

A Word of Hope for Those Who Feel Homesick This Christmas

Editor's Note: This article by the late Jamie Buckingham originally appeared in Charisma's December issue in 1982.

I write this aboard a jet airliner speeding south from one of the nation's great 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 eggnog) and feel "at home" in each other's presence.

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

Home for Christmas! 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.

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! Brokenhearted parents sit and wait by the telephone, anxiously scan the mail, hoping memories of Christmases past will stir in the heart of a runaway child and bring word of safety.

Runaway children walk city sidewalks, huddle in motel rooms, sit and stare in drab apartments on this, the loneliest day of the year.

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.

Home for Christmas! For many it is but an impossible yearning.

In hospitals, while suction machines whir and monitors bleep, 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 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, 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 the 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 foreign cities, hanging red and yellow decorations on banana trees, walking through maddening markets where the world roars by without even knowing the name of that baby. They are people on a mission.

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

Because of Him, men and women no longer throng taverns, no longer fill their bodies with chemicals. Because of Him, children do not have to 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. {eoa}

Jamie Buckingham was a Charisma columnist for 13 years before his death in 1992.