material universe, if that's all you are, why don't you feel at home in it? Do fish complain about the sea for being wet? We feel wet when we get into water because we're not aquatic creatures. Then why don't you feel at home here? The only possible explanation is real home is somewhere else." So don't get naïve, but don't be despondent. Understand what your longing for home means and why we long for home.

Jan 2

2. How are we going to get home? See, we have a problem. Verse 11 tells us. Interestingly enough, he can't just bring Israel back. Notice this. He says, "For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they." Now what does this mean? We can't just find our way home. Why were Adam and Eve exiled? Why were they cast out? There's something about sin. What is sin? Well, sin is a self-centeredness. Let me just suggest something to you. Sin, by its very nature, casts you out. Do you know that? It thrusts you out. Sin, by its very nature, isolates and alienates. For example, if you lie to somebody, there's an isolation. There's a distance. You've created a distance. They've moved away from you. You've moved away from them. You have to hide from them. You have to be careful what you say now because you might say something that might show originally there was a lie. There is a distance. Listen. When you lie to a friend, that's the beginning of the end of the friendship. You could always remedy it by telling the truth. When you lie to a spouse, that's the beginning of the end

of at least a good marriage and maybe the beginning of the end of the marriage. All selfishness, all self-centeredness, all sin, everything automatically drives you out. You're asking for it. You're doing it even as you do it. Throughout the Bible, the penalty, therefore, of sin is to be banished, is to be exiled. In the Old Testament during the wanderings in the wilderness, the children of Israel once a year put their hands on a goat, confessed their sins, and drove it out of the camp. That was their way of recognizing the penalty of sin is to be driven out, is to be exiled, is to be cast out, is to be banished. How then are we going to find our way home? How are we going to be brought back into the arms of God? The answer is the tears of Rachel. Look. Verse 15. "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more." What's that all about? There are three places in the Bible where Rachel weeps for her children. First, back in Genesis 38, Jacob was bringing his family home. He had been in exile, and he couldn't wait to bring his family home and raise his family in his homeland. But the great tragedy is on the way home at Ramah, Rachel had to stop because she was pregnant, and she had to give birth. As she gave birth and she looked upon her son, she knew she was dying. She knew she was dying in labor so he could live. She named him and wept and died. The second time we hear about Rachel's tears is right here. Years later, what happens at Ramah? Something interesting. The Babylonians have sacked Jerusalem. They have killed people, and they have taken prisoners. They brought them to Ramah. Ramah was a staging station where it was a transit camp for the people on their way to Babylon in exile. So it was sort of a camp of prisoners who were going to be taken away. You can imagine the tears of the mothers weeping over their children who had been lost, weeping over their children who had been killed. Rachel's tears are the tears of every person who has ever wept over the spiritual inhospitality of the world to your deepest desires. Your deepest desires are to have love that lasts, to love someone who is not going to turn to fertilizer. You realize every mother who has ever picked up a baby, either the baby is going to see the mother turn to fertilizer, or you're going to see the baby turn to fertilizer. That's it! "Oh, I don't like to think about it. Let's not go there." Camus says have the guts to do it, because if you recognize that, if you recognize the reality, you realize not only Mars isn't our home, but this world isn't our home either. You're not home. Rachel's tears are the tears of every person who has ever wept over the spiritual inhospitality of this world to your deepest desires. There's a third time in which Rachel's tears are mentioned. Genesis 38, here in Jeremiah 31, and Matthew 2. Matthew quotes this very verse here from Jeremiah 31:15. Rachel is weeping for her children and says, "That is fulfilled." Fulfilled! Matthew says Jesus fulfills this. How did that happen? I'll tell you why. Matthew quotes this thing. The first time is in Matthew 2, when Herod slaughters the innocent, slaughters the infants in Bethlehem, trying to kill the Messiah who supposedly he has heard has been born in Bethlehem. Jesus, in order to escape that, and his parents go into exile to Egypt. They go into exile. Interesting. Not only that, but if you understand the whole career of Jesus, he is always in exile. You know the place where Jesus says, "Foxes have holes. Birds have nests. The Son of Man doesn't have a place to lay his head"? Why not? His family thought he was crazy. The authorities wanted to kill him. His friends even were stupid. He, therefore, had no place to go. He was always a homeless wanderer. Jesus was a homeless wanderer. Finally at the end of his life, he headed for Jerusalem. Luke 19 says when he saw Jerusalem, he wept over it. Matthew says when he wept, he said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I wished I could take you under my wings." That's the language of a mother bird, and that is

mighty bold that in the Gospels we have Jesus Christ, the Messiah, weeping like a mother, weeping deliberately like a mother, referring to himself as a mother. Why? Oh, don't you see? He is the ultimate Rachel who is going to die in labor so we can be born again. When he gets up to the cross, do you know what Hebrews 13 says? It points out the cross was outside the gate. It was outside the camp. It was outside the city. He was cast out. He is the true scapegoat. He went into the ultimate exile. The Father cast him out so we could be brought in. He paid the penalty. He took what we deserve. What do we deserve? Exile. He took it. That's the reason why we could be brought in. Listen, friends. Three hours or four hours only before he was completely cast out of his Father's presence, he said to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. In my Father's house, there are many suites. I go ..." Where? "... to the cross to prepare a place for you." We want a place. You build a beautiful home. It won't be enough. It will crumble. You build this great family, or you find the love of your life. One of you will watch the other of you turn to fertilizer. It won't work. When Jesus says, "I go to my Father's house to prepare a place for you," listen. The best fathers and mothers are just a dim echo of this. The most beautiful homes are just an echo of this. Until you recognize that, until you realize this is the home you're looking for, you'll spend all of your life chasing will-o'-the-wisps. All of your life. But Jesus has opened the door. Jesus has paid the mortgage on a palatial apartment in the Father's house. It's not millions of dollars the way the nice ones are here in New York. It's far more than that, and yet it's incredibly costly, but the doors are wide open to you. He says, "I go to the cross to prepare a place, the home your hearts have always been longing for. Unless you recognize that, you're going to spend a tremendous amount of your life chasing will-o'-the-wisps."

Jan 3. What will life be like there?

Lastly, what does that really mean for us practically? It means an incredible new relationship. That's what verses 31–34 are all about. Let me summarize it like this. If you get this new relationship with the Father through Jesus, you notice how verses 31–34 say, "I'm going to bring a new covenant." Now covenant is a word for relationship. A new covenant means, "I'm going to give you a far more intimate relationship with me than you ever had before. Moses was the mediator of the first covenant, and he slaughtered animals, and he sprinkled the blood for atonement. If you were standing there, how would you have felt? You would have said, "Well, that's very instructive. I kind of learned something about atonement, about my sin. It's very awesome." But it wouldn't be all that moving, would it? It wouldn't be beautiful. No. When you see the better mediator, Jesus, who sacrifices himself, that changes you. It doesn't just frighten you. It doesn't just awe you. It melts you. That's the reason why John Newton has that line in the hymn, "Our pleasure and our duty, though opposite before, since we have seen his beauty, are joined to part no more." Joined to part no more. His beauty. When you watch Moses conduct worship, it wouldn't have been beautiful. It would have been awesome. When you see the sacrifice of Jesus giving himself to you ... the ultimate Rachel weeping in labor, dying in labor so you could be born, the ultimate exile so you could be brought in ... that writes the law on your hearts. The law does not become something out here I have to do to please this big God up here. The law becomes something I want to do to please and delight the one who has done this beautiful thing for me. The Holy Spirit burns it into your heart. It becomes you. It becomes the thing you want. It's a whole new relationship. What this means is simply this. Two

final applications. If you get this new covenant relationship in Jesus Christ because of what he has done on the cross for you, you must regularly visit your true home through prayer so you can renovate your future home through action. Visit your true home through prayer. Renovate your future home through action. What do I mean? Okay, very fast. First of all, visit your true home through prayer. Yes, Psalm 17 is right when he says, "When I awake ..." He means after death, when he awakes. "... I will see your face ... I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness." It's a profound verse, but what it's saying is, when we actually see God face to face, it's like back in the garden of Eden. That's home. You were built for the glory of God. You were built to see his face. All of your intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, psychological, and spiritual capacities will finally be utterly filled. You'll finally be home. You won't be breaking down. You won't be disintegrating. Finally home. Do you realize that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 even now we gaze on the glory of God through the face of Jesus Christ? What he means is it's possible through the Holy Spirit right now, even though you're not home, you can visit. There are times in which you can experience his love. There are times where you can experience his presence. He can come into your heart and actually say to you, "I am yours, and you are mine." In other words, if you just do "give me" prayers ... "Lord, give me this. Give me this. Help me here. Help me there." If you, through prayer, visit home, it's possible. Do you know what the stability is you'll have in your life? You'll be able to face disease. Even though you're still experiencing some alienation, it won't take you out, because the great disease has been healed, right? If you experience debts, even though you experience some economic alienation, it won't really take you out because the great debt has been paid. Think of the stability you will have. So visit your true home regularly through prayer. Then if you do that, you'll be able to renovate your true home through action. What do I mean by that? This world is not your home, but the Bible says it will be. At the end of time, at the end of Revelation (Revelation 21), we see the city of God. Home. The Father's house. Many mansions and all that. We see the city of God. Notice at the end of Revelation, we do not leave to go to the city to go home; the home comes down. God is going to come back. He is going to descend with his power at the end of time, and he is going to make the whole world into a garden of Eden. That's what Ezekiel says. That's what all the Bible says. He is going to get rid of the disease that's here. He is going to get rid of the death. Camus was right. You're not home until death is gone. We were not built for death. We don't want death. There's nothing nice about it. No reason to sing about it. Until death is gone, we are not home, but God is going to come down. He is going to destroy death. He is going to destroy poverty and injustice. He is going to destroy disease. He is going to destroy everything that's wrong here. If you visit your true spiritual home with regularity through prayer, you will have the ballast and the strength in your life to work to renovate your future home. You'll have the guts to call a spade a spade, as it is. You'll have the guts to say, "This is wrong. This is unjust. This is not true." You'll also have enough emotional wealth that you don't have to make so much money. You can spend a lot of money on other people. You can be generous. You can work to serve other people. If you visit your true spiritual home through prayer, you can renovate your future home through action. When I first moved here 14–15 years ago, a lot of homeless people lived in the parks. You know, it was a terrible thing when homeless people were forced, to a great degree, to live in the parks, I think. I know this. As wonderful as parks are, if you visit them, if you go in for several hours to read or to walk or to just talk with people, the parks are wonderful. If you live in them 24 hours a day, they get very foul, because parks are not designed to bear the full

weight of the whole human life. They can take visits, but if you live in it, the parks ... When people lived in them, they got foul. Do you understand? That is a metaphor. Look at your houses. Look at your careers. Look at your friends. Look at your family. They're wonderful, but they cannot bear the full weight of your soul. They're not home. Unless you recognize that, unless you make your relationship to God, getting it and cultivating it, the most important thing in your life, unless you recognize that and only that is home, you're going to feel so much a stranger. You're going to feel so much alienation. You're going to feel like a person always traveling, never arriving. Your life will be like always winter and never Christmas. The Bible says, "Dry your tears, Rachels. There is hope." Let's pray. Father, we ask you would help us to have the poise in our lives that comes from knowing where our true home is and visiting it with regularity experientially through your Holy Spirit in prayer. We also thank you that you have promised us that the home we know we're built for is going to be set up here on earth someday. We're going to live with you in it. We're going to live with each other in it. We need this. We need to know this. We need the hope of that. There is a hope. Your future will not be cut off. Dry your tears, Rachels. Because your Son wept the bitterest of all tears, your Son was cast out, we can know you will bring us in. We pray you would help us to live the great kinds of lives that go along with that knowledge. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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