

**Introduction:**

***"Life in the Present"***

*We are not entirely present to ourselves until the day of our death.*@

Louis Lavelle (Christian philosopher 1883-1951)

Until now, we have worried about tomorrow -- unpaid bills and upcoming appointments. The future has driven the present moment from our awareness. We have grown accustomed to knowing more about what is in the refrigerator than about what is in our hearts.

Then, we hear a doctor say our days are numbered. Living for tomorrow doesn't have the urgency it once did. For us, life is now -- this present moment. It is not a journey into the future, for tomorrow we will be going Home, with a capital "H." Being a Christian gives us a right to use the word home to refer to two different places: the house where we currently keep our knickknacks, and the other home which Paul refers to as,

*"...a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."*

(II Corinthians 5:1 NIV)

When we begin to understand for ourselves that the time we may have upon this earth is short, we round a corner and enter a narrow passage. The future and the past are now other rooms, places in which we no longer dwell. We are not yet dead. We are not fully among the living, either. We are in the hallway in between.

Now we have certain decisions to make, affairs to put in order. But on the whole, we may feel out of control. People may ignore us or leave us to feel lonely. They may not be willing to take our wishes seriously. We may be struggling to put right long-time conflicts. We want to use this time to make peace and prepare our souls and our legacies. It is hard to do that when people become distant. They are not in this hallway with us, how can they understand?

Even God may feel distant at this time, although we are heading to be with him. Take this to heart: there is nothing wrong with your faith. Just as your eyes need to adjust when they enter a darkened corridor, so also your eyes of faith are adjusting to the new experience of being in this passageway between earth and heaven.

Going Home aims to be your companion for this time of transition. Though we have glimpsed this hallway, we are not there with you. But, we have sat with and listened to others who traveled Home slowly enough to share with us the things which encouraged them. This book is a tribute to the faith that kept them on their way.

Others have asked your questions and felt the same emotions that you feel. It is part of the journey. The journey towards death tests our courage. While wrestling with the deepest spiritual concerns of all mankind, we are also contending with pain, fatigue, medical treatments, loss of memory and often, new financial woes.

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Through it all, we have a loving God who has promised not to abandon us. Keeping that promise to heart will keep us steady, through all the decisions, through all the afflictions, through all the lonely hours, until we reach the heavenly home that has been promised us.

And, when get there to the place Jesus himself prepared for us, we will find it is the place we have been homesick for all our lives, even though we didn't know it.

## Chapter 1: "Our Other Home"

*And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

I Thessalonians 4:17

Many of our Lord's most cherished words and deeds come from the days right before he died. While in the passageway between earth and heaven, He prepared a plan for how and where he would die. He said goodbye to his friends and gave them a meaningful legacy. He fortified himself with prayer and the companionship of fellow Christians. Remember how on the night he was betrayed, he urged his disciples to be near him in the garden as he prepared to suffer the next day with dignity? As He was crucified, He even shared his own experience of death by inviting a thief to receive salvation and enter into eternal life.

Mindful of those, like us, who would enter this passage after Him, Jesus gave us a model for how we should act. He wanted us to have faith, to discharge our duties honorably, and to have no fear.

Wherever you are on the journey between this life and eternal life, Jesus is ahead of you. During the last meal he shared with his disciples, the fact of his death is real yet he comforted them:

*"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 am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to*

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*be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."*

(John 14:1-4 NIV)

With these words, he said, "Look, you wait here. I'm going to go ahead and make reservations."

The "*many rooms*," or in the King James, "*many mansions*," means infinite space, a comfort to those who are afraid they might not get in. We have all been in those situations. Maybe we made plans but found we couldn't get tickets or transportation or lodging. What if heaven were like that? What if there was only room for 144,000 people? If you happen to be 144, 001, then, you are out of luck. We could live our lives as Christians only to meet Saint Peter and hear him say, "Sorry we're full."

But that is not what we are promised. Jesus says, "*I go and prepare a place for you.*" There is a place prepared for you! We are meant to hold onto these words like a reserved seating ticket. We have confirmation in hand; no one can bump us from glory.

There is also an implied promise of individualized attention. Jesus is preparing a place *especially* for you, and no one knows you better than He does. Letting our human imagination roam a bit, what would your space in heaven look like? A cabin? An apartment? Would you have a certain favorite chair? Would a window look out on a forest or waterfall? Would you want to hear the sound of the sea or of thunder over the mountains? What photos would be on the wall? What books on the shelf? Is there

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something about that room which would instantly tell you that Jesus had chosen it just for you?

Jesus is saying that our personal relationship with him is central. As long as we have accepted him into our hearts, there is nothing more that we need to do during our final weeks upon this earth to improve our chances of getting into heaven. We shouldn't look upon this time as a period in which we cram for life's final exam.

Jesus says it as simply as he can for the disciples:

*"Ye believe in God, believe also in me."*

(John 14:1 KJV)

To believe means to trust in the fact that you know Jesus and He knows you. The disciples were not geniuses being asked to make some kind of great philosophical leap in order to be worthy of a room in eternity. Jesus simply asked them to hold onto their friendship with Him. Later in this same place, Jesus says:

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

(John 14:6 NIV)

What comfort! Jesus says that He, personally is the way. Even with a map and directions a driver can get lost going someplace new. If Jesus had merely drawn a map to heaven for us, or given us complicated teaching about salvation, then most of us would be lost.

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Instead He is the friend from the place where you need to go; he offers to come with you and sits in the seat beside you, guiding you as you drive into the unknown.

By his presence, He is for you the way. When you need to cross over from here to heaven, Jesus promises to meet you and to be your way, your truth, your life. The same promise is also given in the Old Testament, when the shepherd's psalm says:

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

(Psalm 23:4 KJV)