

Between Heaven and Earth

A growing number of us, I have discovered, have tasted heaven but returned to earth. We are the ones who have literally “entered into His presence.” Some have experienced that wonderful level of intimacy with God through prayer and revelation. Others, like me, have been forced upward—out of carnality and selfish living—through personal crises. Some have actually died—or come close to it—and returned like Lazarus from that marvelous place of peace to a world of turmoil.

All of us are confused about our dual status: one foot in heaven and the other on earth.

We all experience the problem of re-entry into “life as usual.” We are different, not like other people. We will always be that way. Having tasted from the sweet spring of intimacy with God, we will never again be satisfied with lapping from the earth’s polluted puddles.

The risen Christ chided the pastor at Ephesus for having lost his first love (see Rev. 2:4-5). We all need, on occasion, to stop and remember what our first love was like. We need to recall that overpowering rush of emotion that we now smile at and call puppy love.

I couldn’t eat for thinking of her. I’d sneak away, find a phone and talk with her for hours about nothing. Those long nights, lying in bed looking at the ceiling—longing, dreaming. Oh, how I wanted to be with her.

I'd rush off to school early to meet her in the parking lot. Just a smile, the touch of her hand, the smell of her perfume would set my heart beat-ing wildly. Nothing mattered: father or mother, studies, sports—all faded into insignificance when I thought of her.

And I was in only the seventh grade.

So it is with those of us who have been to heaven's gate, have heard the sound of His voice, have felt the touch of His saving, healing hand. Nothing else—no love, no desire, no pleasure—will ever match His sweet, holy presence.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul described it as being “caught up to the third heaven.” But to keep him from becoming conceited, God allowed a “thorn in the flesh” (v. 7)—a companion of pain—to accompany him on earth and be with him until his final return. Thorns, it seems, always accompany visits to glory. No one who has walked in His presence will ever be allowed to strut.

Don't regret the limp. Only fear that you lose the wonderful intimacy that came when life was so helpless and death so close.

Francis Frangipane once told me of the beginning of his little church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A spiritual idealist, he committed himself to spend every morning—all morning—in prayer. Then his church grew.

People with problems began to show up. There weren't enough hours in the day to minister to God and minister to people, too. He cut his prayer time to three hours a day, then two.

One day, he said, a young friend who had just spent the morning with God stopped by the house. He had a message from God: "Tell Francis I miss him."

Who among us, having tasted the sweet intimacy of walking with the Father, does not fear those sad words: "I miss you"?

The Bible emphasizes knowing God intimately as Father, as Daddy.

Jesus often used agricultural terms. Agriculture, in its most basic sense, is not learning how to control the seasons, soils and processes—it's learning how to cooperate with them.

So it is when you've walked with God. Instead of controlling time, you cooperate with time. Instead of controlling people, you cooperate with them. You love with the love of heaven—for you have been there.

Here's my prayer. You can pray it, too.

"Lord, help me to remain aloft without becoming aloof. Show me how to remain in orbit with You above the earth's poisoned atmosphere yet dip at Your command to touch, instruct and heal as Jesus did. May I never again be 'of this world.' May I always—in my own mind and in the oft-critical eyes of others—belong to a different kingdom. May I be in the world but not of the world, ministering at Your pleasure, marching ever to the sound of the different drummer." *

Jamie Buckingham (1932-1992), a pastor and author, wrote a column for Charisma that was published from March 1979 to August 1993. As we approach the 10th anniversary of his death this February, we are reprinting some of his best works.