

# Holy Longing

by Stewart Ruch

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*The sermon explores the theme of holy longing, emphasizing the Christian experience of being homesick for God's presence and the importance of thriving in an un-Christian world.*

**Duration:** 24:46

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-2, Matthew 6:33, John 14:2-3, Romans 8:18, Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 11:13-16, 1 Peter 1:2-9, Revelation 21:1-4

**Topics:** "Seeking God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a beautiful day spent with his family on a mountain. They enjoyed the scenery, played games, and had a picnic. However, despite the happiness of the day, the speaker felt a longing for more. He explains that this longing is a holy longing, a homesickness for a home that is coming soon. The speaker encourages the audience to embrace this longing and live in a way that reflects their joy and belonging to a different place, ultimately leading others to join them in their longing for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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## Transcript

Have you ever had a day that was so perfect, so beautiful, even while you're in the midst of that day, you're just thinking, I don't ever want this day to end. Maybe it was a day in your childhood that you remember or a Christmas day. We had a day like that this summer.

It was a day in which everything on this vacation that we had taken to the Blue Ridge Mountains came together. It was just a beautiful day. It was physically beautiful.

The sun was gorgeous and it was cloudless and we made our way up a Blue Ridge Mountain called Rowing Mountain. And as we were going up the side of the mountain, we couldn't help but stop in several places to just take in the expanse and watch the sun rolling out over all these meadows and trees. We actually climbed to one of the bowls on the mountain, spent time there together as a family.

We then made our way back down the mountain, down into a valley where there was a gorgeous meadow packed with mountain wildflowers. Next to the meadow, we played a game of family soccer. We grilled out there at the picnic area.

We strolled over to a stream nearby and Catherine and I fell asleep in camp chairs while the kids literally and in an idyllic way just played there in the creek. We were hungry so we finished the day by going to a

pizza place in the area. We sat outdoors at a picnic table next to the kitchen garden from which all the ingredients for our pizza was made.

And I finished that day and as happy as I was, I wasn't fully satisfied. It actually as good as it was had awakened a longing in me. I wanted more of that kind of day.

I knew the days were going to come when we would be hoping to go somewhere and a flat tire would occur or we'd have plans and it would thunderstorm or we were looking forward to an event as a family and one of the children would get strep throat. There would be so many days unlike that day, that beautiful perfect day. There's a wonderful song by Van Morrison, Irish recording artist.

He talks, it's called Coney Island and he describes a day where he and a friend travel out to Coney Island in Ireland. And this is from one of his songs. He says this, he said, I look at the side of your face as the sunlight comes streaming through the window in the autumn sunshine.

And all the time going to Coney Island, I'm thinking, wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time. That longing, that human longing is not just a human longing, but that taste of something beautiful and connected and rich and pure. That taste is a Christian longing that actually connects with our hearts that long for home.

Our hearts that long for the presence of God, the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit. Christian people are a people of longing. Christian people are a homesick people.

We live with a holy homesickness, knowing that where we are now, as beautiful as it can be, as connected as it might be, is never fully satisfying. As a matter of fact, you are to live with a sense of longing throughout your life. Longing for more.

Longing for more of what? Peter tells us there in verse two. Longing for the knowledge of God, the father who knows you. Longing for the gift of the Holy Spirit who fills you with his presence, sanctifies you.

Longing for Jesus whom you long to obey and who makes you clean. He sprinkles you with his blood, an image of making you clean from the Old Testament teachings. Few books in the Bible deal with the call for longing like 1 Peter.

We're going to spend several weeks together studying 1 Peter and seeing again and again that because Peter celebrates God, again and again you'll hear an exuberance in Peter. If you know anything about the New Testament, Peter was one who was exuberant and full of energy. You'll hear that energy in his writing.

It came through his pen. You'll feel his voice. He celebrates God.

He'll just go off on doxologies, thanking God for his goodness and his glory. Because he celebrates God and he's experiencing God, he longs for more of it. It actually incites a longing in him for a completeness.

We titled this series Living Christian in an Un-Christian World. And it's very important to understand that understanding how to live Christian in an un-Christian world from the perspective for 1 Peter is not living embattled as a Christian. It's not living on the defense.

It's not living saying, oh, why is it so hard always to be a Christian in America? Why are we so embattled? We're shocked that we're embattled. This is so unfair. That is not the position of 1 Peter.

As a matter of fact, the good news is in the same way that we feel in our culture in encroaching darkness and we do. In the same way that we're aware that assumptions around relationships and marriage and how one would live one's life and even laws that would define how one would live one's life are changing radically and rapidly in our country. That what's happening now is actually nothing new to what has happened century upon century upon century to Christians in different societies.

The society that the people of 1 Peter lived in, he wrote this letter to people that lived in modern day Turkey, what was then called Asia Minor. The cities that were detailed for you in verse one are part of that. They were people who were not dying by the sword as best as we can tell.

They were not being martyred for their faith as Christians we know are today being. No, they were very likely living in a culture that was increasingly becoming more ambivalent and in some areas hostile to their faith, but it was a hostility of words. It was a hostility of marginalization.

It was a hostility of ridicule or mocking or simply silence. Not at all unlike our culture now. And Peter's strategy for them is not simply for them to survive as Christians in an unchristian world.

His strategy is to thrive and to do so in a way that others around you see your joy, see your longing, see that you belong somewhere else, and that if they want, they can go with you to that place, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This holy longing is captured in our text today, and I want to look with you at primarily verses one to two and also at verses three through nine. Turn with me in your bulletin if you're not there yet.

The title of the sermon today is Holy Longing, homesick for a home that is coming soon. For what we see is that holy homesickness is actually the health of the Christian. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, when Peter says an apostle of Jesus Christ, what he is saying and what the actual word mean is messenger or one who is sent.

Peter, apostolos, one who is sent. Peter, one who is homeless, writing to those who are homeless, exiles, elected, chosen exiles. Peter is living in Rome.

He calls it Babylon at the end of the letter, chapter five. He's writing from Rome. He's writing to those who are dispersed throughout Asia Minor in Roman provinces or Roman influenced communities.

He's writing a letter that actually has a kind of technical background. He used a word that we might have missed. He uses the word dispersion.

That's a technical word. It actually means diaspora. And the word diaspora came from a time in the history of the Israelites when they were living in Jerusalem and foreign armies came in and they dispersed them throughout the ancient world then, Persia, Assyria, and beyond.

And as some leaders would come back to Jerusalem, they would write diaspora letters. They would write letters to those who've been dispersed. And they would say, we are all of one blood in God, even though we are far apart and we are exiled and we are strangers and we are sojourners in foreign lands.

That doesn't matter because it doesn't matter where we live and it doesn't matter our nationality. What matters is that we know the living God who has now been revealed in Jesus as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It's a diaspora letter.

It's written to those who are exiles, chosen, elected exiles. Homesickness, it turns out, is good for you. It's essential if you're a Christian.

Over the years in the summers, several of our children have gone to camp. And Kath and I always await eagerly the first letter that comes from camp. And the first letter is often the same.

It's a letter of homesickness. And one year we got a particularly poignant letter from one of the children. And in that letter they said, I'm writing you now, but even writing you is hard to do because every single hour I'm homesick for you and daddy.

I love camp, but I had no idea how much I would miss you. And that's how we as Christians relate to our Father. Father in heaven, I think of you every hour.

I miss being fully and completely with you and your Son, Jesus Christ. I'm thankful for my life on earth, but I can't stop thinking of home. We can't stop thinking of home because home is so good.

Do you see Peter's celebration in verse 3? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he goes on with this, this exuberance. He's caused us to be born again to a living hope.

He's saying the goodness of God, the home is so rich that when you're away from home, you're homesick because you love it so much. Christians live as Christians in an un-Christian world because we're so full of Christ. We're so sick for home.

We long to be home and we know we're exiled. We know we're sojourners, as Peter says in chapter 2. Peter wants you to be clear from the very beginning of his letter, you don't belong here. You're to love here.

You're to serve here, but never ever forget this is not your home. Don't you want to go home? Do you ever feel displaced here? Do you ever feel like you don't quite fit in? And there could be an unholy restlessness, but I'm speaking of a restlessness that comes because you actually are trying to live as a Christian. You actually are trying to spend your money like a Christian.

You're trying to treat your home, your house, like a Christian. And there's a sense that I'm never quite right here. I'm not quite fully happy here.

And maybe you thought something is wrong with you, or maybe you thought that you need to spend your life fixing that, that somehow you need to be right here. You need to fit in here. You need to feel a part of things here.

Oh, those who are our youth, junior high, senior high students, do you understand that you're supposed to feel like you don't fully fit? Adults, do you understand that what you felt then you're to feel now as well? You're in exile. By God, he's exiled you. You don't fully fit in here.

The rhythms of this world are not your rhythms. The habits of this world are not your habits. The food of this world is not your food.

If you were to be tested for the homesick virus, would it come back clearly positive? Do you have a homesick fever? Are you, are you truly longing for something more or actually you feel pretty good. You're actually pretty set. Your life isn't marked by longing, a kind of holy dissatisfaction.

If you feel like you're set or you feel like you're working really hard to be set, then you need to let this scripture confront that. If you feel like you are longing and you've wondered if something's wrong with you, let this scripture console you. We as Midwesterners are a sense of place people.

I borrow that phrase from Wendell Berry, Kentucky poet and essayist. And there's nothing intrinsically wrong with a sense of place, but we quickly move here in the Midwest to a sense of place as a kind of idolatry. Midwesterners love their homes.

We invest an immense amount in our houses. How true that is here in the Western suburbs. Our houses are not for us a way station that we're there for a while, but we know we'll one day leave a place where people can come in and go and out and in and out.

Instead, they become for us a place where we secure our connection. Has this prevented you from a homesickness that is actually your right and holy state? What we see is that homesickness actually prepares us for one of the most important things in life. And Peter very pragmatically breaks in in verse six because he wants to actually teach you that to be rightly homesick, to know your exiled identity will be critical when inevitable and I underscore inevitable trials will come.

Look at verse six. It's actually, it feels like a disjointed. It feels somewhat abrupt.

He's celebrating God and inheritance in verse four. God's power being guarded through faith for salvation to be revealed in verse five. And then in verse six, in this you rejoice in who God is and what God has given you in the glory of God.

Though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials. It's as if Peter pastorally is celebrating and caught up in the glory of God, but he stops and he says, Oh, I know some of you getting this letter. You're, you're going through trials in your communities.

I actually know that you're, you're suffering in your communities and he'll lay out later a kind of theology of suffering. I'll say there's really two kinds of suffering. He'll say, there's a suffering that comes from our sin.

It's a suffering in which we reap what we have sown. We suffer because we have not lived in the way that God has called us to live in the joy of living in God. And so we don't know joy.

He says you can be free from that suffering by repenting of that sin. And when you repent, that suffering may not fully lift, but now you're suffering with Jesus. You're suffering for God.

You're suffering for doing good. And Peter says, Oh, to suffer for doing good. That's the right kind of suffering.

Peter never, ever promises that there will be no suffering. If you turn to good, Peter promises that you will know is suffering with Jesus Christ. You will share in his sufferings and thereby you will love him even though you have not seen him.

And he's saying for those trials that come to have a homesick heart prepares you. Cause if you're a homesick for God, you have less to lose than if you've been home fixated, home obsessed, and you've gathered all your things together and held them close to your body and your heart and your mind. You have more to lose in that case.

But when a trial comes, the homesick heart knows it is passing. It is horrible. It is painful, but it is for a little while because I'm moving on again and again.

One of the key lessons that Paul and Peter teach us in the midst of trials. And it sounds, it sounds almost insensitive, but they say they're light and momentary. Paul says, Peter says for a little while, because they understand that we're moving and that we're heading somewhere else.

And if you're homesick and you know, this is not your home, a trial will be painful, but it won't wreck you. A trial is a test. And the nature of the test is to find out just how homesick you really are, how rightly disconnected from the things of this world and how profoundly connected to the things of Jesus and the things of heaven you really are.

I have learned this from some dear friends who were long-term missionaries here at church of the resurrection, Pat and Joan Crayer. We've supported Pat and Joan for many years. They spent a quarter of a century in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

One of the harder places probably in this world to live, working among a people called the Pashtun people. They lived lives of constant sense of exile. They came to love some of the music and they came to love the food, but they were never, ever confused that this would somehow be their culture, that they as Americans would be accepted in this culture.

So day after day, month after month, exile and sojourn was ministered into their lives. And when the day came and they suffered a significant trial, it was actually their daughter was in boarding school when Islamic jihadi group attacked the school. Their daughter survived, although profoundly traumatized.

They grieved. They weren't disconnected. But I walked that school when I visited Pat and Joan in Pakistan and they showed me the bullet holes and the walls and the elements of that attack.

I don't know how to describe it. He was free. He was free.

His daughter had survived, although she'd been traumatized. He cared. He was not disconnected in a strange way, but it was as if he knew this was for a little while.

It was as if they had ingested that they were going home and their expectations of this world and their expectations of this earth were rightly measured. We don't expect as Christians to be accepted by our culture. We don't expect as Christians for the world, and that I mean the cosmos that's been set in rebellion against God, to appreciate our convictions and our stands.

Because we're going home, and yet we're chosen, we're dispersed for a season before we go home so that we can give witness, as Peter will say later, to the hope that is within us. You don't belong here. You're placed here because you must minister the joy of knowing God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But repent today. Repent of any idols of place or home or way of life that would somehow wrongly prevent you from a holy homesickness. Let's be quiet before the Lord.

Just quiet your hearts, if you would bow your heads, just to give yourself a chance to focus. I have on my heart specifically, we have some junior high and high school students that are in the church today, and I just want to speak a word from the Bible to you, that when you have felt misfitted, and you have felt that

the way your parents are raising you in the faith creates for you a constant tension, I just want you to be affirmed in that tension. I want you to hear that you are living as a sojourner and an exile, that you will do great good for Jesus and this world.

Because you do not fit in this world. And you are right now in a very intensive subculture in your high school or your junior high or your neighborhood or among your friends. You will never feel as if you fully fit.

And I pray, O Lord, that you would lift from our students here at resurrection a burden that would almost drive them to do anything to fit. And I pray instead, O Lord, they would feel a relief that this is the way that they can come close to you and walk with you and be effective for you. Lift from our students a fog that would confuse them about this sense of not fitting.

And I pray, O Lord, for any of us that carry idols that we have taken to prevent a homesickness and a longing. And I pray for some of you even now, O Lord, just show them the name of that idol. Show them the name of that place where they've done all they could to prevent a homesickness that is holy and right.

And I pray for those who do long for a God right now. You've turned from the things of darkness. You've turned from the way of sin.

And you feel a longing. You feel a yearning. You just need to be empowered now in the Lord to stay in that place, to continue to long for the things of God.

And I pray for a strengthening for you. I pray that you will be given the strength from God to suffer before him in holy ways and to know that in that suffering you draw close to Jesus Christ who suffered upon the cross. Bring us home, O Lord.

Bring us home, we pray. And may we be faithful at the full revelation of Jesus Christ. And we pray this in his name.

Amen.

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