

Home

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International Christian Fellowship of Oulu

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Sources: NIV Bible, "Large Catechism" by Martin Luther,

"In the House of the Lord" by Henri Nouwen,

"Lexikon zur Bibel" by Fritz Rienecker & Gerhard Maier

Conversations with Hanna Fähnrich, Picture by Samuel Hägele



Dear Congregation!

In the past weeks I've been thinking a lot about the topic and meaning of home. What is a home, what does it really mean? The more I've been thinking about it, the more I came to understand that the meaning of home has always been one of my favourite topics. Perhaps this is due to the fact that I've been living for many years as a foreigner in this country, and thus have been continuously trying to understand what a home or having a home really means. Is it a country where we are at home, a homeland, so to speak? Or is it a building like a house, a man-made place with a foundation, walls and roof and furniture? This seems understandable: A home is a physical home, built by man, a house to live and dwell in, where we can experience comfort and have shelter. Let me explain by means of an example: lately I've been helping students coming to Oulu to find a home, or at least a small place, a house or apartment. The students need a roof over their head to feel comfortable, at home, here in Oulu. It's been really challenging due to the difficult accommodation situation, and especially students arriving after the start of the academic term have had and continue having troubles in finding a home.

However, during the past years I've also pondered and come to the understanding that a home is not so much about a physical place or a house but more about a relationship in which I can feel at home. Moreover, it seems to be a relationship where I can receive and provide a home for and with others, such as in a family. In particular, my own little family, my wife Hanna and son Samuel, have spurred my thoughts and feelings of what a home really means. Some of you know the difficulties our family is currently dealing with: we have recently purchased a house and wished to make it our home. But soon after we had moved in we experienced health difficulties, most likely due to some problem in the house, and thus had to move out. We could go back to our previous home, which hadn't been sold – thanks to God. Now we are safely accommodated in our apartment nearby this church but have to maintain two homes at the same time. This comes with many challenges for our family, but all in all it has brought us closer together, and revealed that a home really is about a relationship between people loving and caring for each other.

As much as this understanding of home has kept us going and blessed us as a family, it has also pointed to yet another meaning of home. We have also been allowed to experience our congregation and thus everyone of you as a real home. Yes, let me say this again: even though we could lately not always physically come and take part in the activities of this church, we do think of

you and our congregation as a home. We want to thank you for making us understand that such things as love and care are not confined to within the walls of our small family's home. We'd like to express our gratitude and appreciation to all of you, especially for your prayers and friendship as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Last week we also received, amongst others, a generous donation that you had gathered for us. Your donation amounted to the sum of the loan that we're currently paying back to the bank each month. The money has already been used entirely. That is, we've used it for the repair of our car that had gotten damaged in the yard of our house a few weeks ago. Thank you!

But is this all we can think and understand of as a home? Is there more to it than the meaning that comes with a homeland, a place to stay like a house, or a relationship between people such as a family or congregation - or all kinds of provisions and acquirements that give us a homelike feeling of safety and comfort, love and care? Is it sufficient to accommodate ourselves and make our home with things and people as mentioned before? After all, in due time we all have to leave our homeland or at least move from one place to the other within our countries of origin, our houses get older and deteriorate over time, and eventually people leave relationships, and things provided to or acquired by us will not last forever. I will pose again the question that I raised above: are the afore mentioned meanings really all that we can think and understand of as a home? I believe that there is a yet more profound meaning of home! Let's search for understanding and answers in the Bible. God's word is full of the meanings of home. I do not intend to give a comprehensive understanding but shall provide some of the most meaningful answers according to my reasoning based on Scripture.

I would like to begin with stating, what I believe is the most profound meaning of home. It is our relationship with God. We read in the Bible ([Genesis](#)) that once upon a time man had a wonderful home. This home can be best understood as a perfect relationship with God. This relationship or home can be located in Paradise, or the Garden of Eden. However, with the fall and sin of man this came to an end, and man was cast out of this blissful original home or relationship. I would say that ever since the fall man has been homeless. The Bible says that man is a "foreigner and stranger" ([1 Chronicles 29:15](#), [Psalm 119:19](#); [Hebrews 11:13](#)) and a "restless wanderer on the earth" ([Genesis 4:12](#)). We read from the history of Israel, God's chosen people, that God still stayed with His people, called some by faith and sent prophets and leaders to guide them. God never turned away from man in the first place, even though men went and still go away and stay away from Him.

On the one hand, the Bible makes us understand that man does – at times – appreciate God's dwelling and leadership among them, for men and women have essentially longed for the home in God ever since Paradise was lost. This longing for God's home is perhaps most earnestly expressed in the Psalms. We read from [Psalm 84](#): *"How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself – a place near your altar, LORD Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever*

praising you. (...) Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

We can learn so much about faith from Abraham ([Genesis 12](#), [Hebrews 11](#)). Abraham's life consisted of being almost constantly on the move, but he foremostly followed God's call and always went along with God. Abraham was an obedient, trusting and faithful servant of God. He left his home with his family and started out for the promised land, which he could only hope for based on God's promise. We read from [Hebrews 11:8+9](#): *"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise."* Abraham's "pilgrimage" was blessed and turned out to be a blessing to so many people, and hopefully to us as well. [Psalm 84](#) reads: *"Blessed are those whose strength is in God, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage."* It seems to me that, by faith, Abraham was content and always at rest with what home(s) God had promised him and set before him throughout his lifetime journey.

We learn from Moses that God dwelled among the Israelites, leading them by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire ([Exodus 13:21](#)). He made wonderful provisions for His people throughout their journey out of Egypt and in the wilderness. He accommodated them with free gifts from heaven like "manna" and "sought out a place to pitch their tents" ([Exodus 16:31](#), [Deuteronomy 1:33](#)), so that they could be secure and rest for a while. The only thing to do for Moses and the Israelites was, as with Abraham, to simply obey, trust and put faith in God ([Exodus](#)). At times the people of Israel appreciated God among them, as for instance in Moses' and Miriam's song of deliverance ([Exodus 15:11,13](#)): *"Who among the gods is like you, LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling."*

On the other hand, the Bible gives us an understanding that man was and is continually wandering away from God, and pitching his tent with the wicked here and there. The history of Israel gives many accounts of man going astray, especially as the Israelites left the Lord's way taught to them by Moses. They were not always content with the provisions by which God accommodated His people, and when they felt that Moses and thus God seemed to be away for a while, they themselves turned away and built a golden calf that they worshiped as a sort of God-replacement ([Exodus 18:20](#); [Exodus 32](#), [Deuteronomy 1:26-46](#), [Numbers 11](#)). It is hence obvious that man tends to follow his own ways and look for replacements of God rather than the home God would like to provide for him. Indeed, man replaces the home in God or the home(s) provided by Him with all kinds of idols. Man is an idolater and accommodates himself with things that don't last. In the long run idolatry even leads to man's destruction and perishing. We read in [Proverbs 14:11-12](#) (compare with [Psalm 127:1](#) and [1 Corinthians 3:9-17](#), [Matthew 7:24](#), [Luke 6:48](#)): *"The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death"*.

But what are our idols? What are these things with which we replace God? Into what or whom do we put our trust and faith instead of God? Let me say that these are the very things that we usually think of and understand of as our home. These are the things with which we accommodate ourselves, placing our trust and faith in them [Exercise for congregation: With which idols can you come up with? What are false replacements of God? Let's name a few of these. Homework: Read up Martin Luther's [Large Catechism](#), especially, the explanation to the first commandment]. Our houses, money, possessions, human relationships, wealth and power, our own abilities, and so on can become idols.

According to the Bible it goes now almost without further saying that man is severely mistaken when turning or staying away from God and accommodating himself with other things or people instead of God. God and His Home cannot be replaced by anything or anyone else nor can it be acquired by our own strength. But what does this mean for us as believers in Jesus Christ? It means that we have to turn from our evil ways and follow Christ, and first of all give Him priority over all things and even people: "Jesus says: *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind!'*" ([Matthew 22:37](#)). The Bible says that we simply need to hear and obediently follow His call, repent and turn around. We need to leave the path of sinfulness and come to Him. We need to break down our tents of wickedness. We have to let go of what we have wrongly and mistakenly accommodated ourselves with, things or even people, if we have put them above or before God! Jesus is there, and He wants to accommodate us in Himself. We only have to repond to His care and love and let Him make his home and dwell in us! Jesus says based on [John 14:23](#): *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."*

In [Revelation 3:19-21](#) we read that Christ is knocking at our door, and if only we allow him He will enter and make his home with us, and remove everything that doesn't fit a godly home. We could say and conclude that Jesus is the most meaningful home, or the Home, provided by God as a free gift. Christ says based on [John 15:4](#) (which can be worded in English as follows, according to The Jerusalem Bible, and a similar translation of the Greek is given in the Wycliffe and Amplified Bible): *"Make your home in me, as I make mine in you"* or *"Dwell in me, and I will dwell in you."* It is remarkable that the Bible says that Jesus may *"dwell in us through faith"* ([Ephesians 3:17](#)), that is, God accommodates us in Himself in a similar way as with Abraham and Moses – by faith. The Bible also says that once we have let Christ make His home in us, we *"are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household"* ([Ephesians 2:19](#)). By Him we are given a home, or the Home, and we never ever need to feel foreign or estranged from God. Even if we loose the homes of this earth, we need never fear being homeless again. God's safety, His love, care and peace will stay with us.

God thus really restores the original blissful home or relationship of man with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. Please note that this includes the relationship with the Father and the Spirit ([2 Timothy 1:14](#), [Ephesians 2:21-22](#)) and that God accommodates us in Himself already in this life! To be more precise: believers in Jesus Christ are still on a lifelong "pilgrimage" like Abraham and Moses once were, even though we may be looking forward to and may rely on God's promise of

our eternal future home ([Ecclesiastes 12:5](#), [John 14:2](#), [2 Corinthians 5:1](#), [Hebrews 13:14](#), [Revelation 21:3-4](#)). For the time being, however, believers are called to live a Christ-like life on this earth. We as followers of Christ are also called to make room and pave the way for others to get to know Jesus as the Home. This is not always an easy task, but we can be sure that God will be with us at all times, just as Jesus' name – Immanuel – promises: Immanuel means “*God with us*” ([Matthew 1:23](#)). We can then also say and faithfully trust God in all circumstances, as we read in [Acts 17:28](#): “*In Him [and in nothing or no-one else] we live and move and have our being.*”

Amen.