



"Then he taught them saying, 'Is it not written: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"? But you have made it a den of thieves.'"

—Mark 11:17

A few years ago, we relocated my mother from a home several hundred miles away, where she had lived for more than 50 years. She made the transition very well to a small duplex near us, but the move was not without its challenges. Mom's heart sometimes longed for the more familiar past when family gathered for the holidays, and she cooked our favorite dishes—while lavishing loads of love on her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Yet, her life's companion of more than 61 years had relocated to his new home in heaven, the house was emptied of all its furnishings, and a new owner had moved in.

Reflecting on sweet memories of warm embraces, children's laughter echoing from the rooms, and the delicious aromas wafting through our old homeplace stir mixed emotions for me too this time of year. However, Mom is now enjoying being reunited with Daddy and celebrating God's amazing blessings in her heavenly home. Her passionate faith has become sight!

This spring, my husband and I transitioned from a home, where we had lived for almost 39 years, to a condominium, minus a whole lot of stuff! This will be our first holiday season in a new house since our children were babies, and we've been discussing where we should put the Christmas tree. Although it's been a very liberating experience to be rid of some of the trappings of the past, I'm sure we'll be a bit emotional when we reflect on fun times like reading *Mr. Toy Man* and *The Gift of the Magi* in front of the fireplace or having scavenger hunts to locate our presents. Yet, this is not the biggest transition I've ever made.

My most significant transition in life was when my spiritual house was emptied of its unnecessary furnishings, and a new Owner took possession of my heart, soul, and spirit.

Paul told the Corinthians, "*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself*" (1 Corinthians 6:19 NLT). Although I sometimes act a bit bossy and think I still "rule the roost," the true Owner reminds me that He is the One in authority because I am now His dwelling place. Believe me, He is a much better proprietor

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than the previous one. Like the HGTV extreme home makeovers, my renovation process is taking a bit of time, but oh what a beautiful difference the new Owner is making! I understand that the Father's house in Scripture may have several different applications or meanings, but what should typically be some of the most appealing features about the Father's house?

PLACE OF PRAYER

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that those (both Jew and Gentile) who joined themselves to be servants of the Lord—ministering to Him, loving His name, and keeping His covenant—He would bring them to His holy mountain and make them joyful in His house. *"Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples"* (Isaiah 56:7).

After coming to earth and clothing Himself in human flesh, Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem many times. Scriptural evidence indicates at least two occasions occurred when He found it necessary to do some house cleaning. John's narrative suggests one cleansing was near the beginning of Christ's ministry (John 2:12–17). This reminded His disciples that it was written, *"For zeal for Your house has consumed me . . ."* (Psalm 69:9). If a Spirit-fueled burning emotion—love, anger, jealousy—for an earthly temple consumed Christ, how much more must He burn with love and even jealousy for us, His spiritual dwelling places?

The three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) record a time near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry when He again did some temple cleansing and reiterated the declaration in Isaiah 56:7.

They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:15–17, also see Matthew 21:12–13; Luke 19:45–46).

In much the same way our homes need to regular cleanings and the temple required a second cleansing, our spiritual "house" needs consistent cleansing of unnecessary attitudes, impurities, and emotional or spiritual baggage in general. Some of the best ways to do this are through prayer and time spent in the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26).

Thankfully, when Christ was preparing to leave His disciples, He promised the abiding Helper or Holy Spirit who would comfort, convict, guide into truth, and fill His new dwelling places with joy. Isn't that what we experience in prayer?

MANY ROOMS

Not only is His Father's house a place of prayer, but Jesus also comforted His followers by telling them, *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (John 14:2–3 NIV). We know the earthly temple was patterned after the heavenly one (Exodus 25:9, 40; Hebrews 8:5), and Christ has promised to come and take us to this eternal dwelling place.



PERSONAL OR GROUP INTERACTION

Take a few moments to write in your prayer journal, share with two or three small group members, or use as a sermon illustration your response to the following:

1. One of my favorite memories of the holiday season is: _____

_____.
2. When I picture my heavenly Father's house, I get most excited about: _____

_____.
3. I sense Jesus calling me to extend His love and invitation to _____ (name a family member, co-worker, friend, etc.), so they will feel more welcome in my house (heart) and the Father's house during this season.

“. . . 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.”
—John 14:23

Surely, heaven isn't the only place where we will experience love and rest in His presence!

However, the only other New Testament verse where we find this Greek word for “rooms” or “dwelling places” is John 14:23, *“Jesus replied, ‘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’”* (NIV). *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* indicated the exact meaning of the Greek for rooms or home could be either “resting places” or “dwelling places.”¹

Surely, heaven isn’t the only place where we will experience unconditional love and rest when dwelling in His presence!

Paul told the Ephesians, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* (2:4–6).

As our relationship with the Lord grows and deepens, we find ourselves moving into new places and deeper depths of intercession and communion with Him. At times, we may bask in a “room” where the Father’s love and joy are permeating the atmosphere, inspiring worship and celebration. In other seasons, our spirits may grieve and weep with Jesus in a “room” or place of intensely praying for a prodigal child or unbelieving people all around us. Just as Christ, who is our Advocate at the Father’s right hand, is moved with compassion and intercedes for those needing healing or deliverance, we may find ourselves in a “room” declaring the words of Isaiah:

*But He was pierced for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him,
and by His stripes we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5).

I wish we were face-to-face, so we could worship and celebrate the powerful truths Holy Spirit is revealing as He invites us “home” to the many “resting places” that Christ has prepared for us.

LOVING ATMOSPHERE

“Why were you looking for Me . . . Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”
—Luke 2:49

As my friend Dawn says, “Jesus is the door; if anyone comes to the Father, it is through Him! There are many doors throughout a house, but He is my entry point to the abundance of all that’s in the Father’s house.”

Imagine yourself in the temple in Jerusalem with Simeon and Anna as Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to present Him to the Lord (see Luke 2:21–38). How the atmosphere must have been charged with love and peace as God’s servants spoke prophetic declarations over the Messiah. After becoming a widow, Anna never left this “place” of fasting, praying, and worshiping!

Twelve years later, after celebrating the Passover with His parents, Jesus remained in the temple courts in Jerusalem. After they returned and found Him, He questioned: *“Why were you looking for Me . . . Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”* (Luke 2:49). Can you picture the environment of wisdom and grace as He astounded the teachers with His understanding?

¹ *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*, Online: <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/john/14-2.htm> [Accessed 11/14/2019].

Notice the significance of what occurred and the power of love that must have filled His Father's house of prayer after Jesus cleansed the temple. ***"And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them"*** (Matthew 21:14).

Recall the narrative recorded in Luke 13 as Jesus also healed and delivered in the synagogue on the Sabbath—a day of rest. An unnamed woman, who had been bound by Satan and bent over for 18 years, was invited to experience a life transformation. ***"When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your sickness.' And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God"*** (Luke 13:12–13).

We don't have to drive, fly on an airplane, or hop a train to be "home" for the holidays!

CONCLUSION

As you enter this holiday season, you may be so busy with church and family activities that you feel you don't have time to think, much less reflect on sweet memories of home and Christmases past. Life transitions might have been different for you this year, and some may still be in progress.

You may find yourself living in a room or dwelling place of . . .

- ✚ Loneliness, grieving broken relationships.
- ✚ Disappointment, weeping for prodigal children.
- ✚ Rest in His presence, following a long season of active ministry.
- ✚ Amazement at His wisdom, absorbing His grace and understanding.
- ✚ Waiting for release, longing for healing and deliverance.
- ✚ Fasting, praying, and anticipating the prophetic fulfillment of His Word.
- ✚ _____ (You fill in the blank.)

Ironically, although we're the temple of His Holy Spirit, He's also at the Father's right hand in a place prepared for us to join Him. Yes, in the Father's house is to be called a house of prayer, and it has many rooms. As we persevere in whatever place we find ourselves, surely we can have hope because according to Paul, the love of God is continually being ***"poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us"*** (Romans 5:5). We can't afford to be so preoccupied during the holidays that we fail to go "home" to the Father's house.

Although I may miss the familiar sights, sounds, and smells of my childhood home, I'm super thrilled that I don't have to travel to be home for the holidays. Children and grandchildren will now gather around the Thanksgiving table and Christmas tree at our new house. That's also the exciting thing about being invited to go to the Father's house. **We don't have to drive, fly on an airplane, or hop a train to be "home" for the holidays!**

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