

What Mystical Longing Calls Us Home for Christmas?

✖ I write this aboard a jet airliner speeding south from one of the nation's greatest northern cities. I am heading home for Christmas.

How eager I am to see the face of my wife, embrace my now-grown children who are gathering at the old homestead, grab my little grandchildren and swing them high as they squeal:
"PaPa's home."

How eager I am to sit quietly with my dear friends, my extended family, to embrace and whisper "I love you" in the ears of those as committed to me as they are to their own blood relatives. We will embrace, take off our shoes, sit in front of a fire (sipping egg nog), and feel "at home" in each other's presence.

Home for Christmas! My oldest son will be driving through the night after finishing his work in the nation's capital—joining his family in Florida. Our youngest daughter will fight the mobs which throng the airports, winging in from college in middle-America.

In all of our efforts to get home for Christmas, we touch others—desperate, happy,

lonely,
cheerful—thronging crowded terminals, all trying to make that
mystical
deadline.

What is it on this day
that so drives us to be among loved ones?

Busy businessmen forget
about buying and selling, creating and convincing, to lounge
around the house
with the family. Things like trade agreements, real estate
deals, marketing and
sales—all take a back seat to important things like carving
the turkey and
opening inane but precious gifts under a tree.

Dignified college
professors, their cheeks ruddy and hair blowing in the wind,
race up and down
sidewalks, laughing and shouting as they hold on to small
children riding bikes
with training wheels.

Ranchers and dairymen
quickly finish morning chores so they can take off muddy boots
and join
laughing families at Christmas breakfasts.

Computer experts,
physicians, engineers—(all intellectuals, all degreed and
pedigreed) sit
cross-legged under trees, waist-deep in wrapping paper, turned
into little
children—at least for the day.

Gangsters, tax evaders,
liars, drunkards, adulterers, prostitutes, even members of the
Mafia—all turn

aside on this day to kneel at altars and shed a tear in a
communion cup for a
baby in a manger.

Home for Christmas!

Broken-hearted parents sit and wait by the telephone,
anxiously scan the mail,
hoping memories of Christmas past will stir the heart of a
runaway child and
bring word of safety.

Runaway children, some
young, some very old, walk city sidewalks, huddle in lonely
motel rooms, sit and
stare in drab apartments on this, the loneliest day of the
year—yearning for
some power so they can hurdle the wall of pride and reach out
for home.

Soldiers in far-flung
military outposts, wet and cold, sweaty and sticky, stand
lonely watch around
olive drab vehicles or shiver in isolated guardhouses at the
gates—all dreaming
of home.

Airmen, cramped in the
cockpits of flying cannons high in the darkened and silent
skies on Christmas
Eve, look upward for a star, then down over tilted wings at
the winking lights
below Misty-eyed, they dream of the touch of a mother's hand,
the warmth of a
father's chuckle, the squeals of little ones, cookies, candles
and a choir
singing "Silent Night."

Home for Christmas? For

many it is but an impossible yearning.

In hospitals, while
suction machines whir and monitors beep, some fight for their
lives. Christmas
is but a card, a small wreath on a tray, or the gentle touch
of a nurse's hand
to say, "I am with you on this day."

In jails and prisons,
men and women, black and white, lie on rusting steel cots
facing concrete
walls, or stare upward at gray ceilings where peeling paint
covers faded
obscenities written by those who walked this angry path before
them. All,
strong and weak alike, finally bury their faces in the
mildewed canvas of a
lumpy pillow and cry away the day.

Home for Christmas! In
nursing homes, neglected and forgotten, the grand old people
of this world
reach out for a small group of strangers with cookies and
carols, vainly look
for comfort from an indifferent attendant bitter over a
rotation system that
forces her to work on a day when no person should work,
struggle to hear a
voice on radio or see a face on television—anyone who might
bring a message of
comfort and cheer.

The words echo from the
centuries: *God rest ye merry, gentlemen.*

God rest ye merry? How can there be any merriment if we are
not home

for Christmas?

Why all this homesickness? Why does a cup of cold water seem
so blessed
on this day when loneliness sweeps the world like an epidemic?

Why do the Salvation Army lassies take on an almost saintly
hue as
they ring their little bells? They, even if you do not, will
try to provide a
home for those not home for Christmas.

Could this homesickness be from God himself?

Is it possible that Jesus, lying in a bed of straw on
Christmas Day,
was homesick? Could it be the memory of heaven still lingered?
Were some of
those infant tears the same tears lonely men and women shed
today—tears in
memory of home?

This Christmas, missionaries will gather their families about
them in
heathen cities, will hang red and yellow decorations on banana
trees, will walk
through maddening Orient markets where the world roars by
without even knowing
the name of their baby. They are followers of Him—men on a
mission.

So He came, to bring heaven to earth, to make the kingdom He
had known
and establish it on this planet.

Because of Him, men and women in many sectors of earth no
longer throng
taverns, no longer blast their brains with ungodly sound, no
longer fill their

bodies with chemicals. Because of Him children do not run away. Because of Him, no matter where we find ourselves on this Christmas Day, we will be home.

O tidings of comfort and joy!

Jamie Buckingham was senior pastor of the 2,000-member Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Fla., a nondenominational church he founded in 1967. The former editor of *Ministry Today* magazine, he wrote dozens of books, including autobiographical works for Nicky Cruz (*Run Baby Run*) and Pat Robertson (*Shout It From the Housetops*). He died in 1992.