

My Spiritual Home

Where is the best place to be for all of us? Where can we be free, rest, eat, and be comforted? Where are our dearest ones? Wouldn't, "At home," be our reply? Home is where our heart is, they say. Although a family's temporal home can be seen as a building, the building itself is nothing without our loved ones. Home is a place of refuge where we are welcomed and loved even if we are weak and faulty. Even though we say things that hurt our loved ones, we fret and grumble, we tire and are impatient; we are loved at home just as we are. We can take care of matters with the gospel and move on.

A Gift of God

The best place for our undying soul is in our spiritual home. This is also a home where we can be free, rest, and be nourished. It may be thought of as our church building, but its essence is in our spiritual family, amid our brothers and sisters in faith. The building alone is not God's kingdom. The boundary of the kingdom cannot be seen; it goes from one child of God's heart to another. Neither can our undying soul be seen. It is a treasure, a gift of God, carried in clay vessels—our earthly bodies. We need to actually take footsteps to bring our undying soul to where it is nourished and strengthened, to the gatherings of God's children: services, Sunday school, Bible class, "haps" gatherings, and other functions in the kingdom. Services are the central form of work in Christianity. All other functions—as well as the work done in our homes—support services, where we hear God's Word. The Bible reminds us of the importance of services: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

A Place of Care

While a believing home is where our fathers and mothers teach and instruct us, forgive and encourage, we also need the care and cradling of our spiritual home. Sometimes the believing home is called God's kingdom in miniature. It's a home inside a home, like a room in the house of God. If it were without the protection and warmth of the house, the room on its own would be a cold and unsheltered place when the world's cold winds blow.

Our spiritual home is described in Psalm 132:13,14: "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." The Almighty God provides the warmth of His house through His Word. Flickering faith is there strengthened, and we feel sheltered from the world. We can feel the support of other children of God in our personal faith life, in rooting our children in the kingdom, and even amid temporal worries.

We Battle Our "Old Portion"

Sometimes we feel that our "old portion" is slow to go to church functions. Life is busy and we get tired. In families, preparing for church may even be one of the most strenuous times of the week; often there is need for the gospel before we even get there. Special services on a weeknight or Saturday may not fit into our busy schedules, and even Sunday might feel like a time we would rather dedicate to personal relaxation or family time after a busy week. Time flies and we tend to fly with it, feeling that we haven't yet accomplished what we thought we would.

When we come to services, are greeted with smiles and "God's Peace!" we can rest. We can pause around that which is most important. We can put away bad thoughts, those words uttered in weakness and tiredness. We together can ladle from the crystal clear fountain of life to quench our thirst and break the bread of life for our hungry and weak souls.

We can share our worries and spread joy and strength from one vessel to another. Providing the opportunity to visit and share thoughts after services, over refreshments, for example, is important.

We're All Needed in God's House

Do we ever regret that we came to services? Do we feel it was a waste of time to come to teach Sunday school? Is having "hops" at our homes tiring, or do we feel that we've been touched by the singing and happy faces of our youth? What a wonderful kingdom God has given! We can feel we're not alone with our burdens. We can help in the work with the gifts we've been given, and together, through the love and gospel work patch those cracks in the mortar of the walls of the house. We are all needed and loved in the house of God: in the safe arms of our Heavenly Father and the guidance of the congregation mother. At services we hear about the foundations of faith. The beautiful songs are like miniature sermons. Why would we stay home if we have the opportunity to go?

Sometimes we cannot make it to services or other gatherings. Still, we are not forgotten: many times we pray at services for those who cannot come, whether they are in their earthly callings, ill, or in remote places. It is good that we have the opportunity to listen to services through the Internet in these times. We can be uplifted and encouraged through hearing the Word.

Let Us Hunger for the Word

Internet services are a great resource temporarily, sometimes needed even for longer periods. But feeling the presence and unity, the fellowship and love of our brothers and sisters in faith when we actually attend services is vital. God's has given us His Word to strengthen our faith. He has exhorted us to come to hear His Word, like a father who wants His children to be near Him. At services arranged in areas where there are no regular church activities, or in the mission work done in African countries or Ecuador, the desire to come to services is vividly seen, and distances are not an issue.

This is a reminder to all of us; how we should come as a flock of hungry sheep to where our Shepherd's voice is heard, to be comforted, nourished, and to stay huddled in the center of the flock. If we only felt the desire as the Psalm writer: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee" (Ps. 84:2-4).

Going to services in itself will not save us if we do not personally want to believe or are traveling on the fringes of the kingdom with a divided heart. In SRK's 2010 publication *Erilaisina mutta samanarvoisina* (Different but of equal value), Olavi Voittoinen writes how it is a dangerous self-delusion if we listen to, but do not hear the Word, or if we come to seek only the social aspect or togetherness. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). Only if we dwell as sinners totally in the mercy of forgiveness, can we remain in the unity of God and His congregation.

Make Time for God's Word

We feel and acknowledge the importance of faith in our lives, but do we always remember how short a time the life of man is compared to eternity? The Bible reminds us how we are like grass that flourishes in the morning and in the evening is cut down and withers (Ps. 90:5,6). We certainly do not devote too much time to God's Word! It is good to stop to think about this. Our church calendars have many events and activities; we may feel that there is even too much going on. However, we need not feel pressure to attend every occasion, as God will ultimately only look into His child's heart, not count the

number of church functions we participated in. We can feel free!

Nevertheless, we can also remember that God has allowed many forms of His work to move forward so that we could get together more. The enemy of souls is slashing violently, for he knows he has little time left. It is good to gather to learn and live of the gospel. Apostle Paul reminds us: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:25).

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Discussion questions:

- What does “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” mean to you?
- What is different about attending services and listening to them online?
- How can we foster hearing the Word in our facilities for all service guests?

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